Transnational Ethnic Communities and Rebel Groups' Strategies in a Civil Conflict

The case of the Karen National Union rebellion in Myanmar

Bethsabée Souris
University College London (UCL)
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I, Bethsabée Souris, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis

Abstract

Few studies have systematically analysed how transnational ethnic kin groups affect the behaviour of domestic ethnic groups in an insurgency, in particular how they have an effect on the types of activities they conduct and their targets.

The research question of this study is: What are the mechanisms through which transnational ethnic kin groups influence the domestic rebel ethnic group's strategies?

This thesis analyses the influence of transnational communities on domestic challengers to the state as a two-step process. First, it investigates under which conditions transnational ethnic kin groups provide political and economic support to the rebel ethnic group. It shows that networks between rebel groups and transnational communities, which can enable the diffusion of the rebel group's conflict frames, are key to ensure transnational support. Second, it examines how such transnational support can influence rebel groups' strategies. It shows that central to our understanding of rebel groups' strategies is the cohesion (or lack thereof) of the rebel group. Furthermore, it identifies two sources of rebel group's fragmentation: the state counter-insurgency strategies, and transnational support. The interaction of these two factors can contribute to the fragmentation of the group and in turn to a shift in the strategies it conducts. These causal mechanisms will be tested by using process tracing in the case of the Karen rebellion in Myanmar/Burma. The paper will present the theoretical framework, and empirical work drawn from fieldwork at the Thai-Myanmar border.

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Impact Statement

This research has investigated the influence transnational ethnic communities can have on rebel groups. Previous research has found that transnational ethnic communities, including refugees and diasporas, have intervened in civil conflicts. The capacity of some transnational ethnic communities to support an armed group means that transnational ethnic communities are potentially powerful actors in international politics. Yet, although the literature on conflict has shown that transnational communities have an impact on a conflict, less is known about the exact mechanisms through which such transnational actors influence non-state armed groups. This research has aimed to contribute to filling this gap in the literature.

Analysing the links between transnational communities and rebel groups can have important implications for policy-makers. For international organisations providing assistance to refugee communities or conflict-generated diaspora can present ethical and operational challenges. Humanitarian workers struggle to protect refugees, asylum-seekers or displaced persons as they are confronted to poor security in refugee camps, sexual and gender-based violence or forced recruitment of soldiers. These security issues can be aggravated by the misappropriation of humanitarian aid. Scholars have shown that these security issues have been linked to the militarisation of refugees or the penetration of rebel groups in refugee camps. The fear of a refugee-warriors who will use refugee camps as bases of military operations, misuse international aid or exploit wider refugee population, has led international organisations to develop policies to ensure a strict separation between combatants and civilian populations in refugee camps. However, this dogmatic approach may miss the complexity of the relationship between refugees and rebel groups. Indeed, one of the findings of this study indicates that rebel groups and refugees can share strong ties and there can be a high level of embeddedness of the rebel groups in the refugee camps. The case of the Karen refugee camps on the Thai-Myanmar/Burma border shows that in some cases, there are no clear separation between soldiers and the refugee population, and the rebel group can ensure the governance of refugee camps.

As such, in some contexts, it is possible to consider rebel groups as a partner in the protection of the refugees rather than a threat.

In addition, this research demonstrates that transnational communities can become a rebel constituency who can have an influence over a rebel group's unity and decision-making processes. As active stakeholders in a rebel group's internal politics, transnational ethnic communities can make or break a rebel group's cohesion. This finding may be important for policy-makers as it highlights that the inclusion of transnational communities can be key to ensure the sustainability of peace deals. Therefore, international organisations might explore possibilities of engagement with transnational communities as partners in brokering a peace deal, with the specific goal of encouraging a more representative and durable approach to peace negotiations.

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Chapter 1: Introduction- Civil war and mobilising across borders

1.1. The puzzle

Civil wars are merely just a matter of internal affairs, and the various civil conflicts in Myanmar are illustrative of wider international connections which can affect the trajectory of a civil conflict (Smith 2007, p. 33). Outside interference can be driven by several actors, notably by diaspora and refugee communities, who can blur the lines between internal and external security (Adamson and Demetriou 2007, Brinkerhoff 2011). These two communities have transcended borders and been providers of external support to several rebel groups (Byman *et al.* 2001). External support may consist of material support through funding, weapons, soldiers (Byman *et al.* 2001, Shain 2007a), and political support in the form of political activism including lobbying and, advocacy activities to host countries (Brinkerhoff 2011, Koinova 2012, 2013). Several case studies highlight the significant influence of refugees and diasporas on internal conflict. During two decades of civil war in Sri Lanka, Tamil transnational groups abroad have provided valuable political and economic support to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) (Wayland 2004). During the peace process engaged in 2002 between the LTTE and the government, the Tamil transnational communities have contributed to peacebuilding initiatives and provided development and humanitarian assistance (Orjuela 2008). Similarly, it has been highlighted that Burmese refugees in Thailand have also been active in the conflict in which the Karen National Union is opposed to the Myanmar Government by providing material support (Brouwer and van Wijk 2013). Therefore, transnational matters, and understanding the involvement of diasporas and refugees in conflicts is key for scholars and policymakers who seek to understand conflict dynamics and take action to promote internal peace.

However, although the presence of external support to rebel groups has been well documented in different literature, namely scholarships on conflict, diaspora, transnationalism, and refugees (i.e. Melvin and King 2000, Tololyan 2000, Zunzer 2004, Fair 2005, Bercovitch 2007, Lyons 2007, Feyissa 2012), a lack of consensus on how to conceptualise the relation between external support from diasporas and refugees and internal conflicts remains (Adamson 2013). Scholars have shown that in

some cases, the presence of diasporas and refugees can have a negative outcome. For instance, the presence of 'refugee warriors' within the refugee population came under scrutiny with the militarisation of refugee camps in the Democratic Republic of Congo in the mid-1990s (Harpviken 2008, Leenders 2009, McConnachie 2012). Similarly, diasporas were seen, notably by the World Bank (2000), as actors who could push for 'vengeance' while being protected from all the consequences of renewed conflict. Other studies have shown, however, that these external actors can promote peace and conflict resolution activities in their home country (Bercovitch 2007, Shain 2007a, Smith and Stares 2007). Then, depending on the case studies, the involvement of diasporas and refugees has alternatively led to violence and non-violence in the homeland, leading Smith and Stares (2007) to conclude that diasporas can be peace-wreckers, peace-makers or neither.

Therefore, diasporas and refugees' involvement in internal conflicts do not lead to any particular outcome, rather their activities and impacts vary. This wide range of possible impacts suggests that the existing studies do not have the analytical leverage to uncover the impact of connections between the transnational and the local conflict actors. This calls for a disaggregated approach that does not focus on the fixed effects of diasporas and refugees on conflict outcomes, but rather explores the variations in the causal mechanisms through which diasporas and refugees may impact the course of a conflict. This research sets out to do so and contribute to the existing literature on civil conflict by uncovering specific causal mechanisms through which diasporas and refugees' involvement may shape rebel groups' war strategies. In other words, this research aims to develop propositions on how diasporas and refugees become active supporters of a rebel group and can shape the planning, coordination and general direction of rebel operations.

A disaggregated approach requires separating the diasporas and refugees' involvement in a conflict into its different constituent parts. It is possible to conceptualise diasporas and refugees' involvement in violent conflicts as a two-stage process (Adamson 2013). The first stage focusses on the process of diasporas and refugees' mobilisation; why and how transnational populations come to be mobilised in a conflict in their homeland. Diasporas and refugees, unlike their rebelling kin, do not have to

necessarily face government actions from which mobilising grievances could emanate. So, why do diasporas and refugees have an interest in a conflict in the home country?

Studies examining diasporas and refugees involvement in conflicts, especially quantitative studies (Byman 2001, Collier and Hoeffler 2004), consider refugees and diasporas as already mobilised and acting groups, whose motivation come from an intrinsic and distant sense of nationalism (Anderson 1991). They do not necessarily aim to understand when and why diasporas and refugees take an interest in the conflict in the homeland. However, the literature on social movements has continuously shown that group mobilisation to promote change, especially when it transcends borders, is not a given and can fail to emerge (Keck and Sikkink 1998a, Polletta *et al.* 2002, Meyer 2004). Then, to gain a more acute insight on transnational conflict processes, it is necessary to examine the mechanisms leading to the "formation of collective agency, group identity and collective interests" (Adamson 2013, p. 68) which can lead diasporas and refugees to become supporters of rebel groups.

The second stage focusses on how mobilised diasporas and refugees impact rebel groups' strategy, which is defined as the planning, coordination, and general direction of rebel operations to meet overall political and military objectives. Numerous studies have examined local factors influencing rebel groups' strategies (Kalyvas 2006, Stanton 2009, Balcells 2010a). These studies show that much of the tactics conducted by rebel groups are strategic, and that each tactic is the result of strategic motivations shaped by the environment in which rebel groups operate. For example, specific groups initial endowments may give rise to rebel groups using violence strategically to control sources of wealth (Weinstein 2007). Similarly, Stanton (2009) shows that rebel groups have five strategies they pursue - control, cleansing, coercion, destabilisation or restraint- which depend on the government regime. While local grievances and conditions clearly shape much of the conflict, an increasing portion of the literature is now showing that external actors can also impact rebel groups' strategies (Adamson 2013, Checkel 2013, Bakke 2014, Salehyan *et al.* 2014, Tamm 2016). This research aims to build upon this growing literature and confirm the presence of mechanisms uncovered in the literature through which support from diasporas and refugees are key for the strategies the rebel groups pursue.

Although the focus of the dissertation is the role played by refugees and diasporas in conflicts, it does not discard the importance of local factors in shaping rebel groups' strategies. Therefore, this dissertation argues that rebel groups' strategies is the result of both domestic and transnational factors.

The following presents definitions of the key concepts used later in the theoretical framework and highlights the main theoretical findings. It then provides an overview of the empirical strategy used to test the theoretical framework.

1.2. Main definitions

1.2.1. Who are the transnational ethnic communities becoming involved in internal conflicts?

The study of transnational actors has been the prerogative of IR scholars (i.e. Risse-Kappen 1995, Davis and Moore 1997, Keck and Sikkink 1999, Portes *et al.* 1999, Vertovec 2001, Barnett and Finnemore 2004, della Porta and Tarrow 2005, Carpenter 2007, Tilly and Tarrow 2007, Shawki 2011). Transnational actors are defined in the IR literature as non-state individuals or communities organised around a collective identity that transcend the borders of a nation-state (Risse-Kappen 1995, Van Hear 2005). Building on this definition of transnational communities, transnational ethnic groups can be defined as non-state and social-political formations dispersed in two or more peripheral regions outside the homeland, who view themselves as the same ethnonational origin as the ethnic group in the homeland. Two key types of transnational ethnic communities linked to a civil conflict have been studied in different sets of specialised literature: conflict-generated diaspora and conflict-generated refugees.

1.2.1.1. Conflict-generated diaspora

The involvement of diasporic communities around the world in civil conflicts in the homeland has been widely recorded (Tölölyan 1996, Melvin and King 2000, Adamson 2002, Wayland 2004, Zunzer 2004, Sökefeld 2006, Adamson and Demetriou 2007, Shain 2007b, Brinkerhoff 2011). However, what

constitutes diasporas is thoroughly debated in the literature (Clifford 1994, Wahlbeck 2002, Braziel and Mannur 2003, Sheffer 2003, Brubaker 2005, Tololyan 2007, Brubaker and Cooper 2015). Early studies on diaspora politics, have defined diaspora as expatriate minority communities outside their homeland who retain a strong collective memory of the homeland (Clifford 1994). However, this definition of diaspora has been criticised notably by Sheffer (2003), Van Hear (2005) and (Cohen 2008), who highlighted that this definition of diaspora was rather descriptive and lacked theorisation. These authors stated that the definition is based on the description of the Jewish diaspora and may not be generalisable. Therefore, Safran (1991) has defined diasporas as groups whose members (1) have been dispersed from a specific original centre to peripheral regions, (2) retain a collective memory or myth of the homeland, (3) acknowledge that they are not totally integrated in the host land, (4) desire to return to the homeland, (5) are engaged in the preservation of the homeland, and (6) regard themselves as the same ethnonationalist origin of their homeland (Safran 1991). Furthermore, other scholars have highlighted that diasporas are transnational social formations that challenge the hegemony of the nation-state (Hall 1990, Clifford 1994, Melvin and King 2000, Vertovec 2001, Braziel and Mannur 2003, Sheffer 2003). Diasporas transgress the hegemonic constructions of national homogeneity, while celebrating imaginaries of nationhood. Hence, diasporas are both "ethnic-parochial and cosmopolitan" (Werbner 2002, p. 140). The challenge remains, however, that this tension between those two tendencies is not identical in every diasporic community. What characterises a diasporic community is how these two tendencies play out in actual situations.

The current emergent consensus is that diasporas are political formations implicated ideologically and materially in their homeland. A diaspora emerges when individuals with similar backgrounds mobilise using discourses on common roots (Werbner 2002). A diaspora is not a given and homogenous social formation (Brubaker 2005). Diasporas are groups constituted by many of passive members and few active members who contribute to defining the identity and boundaries of the diasporic formation (Tölölyan 1996). A diaspora can be conceived as a movement defined by activists motivated by a specific political or social struggle (Tölölyan 1996, Sökefeld 2006). Building upon these assumptions, this dissertation will consider that a diaspora materialises when diasporic activists create a discourse

commemorating traumatic disasters, their relation of difference with the host land and their similarity with the homeland. Therefore, diasporic activists produce a distinctive cultural and political diasporic identity.

Moreover, scholars have shown that there are different types of diasporas (Fair 2005, Lyons 2007, Koinova 2011, 2013). Conflict-generated diasporas differ from those originating in economic and other voluntary migration (Koinova 2011). Conflict-generated diasporas are a particular category of diasporas characterised by the source of the group's displacement—violence and human rights violations linked to a conflict (Adamson 2005a, Lyons 2007, Koinova 2012). Therefore, the conflict itself tends to be important in shaping the conflict-generated diaspora (Adamson 2012). Conflict-generated diasporas differ from diasporas resulting from economic migration, where certain categories of people, young men, go abroad to look for work. In conflict-generated diaspora cases, the initial migration is often precipitated and includes entire families or villages and the impediments to returning are political rather than economic (Lyons 2007). The present research focuses on conflict-generated diasporas as it is the type of diaspora which is the most likely to have links to rebel groups and incentives to be involved in the conflict in the homeland.

1.2.1.2. Conflict-generated refugees

There is an ongoing debate in political philosophy, anthropology, and political science regarding the definition of a refugee. The search for policy relevance has underlined the academic definition of a refugee with a consensus among authors that refugees are different from other migrants as they require special protection that is not addressed by their home state (Mantel 2019). In the policy-oriented studies, the basic assumption is that the term refugee refers to any person who has fled from his state of nationality to a neighbourhood country because of political, racial, religious, ethnic or other kinds of persecutions or to avoid warfare or other violence (Shacknove 1985, Zetter 1991, 2007, Bakewell 2008, Chimni 2009, Crawley and Skleparis 2018). Within this approach, refugees are intrinsically linked to conflict and seen as a "recurring phenomena with identifiable and often identical patterns of behaviour and sets of causalities" (Stein 1981, p. 321). There are essential traits

and characteristics attached to the refugee experience which Stein (1981) conceptualise in four stages: (1) the perception of threat; (2) the decision to flee; (3) the period of extreme danger; (4) reaching safety; (5) repatriation, settlement, or resettlement (Keller 1975). The main caveats of this definition are that it does not necessarily recognise the diversity of refugee experiences (Harrell-Bond 1986, Zetter 1991). Zetter (1991) shows in his seminal study on Greek-Cypriot refugees that refugees may not conceive their identity or experience in very different terms from those bestowing the refugee label, but yet have to conform to a label which can be easily politicised by political institutions. Therefore, this dissertation aims to adopt a more comprehensive definition of refugees that includes constructivist elements (Hayden 2006, Zetter 2007, Bradley 2008) and considers refugees as communities whose boundaries and identity are established by group activists or external actors (i.e. states or international organisations) (Zolberg and Aguayo 1989). The refugee identity is constructed in relation to both to the homeland, and to the host state, from which they are reluctant to uproot themselves. What distinguishes refugees from other migrants decisively, in particular diasporas, is not only that the refugee community is built upon the loss of protection from their states against perceived threats but also upon their transitory status (Harrell-Bond and Voutira 1992). Refugee communities flee to neighbouring countries while they wait for repatriation to their country of origin or resettlement to a third country. In this way, refugee communities are created when there is violence or fear of persecution, and they disappear when refugees are successfully repatriated to their country of origin or resettled to a new host land. In other words, refugee communities are characterised by violence-related transnational displacement, transitory settlement in a neighbouring country, sustained relations with the homeland and dynamics of repatriation or resettlement.

1.2.2. What are the strategies rebel groups can pursue?

Another key concept to answer the research question is rebel groups' strategies. Rebel groups can be defined as groups conducting activities directed at political change "which occur outside the bounds of institutional political channels" (Chenoweth *et al.* 2011, p. 12). Rebel groups have at their disposal distinct strategies of resistance from a list of options distinguishable in terms of violent or non-

violent means (Seymour 2014). Rebels' violent strategies have stood as the focus of the literature on civil conflict (Kalyvas 2003, Wood 2003a, Valentino *et al.* 2004, Humphreys and Weinstein 2006, Weinstein 2007, Downes 2008, Hultman 2008, Balcells 2010a, Besley and Persson 2011, Ottmann 2015). These studies have traced the logic which leads rebel groups to use the extortion of physical force for damaging, killing, and harming, either by exerting direct military pressure on the state or using violence against civilians (Raleigh *et al.* 2010). The emphasis on violence in civil conflict, in many studies on internal wars, has allowed an understanding of how and why rebel groups use violence as a strategy of war, but it has not traditionally explored the array of strategies rebel groups can choose to confront the government.

A turn to transnational politics literature can however help uncover different rebel groups' strategic choices. The literature on social movements and civil resistance has shown that organisations have different strategies of contention. It shows that social movements can concurrently choose non-violence or violence as a strategy to challenge the state (Sharp 1973, Tilly 1978, Paulsen and McAdam 1993, Ackerman and Kruegler 1994, Ackerman and DuVall 2001, McAdam *et al.* 2001, Jasper 2004, Schock 2005, 2013). Non-violence may include pressing their demands through conventional political demands, such as agreeing to enter in negotiations offered by the government, engaging in electoral politics, petitioning the state or pursuing legal recourse (Cunningham 2013a). Non-violence also includes irregular politics, strategies which are meant to impose some costs on the state outside traditional institutional channels, such as methods of protest, persuasion or non-cooperation (Sharp 1973, Mccarthy and Zald 1977, Pearlman 2011a, Cunningham 2013b).

1.3. Main theoretical findings

1.3.1. Why do diaspora or refugee communities provide support to rebel groups?

One of the main findings of this dissertation is the importance of ties between communities' leaders as a driver for transnational communities' mobilisation. Traditionally, the analysis of transnational ethnic communities' involvement in a conflict has been the prerogative of diaspora

studies (Tölölyan 1996, Shain and Sherman 1998, Portes *et al.* 1999, Adamson 2002, 2013, Horst and Van Hear 2002, Shain and Barth 2003, Sheffer 2003, Zunzer 2004, Fair 2005, Shain 2007a, Cohen 2008, Kleist 2008, Cochrane *et al.* 2009, Rainer and Faist 2010, Brinkerhoff 2011, Koinova 2012). The shared assumption to explain why diaspora mobilise for their homelands takes an ethno-nationalist approach focusing on the "long distance nationalism" argument (Anderson 1998). Under the premise of mutual responsibility, the homeland and the diaspora communities monitor each other's' welfare and behaviour (Shain 2007a). This natural mutual attraction, or what Davis and Moore (1997) named 'ethnic affinity', creates diasporic-homeland connections and willingness to become involved in events in the homeland. Similarly, the literature on refugees and internal conflict has seen refugees as transnational extensions of rebel groups. The affinity between refugees and rebel groups was notably conceptualised by the term "refugee warrior" in the late 1980s (Zolberg *et al.* 1989). This concept referred to "highly conscious refugee communities with a political leadership structure with a political leadership structure and armed sections engaged in warfare for a political objective, be it to recapture the homeland, change the regime, or secure a separate state" (Zolberg *et al.* 1989). Departing from the traditional literature which views refugees as passive objects, in need of humanitarian aid, these scholars have acknowledged that "there are cases in which refugees grant legitimacy to the warriors who militarise their camps and see them as protectors or liberators" (Stedman and Tanner 2004, p. 4). There have been numerous instances of militarisation of refugee camps recorded (Zolberg and Aguayo 1989, Loescher and Milner 2004, Lischer 2006, Muggah 2006, Harpviken 2008, McConnachie 2012), including Palestinian in Lebanon and Jordan, Rwandan Tutsi in Uganda, Rwandan Hutus in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kosovars in Albania, Khmer in Thailand, Sudanese in Ethiopia, Eritreans in Sudan, and Kurds in Iraq.

Although this 'ethnic affinity' approach to understanding transnational groups' mobilisation has been widely used across studies, it presents some caveats. Notably, this assumption does not provide any explanation for variations in the mobilisation across or within transnational groups. Part of the problem may be these approaches' tendency to reify diasporas and refugees and to treat them as pre-existing mobilised collective actors. They do not necessarily try to understand how any of these groups

come to be viewed as active actors who have an interest in the homeland conflict. In other words, the literature on diasporic involvement in conflicts does not necessarily consider the questions regarding groups collective mobilisation, agency, and interests.

Through a mechanism-based approach, this dissertation shows that in the case study, ethnicity, itself, is not a necessary driver for transnational mobilisation. This study argues that diaspora mobilisation is mainly the product of the diffusion of the conflict frames by elites. Therefore, what is more relevant than ethnic affinity to understand transnational ethnic support to a rebel group are transnational elite ties and networks. These 'elite ties' (Bakke 2015) may encompass direct connections between elites as well as institutional communication channels, which systematise the diffusion of information from the conflict and through which rebel groups can control the interpretation of the conflict within transnational communities. The information diffused through the elite ties can socialise to conflict frames, individuals who do not have to bear the burden of a conflict, and do not have an immediate interest in participating in the conflict. Conflict frames are the "central organising idea or storyline that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events" (Gamson and Modigliani 1987, p. 143); they showcase why and who individuals should fight. These frames assign meaning to the goals and grievances of the homeland conflict and compels transnational communities' members to support their rebelling kin. Furthermore, this study shows that transnational communities do not replicate exactly the conflict frames developed by the rebel group. Transnational collective conflict frames are built by assembling frames diffused by different actor to which the community is tied. Conflict frames developed by transnational communities are the consolidation of different frames diffused by their rebelling kin but also by international actors. This shows the importance of focusing on networks and diffusion processes in studying transnational communities' mobilisation.

1.3.2. How do diaspora and refugees influence rebel groups' strategies?

This dissertation aims to trace how transnational actors, such as refugees and diasporas, can constrain a rebel group's strategies by affecting its ability to remain united. It shows that rebel groups' strategies are the results of the rebel groups' internal structure. The rebel group's organisational

capacity defines the range of possible strategies and tactics it can conduct to achieve its goals. This thesis further shows that there are two main sources which can influence the cohesion, or lack thereof, of a rebel group. One source shown to influence the rebel group's organisational structure is transnational support (Staniland 2012a, Brouwer and van Wijk 2013, Bakke 2014). The support provided by mobilised diaspora and refugees can under different circumstances either strengthen the groups' cohesion or feed intra-group competition (Staniland 2012a, Bakke 2014, Rudloff and Findley 2016). The analysis of transnational communities' support highlights that transnational Karen communities are rebel social bases, which, through their support, can influence rebel internal politics through two slightly different processes. First, transnational communities, by providing support to one faction rather than other, can heighten grievances. These grievances may be politicised creating a milieu conducive to faction rivalry with a spiral of outbidding of extreme positions and demands. These grievances can be utilised by the political entrepreneurs who encourage the fragmentation of the group. The second mechanism observed through which transnational communities can affect the rebel group's cohesion or lack of thereof is altering factions' strategies. Rebel group factions who share ties with transnational communities will alter their strategies to meet their demands and needs as a way to secure their support in the future. However, the demands of the transnational social base may not overlap with the demands of other factions' social bases. Therefore, the faction modelling its strategy to transnational demands may alienate other factions who are driven by their own social bases' demands (Jolliffe 2016, Brenner 2018). The refugees and the diasporas, by acting as an active rebel social bases, can contribute to in-group competition between incumbent and aspiring leaders, triggering the fragmentation of the rebel group.

The thesis also demonstrates that an alternative external source of rebel group's fragmentation is the state counter-insurgency strategies. It has been shown that states use 'divide and conquer' or 'concede and conquer' strategies (Cunningham 2011) which can foster in-group competition. Internal divisions within a rebel group – which are observable when factions have different ideas of what the struggle should be about and how it should be fought, or when they compete over resources - are the opportunity for the state to bargain between different partners and find a settlement with the rebel

group's factions that requires the least concessions. By settling with some factions, the state expects the rebel group to be weakened and forced into surrender, putting an end to the conflict. To spur further internal division, the state can also prevent the rebel group from monitoring and accommodating its factions' demands. Therefore, it can cut the rebel group's sources of revenues, or weaken its political institutions (Lawler 2006, Johnston 2007, Cunningham 2011). As they get less material benefit or are less held accountable to the leadership, factions are more likely to be convinced or incentivised to split from the rebel group and join the state.

This thesis further argues that the concurrent occurrence of transnational and domestic mechanisms that can lead to the fragmentation of a rebel group. This dissertation highlights that transnational communities and the state can both contribute through different mechanisms to the rebel group's fragmentation. A full understanding of the rebel group's strategies requires considering the influence of both the state and transnational actors on in-group dynamics.

1.4. Empirical approach

1.4.1. Rationale for using process tracing

To assess the theoretical framework briefly presented above, this dissertation has used the process tracing method. Process tracing in social science is commonly defined as a method of research to trace causal mechanisms (Tansey 2007, Collier 2011a, Waldner 2011, 2012, Beach and Pedersen 2013a, Mahoney 2016). Causal mechanisms may be defined as "an entity that has the capacity to alter its environment because it possesses an invariant property that, in specific contexts, transmits either a physical force or information that influences the behaviour of other agents or entities" (Waldner 2012, p.75). Hence, process tracing methods trace the events relevant to understanding how X leads to Y, to show whether the case studied confirms/disconfirms the presence of the theorised mechanism under consideration (George and Bennett 2005, Waldner 2015, Falleti 2016). This event focused method contrasts with comparatists and frequentist studies which analyse associations between variables representing properties possessed by cases (Mahoney 2016, p.495). Process tracing is

interested in complementing frequentist and comparative studies' approach by establishing the presence of causal mechanisms which explains the association between two variables.

While the large-N studies have proven the relevance of the association between the presence of transnational ethnic communities and changes in rebel group's behaviour, the present research aims to uncover *how* the transnational ethnic communities change the behaviour of rebel groups. Using the process tracing method allows scrutinising the theoretical processes at a micro-level and adding analytical leverage to our understanding of transnational mechanisms in civil conflict (Lieberman 2005, Beach and Pedersen 2013b, Bennett and Checkel 2014a, Trampusch and Palier 2016).

1.4.2. Rationale for using the Karen conflict as a case study

The first rationale for choosing the Karen conflict as a case study to uncover the presence of the transnational mechanisms influencing rebel group's strategies of resistance is that the Karen case is an "on-the-line" case; that is a case which is well-predicted by statistical models (Lieberman 2005, p.444). The seminal study on transnational ethnic communities' link to civil conflict from Cederman et al. (2009) has shown the "border-crossing ethnic affiliations have a considerable impact on the likelihood of ethnonational civil wars" (p. 432). Their statistical model which uses a dataset of 23 excluded ethnic groups who have transnational ethnic kin include the KNU in Myanmar. Their study shows there is a significant statistical association between the occurrence of civil conflict, measured as the presence of conflict a given year and the presence of a transnational kin in the Karen case. The present study aims to report additional analytical leverage to Cederman et al. (2009) study by exploring the exact mechanisms which link the presence of transnational Karen communities to the conflict in Karen state. Another rationale for selecting the Karen case to trace the transnational causal mechanism influencing rebel group's behaviour is the data richness it presents. The Karen case, which also remains less studied than other cases of civil war in political science, is likely to offer abundant empirical evidence to determine the presence of key indicators of the causal mechanisms theorised in the previous chapters. The Karen struggle began in 1949 and has been one of the longest-running rebellions, led by the KNU and its military wing the KNLA (Rae 1991, Bowles 1998, Smith 1999, Fink

2008, South 2011). The KNU has been involved in a conflict against the central Burmese/Myanmar Government since 1949 using different tactics and strategies of resistance, which allow an assessment of whether the changes have been linked to the influence of transnational Karen communities. In addition, the Karen conflict has created large flux of displacement. Since 1984, when the first camp was opened in Tak Province, it is estimated that one million people have crossed the border from Myanmar/Burma to Thailand, of which 120,000 to 140,000 are still living in refugee camps (TBC 2014). Moreover, resettlement programmes in those camps have allowed Karen people to move to third countries, in particular the US, Australia, and the UK, where they have formed a new diaspora. Thus, the presence of different transnational Karen communities that could allow assessing how transnational ethnic communities can influence the struggle in the home country.

Consequently, the case of the Karen struggle, from 1984 (the date of the creation of the first refugee settlements) to 2015 (the end of the field work of this research project), provides the data richness required to assess the validity of each part of the causal mechanism linking transnational ethnic communities and rebel groups conceptualised in the theoretical framework.

1.4.3. Notes on language: Myanmar or Burma?

This thesis has endeavoured to remain neutral in its use of Burmese/Myanmar words, including in naming the country. In 1989, Burma's military government changed the name of the country to Myanmar (Mackerras 2003). In 2008, the name of the country was changed again to the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. The new name was taken from the literary form of the language, which first appeared in the 12th century, while the term 'Burma' was derived from the spoken form in Bamar, the language of the majority Burmese ethnic group (Mackerras 2003). Although this change in name was internationally recognised, some countries, including the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as some political activists and groups have continued to referring to 'Burma' rather than 'Myanmar'. Other countries or organisations have resorted to catch-all solutions using 'Myanmar/Burma'. Far from being a mere linguistic dispute, these two names have come to symbolise two different national identities and political trajectories, upholding claims to legitimacy and political

loyalties (Ganesan 2017). It is therefore often understood that those referring to 'Burma' use such terminology as a way to express their opposition to the ruling regime.

To avoid any terminological controversy, this thesis will use 'Burma' to refer to the country prior to the name change in 1989, or when directly citing interviewers using 'Burma'. It will use 'Myanmar' for any reference post-1989. This choice does not reflect a political stance, rather aims to reflect formal changes in terminologies.

1.5. Layout of dissertation

In this chapter, I have put forth the reasons why such a study is important and explain my approach for understanding transnational influences on rebel activities. Chapters 2 and 3 set out the specific theoretical expectations of the mechanisms which explain firstly the transnational ethnic communities' mobilisation, and secondly, the influence of transnational ethnic communities' support and the state counterinsurgency strategies on the rebel group's strategies. I situate each theoretical expectation within an appropriate theoretical context, including the literature on transnationalism, diaspora politics and refugees; the literature on the fragmentation of rebel groups; and studies on violence against civilians and non-violence. Chapter 4 exposes the research design and the methodology of the dissertation.

The second part of the dissertation is dedicated to test the theoretical framework in the case of the KNU rebellion in Myanmar/Burma. Chapter 5 and 6 present an account of how the domestic context has influenced the KNU choice of strategy and how it has fuelled its fragmentation in two instances, in 1995 and 2012. Chapter 7 presents the detailed results of the embedded case study of how the Karen refugees fuelled the KNU's fragmentation and activities in 1994. Chapter 8 traces the mechanisms of the theoretical framework in the case of how the Karen refugees fuelled the KNU's fragmentation and activities in 2012. Chapter 9 analyses how fuelled the Karen diaspora on the KNU's fragmentation and activities in 2012.

Chapter 2: Understanding transnational ethnic communities' mobilisation

2.1. Introduction

Why and when do transnational ethnic communities become supporters of a homeland internal conflict? This chapter argues that pre-existing networks provide the foundations for transnational mobilisation. Diaspora and refugee communities' members are geographically dispersed, but they are linked to members of the rebel group in the homeland through social ties. These connections, which are "embedded in formal organisations and associations and in informal relationships" (Staniland 2014, p. 15), allow communication, coordination and cooperation across localities. The mobilisation of transnational communities as supporters of a rebel group is constrained and enabled by such social ties.

This chapter first summarises the existing literature on transnational involvements in civil conflicts. In particular, it analyses the limitations of studies based on the assumption stating that ethnic affinity can trigger transnational involvement in a civil conflict. It then explains that the ties between the transnational ethnic communities and the rebelling ethnic kin can be support for the diffusion of the conflict's frames, which can generate the mobilisation of transnational ethnic kin communities and strengthen the support they provide for the rebelling kin.

2.2. Existing explanations for transnational ethnic mobilisation

Different bodies of literature have examined the influence of transnational ethnic actors on rebel groups and civil war, including the literature on civil war, the literature on transnationalism, and the literature on diaspora politics.

The literature on civil conflict has recorded that different transnational actors can be involved in a civil war. Studies have noted that rebel groups have several requirements to be successful—political, human, and material (Byman 2001). When these resources are not available domestically, rebel groups can look for them externally, either from sponsoring states or transnational ethnic communities such

as refugees and diasporas. External material support provided by transnational ethnic communities can include safe haven or financial resources (Byman 2001, Salehyan *et al.* 2011, Brouwer and van Wijk 2013, Checkel 2013). Havens are places that provide sanctuaries to the rebel group's leadership and selected members; it is a place where they can rest, plan for future operations, and in some cases be bases for additional recruitment or training (Salehyan 2007). Financial resources provided by transnational ethnic communities can take the form of legitimate business enterprise abroad, or fundraising activities (Shain 2007a, Koinova 2012). Political support provided by transnational ethnic communities recorded in the literature includes advocacy and lobbying activities to encourage the host countries to back the rebellion and political activism (Brinkerhoff 2011, Koinova 2012).

Although the literature on civil conflict has recorded the types of support diasporas and refugees can provide to rebel groups, less is known about the processes and causal mechanisms by which these communities come to play a role in conflicts (Adamson 2013). In most of the studies looking at diasporic and refugee involvement in civil conflict, transnational communities are analysed as independent variables; that is as factors that can influence the course of a civil conflict (Adamson 2013). They do not determine the circumstances under which these groups become active supporter of rebel groups (Melvin and King 2000). Yet, rebel groups can use the diasporic or refugee resources only if they are able to mobilise these transnational actors abroad. The mobilisation of transnational communities should be treated as a dynamic process and equally as a dependent and independent variable. The rebel group's behaviour is influenced by the mobilisation and the support of transnational ethnic communities. Concurrently, the mobilisation of transnational ethnic communities is dependent on the rebel group in the homeland (Adamson 2013). In this chapter's conceptual framework, this dynamic loop is highlighted, contrasting with the predominant approach of transnational aspects of civil conflict which considers the mobilisation of transnational communities independently from the characteristics and actions of the rebel groups they support.

Theoretical insights on the foundations of transnational communities' mobilisation as supporters of rebel groups can be taken from the literature on transnational and diaspora politics. Some scholars have argued that transnational communities are motivated to intervene in the homeland's politics by

"long distance nationalism" (Anderson 1991). This 'ethnic affinity' (Davis and Moore 1997) between different groups is seen as a de facto motivation for monitoring the welfare and behaviour of ethnic kin groups. Diaspora communities identify themselves, and are identified by others as part of the homeland national community (Shain 2007a). Under the premise of mutual responsibility, the homeland and the diaspora communities monitor each other. Israel for instance, considers itself by law responsible for the welfare of all Jewish communities and views them as strategic assets (Shain 2007a). The ethnic affinity between the homeland and the diasporic communities creates a diasporic connection to events in the homeland.

This explanation for transnational ethnic solidarity derives from primordialist and essentialist approaches to ethnicity. The primordialist view of ethnicity is defined as a collective identity based on common descent, shared experiences, and ascriptive differences, including customs, language, appearances and religion (Gellner 1983, Banton 1994, Hale 2004, Chandra 2006, Sökefeld 2006, Wimmer 2008). Members of ethnic groups may define themselves or be defined by others in terms of cultural traits, and ethnicity is a subjectively felt sense of belonging (Wimmer 2008). The perception of ethnicity as the most essential component of an individual's identity characterises both the primordialist and the essentialist approaches (Horowitz 1985, Anderson 1991, Petersen 2002). Ethnic membership is acquired through birth, hence a given and stable social category. Ethnic affiliations transcend other types of affiliations including those to the state (e.g. Horowitz 1985 p.91). Moreover, an individual's ethnic identity shapes his/her interests, defining which ones are appropriate; ethnic identity is the foundation of the individual's rationality (Posen 1993). Thus, members of diaspora or refugee communities tend to act upon perceived collective interests of the ethnic group and mobilise when the collective interests of the group are at stake.

However, this approach to transnational communities' mobilisation does not explain the variation between transnational ethnic community members' involvement in the homeland (Sökefeld 2006). In other words, why in one ethnic group some members actively take part in the civil conflict while others are more passive and 'dormant' (Sheffer 2003). Defining ethnicity as an essential identity that is the

foundation of individuals' rationality implies that all the members of an ethnic group should mobilise to defend the interests of the rebel group.

The literature on social movements takes a slightly different approach to explain transnational mobilisation. According to this literature, mobilisation is a process led by political activists who use political, social and economic resources for a collective claim (Keck and Sikkink 1998a, Tarrow 2005, Carpenter 2007). If transnational ethnic communities' mobilisation is uneven across the community and led by a small number of political entrepreneurs, it implies that all members of an ethnic group do not necessarily value the interests of the ethnic group and in turn are likely to mobilise to protect it. Rather, according to the social movement literature, there are three factors driving mobilisation: political opportunities, mobilising structures, and framing. Political opportunities refer to the contextual and structural conditions that enable the rise of social movements (Tilly and Tarrow 2007). Mobilising structures are the vehicles through which people become engaged in collective actions (Mccarthy and Zald 1977). Framings are the ideas that foster a shared understanding of what the social movement should be about and how it should be conducted (Benford and Snow 2000). In sum, the social movement theory adds some analytical leverage in understanding transnational communities' mobilisation in the homeland by moving away from the assumption that transnational mobilisation is contingent on the self-identification of diaspora or refugee communities as member of the same ethnic group as the rebel group.

The following builds upon social movement theory to conceptualise the mechanisms through which diaspora and refugee communities mobilise and become supporters of the rebel group.

2.3. Conceptualising the mechanisms driving transnational ethnic communities' mobilisation

This section presents the conceptual mechanism explaining the mobilisation of transnational ethnic communities for rebel groups. This mechanism unfolds in two steps, which can occur concurrently: first, members of transnational ethnic communities mobilise for their ethnic kin when they are part of trust networks, such networks will enable the diffusion of the rebel group's collective

goals, including the frames of the conflict. Secondly, the adoption of the rebel group's collective goals will trigger the transnational ethnic communities' mobilisation, including political and economic support.

2.3.1. Premise: Salience of ethnic identity as a condition of mobilisation

The starting point of this research's transnational ethnic mobilisation theory is a constructivist definition of ethnic identity. Constructivist scholars show that ethnicity is an enduring social construction based on objective criteria, like common descent or customs and languages (Barth 1969, Connor 1994, Brubaker and Laitin 1998, Brubaker *et al.* 2004, Sökefeld 2006, Wimmer 2008). Nevertheless, the salience of the ethnicity in an individual's identity is not a given. The defining feature of an ethnic group is not necessary the language, common descent or language, but the "mere fact that boundaries are perceived and persist" (Hale 2004, p. 461). Criteria for ethnic group membership change over time and individuals do not necessarily define themselves as members of an ethnic group nor are they automatically willing to mobilise in the name of the ethnic group. An individual's ethnic identity is a social radar, giving individuals some points of reference on how to interact with others (Hale 2004, p. 463). However, one's ethnic identity represents one of many alternatives for an individual's identity and is inherently situational. The salience of an individual's ethnic identity depends on the political and social context (Hale 2004, 2008). For example, an individual who is a member of the Karen minority living in the UK may identify him/herself as Karen when facing a member of the Myanmar Government, and simultaneously identify him/herself as British when interacting with an American. Ethnic identities can therefore be seen as adaptive strategies people adopt to face different social situations. The willingness to act politically in the name of the ethnic group depends on the individual's consciousness of the ethnic group (Harris 1994, Keyes and Brown 1995). An individual will act for an ethnic group when his ethnic identity is salient.

The individual's group consciousness – "the subjective sense of nationhood"(Hale 2008) - is the result of a socialisation process, rather than automatic "ethnic solidarity". Anthropological and Bourdieausian (Bourdieu 1989) sociological approaches of mobilisation emphasise how culturally

grounded framings, discourses, or repertoires that an individual acquires throughout its life, shape their group consciousness and the group's collective goals, and, in turn, their rationale for supporting an insurgency (Hale 2004, 2008). Thus, individuals will mobilise and rally for their kin group's interests when they are socialised to the group's collective goals. The premise of the present study is that mobilisation of transnational ethnic communities is conditional on the salience of ethnic identity and socialisation to ethnic group's collective goals. This premise takes a radical different approach from studies of the diaspora literature which set that diasporas act upon ethnic solidarity and affinity, and calls for thoroughly theorising *how* (that is the mechanism through which) transnational ethnic communities can be socialised to the ethnic group's collective goals. The following section spells out this transnational mobilisation mechanism.

2.3.2. Transnational networks and the diffusion of rebel groups' collective goals

Refugees and diasporas' mobilisation starts when they value their ethnic identity and act on behalf of the ethnic group's interests – that is the rebel group's frames of the conflict. Frames of a conflict are "strategic persuasive devices" (Polletta and Ho 2006, p. 192) that help individuals from the same group to share the same understanding of what the conflict is about, and foster the individuals' mobilisation (Benford and Snow 2000, p. 614). Benford and Snow (2000, p. 615) define frames as an "action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate activities". Social movement scholars have distinguished different types of frames which can consolidate a group's mobilisation: diagnostic framing and prognostic framing. Diagnostic frames are schema that identify the problem and attribute the blame for the problematic situation (Snow *et al.* 1986, Benford 1993). In other words, diagnostic frames are the ideas shared by a rebel group determining what the conflict should be about. Prognostic frames articulate the proposed solution to the problem (Benford and Snow 2000). They identify how the conflict should be fought and strategies thereof. These frames are a critical variable in accounting for mobilisation in a conflict as they allow different individuals to link their interests, values and beliefs to those of the conflict.

Rebel groups' frames are simultaneously shaped by political opportunity structures to which they are exposed, that is opportunities allowing their grievances to emerge, and by their relationship with their allies, competitors, antagonists, and third parties (Polletta and Ho 2006). Then, a puzzle emerges: how can refugees and diasporas share the conflict frames developed by a rebel group, when they are neither exposed to the same political opportunity structures or share the same relationships with their rebelling kin?

The following will argue that diffusion is the key mechanism that allows the diasporas and refugees to share a rebel group's frames of the conflict and in turn provide support to their rebel kin group. Diffusion has traditionally defined to describe the process of transnational policies, ideas, norms being transferred from one country to another (Starr 1991, Braun and Gilardi 2006, Simmons *et al.* 2006, Carpenter 2007, Marsh and Sharman 2009, Elkins 2010, Gilardi 2012). Scholars have emphasised that diffusion is a process leading to the adoption of ideas, norms or policies, as opposed to the actual adoption of ideas, norms or policies. Various diffusion mechanisms have been identified. They are commonly grouped into four broad categories: coercion, competition, learning, and emulation (Simmons *et al.* 2006). *Coercion* refers to the imposition of a policy or a norm by powerful transnational actors or countries. *Competition* means that countries adopt new policies because their rivals have done so, and to remain competitive. *Learning* conceptualises the mechanisms by which one country uses new evidence and assesses the efficacy of a policy from another country to adopt or implement a norm or a policy. Finally, *emulation* refers to the "logic of appropriateness" (Checkel 2005) of policies and norms. While the *learning* mechanisms may be rational, *emulation* is merely copying with no consideration for whether the policy is appropriate (Simmons 2000, True and Mintrom 2001, Simmons *et al.* 2006). Transposing this definition of diffusion to this research's topic of study, the diffusion of the rebel groups' conflict frames could be defined as the process leading diasporas and refugees to echo the threats to which rebel group in the homeland is exposed and accept why and how the war should be fought.

For the diffusion mechanism to occur, transnational actors must interact with one another and create transnational networks that support of diffusion. Rebel group's framings of the conflict are more

likely to be diffused, have an echo and mobilise the transnational ethnic communities if the ties linking them to the rebel group constitute a "trust network" (Tilly 2007). Political participation is a long-term risky enterprise whose results depend on the successes, mistakes or failures of others mobilising for the same goal. Hence, transnational ethnic members are likely to adopt the diffused frames of the conflict and mobilise alongside their rebelling kin when they are part of a network that can reduce the risk of their participation in the ethnic conflict. Such networks, which are formally described by Tilly (2004) as trust networks, and they consist mainly of strong ties which give one-member significant claims on the attention or aid of another, and allow members of the network to collectively carry a long-term and risky enterprise. Trust networks include some religious communities or kinship groups (Harris 1994, Leighley 1995, Calhoun-Brown 1996, Putnam 2001, Mcclurg 2003). Religious or civic communities can be institutions with the capacity to transmit political messages stimulating the collective interests in politics (Putnam 2001), coordinate the resources needed for political action or help members to learn skills that make participation easier (Calhoun-Brown 1996). While the concept of trust networks has mainly been analysed for domestic mobilisation, they can also be useful when considering transnational mobilisation. In the context of transnational ethnic mobilisation to support rebel groups, trust networks are key resources for the transnational diffusion of the rebel group's frames of the conflict, their adoption by the transnational ethnic communities and enabling their mobilisation to support the rebelling kin group. When diaspora's members and refugees are part of a pre-existing trust network linking them to the rebel group, the diffusion of the conflict frames can occur. The trust network is the support for the conflict frames diffusion and allow diasporas and refugees to echo and link their own interests, values and beliefs to the threats and grievances promoted by rebel groups, which is key to ensure the mobilisation of the transnational communities.

The mobilisation of transnational ethnic communities can take various forms. The first avenue for affecting changes in the rebel ethnic group is by providing political support (Portes *et al.* 1999, Adamson 2002, Wayland 2004, Fair 2005, Smith and Stares 2007, Orjuela 2008, Brinkerhoff 2011, Koinova 2011). The concept of political support is here influenced by the work of democratic theorists (Easton 1975, Norris 1999). Political support is defined as the congruence between the political

community (i.e. the constructed cultural entity that inscribes the collective political identity), the formal governing structures (i.e. the regime), and the incumbent authorities (Norris 1999). There are three forms of political support: backing the recognition of the political community which is translated by national pride and identity, increasing the legitimacy of the rebel group and its principles which can be evaluated by the satisfaction and trust in the rebel institutions, and developing the effectiveness of the authorities' performance indicated by the feelings towards political leaders. Transnational ethnic groups can contribute to these forms of political support through different activities. They can create a safe haven from where the rebellion is organised outside the reach of the targeted state. This allows them to reinforce their governing structures and increase the incumbent leaders' performance (Byman 2001). For example, after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, nearly 6 million refugees fled Afghanistan towards Pakistan or Iran. In Pakistan, the Afghani resistance created a powerful state in exile operating from the refugee camps they controlled (Lischer 2006). Moreover, transnational ethnic groups can provide important political support by advocating their kin's situation to the international community defending the rebel group's international representation and support. This will reinforce the rebel group's formal governing structure. It includes taking part in lobbying, diplomatic activities and demonstrations in host countries (Adamson 2002, Orjuela 2008, Feyissa 2012). For instance, the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora organised numerous events to advocate for an LTTE territory (Wayland 2004, Fair 2005, Shain 2007b). They can also become directly involved in the rebel groups' politics to increase trust towards the rebel leadership's performance and further the transnational identification with the rebel group's claimed political community.

The second avenue for affecting changes in the rebel ethnic group's behaviour is by providing economic and financial support (Byman 2001, Collier and Hoeffler 2004, Fair 2005, Orjuela 2008, Feyissa 2012). These economic resources can be used to acquire arms and recruit soldiers, or more generally organise the insurgency. Transnational ethnic communities can play an important economic role for their rebelling ethnic kin through fundraisings activities, remittances and business investments.

2.3.3. Observable implications

The section above unfolded the process through which transnational ethnic communities become active supporters of rebel groups. Transnational ethnic communities provide support to their rebelling ethnic kin when they are part of a pre-existing network linking them with members of the rebel group. The ties between the transnational ethnic communities and the rebelling ethnic kin are the support of diffusion of frames of the conflict, which can enhance the mobilisation of transnational ethnic kin communities and strengthen the support they provide to the rebelling kin.

Mechanisms are ultimately unobservable, and it is therefore key to spell out their empirical manifestations. As such, although diffusion is unobservable, but it is possible to observe its empirical manifestation (Bennett and Checkel 2014b). Therefore, the observable implications of the process theorising why diaspora and refugees become supporters of a rebel group are set out below. If the existence of trust networks is a condition for the diffusion of conflict frames, it is expected that when transnational ethnic communities are part of religious or civic communities where rebel group's members are present, there will be diffusion of conflict frames. These religious and civic communities will be opportunities for the rebel group to share its views on the conflict, its enemies and grievances. Because these communities reduce the risk of the political participation to the conflict, transnational communities will adopt and echo the conflict frames. Diffusion will further be uncovered if a change in the rebel group's conflict frames, such as change in the perceived grievances, or in the rebel groups' strategies, is reflected in the transnational ethnic communities' discourse.

Furthermore, if as theoretically expected diffusion enables transnational communities' mobilisation, empirically several observations can be yielded. When diasporas and refugees share the rebel group's conflict frames, they will the ones providing political and economic support in forms of lobbying, diplomatic activities or by transmitting economic resources. This support is expected to decrease or cease whenever the diaspora or refugee communities no longer echo the rebel group's conflict frames.

2.4. Conclusion

This chapter aimed to conceptualise how and why transnational ethnic communities, who do not bear the brunt of a conflict, become supporters of a rebel group. To do so, it has shown that transnational ethnic mobilisation is a process encompassing two mechanisms, that occur concurrently. First, transnational ethnic communities do not necessarily mobilise for their rebelling kin; rather, they mobilise for the homeland when they are part of a social network linking them to their rebelling kin. This social network allows the diffusion of conflict frames to the transnational ethnic communities, socialising them to the ethnic issues in the homeland. The diffusion and adoption of conflict frames are more likely when transnational ethnic communities and the rebel group are part of a trust network. This network not only allows a better diffusion of the frames but also secures their adoption by the transnational communities. Secondly, the diffusion of such frames results from the mobilisation of transnational ethnic communities. Such mobilisation can take different forms, including political and economic support.

This conceptual framework provides various benefits. It reconciles different literatures providing important insights into transnational mobilisation, that have not necessarily interacted before. The literature on diaspora politics highlights that ethnicity is key in the mobilisation of diaspora and transnational ethnic communities. However, it often fails to identify the precise mechanisms through which ethnicity can mobilise transnational communities for the homeland. This is because it is often agnostic of the social mobilisation and transnationalism theories. It can overlook that transnational ethnic communities' mobilisation is a form of political mobilisation which can be affected by mechanisms such as diffusion, processes which have been widely analysed in the social mobilisation literature. Furthermore, this conceptual framework untangles the mechanism explaining how ethnic identity can lead to transnational mobilisation. It considers ethnicity not only as an umbrella notion, embracing colour, language and religion, but as a component of individual identity granted through socialisation processes and varying according to the social context. Individuals can rally or mobilise for ethnic issues when they are part of a social network that can activate their ethnic identity. Hence,

social networks are key to understanding transnational ethnic mobilisation as they allow the diffusion of elements for identifying with an ethnic group. This definition of ethnic identity has allowed to show that transnational mobilisation requires trust networks which can socialise transnational communities to homeland groups' collective goals. Finally, this chapter has analysed how rebel groups influence the mobilisation of transnational ethnic communities through the diffusion of conflict frames through trust networks. Nevertheless, if diffusion mechanisms occur from the rebel group to the transnational ethnic communities, they should also occur from the transnational ethnic communities to the rebel group. The consequences of the transnational mobilisation are therefore analysed in the following chapter.

Chapter 3: Transnational ethnic communities 'influence on domestic conflict

3.1. Introduction

The previous chapter aimed to theorise the mechanisms responsible for the transnational ethnic communities' mobilisation and engagement in the homeland conflict in which their ethnic kin is a party. Once this process of mobilisation takes place, the question is how the transnational communities influence the violent conflict. This chapter argues that diasporas and refugees can influence the conflict, by impacting the organisational structure of the rebel group. Different contentious strategies require different organisational capacity, and therefore cohesion (or lack of thereof) of a rebel group is a key factor for its choice of strategies. The cohesion or lack of thereof of non-state armed groups is linked to "variation in conflict processes" and choices of strategies of resistance (Bakke *et al.* 2012, p. 264). Indeed, the fragmentation of the armed groups "undermines the capacity for collective action and diverts energy away from the pursuit of public, political aims towards the pursuit of private advantages" (Bakke *et al.* 2012, p. 273), and as a result can be linked with an increase in the use of violence, in particular against civilians. Yet, transnational communities' political and economic support can affect the power balance within a rebel group; their ability to remain united and conduct activities with public, collective and political purpose. In addition, this chapter explores an alternative and complementary pathway that can affect the organisational capacity of a rebel group, acknowledging that transnational communities' support impact on rebel group's strategies is only one part of the larger landscape from which rebel group's strategies emerge. Therefore, it will show that other factors, such as the role of the state matter for the choice of strategy, equally shape the rebel group's ability to remain united.

The following chapter provides an overview of the existing literature on rebels' strategies and highlight its limitations. Then, it shows that a key mechanism to explain rebel groups' strategies is their internal group dynamics. From this, it demonstrates that two main pathways can affect a rebel group's internal dynamics: its relationship with the government; and transnational support.

3.2. An organisational theory of rebel groups' strategies

3.2.1. Existing explanations for rebels' strategies and tactics

Theories on social movements have shown the importance of opportunity structures and the political context in accounting for the choice of groups' strategies (McAdam *et al.* 2001, Polletta *et al.* 2002, Saxton and Benson 2006). The choice of a tactic is the result of a rational calculation aiming to reach a maximum goal at the lowest cost. According to these scholars, what influences such rational calculation are the political structures and the institutional context in which a group operates (McAdam *et al.* 2001, Polletta *et al.* 2002, Meyer 2004, Saxton and Benson 2006, Davenport 2007, Gleditsch and Ruggeri 2010). It is argued that events or structural changes can reduce the costs or the effectiveness of certain tactics, explaining the timing of different strategies. Initially a group will aim to attain its goals through institutional channels and favour non-violent strategies. However, when such an avenue is blocked and there is no opportunity for a rebel group to attain its goals through institutional channels, rebel groups' strategies shift towards violent tactics. There is a natural escalation from conventional to non-violent and violent strategies.

Transposed to a conflict context and rebel groups' strategies, this type of argument sustains that rebel groups pick strategies they think will work to achieve their maximal and proximate goals. Rebel groups would be concerned with their long-term prospects and more immediate concerns, such as their ability to attract and retain supporters, or demonstrate mobilisation capacity (Ackerman and DuVall 2001, Cunningham *et al.* 2016). The group's ability to attain such goals can be determined by the country's institutions and political context (Ackerman and Kruegler 1994). For instance, when a group chooses non-violence as a strategy to challenge the government but if the government itself uses violence, it will be too costly for the rebel group to stick to non-violence (Ackerman and Kruegler 1994). With this approach, rebel strategies are seen as a result of the domestic political context.

Another set of arguments in the conflict literature relies on the assumption that rebel strategies are linked to the resources available (Stephan and Chenoweth 2008, Asal *et al.* 2013, Chenoweth and Stephan 2013, Cunningham 2013a, 2016, Dudouet 2013, Schock 2013, Cunningham *et al.* 2016). The

rebel groups' strategies are the result of rational calculation analysing whether the resources at their disposal are sufficient to successfully challenge the government (Olson 1971, Polletta *et al.* 2002). Rebel groups need to ensure that they have the necessary resources to conduct their chosen strategy. If they want to conduct non-violent tactics, such as protest, they need to ensure mass mobilisation (Stephan and Chenoweth 2008). Similarly, if the rebel group want to challenge the government's military on a battle field they need to secure the necessary military equipment (Valentino *et al.* 2004, Downes 2008, Nilsson 2010). These explanations for rebel groups' strategic choices tend to assume that rebel groups are unitary actors who make rational decisions in the name of a group. Each rebel group has an identified maximal and proximate goal.

However, a growing body of work has shown that rebel groups can consist of multiple organisations and that there can be innate of competition among them (Pearlman 2009, 2010, Bakke *et al.* 2012, Cunningham *et al.* 2016, Seymour *et al.* 2016). Recent empirical studies have shown that rebel groups are not coherent groups, rather coalitions of subgroups with malleable allegiances and divergent interests (Pearlman and Cunningham 2012). For instance, the Palestinian national movement reveals that rebel groups are malleable organisations, prone to divisions. For example, in 1968 and 1969, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine split into two factions: the Popular Front of the Liberation of Palestine-General Command and the Democratic Front of the Liberation of Palestine (Pearlman 2011a). Rebel groups' strategies and tactical choices are therefore not straight forward and can be the result of internal struggles of power between different factions or subgroups. As such, Warren and Troy (2011, 2014) have shown that collective violence is produced by the interaction between rebel subgroups and the suppressive actions of the state. Similarly, Pearlman (2011b) has taken a "composite-actor" approach to shown that rebel groups are not unitary actors, and rebel strategies are shaped by the interaction between different sub-groups. There is great diversity in the ways movement can be internally divided and in the implications on the strategies they choose to confront the government (McLauchlin and Pearlman 2011, Warren and Troy 2011, 2014, Cunningham *et al.* 2012, Driscoll 2012, Cunningham 2013b, Rudloff and Findley 2016, Seymour *et al.* 2016). The following section presents theories on how the in-group dynamics can influence the rebel group's strategies and

focus on two mains sources of rebel groups' fragmentation: the government counter-insurgency strategies and transnational ethnic communities' support.

3.2.2. Rebels' strategies of resistance, the outcome of in-group dynamics

This research intends to argue that rebels' strategies of resistance results from in-group dynamics. A growing body of literature argues that members of a rebel group have two sets of motivations to act: (1) they seek public and collective goods for the ethnic group (e.g. autonomy or independence), (2) they seek private goods that might benefit them personally (Cunningham *et al.* 2012). In turn, one ethnic rebel group can encompass different factions or subgroups which claim to represent the group' greater welfare but might have divergent interests. Factions can be armed groups, political organisations, or civil associations (Cunningham et al. 2012). The extent of a rebel group's fragmentation depends on the numbers of subgroups competing for power within the rebel group and the level of institutionalisation of the factions (Bakke *et al.* 2012, Cunningham *et al.* 2012). Each faction participates simultaneously in two competitions: (1) against the state they challenge to gain public goods that benefit the group and (2) against other factions to increase power and material goods that benefit the individual faction. The tension between these two sets of motivations shapes the type of activities a rebel group conducts (Pearlman 2011c, Bakke *et al.* 2012, Seymour *et al.* 2016). The literature on rebel groups' fragmentation has identified different mechanisms linking the rebel group's internal organisation to its tactics and strategies. Therefore, the following outlines how the rebel groups' internal cohesion is key to understand their choice of non-violent and violent strategies. Then, it assesses the different factors leading to internal cohesion (or lack of thereof) and highlights the role of transnational support in triggering fragmentation or reinforcing the groups' cohesion.

The literature has first identified several mechanisms leading to non-violent strategies. Non-violent strategies require coordination and restraint that only a cohesive group can insure (Pearlman 2011c). A cohesive movement in which each faction seeks collective goods, has the organisational power to mobilise mass participation, enforce discipline by containing disruptive dissent and clarify a coherent collective goal; three key factors for the emergence of non-violent strategies (Pearlman 2011c). Mass

participation is important for the success of non-violent activities such as protests or boycotts; while violent activities carried out by a small group of individuals have highly visible consequences, non-violent activities such as demonstrations or boycotts are visible only if they have enough recruits to undermine and challenge the state's decision-makers. Discipline is also crucial for non-violent activities as it forces rebel groups' recruits to act according to collective goals rather than aiming to increase their private advantages which often entails resorting to violence to increase their personal profit (Pearlman 2011c, Bakke *et al.* 2012). Finally, coherent collective purpose can motivate large numbers of recruits: without clear collective goals and the expectation of benefiting from public goods, rebel group's recruits will not act consistently towards a collective objective and they might favour private advantages which can deter the use of non-violence. If this mechanism is present, the following observable implication is expected to be observed: if a rebel group is united, it is expected that they can mobilise high numbers of participants who display the same strategic goals in their discourses. If they can achieve broad-based participation, it is expected that the rebel groups use non-violent tactics to confront the government.

Similarly, non-violent strategies including entering into peace negotiations, require high levels of group cohesion. Studies on peace and negotiated settlements have shown that rebel groups can successfully enter peace negotiations when the leaders can deter factions from spoiling peace (Stedman 1997, Nilsson 2008, Pearlman 2009). Peace agreements, or even the prospect of a peace agreement, are key events for rebel groups. They can heighten divisions by favouring some factions and disadvantaging others (Pearlman 2009, Seymour *et al.* 2016). Factions turn to negotiators or spoilers depending on whether it can offer them the opportunity to advance their struggle for political dominance (Pearlman 2009, p. 79). The existence of peace spoilers can destabilise peace talks and negotiations (Stedman 1997). Therefore, this research argues that rebel groups may refrain from engaging in conventional strategies if they are not united as they anticipate the failure of peace (Nilsson 2008). If this mechanism is present, it is expected to observe that if a rebel group is united— it has one leadership who is perceived equally legitimate by all rebel group's subgroups – and the state agrees to hold peace negotiations, the rebel group will be able to sustain peace talks.

Concurrently, scholars have shown that the fragmentation within a group can lead to violent activities targeting the state and civilians (Cunningham *et al.* 2012). Factions within a group "compete with each other for political relevance" which come from controlling territory and people or by benefiting from any future settlement (Cunningham *et al.* 2012, p. 74). In a fragmented group where the central leadership is unable to drive factions towards a collective goal, factions will look to gain private goods that benefit the members of their individual faction rather than seeking the public good for the whole group (Pearlman 2011b, Bakke *et al.* 2012, Chenoweth and Cunningham 2013). The competition between factions for political relevance can lead to violence against the state. Competing factions become relevant when they are selected by the state as negotiating partners. Violence may be a strategy for factions to become visible amid other competing factions and be incorporated in the process of negotiation (Pearlman 2009, 2011c, Cunningham *et al.* 2012, Cunningham 2013a, Seymour *et al.* 2016). Faction competition is likely to foster violent acts against the state as a way for factions to establish their credentials. Empirically, if this mechanism is present, it is expected to observe that if the group is fragmented, subgroups would present themselves as politically relevant with the capabilities to challenge the government and win the conflict while presenting other subgroups as irrelevant, and incapable to challenge the government or settle the conflict. When the subgroup displays this opposition, it is expected that they would use violence against the state.

Fragmentation of a rebel group may also lead to violence against civilians (Cunningham *et al.* 2012). As competition between factions of a rebel group increases, factions strive to establish their political relevance by extending their support base while draining the support for the competing faction. Thus, they are likely to target civilians, who are perceived as "loyal" to an opposing faction (Kalyvas 2006, Balcells 2010b, Wood *et al.* 2012, Schwartz and Straus 2018). Empirically, if this mechanism is present, when a rebel group is fragmented into factions, it is expected that subgroups' speeches and discourses will distinguish two categories of civilians: 'loyal' civilians who side with their faction and 'disloyal' civilians who are affiliated to the opposing faction. If this categorisation is made, it is expected that the rebel subgroups would use violence against civilians.

This section aimed to show how rebel groups' dynamics and their organisational capacity define the range of possible strategies and tactics they can conduct to achieve their goals. To understand what drives rebel groups' strategies, it is key to understand what causes rebel groups to be divided and fragmented. Scholars have shown that the cause of faction competition can be internal - due to the diversity of demands (Seymour *et al.* 2016) - or the lack of strong leadership (Pearlman 2011c). However, research has also suggested that relations between the rebel group and external actors can shape the rebel groups' internal organisation. Seymour *et al.* (2016) show that the state, and its counter-insurgency strategy, can boost a rebel group's fragmentation. Therefore, the following develops the mechanisms through which the state can divide rebel groups. It then shows that transnational ethnic communities can also influence a rebel group's cohesion (or lack of thereof), which in turn shapes the rebel groups' strategies.

3.3. Sources of variations in a rebel group's organisational cohesion (or lack thereof)

3.3.1. Existing explanations of the cause of rebel fragmentation: the state counter-insurgency strategies

Studies have analysed how external influences can shape rebel group's organizational cohesion (or fragmentation), which has implications for strategies and tactics (McLauchlin and Pearlman 2011, Seymour *et al.* 2016). These studies assume that the rebel groups' strategies are shaped by the group's institutions, in particular, its command and control structure (Weinstein 2007, McLauchlin and Pearlman 2011, Pearlman 2011c, Staniland 2012b, Checkel 2017). Rebel groups, like any other social movement, are often composed of subgroups with differing political preferences, for example between "moderates" and "radicals"(Staniland 2012a). To overcome internal cleavages, the rebel elites create institutions that ensure discipline. Institutions are the persisting rules and practices and include bodies which clarify formal and informal rules as well as monitoring mechanisms and enforcement of the formulated rules (Bakke *et al.* 2012, Green 2017a). When the rebel group displays strong institutions that can reliably ensure behaviour compliance, it generates strong incentives and

punishments for its recruits, creating an institutional equilibrium preventing any challenges to the authority (Asal *et al.* 2011, McLauchlin and Pearlman 2011). The state counter-insurgency may disrupt this institutional equilibrium (McLauchlin and Pearlman 2011): if there is existing discontent among the group, with subgroups looking to rearrange the distribution of power, state counter-insurgency campaigns provide the opportunity for discontented subgroups to defy the leadership and existing institutions.

Two main mechanisms explain how the state may disrupt the institutional equilibrium. First, the state can use divisive strategies to weaken the rebel group and settle a conflict by conceding as little as possible (Lawler 2006, Posner *et al.* 2010, Cunningham 2011). The government can implement a "divide and concede" strategy, by selectively accommodating and bargaining with factions displaying discontent (Cunningham 2011, McLauchlin and Pearlman 2011, Cunningham and Sawyer 2014, Seymour *et al.* 2016). It does so, by co-opting factions: providing political, economic and social incentives that give factions higher returns from not cooperating than from remaining united. In other words, the economic and social incentives provided by the state surpass the incentives or fear of punishment from the rebel group's leadership or other factions (Lawler 2006, Johnston 2007, Cunningham 2011). This will lead to a division between peace spoilers and peace initiators. There are various empirical examples of this counter-insurgency tactic (Cunningham 2006, Driscoll 2012, Seymour 2014, Otto 2018): 5000 former rebel fighters were incorporated in the Armed Forces of the Philippines in the 1990s; the Russian government enlisted Chechen rebels in the 2000s, the 2000s Iraqi Security Forces incorporated former insurgents. If this mechanism is present, the observable implication is that prior to the government's intervention, subgroups in the rebel group expressed discontent with the leadership. This would be observable through statements blaming the leadership for military or political setbacks or criticising their strategies and political decisions. Following the government's intervention to provide political incentives, such as a seat at the negotiations table, or economic incentives, such as bribes or access to development projects, subgroups that have expressed discontent are more likely to officially split from the rebel group. In turn, the possibility for a rebel

group to implement one cohesive strategy may diminish (Pearlman 2011) and fighting among various groups increase.

A second mechanism which can explain how the state's counter-insurgency can lead to rebel group's fragmentation suggests that the government can "divide and conquer", by preventing the rebel groups from constraining their recruits' behaviour (Cunningham 2011, Seymour *et al.* 2016). Rebel groups' institutions can constrain the recruits' behaviour either by providing economic incentives which can prevent the free-rider problem or raising the private benefits of joining the rebellion (Weinstein 2007). If the state drains the rebel groups' sources of income, it limits its ability to constrain its recruits' behaviour and opens the way for dissent. Simultaneously, the rebel groups can ensure discipline within its group when it has the ability to enforce punishment for deviant behaviour through accountability institutions (i.e. rebel judiciary system or leadership). Through these, Lawrence (2010) suggests that rebel leadership can constrain their recruits' behaviour. If the state removes the leadership, for example by capturing the main leaders of the rebel group, it creates a leadership vacuum allowing different members to act as they please (Lawrence 2010). If this mechanism is present, it is expected to observe that when counter-insurgency campaigns are successful and destroy rebel groups' sources of revenues, or its material infrastructures (i.e. its headquarters), subgroups are more likely to officially split from the rebel group and, as argued above, fragmentation, shapes strategies and tactics.

3.3.2. The main argument: A transnational cause for rebel groups' cohesion (or lack thereof): Refugees and diasporas' support

Although this research recognises the significance of the influence of governmental counterinsurgency strategies on rebel groups, it aims to add analytical leverage to the studies on rebel strategies by highlighting the influence of transnational ethnic actors on rebel strategies. Studies on social movements and transnational dynamics of civil conflict have shown that transnational groups can affect two aspects of a domestic movement which are key to ensure its cohesion and affect its choice of tactics, framing of the struggle, and resources (McAdam *et al.* 2008, Checkel 2013). The social

movement literature has long shown that framing can affect how a group conducts collective action. Frames are "action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns" of a social organisation (Benford and Snow 2000, p. 614). Frames are tools, developed by rebel groups, which provide an interpretation of the world making their strategies and activities legitimate. Frames are schema of interpretation that can guide an organisation's strategic choice by defining which strategy is deemed acceptable. Whether a framing process succeeds in fostering a coherent strategy, depends on how the rebel group's frames align with the recruits' interests (Snow *et al.* 1986, Checkel 2005, Polletta and Ho 2006, Bakke 2014). However, in a fragmented group, factions are likely to have diverse frames on what the war is about, and how it should be fought (Bakke 2014, Seymour *et al.* 2016). Factions are likely to develop frames of the conflict that match their interests, notably on their ability to become politically relevant, rather than a collective goal. Ina fragmented group, there is likely to be a frame dispute (Benford 1993); a competition between factions of what the war is about and how it should be fought.

Another source of fragmentation which can be influenced by transnational communities, is the resources available to a rebel group to conduct the war (Staniland 2012a). Scholars have shown that resource flows are essential to understand a rebel organisation (Ross 2004, Humphreys and Weinstein 2006, Snyder 2006, Weinstein 2007). While some scholars have shown that an increase of resources can increase the military capabilities of a rebel group and its ability to challenge the state (Buhaug *et al.* 2009, Nilsson 2010), other scholars have demonstrated that an increase of resources can lead to group fragmentation (Weinstein 2007). Wealth can be a trigger for indiscipline and faction competition as each group becomes predatory and ignores collective goals. Resources can undermine collective goals as insurgents become depoliticised and become involved in illicit economies with high material returns. Weinstein (2007) has shown that rebel groups, notably in Sierra Leone, with important initial endowments, are often armed groups of loot seekers who display high numbers of human rights abuses.

How can transnational communities affect these two causes of rebel group fragmentation? The literature on transnational influence on civil conflict has shown that transnational actors can influence

the framing and the resources of rebel groups through mechanisms of diffusion (Checkel 2013, Bakke 2014). In the contentious politics literature, diffusion has been described as the process through which social movements' framings or strategies are spread geographically (Starr 1991, Beissinger 1996, Dobbin *et al.* 2007). Diffusion, as explained in Chapter 2, is the process that enables the transmission of information or resources through social networks. Transnational ties that connect diasporas, refugees and rebel groups, allow transnational support to reach the rebel groups. Then, transnational political support, which includes advocating, lobbying or diplomatic activities, may activate shifts in the framing of the domestic rebellion. Conversely, economic support, will rather affect the rebel groups' resource mobilisation. The following explains the theoretical mechanism through which political and economic support may contribute to the fragmentation of a non-state armed group.

3.3.2.1. Transnational political support and divisions between "hawks and doves"

Political support provided by transnational communities is likely to influence the domestic rebellion's framings through diffusion mechanisms. Transnational ethnic communities and the rebel group are likely to share similar diagnosis frames (identifying what or who the rebel group is fighting) as they are a condition for the transnational ethnic communities' mobilisation in the homeland conflict (c.f. Chapter 2). However, as they evolve in a different political, economic and social context in the host country, transnational ethnic communities can develop their own 'prognostic frames' of the conflict, as they can perceive some strategies of rebellion as being more efficient to secure international support (Benford and Snow 2000, p. 616). Prognostic frames are rhetoric devices identifying the goals of the rebellion and the preferred strategy to reach those goals; for instance, separatism, independence, political negotiations or terrorism. Transnational ethnic communities can diffuse these prognostic frames by establishing schools, workshops or conference in the homeland. More directly, transnational communities and rebel groups' direct contacts can diffuse the transnational prognostic frames; especially if transnational communities' members retain some legitimacy among the rebel group. The rebel group, or at least some of its factions, is likely to adopt the diffused prognostic frames either strategically as they want to secure further transnational support, or ideationally (as they

internalised the diffused frames, they incrementally align their own frames with the diffused ones).

Furthermore, the diffusion of new frames can generate fractionalisation among the rebel ethnic group.

Bakke (2014) has argued that when diffused frames do not resonate with local framings of the conflict, a frame dispute between factions who have adopted the transnational frames and those who have adopted the local framing of the conflict is likely to occur; this frame dispute may be the source of a group's fragmentation. Similarly, diffusion of radical frames can contribute to this process of rebel groups' fragmentation. Radical framings of the conflict, as they aim to develop an entirely new system, are likely to provoke internal dissension between the "hawks and doves" (Staniland 2012b). Radical frames are less likely to resonate with the entire group and they are likely to find resistance among moderate members of the rebel group. Thus, moderate and radical members of the rebel ethnic group are likely to split away over the definition of what the rebel group is fighting for, and the effective means to attain their goals, leading to the fragmentation of the rebel group into different factions. If this mechanism is present, it is expected to observe that there are points of contact between transnational ethnic communities and the rebel group through schools, meetings, and conferences. If these points of contact exist, it is expected that the transnational ethnic communities' discourse about the strategies of rebellion is mimicked in the rebel groups', or in some of its factions', speeches. For instance, if a transnational ethnic community advocates for negotiations, it is expected that the rebel group will replicate demands for negotiations. Yet, as some factions may adopt the transnational prognostic frames, other factions may be more resistant and voice their discontent with the new strategies of rebellion.

3.3.2.2. Economic support and institutional strength

Transnational ethnic communities can hasten the fragmentation of a non-state armed group as they provide them with economic support. This research distinguishes economic and financial resources solely used for military purposes (economic resources used for buying weapons and, recruiting soldiers) from economic resources employed for public goods for the rebel group. This section focuses on the latter type of economic resources. Transnational communities can directly

transmit economic resources to their rebelling kin through remittances. More indirectly, transnational communities can establish fundraising institutions that can collect funds from different sources and transmit them to the rebels (Adamson 2005b, Orjuela 2008, Feyissa 2012). Transnational economic support is key to understand the rebel groups' cohesion or lack thereof.

Transnational communities share more links with some factions more than with others. Therefore, their economic support is likely to be transmitted through the factions with who they share the most ties. In a cohesive rebel group, where the factions value the collective goals, these transmitted economic resources are likely to be redirected to the central leadership and used to mobilise recruits, distribute selective incentives, and prevent free-riders (Mccarthy and Zald 1977, Lichbach 1994, Polletta *et al.* 2002, Kalyvas and Kocher 2007). The transmitted resources can also strengthen institutions guaranteeing compensations to the members of the group and, providing them with public services such as education, security, and health (Mampilly 2007, Staniland 2012a). However, where there is existing discontent, the economic resources transmitted can give the opportunity for factions to mobilise against the central leadership or competing factions (Staniland 2014). If this mechanism is present, it is expected that in rebel groups where there is existing discontent, that have expressed the leadership to be incompetent in leading the group to a successful outcome, or who have highlighted political and military setbacks, transnational transmitted resources are likely to further fragmentation.

3.3. Conclusion

The present chapter aimed to build a theoretical framework to map the mechanisms through which transnational ethnic communities may influence non-state armed groups' strategies of resistance. It began by arguing that rebel groups can conduct a wide range of activities during a civil conflict, including non-violent activities, which the existing literature on civil wars has tended to overlook. The present chapter has shown that the fragmentation of a rebel group influences the types of contentious activities it chooses. Non-violent activities require a rebel group to be united, while fragmentation is likely to lead to more violent strategies of resistance. In addition, this chapter aimed to demonstrate that the support transnational ethnic

communities provide can contribute to fragment their rebelling kin. The diffusion of prognostic frames (i.e. arguments on the stated goals and how to conduct the conflict) can lead to the fragmentation of a rebel group when the frames are not adopted by the whole rebel group, and create dissensions between those adopting them and those rejecting them. Similarly, economic support can contribute to the fractionalisation of a rebel group when the rebel group does not possess strong institutions to manage and channel the new funds towards attaining the group's collective goal.

GOVERNMENT'S COUNTER-INSURGENCY STRATEGIES

TRANSNATIONAL ETHNIC COMMUNITIES 'SUPPORT

Mobilisation of transnational communities as result of diffusion of conflict frames through trust network

In-group competition over conflict frames or material resources

Counter-insurgency strategies can be used to divide and conquer or divide and concede

REBEL GROUP'S COHESION (LACK THEREOF)

Cohesive group– Massive participation, discipline and collective goal

Fragmented group- Sub-groups aim to gain political relevance or control civilians

NON-VIOLENT STRATEGIES

VIOLENT STRATEGIES

Figure 1: Diagram of the theoretical framework

Chapter 4: Research Design

4.1. Introduction

To assess the theoretical framework presented in the previous chapters, this dissertation has used the process tracing method. Process tracing in social science is commonly defined as a method of research to trace causal mechanisms (George and Bennett 2005, Tansey 2007, Mahoney 2010, Waldner 2011, 2012, 2015, Collier 2011a, Hall 2012, Beach and Pedersen 2013c, Bennett and Checkel 2014a, Lorentzen *et al.* 2016, Barrenechea and Mahoney 2017, Crasnow 2017). A causal mechanism can be defined as "an entity that has the capacity to alter its environment because it possesses an invariant property that, in specific contexts, transmits either a physical force or information that influences the behaviour of other agents or entities" (Waldner 2012, p. 75). Hence, process tracing "attempts to identify the intervening causal process - the causal chain and causal mechanism - between an independent variable (or variables) and the outcome of the dependent variable" (Bennett and Checkel 2014b, pp. 206–207). Therefore, process tracing methods aim to capture "causal mechanisms in action" (Bennett and Checkel 2014, p.9) and, unpack causality.

Process tracing methods have recently experienced a surge in popularity in qualitative social science. Process tracing was originally employed in cognitive and psychological studies focusing on individual decision-making (Falleti 2016). In political science, process tracing was introduced by George (1979) to investigate the intervening processes occurring behind a correlation in a single case. Process tracing was then used to explain how individual and collective decision-making processes work, paying particular attention to the effects of institutional arrangements on behaviours (Trampusch and Palier 2016). In the last few years, there has been a burgeoning body of literature on process tracing in particular in conflict studies (George and Bennett 2005, Gerring 2008a, Collier 2011a, Checkel 2013, Bennett and Checkel 2015, Waldner 2015, Lorentzen *et al.* 2016, Mahoney 2016, Barrenechea and Mahoney 2017, Crasnow 2017, Green 2017b). Specific examples of empirical works using process tracing include the study of the diffusion mechanisms through which transnational

actors affected the Chechen separatist struggle against the Russian central government (Bakke 2014) or the analysis of how the socialisation of civilians has helped armed groups in Guatemala to retain influence even after the conflict has ended (Bateson 2017).

The following chapter aims to further define process tracing and highlights its benefit to analyse the theoretical framework developed in the previous chapter within the Karen case. It also discusses issues of generalisability when using process tracing methods. This chapter then presents the rationale for using the Karen case in studying the effects of transnational support on a rebel group's behaviour. It also discusses the methodology that was used to conduct a robust and reliable process tracing in the Karen case study.

4.2. Rationale for using process tracing: uncovering causal mechanisms at play

The study of civil conflict has been challenged by a series of methodological problems (Checkel 2013, Valentino 2014). While most civil conflict studies uncovered correlations that explain phenomena in civil wars, many of these studies did not focus on revealing the presence or roles of causal mechanisms (Checkel 2013). Since Elisabeth Wood's seminal work on the Salvadoran civil war (Wood 2003b), a growing body of literature has studied process tracing as a method to capture causal mechanisms in civil conflict. The following section presents the general benefits and limitations of using process tracing in the study of civil conflict. A definition of process tracing is provided, followed by a discussion of the issues of generalisability and validity which come with the use of process tracing.

4.2.1. Definition of process tracing

Process tracing distinguishes itself from other research methods by its approach to causality and inference (Beach and Pedersen 2013a, Bennett and Checkel 2014c, Mahoney 2016). The main difference between frequentist and comparative studies on one hand and process tracing on the other is their ontological understanding of causality. Frequentist and comparative studies have been characterised by a neo-Humean understanding of causality, understood as patterns of regular

associations between "a hook" and a "force" (Beach and Pedersen 2013a, Bennett and Checkel 2014b). According to this frequentist and comparative approach, it is not possible to empirically verify mechanisms that have led an independent variable to result into a dependent variable. Causation can be observed only when there is a regular association between an independent variable and a dependent variable (Beach and Pedersen 2013a, Bennett and Checkel 2014c, Mahoney 2016). A majority of the studies of civil conflict have adopted a frequentist and comparatist approach to understand the dynamics of civil war (Blattman and Miguel 2010). These Conflict studies aimed to assess whether the different variables are associated with the onset of civil war, or different levels of violence. Nevertheless, by focusing on correlations, these studies have black-boxed the mechanisms leading to the onset of conflict or different levels of violence (Lyall 2014). Lyall (2014) shows through various examples how statistical association can correspond to various plausible mechanisms. He uses in particular the example of the work of Cederman et al. (2013), which seeks to show that the exclusion of ethnic minorities can lead to a greater likelihood of civil war. The statistical models created by the authors confirm the significance of the exclusion of ethnic minorities for the onset of civil conflict (Wimmer *et al.* 2010, Cederman *et al.* 2013). The authors then offer five possible mechanisms underlying the statistical association, without ruling which one is at play in the studied cases (Cederman *et al.* 2013, Lyall 2014). To gain a more holistic understanding of civil conflicts, a growing body of literature has aimed to go beyond statistical associations through process tracing methods (Wood 2003b, Gerring 2008a, Waldner 2011, Collier 2011a, Checkel 2013, Dudouet 2013, Green 2013, Bakke 2014, Krause 2014, Krcmaric 2014, Mahoney 2016, Morgan 2016). Process tracing methods seek deeper explanatory knowledge by studying the causal mechanisms through which independent variables cause an outcome (Collier 2011a, Waldner 2011, Bennett and Checkel 2014c). Within process tracing methods, causal mechanisms are understood as the succession of necessary actions that produces an outcome (Mahoney 2016). Here, contrasting with King et al. (1995), causal mechanisms are not intervening variables but the "abstract properties or processes that allow or force one variable to affect another" (Mahoney 2016, p.494). Hence, process tracing methods selects

events relevant to understanding how X leads to Y, to show whether the case studied confirms or disconfirms the presence of the theorised mechanism under consideration (George and Bennett 2005, Hall 2012, Beach and Pedersen 2013a, Waldner 2015, Mahoney 2016). This event-focused method contrasts with comparatists and frequentist studies which analyse associations between variables representing properties possessed by cases (Mahoney 2016, p. 495).

Three main variants of process tracing have been distinguished: theory-testing, theory-building and explaining-outcome (Beach and Pedersen 2013a). These three variants of process tracing methods share a common understanding of causality and causal inference. They focus on the process through which causal forces are transmitted by mechanisms to produce an outcome (Beach and Pedersen 2017a). All the variants "draw on the Bayesian logic of inference to make within-case inferences about the presence/absence of causal mechanisms" (Beach and Pedersen 2013b, p. 13). However, they differ in whether they are theory-centric or case-centric and whether they aim to assess or build theorised mechanisms (Beach and Pedersen 2013). Hence, the variants of process tracing will each require a slightly different research design.

4.2.2. Process tracing's Bayesian logic of inference and issues of generalisability

Process tracing further distinguishes itself from other research methods by its understanding of generalisability (Waldner 2012, Beach and Pedersen 2013a, Mahoney 2016, Barrenechea and Mahoney 2017). Comparative and frequentist studies, whether they use quantitative or qualitative research methods, aim to make inferences about the size of the causal effects of independent variables on dependent variables in a population based on a selected sample (King *et al.* 1995). The validity of these methods requires the ability to generalise, that is make an inference projection of the mean causal effect of an independent variable on a dependent variable in a sample population to the entire population of a given phenomenon.

Indeed, frequentist studies, which use either qualitative or quantitative methods of research, intend to make inferences using predicted probability. The gist of this method of inference is to find

systematic correlations between two variables that are not random, which can then be generalised to an entire population through statistical models. Similarly, comparative studies make inferences from Mill's method of agreement or difference trying to assess the necessary and sufficient conditions that can result in an outcome in various cases (Beach and Pedersen 2013a). Like the frequentist methods of inference, the comparative logic of elimination assesses patterns of correlations which can be generalised to a wider population while also black-boxing the mechanisms at play (Beach and Pedersen 2013a).

Compared to frequentist and comparatist research methods, process tracing has been criticised for lacking of causal validity as it can have a small N problem (Monroe *et al.* 2007, Mahoney 2010, 2016). This criticism is mainly rooted in a frequentist understanding of causal inference, in which a large number of observations is essential for a valid inference (King *et al.* 1995). However, scholars have argued that process tracing should not be "assessed solely or primarily using frequentist assumptions" (Mahoney 2016, p. 496), but rather using a Bayesian logic of inference (Beach and Pedersen 2013a, Mahoney 2016, Trampusch and Palier 2016).

Bayesian logic of inference aims to make inferences about the presence/absence of causal mechanism within a case to "update one's beliefs in the likelihood that alternative explanations are true" (Bennett and Checkel 2014a, p. 16). Process tracing methods do not seek to assess the magnitude of the causal effect of a mechanism on a dependent variable, nor are they interested in establishing the explanatory power of a mechanisms across the whole population (Beach and Pedersen 2013a, Bennett and Checkel 2014c, Mahoney 2016, Barrenechea and Mahoney 2017). Rather, they aim to model how a causal mechanism contributes to producing an outcome (Bennett and Checkel 2014a). Thus, inference in process tracing can be compared to a court trial "where the researcher assesses our degree of confidence in the existence of a causal mechanisms linking X with Y based on many different forms of evidence collected to test the existence of each part of the hypothesised causal mechanism" (Beach and Pedersen 2013a, p. 76).

This Bayesian logic of inference, which only seeks to confirm or disconfirm the presence of mechanisms, is not compatible with generalisation beyond the individual case (Beach and Pedersen 2013, p.88). Process tracing does not make inferences about the necessity or sufficiency of the mechanism in relation to the population of the phenomenon (Beach and Pedersen 2013). A successful process tracing research confirms the presence of a mechanism to explain an outcome and whose presence is iteratively tested in different cases to increase our confidence in the importance of the mechanisms to explain an outcome (Waldner 2011, Beach and Pedersen 2013a, Bennett and Checkel 2014a, Schimmelfennig 2014, Falleti 2016, Mahoney 2016, Morgan 2016). In other words, process tracing does not aim to uncover law-like theories but rather medium-range theories which seek to be iteratively confirmed in different cases (Beach and Pedersen 2013a, Checkel 2013, Bennett and Checkel 2014c). The ambition of process tracing is to study the social world by working with midrange theories that are bound within specific contexts.

The present study has theorised the mechanisms through which transnational ethnic communities can influence rebel groups' behaviour. Then, it has shown whether the theorised mechanisms were present in the case of the KNU's struggle. This study has tested whether each part of the mechanism is present in the Karen case as a first step to increase our confidence in the validity of the theorised mechanisms.

4.2.3. Validity of process tracing

Inferential tools used in frequentist and comparatist methods cannot be used in process tracing research. Validity in frequentist and comparatist research is ensured when scholars can show that there is a contingent relationship between two variables; the change in the value of one variable results in the value of the other; and there is a lack of spuriousness. Process tracing is interested in complementing frequentist and comparative studies' approach by ruling on the presence of causal mechanisms which explains the association between two variables.

As process tracing takes a different approach to causal inference, the tools used to assess scientific validity are also different. The scholarship on process tracing has presented various tests which can increase our confidence in the reliability and validity of a process tracing. These tests aim to show whether the necessary and sufficient conditions to confirm the presence of each part of the mechanisms are present (Mahoney 2010, 2016):

1.   *The hoop test*: this test shows that evidence must be necessarily present for a causal mechanism to be valid. Failing this test will disqualify and falsify the presence of the causal mechanism (Van Evera 1997, Beach and Pedersen 2013a, Bennett and Checkel 2014a). Passing the hoop test is "*necessary but not sufficient* for the validity of a given hypothesis" (Mahoney 2012, p. 574), and passing this test increase the subjective probability that the hypothesis about the presence of a mechanism is correct.

2.   *The smoking gun test:* this test aims to show that evidence is sufficient to confirm the presence of a mechanism. Passing the smoking gun test is "*sufficient but not necessary* for the validity of a given analysis" (Mahoney 2012, p.576)

3.   *Doubly decisive test:* This test aims to show that evidence is sufficient and necessary to confirm the presence of a mechanism (Mahoney 2012, Beach and Pedersen 2013, Bennett and Checkel 2014).

4.   *Straw in the wind test:* This test provides weak or circumstantial evidence that is neither sufficient nor necessary to confirm the presence of mechanism (Mahoney 2012, Beach and Pedersen 2013, Bennett and Checkel 2014).

Iteratively performing these tests should determine the necessary and sufficient conditions and evidence to confirm the existence of each part of the mechanism (Checkel 2008, Beach and Pedersen 2013a, Bennett and Checkel 2014a, Waldner 2015). Therefore, the validity of the present theoretical framework has been assessed by showing whether there is sufficient or necessary evidence to confirm the presence of causal mechanisms outlined in the previous chapters.

4.3. Applying process tracing methods to the present study

The following section aims to show how process tracing can help test the validity of the theoretical framework presented in the previous chapters. First, it will show that the influence of transnational ethnic communities and government' counterinsurgency strategies on rebel groups has been proven by large-N studies (Cederman, Buhaug, *et al.* 2009). However, "the pathway or process by which [the] effect is produced" (Gerring 2008a, p. 176) has not been thoroughly analysed. Hence, the present study aims to complement the existing large-N studies. Secondly, this section argues that the Karen case is particularly relevant to study the influence of transnational ethnic communities on the rebel's strategies of resistance as it is an "on-the-line" case which is well predicted by statistical models. Finally, this section presents an overview of how the present study employs process tracing. It operationalises different parts of the theoretical framework and spells out the different indicators that will show the presence of the theorised causal mechanism.

4.3.1. Rationale for using process tracing to test the theoretical framework

4.3.1.1. Opening the black box of causation

A large number of large-N statistical studies have tested whether transnational communities can be associated with changes in civil conflicts (Doyle and Sambanis 2000, Collier and Hoeffler 2004, Fortna 2004, Austvoll 2005, Salehyan and Gleditsch 2006, Hegre 2006, Lischer 2006, Derouen Jr and Barutciski 2007, Gleditsch 2007, Buhaug and Gleditsch 2008, Salehyan 2008, Cederman, Buhaug, *et al.* 2009, Salehyan *et al.* 2011). Cederman et al. (2009)'s study demonstrated that "border-crossing ethnic affiliations have a considerable impact on the likelihood of ethnonational civil wars" (p. 432). This statistical study has advanced considerably our knowledge of civil conflict as it highlights the importance of transnational factors in civil conflict. However, it has not necessarily uncovered the successive mechanisms through which transnational ethnic communities can affect the strategies of rebel groups.

The present research worked to complement the frequentist scholarship and to answer the questions left open by the large-N studies on rebel strategies. While the large-N studies have proven the relevance of the association between the type of government counterinsurgency strategies, the presence of transnational ethnic communities and changes in rebel group's strategies, the present research has aimed to uncover *how* government strategies and the transnational ethnic communities can change the rebel groups' strategies. Using the process tracing methods has allowed scrutinising the theoretical processes at a microlevel and add analytical leverage to our understanding of mechanisms in civil conflict (Lieberman 2005, 2013).

4.3.1.2. Establish the presence of theorised causal mechanisms

Based on existing literature on civil conflict, the present research has generated theoretical expectations which have shown the necessary, but not necessarily sufficient, transnational mechanisms leading to change in the rebel strategies of resistance. To generate theoretical expectations on how transnational ethnic communities or the government's counterinsurgency strategies affect rebel groups, the present study has drawn upon the flourishing literature on civil war which has theorised and tested causal mechanisms leading to changes in rebel groups' strategies as well as the burgeoning literature on transnational dynamics of civil conflict. Each sets of literature have theorised parts of the causal mechanism which could link transnational communities' support to changes in rebel group's activities. The present study aims to combine the formerly theorised parts of causal mechanisms to uncover the entire causal pathway linking transnational communities to rebel groups' strategies of resistance. Building upon this literature, this research has also aimed to highlight that the transnational communities are not the sole factor influencing rebel groups' strategies, and that government counterinsurgency's strategies are equally key to understand rebel groups' strategies of resistance. The study then assessed whether the theorised mechanisms are present in the case of the KNU's struggle as a way to update our knowledge on civil conflict. This study's theoretical framework has employed the theory-testing process tracing method of research following the ontological foundations of process tracing methods.

4.3.2. Rationale for using the Karen conflict as a case study

The first rationale for choosing the Karen conflict as a case study to uncover the presence of transnational mechanisms influencing rebel group's strategies of resistance is that the Karen case is an "on-the-line" case; that is a case well-predicted by statistical models (Lieberman 2005, p. 444). The seminal study on transnational ethnic communities' link to civil conflict from Cederman et al. (2009) has shown that "border-crossing ethnic affiliations have a considerable impact on the likelihood of ethnonational civil wars" (p. 432). They achieved done so through a series of static and dynamic regression models, in which the basic unit of analysis is a dyad composed of an excluded peripheral group and a central government. They tested whether the fact that excluded ethnic groups have trans-border kin in another state influenced the onset of conflict (Cederman, Girardin, *et al.* 2009). These scholars used the demographic balance as a proxy for the power balance, and they operationalised it as the excluded ethnic group's share of the dyadic population (the excluded ethnic group as well as the central government's population). Their indicator is theoretically bounded between 0 (the ethnic group in power comprises the entire population) and 1 (everyone belongs to the excluded group). Through a cross-national study, they find that trans-border links significantly increase the occurrence of civil war when the power balance between the excluded ethnic group and the central government favours the onset of conflict (Cederman, Girardin, *et al.* 2009).

The dataset used for the regression includes 23 excluded ethnic groups encompassing 50 000 individuals who have transnational ethnic kin and are involved in a conflict. Among the 23 excluded ethnic groups are the Karen in Myanmar, whose dyadic power balance indicator is the median, and is a case that is well predicted by Cederman et al. (2009)' statistical model. Thus, although this frequentist study does not show *how* the presence of transnational Karen influences the occurrence of conflict between the KNU and the central government, it demonstrates that there is a significant statistical association between the annual occurrence of civil conflict, measured as the presence of conflict a given year, and the presence of a transnational kin in the Karen case (Cederman, Girardin, *et al.* 2009). The present study aims to add analytical leverage to Cederman et al. (2009) study by

exploring the exact mechanisms which link the presence of transnational Karen communities to the conflict in the Karen state.

Another rationale for selecting the Karen case to trace the transnational causal mechanism influencing rebel group's behaviour is the data richness it presents, with variation in the key study variables. The Karen case, which remains less studied than other cases of civil war in political science, is likely to offer abundant empirical evidence to determine the presence of key indicators of the causal mechanisms theorised in the previous chapters, such as changes in the government counterinsurgency strategies, changes in the KNU's strategies, instances of fragmentation or division between the KNU's sub-groups. The Karen struggle began in 1949 and has been one of the longest-running rebellions in Asia, led by the KNU and its military wing the KNLA (Rae 1991, Silverstein 1997, Bowles 1998, Smith 1999, 2010, Cusano 2001, Fink 2001, Harriden 2002a, Rajah 2002, Egreteau 2005, Ganesan and Hlaing 2007, Peacock *et al.* 2007, Fong 2008a, Pedersen 2008, South 2008, 2011, Thawnghmung 2008, 2011, Couldrey and Herson 2008, Cline 2009, Bjorklund 2010, Horstmann 2010, Kenny 2010, Brees 2010, McConnachie 2012, Petrie and South 2013, Brouwer and van Wijk 2013, Décobert 2014, Gravers 2015, Sharples 2015). The KNU was established in February 1947 to represent the Karen minority's aspiration for self-determination and independence. After failing to reach a political agreement with the Burmese Government in 1949, the KNU/KNLA entered into rebellion facing the government army in the violent battles. Until the middle 1990s, the KNU was engaged in conventional warfare and operated as a de facto government, controlling large territories across the Karen state and fighting protracted rear-guard operations (South 2011). Weakened by years of the government's violent counterinsurgency campaign and the defection of soldiers who established competitive factions, by the mid-1990s the KNU lost most of its controlled territories (Smith 1999, South 2011). Despite these territorial losses, the KNU has continued to operate from remote locations; however it has changed its strategy of confronting the government in battles towards mounting a guerrilla war, using landmines, and perpetrating a range of abuses such as taxation and civilian killings. Hence, the KNU has been involved in a conflict against the central Burmese Government since 1949

using different tactics and strategies, which allows for an assessment of whether the strategic changes have been linked to the influence of transnational Karen communities.

In addition, the KNU has been an evolving group, prone to divisions and fragmentation (Cusano 2001, Harriden 2002a, Platz 2003, Fong 2008a, Malseed 2009, Bjorklund 2010, Smith 2010, Worland 2010, Kenny 2010, Horstmann 2011a, Gravers 2015, Sharples 2016). Notably, in 1995, a splinter group called the Democratic Buddhist Karen Army (DKBA) was created from dissensions within the KNU; and in 2012 two factions, pro and against a ceasefire agreement, were formed. By analysing these instances of fragmentation of the KNU, this research has assessed the presence of the causal mechanism outlined in the theoretical framework which postulates that transnational ethnic communities can influence rebel groups by affecting their composition.

Another source of data richness of the Karen case stems from the extensive cross-border displacement the conflict has created (Bowles 1998, Worland 2010, McConnachie 2012, Brouwer and van Wijk 2013, Joliffe 2015, Sharples 2015). Since 1984, when the first camp was opened in Tak province, it is estimated that one million individuals have crossed the border from Myanmar to Thailand, of which 120,000 to 140,000 are still living in refugee camps (TBC 2014, UNHCR 2014). Moreover, resettlement programmes in those camps have allowed Karen people to move to third countries, particularly the US, Australia, and the UK, where they have formed a new diaspora. The different transnational Karen communities have allowed to assess how transnational ethnic communities can influence the struggle in the home country. Consequently, the case of the Karen struggle, from 1984 (the creation of the first refugee settlements) to 2015 (the end of the field work of this research project), has provided the data richness required to assess the validity of each part of the causal mechanism linking transnational ethnic communities and rebel groups conceptualised in the theoretical framework.

4.3.3. Assessing the presence of the theorised mechanisms: empirical tests

Literature on the best practices to conduct process tracing has flourished in the last decade(Checkel 2008, Beach and Pedersen 2013b, Bennett and Checkel 2014c, Dunning 2014, Schimmelfennig 2014, Lorentzen *et al.* 2016, Trampusch and Palier 2016). Three main steps for conducting process tracing have been identified: (1) theorise the causal mechanisms, (2) operationalise causal mechanisms through their observable implications, and (3) gather data on the observable implications of the causal mechanisms.

4.3.3.1. Theorising causal mechanisms

According to scholars, the first step in assessing whether a causal mechanism is present in a case is to conceptualise different parts of the causal mechanism based on existing literature (Beach and Pedersen 2013b, Bennett and Checkel 2014b). The conceptual framework exposed in the previous chapter has theorised, building upon existing literature, *institutional mechanisms*—the formal and informal rules or organisational practices which influences an outcome; and *ideational mechanisms* – ideas that allow or force a change of pattern of a variable— which explain how transnational ethnic communities or the government's counterinsurgency strategies influence rebel groups' strategies of resistance. The first step of the process states that the initial condition for the whole process to occur is the presence of strong ties between the rebel group and the transnational ethnic communities. Secondly, if the transnational ethnic communities and the rebel group share strong ties, the rebel group will diffuse its frames of the conflict. If the diffusion is successful, the rebel group's frames of the conflict are adopted by the transnational ethnic communities, contributing to their mobilisation to support the rebel group in their struggle against the central state. Thirdly, the support provided by the transnational ethnic communities can affect the balance of power in the rebel group by providing support to one faction rather than another. The change in the balance of power provides the opportunity for factions with existing grievances to voice their discontent and split from the central leadership.

Moreover, the theoretical framework has mapped an alternative causal mechanism which links the government's counterinsurgency strategies to the rebel group fragmentation. The conceptual framework states that there are two main mechanisms through with the government can impact the rebel groups' internal dynamics. First, the government can use a divide and concede strategy. This mechanisms states that the government will observe existing discontent among the rebel group. It can then selectively accommodate and bargain with factions displaying discontent. This government strategy will encourage the factions to drift away from the rebel group's leadership, and can result in the split of the rebel group. Secondly, the government can use a divide and conquer strategy. This mechanism states that government's activities can limit the ability of the rebel institutions to constrain its members' behaviour, ensure their loyalty to the central leadership, and contain internal competition between factions.

4.3.3.2. Operationalising causal mechanisms

The second step in conducting process tracing focuses on operationalising the theorised mechanisms, translating theoretical expectations into case-specific predictions of the observable implication of each part of the mechanism. In statistical analysis, a data-set observation (Collier *et al.* 2010, Beach and Pedersen 2013b) for the dependent and all independent variables is gathered. This type of data sets allows unveiling correlations between the dependent and independent variables. In contrast, in process tracing methods, casual process evidence is used to provide information about the observable manifestations of a mechanism (Collier *et al.* 2010, Beach and Pedersen 2013b). Causal mechanisms are not directly observable entities (George and Bennett 2005, Monroe *et al.* 2007, Checkel 2008, Gerring 2008a, Collier 2011b, Beach and Pedersen 2013b, Bennett and Checkel 2014a). They are "ultimately unobservable physical, social or psychological processes through which agents with causal capacities operate" (George and Bennett 2005, p.137). What is observable are their empirical manifestations in different contexts. Bennett and Checkel (2014) argue that "we do not observe causality- we make inferences about it" (p. 18). Therefore, tracing causal mechanisms requires thinking about their observable implications in the particular case study.

It is possible to distinguish three main types of mechanism's observable implications. First, the observable implication of mechanisms can manifest itself through a temporal and spatial chronology of events. The presence of a mechanism could be demonstrated through expectations of the timing of events - in other words, the causal mechanism is valid if an event A takes place before event B (Beach and Pedersen 2013b, Bennett and Checkel 2014a). Secondly, the presence of a mechanism can be demonstrated through trace evidence, of which the "mere existence provides proof that a part of a hypothesised mechanism exists" (Beach and Pedersen 2013, p.100) - for instance, the existence of meeting minutes proves that a meeting has taken place (Beach and Pedersen 2013). Thirdly, observable implications of a causal mechanism can be shown through account evidence by which the content of empirical material, such as the content of meeting minutes can show that part of the mechanism occurred (Beach and Pedersen 2013). The following section clarifies the observable implications for the causal mechanisms theorised in the conceptual framework of the previous chapter.

4.3.3.2.1. Operationalising the mobilisation of transnational communities' mechanism

The first part of the theorised mechanism establishes that the ties shared by the rebel group and the transnational ethnic communities are the channel for the diffusion of the rebel group's frames. Such alignment of the rebel group and transnational ethnic communities' frames enables transnational mobilisation to support the rebel group. To show whether this mechanism was present in the Karen case, the present research first aims to establish the presence of three key indicators: shared ties between the transnational Karen and KNU factions, alignment of their frames, and transnational Karen political and economic support. Then, it aims to show that these indicators are connected through a mechanism of diffusion.

The first indicator that enabled establishing the presence of the transnational mobilisation mechanism is the shared ties between transnational Karen and different KNU factions. Ties are connections between individuals within and across state boundaries (Fujii 2008, Forsberg 2014). Ties may be explicit and salient – group members support each other or have frequent contact. An example

of explicit ties could be a member of the KNU and a member from the Karen Association in the UK meeting frequently or exchanging regular emails. The encounters between members of the two groups are varied. They could be official meetings between refugee or diaspora organisations and the KNU, or more private encounters at church or family events. Ties may also be more implicit and latent (Forsberg 2014), reflecting familiarity and the possibility for future alliance and support. These include family members who are not necessarily in frequent contact but are likely to support each other in certain circumstances. For reasons of validity and reliability, the present research has mostly focused on explicit ties, the presence of which was more reliably established. The presence of ties between transnational Karen communities and the KNU has been assessed by uncovering trace evidence which could confirm that meetings between members of the groups have occurred. This included meeting minutes or statements released after meetings found in the KNU available documents, or testimonies in interviews of encounters between members of the two groups.

The second indicator used to operationalise the transnational mobilisation mechanism was the alignment of frames between the transnational Karen communities and factions of the KNU. Frames are the collective understandings of the conflict which can shape the interpretation of who or what the rebel group should be fighting. Frames can consist of ideologies, paradigms, assumptions or definitions used by individuals (Keck and Sikkink 1998b, Barnett and Finnemore 2004, Weldes and Laffey 2004, Polletta and Ho 2006, Desrosiers 2012). They organise knowledge through dichotomous categories such as friend/enemy or war/peace. These distinctions shape who the individuals see as their antagonists in the conflict (Autesserre 2009a). In the Karen conflict, frames were identified by analysing the KNU's and transnational Karen members' understanding of the conflict in Karen state. This required reviewing associations of terms and symbols identifying who/what the KNU should be fighting in discourses of KNU officials and transnational Karen leaders. These discourses were gathered through interviews with KNU leaders, from both "politics first" and "development first" factions, DKBA leaders, Karen refugee and diaspora organisations' leaders, as well as from statements or interviews of this Karen elite in newspaper articles and, speeches. The frames of the conflict allowed identifying

who the Karen recognised as the antagonist and protagonist of the conflict. An alignment of frames between transnational Karen communities and the KNU was established when similar categorisation of who are the antagonist and protagonist of the conflict were demonstrated. For example, the research reported that both groups identify the Burmese/Myanmar Government as the enemy, when in both groups' discourses denoted chains of connotation of signifying elements linking the Burmese/Myanmar government with derogatory nouns.

The third indicator of the presence of the theorised causal mechanism is the political and economic support of transnational Karen communities. The present research considered that transnational ethnic groups provided political support when they took part in activities such as the organisation/participation in conferences, demonstrations, and advocacy campaigns, creation of newspapers specialised on the Karen issue, publication of books, and the organisation of meetings with representatives of the international community or foreign dignitaries – activities which promotes and legitimises the KNU. Transnational ethnic groups provided economic support when they take part in fundraising activities, remittances and business investments. Evidence of transnational ethnic groups' involvement in such activities was gathered in newspaper articles or transnational Karen organisations' documentation, as well as in interviews with transnational Karen organisations' leaders. This evidence was triangulated by information provided by KNU leaders, from all factions, and experts on the KNU conflict.

According to the theoretical framework, the three indicators are linked by the mechanism of diffusion. Diffusion is the mechanism, enabled by ties between the groups, which allows the alignment of frames between transnational Karen communities and the KNU, and in turn facilitates the mobilisation of the transnational Karen communities. Assessing a diffusion mechanism, which is ultimately unobservable, required showing that the presence of ties between the KNU and transnational Karen communities was necessary for them to align their frames of the conflict and in turn support the KNU. This was done by demonstrating that transnational Karen communities who shared ties with particular factions of the KNU shared the particular faction's frames of the conflict

and supported them. It compared the frames of the conflict of different factions and showed that transnational Karen communities shared conflict frames. The present research also showed that when the transnational Karen communities did not share ties with a faction, there was a less likely alignment of the frames. This part of the mechanism was also confirmed by showing that changes of a KNU's faction's frames of the conflict were followed by changes of the transnational Karen communities' frames of the conflict. The chronology of events was key to confirm the presence of the diffusion mechanism.

Similarly, to show that rebel factions received support from transnational communities who shared their frames of the conflict, this research created mapped the origins of the rebel factions' political and economic support. This information was gathered and triangulated mainly through interviews with Karen transnational organisations' leaders and the KNU officials. This research considered support which the transnational Karen leaders acknowledged sending and the KNU officials confirmed receiving. Then, it compared the origins of support with the frames of the conflict, and was able to show that Karen transnational organisations provided support to the KNU factions with whom they shared conflict frames.

4.3.3.2.2. Operationalising the influence of transnational support on the rebel group's fragmentation

The second part of the theorised mechanism argues that transnational support affects the fragmentation of the rebel group. It expects transnational political support to diffuse frames of the conflict which can be adopted by some factions and create dissensions over the collective frames between moderate and radical factions of the rebel group. Similarly, it expects transnational economic support to only benefit - in an already fragmented rebel group - some factions that do not need to rely on rebel leadership to conduct their activities, undermining the strength of rebel institutions. By contributing to dissensions over collective frames and weakening the rebel institutions, transnational support accentuates the fragmentation of the group.

For clarity, this mechanism has been operationalised as two sub-mechanism: the influence of transnational support on the rebel group's dissension over collective frames, and the influence of transnational economic support on the rebel group's weakening of rebel institutions.

Transnational political support

The operationalisation of the influence of transnational support on the rebel group's dissension over collective frames yields three indicators: transnational frames, the adoption of transnational frames, and dissension over collective frames. The mobilisation and support of the transnational Karen communities presupposes that they have adopted KNU's adversarial frames of the conflict - that is who or what is the enemy of the conflict. Nevertheless, as transnational ethnic communities evolve in their host countries, they can develop their own prognostic frames of the conflict. These prognostic frames are rhetorical devices that identify goals and methods of rebellion (Benford and Snow 2000). These frames identified the goals and methods of resistance which were deemed acceptable. In light of the 1994 fragmentation, this research identified two main prognostic frames built around religious lines: the Christian and Buddhist frames. The Christian frames referred to the Karen pan-national discourses including the Karen unity and the autonomy of Kawthoolei. The Buddhist frames in contrast were identified by analysing references to need for collaboration with the government and allusions to an end to the conflict. In 2012, two political frames were established: the "politics first" and the "development first" frames (Jolliffe 2016). "Politics first" frames referred to the need to ensure the political rights of the Karen people as a pre-condition of any peace deal; while the "development first" referred to the need to improve the economic situation of the Karen people and find a peace settlement. The identification of different prognostic frames required analysing the language used in the archives, including KNU official statement published on their website, or KNU-UK or European Karen Network's statements released on social media or traditional media (notably Karen News and Irrawaddy) and interviews with active leaders of the KNU, both from the "development first" and "politics first" factions, and the Karen refugees and diaspora organisation's leaders to distinguish their thematic tendencies. Then, the texts from archives and

interviews with the leaders of the Karen transnational organisations' as well as with KNU officials were classified according to the categories of frames. The theoretical framework states that transnational ethnic communities' prognostic frames are diffused and adopted by the rebel group. This mechanism of diffusion and adoption was observed by analysing whether changes in transnational Karen frames are followed by shifts in factions of the KNU's prognostic frames. Analysing changes in both groups' prognostic frames required performing comparative frame analysis and distinguishing themes in both groups' discourses.

Furthermore, if diffusion and frames adoption mechanisms are observed, the theoretical framework expects the organisational structure of the rebel group to be modified. This part of the mechanism was inferred by observing whether the rebel groups are prone to dissensions between radical and moderate factions. The factions within a rebel group must have a shared overall objective, but they have different views on strategies of resistance or additional goals. A significant faction is a group which has an identifiable leadership – individuals who claim and are recognised as political decision-makers (Pearlman 2011, Krause 2013). This required mapping out of the KNU's organisational structure. Dissensions between different factions over strategies of resistance was observed by analysing the discourses and frames of each faction and denoting antagonistic frames. Factions who have adopted different prognostic frames to present each other as adversaries. In the Karen conflict, frames were identified by analysing the different factions' understanding of in-group politics. This required studying associations of terms and symbols identifying factions as adversaries or enemies. The frames of factions were analysed in KNU officials' discourses, collected through interviews or published in archives. Furthermore, to establish that the diffusion of transnational frames contributed to the fragmentation of the KNU, this research used sequence evidence and focused on the chronology of events. As noted by Bakke (2013), timing is key in assessing diffusion. Diffusion has been inferred if changes in the transnational Karen communities' frames of the conflict are followed by shifts in the KNU's frames.

Transnational economic support

The theoretical framework expects transnational economic support to weaken the strength of the rebel group's institutions. The operationalisation of this part of the mechanism yields three indicators: transnational economic support, strength of rebel institutions and fractionalisation. The strength of the rebel group's institutions was assessed by examining whether factions have been allowed to develop semi-autonomous governance structures, including factions' political offices, affiliated armed forces, and organisations controlling public goods (i.e. schools, hospitals) (McLauchlin and Pearlman 2011). This evidence was collected through KNU official documents which established the existence of political offices, armed forces or public good organisations, and was triangulated with information gathered in interviews with KNU members and experts of the KNU.

To establish that the diffusion of transnational economic support is contributing for the weakening of the rebel group's institutions, this research used sequencing evidence. If the diffusion of transnational Karen communities' economic support was followed by a weakening of the KNU's institutions, the diffusion mechanism was inferred. The diffusion of transnational economic support as a contributor of the weakening of rebel institutions was also be shown by using account evidence whose content demonstrated that the autonomy of the factions from the KNU was linked to the flow of economic resources diffused from the transnational Karen communities.

4.3.3.2.3. Operationalising the government's influence on the rebel groups fragmentation.

As explained in the previous chapters, the theoretical framework expects that the government can also be a source of fragmentation through two main avenues. First, the government can contribute to the fragmentation of a rebel group by a "concede and conquer" strategy. The observable implication of this mechanisms was that before to the government's intervention, subgroups in the rebel group had expressed discontent with the leadership. This was observed through statements from different sub-groups, found in the KNU documentation, or in newspapers. A word analysis of these statements was performed to highlight negative adjectives to qualify the incumbent leadership.

Then, this research aimed to trace whether factions who expressed discontent accepted government's offers of rapprochement. This was analysed by noting all government's interventions to provide political incentives, such as a seat at negotiations table, or economic incentives, such as access to development projects to split from the rebel group's leadership. This information was gathered from newspapers, triangulated with information gathered from interviews with KNU officials and experts. It then traced whether the factions of the KNU who expressed discontent accepted the government's offers, and split away from the rebel group. This evidence was retrieved from faction's leaders' statements and interviews with factions' leaders.

The second mechanism through which the government was expected to influence the fragmentation of the rebel group was a mechanism of "divide and conquer". This mechanism was observed by analysing whether counterinsurgency campaigns were successful and destroyed rebel groups' sources of revenues, or its material infrastructures (i.e. its headquarters). This evidence was provided in KNU official statements which indicated battle losses, and triangulated with interviews with experts and KNU officials which confirmed losses of revenue. Then, this research aimed to show that the loss of revenue translated in a loss of control over its factions and the group's fragmentation. To do so, it mapped out the organisational structure of the KNU, analysing the number of factions present within the KNU and the distribution of material power, like money, manpower and arms among the factions. The group's fragmentation was established by assessing whether factions had developed conflict frames that differed from the leadership's conflict frames, and institutions that allowed them to conduct strategies of resistance which differed from the leadership's strategy. This evidence was gathered through interviews with leaders of all factions and triangulated with interviews with experts.

4.3.3.3. Operationalising the changes in the rebel group's strategies of resistance

The theoretical framework further argues that the fragmentation of the rebel group led to a change of strategies of resistance. Fragmentation can lead to violent activities as factions of the rebel group are likely to engage in intra-group competition, by which each faction is motivated by private

gains rather than collective goals. As factions compete with each other, they are less likely to be held

accountable for their actions, and activities are less likely to be coordinated by the central leadership,

favouring factions to conduct violent activities. This mechanism yields several indicators: rebel groups'

fragmentation, intra-group competition, and rebel groups' activities. First, the theoretical framework

expects the fragmentation of a rebel group to prompt competition between factions over scarce

material and political resources. Competition is understood as localised struggles between factions to

various economic and political advantages (Fearon and Laitin 2003, Blattman and Miguel 2010, Bakke

et al. 2012, Susan 2013). Material resources include financial rewards (i.e. factions seek to increase

their access to cash) and economic enticements (i.e. natural resources and public goods) (Tsukashima

2007). Political resources include political power and the ability to legitimately represent the rebel

group and act as a spokesperson to the state (McLauchlin and Pearlman 2011, Seymour et al. 2016).

The presence of competition between different factions over material resources was established by

assessing whether different factions of the KNU expressed ownership of certain economic and

financial resources. Such information was gathered in Karen elite testimonials, either in interviews or

archives. The competition between different factions over political resources was analysed by

reviewing the discourses of each factions' leaders gathered through interviews or archives, and

establishing who they perceive as the leader of the rebellion. Practically, the perceived leader of the

movement was established by establishing whether terms such as "leader", "representative",

"legitimate", "decision-maker", and "spoke-person" are associated with leading personalities of each

faction. Thirdly, the theoretical framework assumed that competition between factions undermines

the central leadership's ability to hold the factions accountable to the central leadership or

coordinated activities. To establish whether factions were held accountable, this research analysed,

through archives and testimonials of KNU officials, whether factions' activities infringing KNU's policy

were either condemned and addressed by the political bureau of the KNU - and whether such

condemnation led to a change of behaviour of the faction or was prosecuted through the KNU

judiciary system. To establish whether the central leadership was able to coordinate activities, this

research traced whether instructions given by the central leadership are received and followed by adequate behaviour of the factions. Evidence of the instructions given by the KNU leadership was mainly gathered through the KNU official documentations, and KNU officials' testimonies. Evidence on the reception of instructions by the factions was gathered through interviews with factions' leaders.

Fourth, the theoretical framework proposes that the competition between factions that weakens accountability is likely to prompt factions to conduct violent activities, especially violence against civilians. To empirically evaluate the types of activities and targets the KNU conduct, this research relied on the ACLED dataset. The ACLED dataset codes reported information on the location, dates, and types of events in which rebel groups participate. The unit of observation is each event occurring between the rebel groups and the government, other rebel organisations or civilians. The dataset is available for Myanmar from 1996 to 2010 and includes 84 observations. This dataset was replicated and extended from 1994 to 2013. The dataset increased the number of observations between 1996 to 2010. The dataset was extended using LEXIS NEXIS and archives coded following the ACLED codebook. The dataset was used to present descriptive statistics in order to uncover the pattern of the types of activities and targets used by the rebel group yearly. To establish that competition between factions actually promotes the use of violence, this research expected to observe that the fragmentation of the KNU and factions' competition was timely followed by a change or increase in the KNU's activities. For instance, fragmentation of the KNU, is likely to prompt competition between factions and lead to an increase in violence.

4.3.4. Data collection methods

The third step in conducting this data collection requires gathering empirical evidence to assess whether each part of the theorised causal mechanisms is present in the case studied (Beach and Pedersen 2013a, Bennett and Checkel 2014b) The evidence aimed at uncovering the presence or absence of observable implications of each part of the causal mechanisms.

In this step, it is important to consider the potential biases of evidentiary sources. According to Bennett and Checkel (2014), Bayesian tests should be used to assess the potential probative value of the evidence obtained. Researchers should consider the instrumental motives of those providing the evidence, as individuals can distort or omit evidence (Wood 2006, Gerring 2008b, Fujii 2010, Beach and Pedersen 2013a, Bennett and Checkel 2014c, Pouliot 2014). This is particularly true in the context of war, informants might lie, omit some details or reconstruct their story, leading the researcher to record biased information (Fujii 2010, Bennett and Checkel 2014). The data might also suffer from bias due to the researcher's subjectivity in the data collection. The following demonstrates how bias was mitigated in each data collection method used for this research.

The evidence of the observable implications of the mechanism conceptualised and operationalised above was collected through two main methods: interviews and archives.

4.3.4.1. Interview method

To collect data on the observable implications of the mechanisms, the present study conducted elite interviews (Richards 1996, Mahoney 2001, Aberbach and Rockman 2002, Berry 2002, Leech 2002, Silverman 2006, Tansey 2007, Venesson 2008, Harvey 2011, Waldner 2012). There are several advantages in conducting interviews to collect the data. Interviews provided information not available or not yet available for public release (Richards 1996) and helped triangulate data found in other sources. They also helped uncover discourse's frames of key actors responsible for the mechanism studied (Tansey 2007a). Moreover, because the Karen minority is not fully visible and difficult to access, I selected the members of transnational and rebel groups through snowball sampling (Atkinson and Flint 2001, Noy 2008, Wood 2009, Suri 2011). This sampling method identified an initial set of relevant subjects and request that they suggest other potential subjects. The process continued until further rounds of nominations were unlikely to provide significantly new information. One important source of bias with snowball sampling is that respondents often suggest other individuals to interview who share the same characteristics or who will be likely to share the same views. This is particularly acute in conflict settings where the partisan links are more significant. This

bias was reduced by ensuring that the initial set of respondents was sufficiently diverse, so the findings are not skewed excessively in one direction. As such, in the first set of respondents I approached informants which were known from being part of different factions of the KNU. These first contacts were mainly made through people I had met while working with the International Organisation for Migrations in Thailand in 2011 and 2012 and through academics working on Myanmar which I had met prior to the fieldwork. As such the first round of interviews was conducted with members of the "politics first" faction, the "development first" faction, but also of the DKBA. Each of these informants introduced me to other people to interview. This sampling strategy allowed me to conduct 12 interviews with leaders of the KNU, among which 7 were part of the "politics first" faction, and 5 of the "development first" faction, and 3 interviews with the DKBA. Similarly, I have interviewed leaders of the Karen refugee organisations and Karen diaspora in the UK (see table below).

I have also triangulated the data with interviews with experts, which included academics, researchers which have been working on the KNU, and staff of non-governmental organisations which have been working with the Karen refugees in Thailand.

All the interviews were recorded, then transcribed and coded in the software NVivo. NVivo helped identifying thematic themes or nodes (i.e. ties between transnational communities and rebel groups, political support, economic support, 2012 peace process, creation of the DKBA, KNU's activities), in each interview. This allowed creating a report showing all parts of the interviews which had been coding with a particular node. NVivo also allowed running word frequency queries, which analysed the most frequently used words in the interviews from transnational ethnic communities or from KNU leaders. This query helped building word clouds and tree maps as a way to understand the frames used by these groups.

All the interviews were conducted with a Karen translator or in English. The translators chosen were people who knew the respondents or who introduced the researchers to the respondents. Although having a translator may have challenged the reliability of the data, it also facilitated access to the informant. The presence of a Karen member gave the informants more confidence to answer

the questions and helped the researcher identify and analyse unfamiliar meta-data (Fujii 2008). Despite the presence of the translator, the researcher noticed the possibility of one main bias in the respondents' answers. Respondents may have responded inaccurately and have shaped their answers so that they could present themselves in a light which would make them better accepted. Another potential bias identified is the sponsor bias. To mitigate this bias, the researcher ensured that it phrased questions in a neutral manner, and asked different indirect questions which could help confirming the respondents' answers. It also triangulated respondents' answers with other sources, including archives as presented below.

The researcher created three types of template questionnaires for the three types of respondents she encountered. Questionnaire 1 had nine questions for the experts on the KNU case; questionnaire 2 had eight questions for the transnational Karen communities; questionnaire 3 had eight questions for the KNU or DKBA members.

Questionnaire 1 aimed at experts comprised three sections. It started with introductory questions on their experience in Myanmar and any potential affiliation with the KNU. Then, the questions focussed on the fragmentation of the KNU in 1994 and 2012 and on the KNU's strategies. In this section, the researcher also asked questions on the Myanmar government's counter-insurgency strategies and how they may have influenced any changes in the KNU's strategies. The third section focussed on transnational Karen communities and their potential support to the KNU. It aimed to understand whether they provided any support and if so, under which form. Then, it tried to uncover rationale for transnational Karen communities to provide support to the KNU and whether it had had any influence on the KNU's strategies.

Questionnaire 2 aimed at the transnational Karen communities had four sections. First, it started with introductory questions trying to map affiliations of the interviewee. Then, the questions focussed on investigating the frames of the conflict conveyed by the interviewee. As such, the researcher asked questions on the perceived goals of the conflict; whether those goals had changed over time; and how those goals were to be achieved. In the third section of the questionnaire, the questions focussed on

the fragmentation of the KNU in 1994 and 2012, aiming to understand the interviewee's perception of the events. The fourth section of the questionnaire sought to uncover whether, why and how the transnational Karen communities provided any type of support to the KNU. The researcher also asked whether the potential transnational support had changed over time.

Questionnaire 3 aimed at members of the KNU and the DKBA members was similar to questionnaire 2, however it put more emphasis on gaining information on the KNU's strategies. First, it started with introductory questions trying to map the interviewee's affiliation and history. Then, the researcher sought to understand the interviewee's perceived goals of the conflict, and how those goals were to be achieved. In a third section, the researcher questioned the interviewee on the KNU's and the government counter-insurgency strategies in particular in the 1990s and 2000s. The fourth section of the questionnaire focussed on the KNU's fragmentation, trying to uncover its causes and consequences. Finally, in the fifth section of the questionnaire, the interviewee would be questioned on the transnational Karen communities' support and its potential impact on the KNU's strategy.

Figure 2: Number and affiliation of respondents

Interview number	Affiliation	Comment	Location	Interview duration	Month/year of interview	Questionnaire number
1	DKBA		Thai-Myanmar Border	1h28	01/2015	3
2	DKBA	Introduced by 1	Thai-Myanmar Border	2h03	01/2015	3
3	Expert		Mae Sot	1h40	01/2015	1

4	KNU-Development first	Introduced by 3	Mae Sot	1h15	02/2015	3
5	Expert		Skype	1h10	02/2015	1
6	Expert		Chiang Mai		02/2015	1
7	Expert		Bangkok		02/2015	1
8	KNU-Politics first	Introduced by 7	Thai-Myanmar border	1h35	03/2015	3
9	Karen refugee		Mae La	1h03	03/2015	2
10	Karen refugee		Mae La	1h34	03/2015	2
11	Expert		Mae Sot	58min	03/2015	1
12	KNU-Politics first	Introduced by 8	Thai-Myanmar border	45min	04/2015	3
13	KNU-Development first	Introduced by 4	Mae Sot	58min	04/2015	3
14	KNU-Politics first	Introduced by 8	Mae Sot	1h05	04/2015	3

15	KNU-Politics first		Thai-Myanmar border	55min	04/2015	3
16	KNU-Politics first	Introduced by 3	Thai-Myanmar border	1h00	05/2015	3
17	KNU-Politics first	Introduced by 3	Mae Saeriang	45min	05/2015	3
18	KNU-Development first	Introduced by 3	Mae Saeriang	55min	05/2015	3
19	KNU-Development first	Introduced by 18	Mae Saeriang	43min	05/2015	3
20	KNU-Politics first		Thai-Myanmar border	1h12	06/2015	3
21	KNU-Development first		Mae Sot	1h17	06/2015	3
22	Karen diaspora		London	1h35	09/2015	2
23	Karen diaspora	Introduced by 22 & 10	London	1h16	09/2015	2
24	Expert		London	2h15	10/2015	1

25	Karen refugee		Skype	1h13	10/2015	2
26	Karen Refugee		Skype	50min	10/2015	2
27	Karen diaspora	Introduced by 23	London	1h30	10/2015	2
28	Karen refugee		Mae Sot	1h12	11/2015	2
29	Karen refugee		Mae Sot	57min	11/2015	2
30	DKBA	Introduced by 1	Mae Sot	45min	11/2015	3

4.3.4.2. Secondary sources

Secondary sources used in this research comprised of Karen organisations' statements, NGO and INGO reports, and journalist articles from newspapers who are run by the Karen diaspora or community (i.e. The Karen News, the Irrawaddy, and the Voice of Burma). These constituted a tool to cross-check the information on the events of the Karen struggle. The secondary sources were used to corroborate whether events have occurred (i.e. meetings between officials from the KNU and the transnational Karen communities). This provided account evidence of the presence/absence of the conceptualised mechanism. Archives were also used to identify the types of activities used by the KNU/KNLA in their struggle against the Burmese/Myanmar Government. Furthermore, the secondary sources provided evidence on the frames of the different actors involved. secondary sources may contain transcribed speeches of different actors which is useful when performing comparative frame analysis. Using secondary sources in conflict zones can nevertheless be problematic as challenges of gathering unbiased data are intensified by the absence of unbiased data and the partisan nature of

data, combined with organisations operating in conflict zones (Abell and Myers 2008, Bowen 2009, Wood 2009, Altheide *et al.* 2010). To curb the potential bias of the sources of evidence, this research aimed to cross-reference the evidence with different sources of information. This was particularly relevant for the account evidence showing whether events have taken place. Furthermore, some of the sources of evidence may be biased as their content may be shaped by the audience they are targeting. The selection of the evidence has hence been vetted to disqualify evidence that was understood as too partisan and partial in the account of the facts. This required an acute knowledge of the partisan links of the informants issuing the archive evidence to different political organisations.

The following table details the type of secondary sources and method of analysis used.

Figure 3: Secondary sources and method of analysis

Secondary Source type	Source Name	Location	Method of analysis
News outlet	Mizzima, Karen News, The Voice of Burma, the Irrawaddy, The Bangkok Post	Internet	• Event analysis- used to confirm whether events have taken place by triangulating data across different articles • Frame analysis- used N-Vivo to run word frequency analysis to analyse vocabulary used in interviews with key actors to uncover their frames of the conflict
Reports	IOM, Karen Human Rights Group, KNU	Bangkok, Mae Sot	• Event analysis- used to confirm whether events have taken place, in particular regarding KNU and Myanmar Government's conflict strategies

Speeches transcription	KNU, KNUHQ	Internet (KNU and KNUHQ webpages)	• Frame analysis- used N-Vivo to run word frequency analysis to analyse the vocabulary used to uncover frames of the conflict
Social media posts	Facebook pages for EKN, KCA-UK, KCA-Norway	Facebook pages	• Event analysis- used to confirm whether event had occurred, including visits of KNU leaders to transnational Karen communities • Frame analysis- used N-Vivo to run word frequencies and analyse in posts the vocabulary used to uncover frames of the conflict

4.3.4.3. Ethical concerns

Field research in conflict zones can be challenging for ethical reasons. For the field research to be ethical, it should ensure that those who participate in the project are not a greater risk by implementing a do no harm ethic (Woliver 2002, Wood 2006, 2009). To do so, the research subjects of the present study consented to their participation, fully understanding the potential risks and benefits (Wood 2006). In the first stages of the field work, I aimed to implement the norm of informed consent by providing the informants with a written form of informed consent. However, this proved challenging as any written record linking informants to my project would be a risk for participants. Thereafter, I ensured the informed consent of the informants through an oral consent procedure as advised by Wood (2006). I would state the purpose of the project, highlighting that I was gathering knowledge on how the transnational Karen communities could influence the KNU. I presented myself as a French academic researcher enrolled in a PhD programme in the UK. I stated the benefit they could receive from the study was the writing of their history and highlighted that no other benefits were available. The informed consent procedure also included informing the respondents that their

identities would be kept strictly confidential and that any of their answers would be kept anonymous. Anonymity and confidentiality were key as respondents were worried that their interviews could be used against them in a rapidly changing political context. I assured the interviewees that they could decline to participate or withdraw the permission to use any information they have shared. My accountability to them was ensured by assuring the informants that they could approach a point of contact.

The second ethical challenge was to ensure the security of the data gathered. Data gathered may include political preferences, participation in armed groups, and relationships with armed groups. Thus, it was important to ensure the confidentiality of the material gathered and anonymity of my research subject was key. Names of participants were not recorded, or if they were, they were recorded separately from the interviews. I used new material for each trip as not to expose to risk data gathered previously. I also ensured the protection of the data gathered by encrypting notes and backing them up online on a regular basis.

In addition, the present study was approved and abided by the UCL Ethics regulations, which stresses the importance of protecting participants, notably their anonymity, as well as the researcher.

4.3.4.4. Potential researcher's bias

Bias is commonly understood to be any influence that provides a systematic distortion in the results of a study (Beach and Pedersen 2017b). Scholars have recorded how qualitative data collection and analysis methods can introduce bias. They highlight how the researcher is necessarily embedded in a variety of relationships that exert a profound impact on their study (Geertz 1973, Berinsky 2004, Bourdieu *et al.* 2005, Reeves *et al.* 2008, Schatz 2009). The following will highlight how the researcher's positionality may have introduced bias in the present study.

Qualitative data collection, including elite interviews, constitute a social interaction. Although they can be seen as a "conversation at random" (Converse *et al.* 1974), interviews constitute a form of social interactions between two individuals- the interviewer and the respondent. As such, the salience of personal characteristics of the interviewers and respondents can influence interview processes and

outcomes (Berinsky 2004). Scholars have in particular showed that perceived or objective membership of the interviewer to a social or political group can influence respondents' understanding of the interview questions and their answers (Converse *et al.* 1974, Johnston and Conover 1984, Adida *et al.* 2016). For instance, a perceived different social or political affiliation may encourage respondents to answer with more socially desirable and biased so as to present themselves or their group more favourably (Berinsky 2004, Fujii 2010, Adida *et al.* 2016). Hence, it is likely that in the present research, which included highly politically sensitive data, the personal characteristics of the researcher have influenced respondents to over-report behaviours or facts which would have been perceived as favourable to the interviewer. In other words, there is an inherent disturbance of the observer on its research. Two main characteristics of the researcher could have influenced the respondents' answers. First, the researcher was introduced as a PhD candidate at a British university. A second characteristic that could have influenced the respondents was the fact that the researcher had previously worked in resettlement projects with the International Organisation for Migrations (IOM) in Mae Hong Son with Karenni and Karen refugees. These two traits had two effects on the respondents' interactions with the researcher. The fact that the researcher was foreign and had worked for an international organisation may have encouraged several respondents, especially leaders of the KNU's opposing factions, to try to convince the researcher of the rationale and validity of their actions in the hope that the respondent could advocate or advertise their cause abroad. This has led some of the respondents to present their activities on a favourable light. This mechanism was heightened when the respondents knew that the researcher had conducted interviews with the opposing factions' leaders. To overcome this challenge, the researcher has aimed to systematically triangulate information gathered from one faction with interviews with the opposing factions and with experts.

Furthermore, the fact that the researcher had worked on resettlement programmes in an international organisation has led some of the respondents, notably the Karen refugee respondents, to present themselves as politically neutral and to under-report their ties to the KNU. Depending on how the researcher was introduced or the setting of the interview, respondents would change their

discourse (c.f. Chapter 8). More formal and shorter interviews would lead to respondents' under-report links with the KNU and present themselves as non-political humanitarian community-based organisations (Sharples 2015). However, ties with the KNU were revealed when the researcher had the opportunity to spend more extended periods of time with the respondents. It is when the researcher was able to stay for a few days in Mae La camp, that the ties with the KNU were recognised and explained.

In addition to the bias introduced by the respondents' perceptions of the researcher, some bias could have been added in the analysis of the data collected. In the qualitative paradigm of this study, it is assumed that the self of the researcher affected the subject of study (Bourdieu *et al.* 2005, Schatz 2009, Wood 2009, Fujii 2010). Researchers, especially those working on politics, do not exist in an intellectual vacuum. As a result, political science studies tend to have some elements of partiality. In this research, partiality could have been introduced with the researcher's first encounter with the KNU. The researcher was first introduced to the Karen case while working for a resettlement programme for IOM in two Karenni and Karen refugee camps around Mae Hong Son in northern Thailand from 2010 to 2011. This experience allowed the researcher to gain an initial understanding of the conflicts in Myanmar through the lens of the refugees' experience. As explained in this thesis, the Karen refugees have tended to transmit a vision of the conflict that does not necessarily reflect views of all Karen communities but rather the views of one faction of the KNU. Hence, the researcher could have overestimated mechanisms of the conflict if they were salient in the refugees' discourse. In an attempt to overcome this bias, the researcher has aimed to start its research by securing interviews with the KNU leaders rather than with refugees. With this strategy, the researcher aimed to gain a thorough understanding of the conflict through the experience of the KNU leaders, before analysing the influence of refugees and diaspora communities on the conflict.

Chapter 5: Government counter-insurgency campaigns and the KNU strategies in Myanmar/Burma in 1995

5.1. Introduction

What are the mechanisms responsible for the strategic choices of rebel groups? Previous chapters have shown that central to understanding rebel groups' strategies is its cohesion, or lack thereof (Pearlman 2011c, Bakke *et al.* 2012, Cunningham 2013a, Seymour *et al.* 2016). The success of different types of strategies is determined by rebel groups' patterns of organisation. Non-violent strategies can be organised successfully by groups who have the organisational capacity to ensure mass mobilisation (Pearlman 2011c), while violent activities against civilians are the result of in-group competition, where individual incentives override collective goals (Weinstein 2007, Cunningham *et al.* 2012). Then, the next step in understanding the rebel groups' strategies requires analysing the causes of rebel groups' cohesion or lack thereof. While other studies have sought to understand the causes of rebel group fragmentation within the rebel group (Pearlman and Cunningham 2012, Fjelde and Nilsson 2018), this study aims to focus on how external actors influence the insurgent patterns of organisation. Two main external actors with the ability to influence rebel groups' cohesion were identified in the theoretical framework: the state and transnational communities. This chapter focuses on the state, and its choice of counter-insurgency strategies, as a source of the rebel group's fragmentation. Theoretically, two main mechanisms have been identified to explain how the state may disrupt rebel groups' institutional equilibrium: through a strategy of divide and conquer, by co-opting discontent rebel leaders (Cunningham 2011), or by undermining the rebel groups' institutions in their ability to provide incentives or punishments (McLauchlin and Pearlman 2011, Otto 2018).

To inquire into the presence or non-presence of these mechanisms, the Karen conflict makes for an interesting case to study. The government used three types of strategies between 1949 and 1988: conventional warfare, guerrilla warfare, and from 1988, co-optation mechanisms. The chapter demonstrates that the changes in the KNU's strategies and tactics, in particular its use of violence

against civilians, occurred following the government's effort to co-opt a Buddhist subgroup of the KNU. The subgroup, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Association (DKBA), had existing grievances based on the existing power asymmetries, fuelled by transnational communities, between the impoverished Buddhist subgroup and the Christian subgroup. Therefore, it is concluded that in the case of the KNU in 1995, changes in strategy and tactics were partly driven by the co-optation mechanism outlined above.

5.2. Changes in warfare of the KNU/Tatmadaw conflict from 1949 to 1988: Did changes in the Tatmadaw counterstrategies affect the KNU's strategic choices?

Following independence in 1948, the Burmese Army (Tatmadaw) aimed to contain security threats through conventional warfare, based on large divisions and modern war technologies (Myoe 2009). Similarly, the KNU/KNLA based their insurgency tactics on conventional warfare, which involved direct confrontation and offensive campaigns. However, from 1958, constrained by its military capabilities, the Tatmadaw used a combination of mobile-conventional warfare and guerrilla tactics, which led to an increase in violence against civilians to counter the ethnic rebellion (Smith 1999, Lang 2002a, Callahan 2005, Hlaing *et al.* 2005, Ganesan and Hlaing 2007, Myoe 2009, Taylor 2009). Despite this shift in the government's strategy and tactics, this section shows that the KNU/KNLA did not change its strategy dramatically. This shows that rebel groups do not necessarily change their strategies as a result of their opponent's strategic changes and dismisses the theoretical assumption that strategies of the state shape the opportunity costs of the rebel group (Wood 2010).

5.2.1. Sticking to the frontlines: The KNU and Tatmadaw's initial strategies

Following independence, the Burmese nationalist movement, the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) led by U Aung San, who had been put in charge of leading the country to independence, attempted to unify ethnic and political movements to build a federal Union of Burma. It was in this spirit of unity that the Panglong Agreement was instituted on the eve of independence

in February 1947. The agreement was between AFPFL and representatives of several minority groups, namely the Chin, Shan, and Kachin. It set out the founding principles of the Union of Burma and aimed to guide the national integration of the Burman and the ethnic nationalities (Smith 1999, Lang 2002a, Callahan 2005, Hlaing *et al.* 2005, Ganesan and Hlaing 2007, Taylor 2009). However, the Panglong Agreement failed to build a consensual symmetrical federal configuration. From the start, there was unequal treatment of the ethnic nationalities, as the Karen did not participate in the Panglong Conference or subsequent negotiations (Smith 1999). In addition, the Panglong Agreement contained provisions allowing some minorities to seek independence, while ruling it out for others. These political inconsistencies and asymmetries were institutionalised by the 1947 Burmese Constitution, which built upon the Panglong Agreement, marking the onset of the Karen separatist insurgency (Fink 2008). As ethnic tensions grew, Karen nationalists established their own local militia, the Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO), and the Mon nationalists followed suit (Oo and Min 2007). These developments set the stage for ethnic rebellions, and the Karen National Union (KNU) took up arms in 1949.

Simultaneously, growing divisions arose between former members of the AFPFL, the movement which led Burma to independence (Fink 2008), over negotiation strategies and the new regime. These tensions were exacerbated when U Aung San was assassinated, and U Nu became the first elected prime minister. The split of the Communist Party from the AFPFL occurred in two steps. First, dissent appeared within the Burma Communist Party (BCP) itself, with a radical faction fearing that the AFPFL would pursue reformist right-wing policies. This led to the creation of a splinter Communist group, the Red Flag Communist Party, which took up arms against the British imperialists and the AFPFL. The creation of the Red Flag Communist Party put moral and political pressure on the remaining Community Party members who accused the leaders of the AFPFL of serving the interests of British imperialists. The BCP was then expelled from the AFPFL in October 1946. Within three months of independence, the Communist Party launched an armed rebellion against the government, attracting soldiers and officers from the Tatmadaw (Smith 1999, Callahan 2005, Oo and Min 2007). The

Communist Party was joined in rebellion by other groups. By early 1949, the government, led by U Nu, faced a large number of rebellions, including ethnonationalist revolts by the Karen and Karenni forces, the Arakan People's Liberation Front, the Mon People's Front, as well as political insurgencies by the Communist Party and a Muslim resistance army in northern Arakan. The Tatmadaw also experienced mutinies by units who defected to join political armed insurgencies or ethnonationalist movements (Callahan 2005, Fink 2008). In this post-independence context, the Tatmadaw used conventional warfare to regain control over its territory.

In the first years of the KNU rebellion, both parties fought using conventional warfare, sticking to frontlines and displaying massive fighting and shelling. The Tatmadaw's initial strategy was to defend its territory through total war. It mobilised large divisions of soldiers, armoured brigades, tanks, and its aerial capacity (Smith 1999, Fong 2008a, Myoe 2009). Similarly, the Karen Army was formed of Karen defections from the Tatmadaw, notably with the defection of the 1st and 2nd Karen Rifles in 1949 (Lintner 1999, Fong 2008a). Therefore, the Karen armed forces had the capacity to conduct conventional fighting, which was notably displayed during the Insein battle in 1949. During this battle, both armies were engaged in massive fighting, shelling, and building trenches and bunkers (Lintner 1999, Fong 2008a). During this phase of the conflict, the Tatmadaw was considerably weakened by the political and ethnic rebellions, and the Burmese Government lost control of large parts of its territories, with important cities such as Mandalay, Maymyo, Prome, and Insein falling under insurgent control (Callahan 2005). Simultaneously, the Tatmadaw's weaknesses allowed the KNU to gain significant territory advances, and in 1949 establish the Government of Kawthoolei, designating Tongoo as its capital, 130 miles from the capital Rangoon (Smith 1999, Fong 2008a). Fearing the collapse of the country, and as Tatmadaw struggled to maintain control of its territories, local and state officials created pro-governmental militias from groups who had held on to the WWII arms (Callahan 2005). These local pocket armies regained control of central Burma and allowed the government to re-establish some authority throughout the country. This new man-force allowed the Tatmadaw to launch offensives in Karen-claimed territory, notably in the Delta region, a strategic area

for the KNU as it had a large Karen population, access to the sea, and a strong local economy (Fong 2008b). These offensives produced periods of heavy fighting, and eventually the Tatmadaw and its proxies were able to take rebel strongholds, including Tongoo, and kill its leader Saw Ba U Gyi. However, as the Tatmadaw strengthened, it changed its counter-insurgency strategies from conventional to a mix of conventional and guerrilla warfare. Previous chapters have explained that theoretically there are several explanations for how states can influence rebel groups' strategies. Some scholars have shown that changes in the state can influence the opportunity costs of rebel groups influencing the strategies they can conduct (Ackerman and Kruegler 1994). Alternatively, this dissertation has argued that rebel strategies are shaped by the group's cohesion which can itself be shaped by the shape and transnational actors. Then, the following will investigate which of these mechanisms are at play in the KNU case study and uncover how changes in the Burmese/Myanmar Government counter-insurgency strategies have affected the KNU.

5.2.2. The protracted people's war: Between guerrilla and conventional warfare

While the Tatmadaw strengthened, a second wave of civil conflicts began from 1958, when ethnic nationalities who were signatories of the Panglong Agreement took up arms. The Shan and the Kachin formed, respectively, the Shan State Army (SSA) and the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO), as frustration grew with U Nu initiatives to make Buddhism a state religion and their lack of right to secession under the Panglong Agreement. Other ethnic groups, including Paluang, Lahu, Wa, Chin, and Naga also took up arms. In addition, new security concerns from China arose (Beehner 2018). The presence of the remnants of Chiang-Kai-Shek's Guomindang (KMT) forces at the China-Burma border heightened concerns among the Burmese military leaders of a Chinese incursion in the country (Clymer 2014). This second wave of ethnic rebellions and Chiang-Kai-Shek's KMT presence in the northern territories allowed General U Ne Win, the head of the Tatmadaw, to stage a coup in 1962, claiming that the country was under threat. After the coup, General U Ne Win established a one-party socialist government, and shifted the political focus on security threats away from development tasks

(Myoe 2009). As he took power, General U Ne Win developed a new counter-insurgency strategy. According to reports from the General Staff Office and former Tatmadaw officers, from the 1960s, the Tatmadaw was to conduct a "people's war", influenced by Maoist military strategy, which aimed to "carry out the normal functions of military warfighting, neutralisation of the armed capacity of the enemy;" as well as build the necessary structures for the political activities of state-building (Marks and Rich 2017, p. 411). In other words, the Tatmadaw aimed to destroy the resources of their enemies while gathering the support of civilians. As part of the people's war doctrine, the Tatmadaw adopted the four cuts (*Phyet-Lay-Phyet*) strategy to fight the ethnic nationalities during the 1968 Tatmadaw conference. The strategy, which can be theorised as a 'pacification mechanism' (Valentino *et al.* 2004, Hultman 2008), included cutting food supply to ethnic insurgents, cutting financial resources the insurgents gathered from civilians, cutting contacts between insurgents and civilians to disrupt the diffusion of intelligence, and cutting the 'insurgent's head', that is preventing recruitment for insurgent groups (Smith 1994, Callahan 2005, Oo and Min 2007, Myoe 2009, South *et al.* 2010a). With this strategy, the Tatmadaw aimed to transform areas controlled by insurgents ('black areas') into areas controlled by the Tatmadaw, where insurgents may operate ('brown areas'). In a second phase, the four cuts strategy would transform the 'brown area' into a 'white area', where the territory would be cleared from insurgents' presence. In this second phase, anti-guerrilla warfare would continue alongside development programmes to ensure the population's support (Smith 1999, Lang 2002b, Myoe 2009). The Tatmadaw initially applied this four cuts strategy in the Delta regions where the political rebellions were based, including the Communist Party and its allies such as the National Democratic United Front (Lintner 1990, Lang 2002a, Myoe 2009). By May 1974, the Tatmadaw destroyed the Communist Party headquarters in Pegu Yoma, and declared that the Delta region had become a 'white area' (Myoe 2009). Following the Tatmadaw victories in the Delta region, the Communist rebellion experienced a lack of resources to sustain the fight and became a shell of what it once was.

The Tatmadaw faced more challenges in applying the four cuts strategy in the borderland regions with ethnic insurgencies. The changes in the Tatmadaw strategies from conventional to guerrilla warfare, rather than encouraging the use of violence against civilians by the KNU, reinforced its capacity to sustain conventional warfare. This contradicts the theoretical models by which violence begets violence (Hultman 2008, Lyall 2009, Schneider *et al.* 2012). In the borderland regions, the Tatmadaw would simultaneously conduct large-scale counter-insurgency offensives during the dry season and guerrilla warfare. As part of the guerrilla warfare, the Tatmadaw would target civilians, who were perceived as necessary supporters of the rebel groups, to undermine the supply lines of ethnic insurgents (Smith 1999, Lang 2002a). This tactic notably created a massive exodus of refugees fleeing to Thailand. Yet, this counter-insurgency strategy did not lead to a change in the KNU strategies. The KNU and its armed forces remained mostly engaged in conventional warfare, with close-range warfare with artillery fire, which allowed them to maintain control over their territory and even attempt to advance their territory (Lintner 1999, Fong 2008a). For instance, in 1983, a heavily-armed column of 200 to 300 KNLA soldiers marched towards Pegu Yoma (Lintner 1999, Fong 2008a). Similarly, in 1987, as the Tatmadaw shifted their offensives towards the Thaton, Toungoo, and Nyaumglbebin leading to the exodus of civilians, the KNU pushed the Tatmadaw forces back and seized their supply base.

The main reason the KNU's strategies did not change despite the Tatmadaw changes is that the lack of control of the Tatmadaw in the borderlands reinforced the KNU's sources of revenue. In the border areas, the four cuts strategy was logistically challenging to sustain. According to Colonel Aye Myint, the former head of the Tatmadaw of the North-East command interviewed by Smith (1999), in these areas the Tatmadaw did not have the logistical or financial capacity to gain control of the territory, especially as the rebel groups had a "back-door escape" and a supply line from Thailand (Smith 1999, p. 261). Along the Thai-Burmese border, the ethnic nationalities benefited from border trade with Thailand while, since independence, Burma's economy struggled to relinquish. This led to recurrent domestic shortages of goods, which then led to the development of a flourishing black

market, mainly from Thailand. The Thai military circles feared a Communist link-up between the Burmese Communist Party and the Communist Party of Thailand. They saw the KNU as indispensable to halt the Communist threat and tolerated this black market (Smith 1999, Fong 2008a). Then, the KNU set up toll gates, which allowed it to levy taxes on all traded goods. This meant that the KNU had the financial capabilities to buy new arms and equipment and continued military capabilities to maintain control over the borderlands (Smith 1999). By targeting the civilians in the Karen areas, the Tatmadaw did not weaken the KNU's organisation nor its ability to sustain its strategy.

5.3. The warfare of the KNU/Tatmadaw conflict from 1988- 1995: The co-optation of rebel subgroups as one of the sources of the KNU's strategic changes

Rather than being driven by a direct response to the government's counter-insurgency changes, the rebel group's strategic changes can result from the ability of the government to influence its structural organisation through co-optation mechanisms. By undermining a rebel group's organisation, the government can affect the cohesion needed to conduct conventional warfare and trigger in-group competition. The theoretical implication of the co-optation mechanism says that the government can incentivise subgroups who had expressed discontent to break away from the rebel group. The in-group competition can trigger the use of violence against civilians as a strategy of war, as rebel subgroups will be looking to gain political power and material resources by targeting civilians from opposing groups. The following shows that such mechanisms can be found in the Karen case. From 1988, the Tatmadaw started using a new co-optation tactic to counter the Karen rebellion, which played a crucial role in triggering in-group competition that eventually led to the creation of a splinter group, the Democratic Buddhist Karen Association (DKBA) (Kenny 2010, South 2011, Brenner 2018). Following the split and defection of the DKBA to the government, the KNU changed its adverse from conventional warfare towards guerrilla warfare, with 'hit-and-run' activities that had negative effects on civilians (Kook 2007, Fong 2008a, Giammatteo *et al.* 2013, Jolliffe 2016). This can be explained by the weakening of KNU's organisational capacity following the DKBA split. The power was decentralised

to individual KNU brigades who had to rely on civilians for the resources needed to sustain the war. This led to an increase in low-intensity violence against civilians. Simultaneously, as expected by the theorised mechanisms, the splinter group, the DKBA, increased the use against civilians to undermine their KNU factions' civilian support base while increasing their own. The following sheds light on how the state counter-insurgency strategies were crucial for to the KNU split in 1995, and the subsequent change in strategies.

Due to its limited resources, the BSPP government failed to support economic growth and maintain its control over the economy, as illegal trade flourished and dominated the Burmese economy. In 1988, the country's currency was demonetised, and the United Nations declared Burma as a 'least developed country'. With the economic failures of the BSPP government, popular grievances increased, which resulted in a civilian uprising in 1988 (Smith 1999, Fong 2008a). On 8 August 1988, thousands of demonstrators marched in Rangoon calling for an end to the military dictatorship but were received with gunfire from the Tatmadaw. Despite this crackdown, demonstrations continued to grow nationwide. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, daughter of Burmese independence leader U Aung San, who happened to be present in Rangoon, joined demonstrators and became the leader of the democracy movement, the National League for Democracy (NLD). To contain the growth of the democracy movement, General U Ne Win stepped down, put an end to the BSPP government, and established the State Law and Order Restauration Council (SLORC), whose mission was to restore law and order through martial law before handing power to a civilian government. Nearly 3000 protesters were killed, and others were imprisoned, tortured, or forced into exile.

In this context, the Tatmadaw began a new strategy of war which affected the KNU's cohesion. From 1988, when the SLORC was formed, the Tatmadaw officials aimed to consolidate long-term military control of the country (Kenny 2010), by substantially expanding and modernising the capabilities of its armed forces. The modernisation of the Tatmadaw was enabled by the sudden collapse of the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) in 1989, and the subsequent financial support of the Chinese to the Tatmadaw(Callahan 2007). Up until 1989, the CPB was led by a Burman leadership

supported by China but had key alliance several ethnic nationalities, including Kokang and Wa groups, allowing to overrun Tatmadaw's outposts and maintain control over a large area at the Chinese border (Lall 2016). However, in the 1980s, China gradually reduced its aid to the CPB, largely weakening the ability of the CPB leadership to maintain control over the local CPB brigades, including ethnic nationalities. In March 1989, the CPB was hit by a series of mutinies led by the Kokang and the Wa (Smith 1999, Lall 2016). The result was the creation of armed organisations based along ethnic lines. These included the United Wa State Party (UWSP), the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) in the Kokang region, the National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA) in Easter Shan State, and the New Democratic Army- Kachin (NDA-K) in Eastern Kachin State (Lall 2016). This contributed to the CPB's downfall.

As long as the CPB, which was ideologically close to the Chinese Communist Party, was active, China officially took a neutral stance and did not provide aid to the Burmese Government. However, as the CPB disintegrated in 1989, China was able to provide explicit and financial support to Rangoon (Lintner 1990). This translated to providing the Tatmadaw with newer weaponry. Simultaneously, the government invested in improving roads and airports throughout the country, providing the army logistical support for its operations. In addition to contributing to the modernisation of the Tatmadaw, the demise of the CPB allowed the Tatmadaw to shift all its attention to the ethnic conflicts (Lintner 1990, Smith 1999, Fong 2008a, Dukalskis 2015).

To reach nationwide peace, the Tatmadaw began to use a tactic of co-optation, or what the Karen leaders more commonly called the 'divide and rule' tactic (Kenny 2010). The Myanmar government sent envoys to breakaway groups to discuss a possible truce. The lead architect of the ceasefire negotiations was General Khin Nyunt, the head of the Military Intelligence from 1982 to 2004 (Oo 2014, Lall 2016). The approach of General Khin Nyunt was to negotiate with each armed group separately to enable ethnic armed groups' leaders to enter conventional politics as leaders of ethnic political parties (Lall 2016). General Khin Nyunt first initiated talks with the Kokang leaders in March 1989 (Smith 1999, Oo and Min 2007). These ceasefire talks did not result in writing agreements, except

for the KIO, nor did they result in political dialogue. These unwritten gentlemen agreements had a strong focus on military matters and allowed the armed groups to retain weapons and territorial control. The agreements demarcated the territory under control of the groups, location of checkpoints, number of soldiers and location of liaison posts (Lall 2016). While they generally restricted recruitment and expansion, they provided the armed groups with economic opportunities, especially in natural resource extraction industries, such as jade mines, mineral extraction and logging (Htun *et al.* 2015, Lall 2016). For instance, the Kokang armed group was allowed to keep its arms and control of all its territory for some time. Similarly, General Khin Nyunt made a ceasefire deal with the UWSA in September 1989, allowing them to continue with drugs businesses and natural resource extraction. The KIO set up the BUGA company which became involved in jade and logging (Oo and Min 2007, Oo 2014, Lall 2016, Bertrand *et al.* 2020). It was also understood that the Tatmadaw would support improved health and education services as well as better infrastructures (Lall 2016, p.15). In return to these economic privileges, the ethnic armed groups agreed to postpone discussions on political solutions with the future regime, as the SLORC claimed only to be a transitional government (Thawnghmung 2011, Oo 2014). By 2004, General Khin Nyunt achieved ceasefire agreements with approximately sixteen-armed group (Ganesan 2017).

Concluding ceasefire agreements with the ethnic armed groups was the preamble to General Khin Nyunt's 'Seven-Step Road map' to democracy and notably to the convening of the National Convention on 14 May 2004 (Huang 2013, Lall 2016). Ethnic armed groups who had concluded ceasefire agreements were invited to participate at the National Convention and in negotiations for a political solution to the ethnic conflicts. As part of the National Convention, the ceasefire groups were able to raise demands for ethnic rights to be included in the draft Constitution. Their demands included increasing legislative and administrative power for local governments, the creation of local ethnic security forces and establishing a federal union (Lall 2016). However, as General Khin Nyunt was removed from power, and the MI apparatus dismantled in 2004, these ceasefire agreements were weakened, and the ceasefire groups' proposal was never included in the draft constitution (Selth

2019). General Khin Nyunt had developed personal relationships with many leaders of the ceasefire groups, and most of the direct contacts with them were controlled by the MI (Lall 2016, Woods 2016). Following his removal, relations with the ethnic armed group deteriorated, and when the 2008 Constitution was approved, it did not address the main grievances and aspirations of the ceasefire groups.

Achieving peace with a large number of ethnic armed groups, notably in north-eastern Myanmar, allowed the Tatmadaw to focus its attention and resources onto offensives against the KNU. The counter-insurgency campaigns were not only more prolonged, occurring even during rainy season, but more intense, with the Tatmadaw light infantry receiving support from the Burma Air Force, who bombed the headquarters of the KNU, Mannerplaw in 1992 (Smith 1999, Thawnghmung 2011, Oo 2014). The KNU had resisted individual ceasefire talks insisting that a nationwide ceasefire that could provide a political solution to the conflicts should be negotiated (Lall 2016). Simultaneously, conforming to the approach of combining ceasefire negotiations with military offensives, General Khin Nyunt reiterated invitations to individual military talks with different Karen groups (Oo 2014, Lall 2016). To such invitation to ceasefire talks, the KNU asked for political negotiations to be held. General Saw Bo Mya wrote an open letter asking for a countrywide ceasefire and the release of political prisoners as a precondition to peace talks that could be conducted in a third country and with UN participation (Oo and Min 2007). It is in this context that the KNU's fragmentation occurred.

Although the exact date of contact is unknown, it is estimated that from 1990, the Myanmar Government was able to establish communication channels with the Buddhist subgroup of the KNU, their goal being to fragment the KNU to capture its headquarters in Mannerplaw (Smith 1999, Swe 1999, Fong 2008a). From the 1980s, grievances of the Buddhist subgroup had grown due to power inequalities between Christians and Buddhists within the KNU, as the Christian faction had access to trans-border resources (see more in Chapter 7). These grievances allowed the Tatmadaw to tap into the Buddhist grievances (Rogers 2004, Fong 2008a, Kenny 2010). From the beginning of the 1990s, the leader of the Buddhist subgroup, monk U Thuzana, claimed that he wanted to remain neutral and be

in contact with members of both sides of the conflict (Swe 1999). The friendly relationship with the Myanmar Government allowed its monasteries to remain largely exempt from fighting and attacks (Jolliffe 2016). In 1995, building on the existing discontent of the Buddhist soldiers, the government forces approached U Thuzana, promising him the governance of the Karen state if he helped "to destroy the KNU" (Interview 6, Gravers 2004, South 2008). U Thuzana defected from the KNU and created a splinter group with approximately 1,000 KNLA deserter soldiers, named the Democratic Buddhist Karen Army, whose stated goal was to reach peace (KHRG 1998, Gravers 2004): "We're going to form a separate group. The Sayadaw [U Thuzana] will be our leader. We ourselves will go about to make peace" (DKBO 1995). As soon as it was formed, the DKBA signed a peace agreement with the Myanmar Government, confirming the co-optation from the government (KHRG 1997, 2001, South 2011). Simultaneously, the KNU declared war on the DKBA on 3 January 1995 (Fong 2008a), and the DKBA effectively acted a proxy of the Tatmadaw. This confirms the theoretical expectations that the state's co-optation strategy is an effective tool in triggering rebel groups' fragmentation (Cunningham 2006, Driscoll 2012, Seymour 2014, Otto 2018). By providing political and probably economic incentives, the state was able to provide the subgroup with higher returns by splitting from the group than from remaining united (Lawler 2006, Cunningham 2011, Otto 2018). Therefore, the role of the state counter-insurgency strategy is crucial in understanding the rebel group's cohesion, or lack thereof. However, although the state pulled the trigger for the KNU fractionalisation, the success of the co-optation strategy relied on existing grievances within the rebel group, which is linked partly to transnational support in the next chapters. The combination of the state counter-insurgency tactics and the existing grievances within the group led to its split. Furthermore, the next step in understanding changes in rebel groups' strategies is to consider how the cohesion (or the lack thereof) influenced the choice of strategies. Hence, the next section shows that following the split, both Karen factions change their strategies from conventional from guerrilla warfare, with an increase of violence against civilians.

5.4. The KNU and DKBA war strategies - a result of the KNU fragmentation

The fragmentation literature expects the fragmentation of rebel group to influence the course of the war by affecting the strategic choices of each faction (Pearlman 2011c, Bakke *et al.* 2012, Cunningham 2013a, Seymour *et al.* 2016). It is theoretically expected that in a fragmented group, factions are more likely to engage in in-group competition for political and material resources. Each faction is likely to use violence against civilians to gain the support of the population they claim to represent and/or punish them for supporting opponents (Humphreys and Weinstein 2006, 2008, Cunningham *et al.* 2012, Wood and Kathman 2015). Consistent with these theoretical expectations, the split of the KNU led to an increase in violent tactics against civilians reported by human rights organisations (Amnesty international 1995, KHRG 1998a). Despite its claimed goal of becoming a peaceful organisation, the DKBA operated as a Tatmadaw militia (Smith 1999, Lang 2002b, South 2011). According to interviews with leaders of the DKBA and experts, the Tatmadaw would provide the DKBA with most of their supplies, including food, ammunition, uniforms, and cash salaries (KHRG 1998, Interview 7, Interview 6). As they became a Tatmadaw's militia, the DKBA engaged in a campaign of fear and intimidation which led to gross violations of human rights of the Karen civilians, including forced labour, illegal detention, torture, and unlawful killing (Human Rights Watch 1995, KHRG 2007). The campaign of intimidation of KNU civilian supporters was particularly fierce in refugee camps. The DKBA crossed the Moei River into various Karen refugee camps, abducting senior KNU officials and civilians, or killing opposing refugees and burning their houses. In late April 1995, two camps, Baw Noh and Kamaw Lay Ko, were completely destroyed, and the refugees had to take refuge in other camps. Between 1995 and 1998, hundreds of incursions into the refugee camps were made, with the DKBA killing and kidnapping refugees or burning their houses (KHRG 1998a, Lang 2002a). The rationale for these attacks was to erode the KNU support and build civilian support for the DKBA by relocating the refugees towards DKBA territories (Gravers 2007, KHRG 2007, Kenny 2010). Therefore, there were reports of the DKBA distributing leaflets, promising refugees moving to DKBA territories rice supply, peace, and tranquillity (Bangkok Post 1995). The use of violence against civilians by the DKBA following

its split from the KNU is therefore consistent with the fragmentation mechanism outlined above stating that factions are also more likely to use violence against civilians to gain control over the population they claim to represent and/or punish them for supporting opposing factions.

Following the split, the remainder of the KNU also turned to guerrilla warfare with violence against civilians, however, the mechanisms leading to this strategy differ from that leading the DKBA to use violence against civilians. Rather than being linked to a logic of control of civilians, the use of violence against civilians by the KNU stemmed from the need to get the necessary resources to pursue the conflict. The fragmentation of the KNU weakened the KNU's military capabilities (Rogers 2004, Fong 2008b). Between the defection of soldiers to the DKBA and soldiers fleeing to the refugee camps in Thailand, the KNLA, the KNU armed force of 15,000 soldiers decreased to a third of its size (Rogers 2004). Furthermore, the loss of the major trading post resulted in a large decrease in the KNU revenues. One of the KNU leaders, P'doh Saw David Tharckabaw stated:

> Unfortunately, and in summary, given our available resources the KNLA is unable to successfully mount a comprehensive Karen defence. We have inadequate personnel, supplies and arms. One reason for this is that territory losses over the years have reduced our ability to raise taxes (on legitimate trade) and hence finance defence requirements (Tharckabaw and Watson 2003).

The decline of the KNU's military capabilities forced the KNU to shift its strategies of resistance (Kook 2007, Fong 2008a, Giammatteo *et al.* 2013, Jolliffe 2016). The KNLA army was decentralised into smaller mobile guerrilla units "fighting a hit-and-run war" (Fong 2008a, Korf and Raeymaekers 2013). Although the KNLA has occasionally staged larger-scale attacks on DKBA bases, the fighting consisted of small hit-and-run ambushes, and laying landmines to restrict the Tatmadaw's movements and activities (KHRG 1998). The KNU and KNLA would also hide when the Tatmadaw would set up attacks. This means that there were no longer real frontlines, but areas of relative control where the threat is constant but combats occasional (Fong 2008a, KHRG 2010). Guerrilla warfare as an official strategy was adopted in a Mae Tha Raw Hta seminar in 1998 (South 2011). Instead of holding their base camps,

the KNU dismantled its military bases that could be seized by the Tatmadaw or destroyed roads that the Tatmadaw used to transport supplies (KHRG 1998a). From then on, the KNLA has consisted of small militia units, ensuring the security of villages where the KNU remain active. This new war strategy has led to an increase in the violence against civilians (KHRG 2010, South 2011). Although the cases where KNLA soldiers purposefully targeted civilians are rare, the civilians bear the consequences of the changes in strategies (Amnesty international 1995, KHRG 1998b). Over the years, the KNU has perpetuated a range of abuses, including forcible taxation and conscription, the use of child soldiers, and landmines (KHRG 2008, Bjorklund 2010, South *et al.* 2010b, South and Jolliffe 2015, Jolliffe 2016). In general, however, KNLA personnel seem to be involved in human rights violations on a less systematic level than either the Tatmadaw or DKBA. With the use of landmines, though meant for the Tatmadaw and villagers made aware of their locations, civilians are inevitably frequent victims, particularly because when the Tatmadaw seizes a KNU village, they force the villagers to identify the locations of the mines (Amnesty international 1995, Human Rights Watch 1995, 2005, KHRG 1998b, 2008). The increase in the use of violence against civilians by the KNU following the splintering is not consistent with the mechanism stating that factions increased the use of violence against civilians to control their opponents' civilian support. Rather, the evidence shows that using violence against civilians was not a way to ensure their relevance in the competition with the other faction. The KNU's use of violence against civilians has been an externality of the change of in its warfare strategy.

5.5. Conclusion

Building upon the literature on conflict and violence against civilians, this chapter aimed to identify the mechanisms that led to the changes of rebel tactics through a process tracing analysis of the KNU's split in 1995. The evidence presented here suggests that the change of the KNU strategies of war occurred following its split in 1995. This split resulted from the strategy of co-optation used by the Tatmadaw. Before 1995, the KNU engaged in conventional warfare with military offensives along battlefronts. In the 1990s, the Tatmadaw began to use successfully a new co-optation tactic by tapping

into existing grievances to absorb part of the Buddhist faction of the KNU. This counter-insurgency strategy led to the split of the KNU, with the Buddhist faction switching sides and becoming a proxy of the Tatmadaw. The split led to a shift in the Buddhist faction and the remaining KNU factions' strategies. Both factions turned to guerrilla warfare and increased the violence against civilians.

Although understanding the role of the state is key to understand the fragmentation of the KNU, which led to a shift in their strategies, the following chapters show that the government's co-optation tactics would not have been successful without existing grievances among the KNU subgroups. Yet, these grievances were, I argue, fuelled by the Karen refugees' support to the KNU's Christian faction. Therefore, this chapter highlights that the changes in rebel strategy and tactics can be understood by analysing the interdependencies between different rebel armed groups, government armies or militias, civilian actors, and external supporters.

Chapter 6: Government counter-insurgency campaigns and the KNU strategies in Myanmar/Burma in 2012

6.1. Introduction

Myanmar has experienced a period of political transition since 2010 from authoritarian military rule to a semi-civilian hybrid parliamentary regime. Several political, social, and economic reforms have altered the country's political landscape (Jones 2014a, Ganesan 2017). These reforms include the negotiation of ceasefire agreements with most of the ethnic groups and the inauguration of Myanmar Peace Centre (Egreteau 2012, Simpson 2013, Jones 2014a, 2014b, Ganesan 2017). In this process, the Myanmar Government signed a ceasefire agreement with the Karen National Union on 12 January 2012. The truce received international attention as the KNU was the main sizeable ethnic armed group who had fought the Myanmar Government continuously since the start of the conflict in 1949. Although the Myanmar Government and the KNU began several ceasefire negotiations since 1995 (in 1995, 1996, 2003, 2004, 2005), none of these talks ended up in an agreement and the KNU stuck to guerrilla warfare (South 2011). So, why did the KNU changed their strategy and signed a ceasefire in 2012?

Theoretically, two mechanisms could explain such shift. The change in strategies in 2012 could have been linked, as argued by some commentators (International Crisis Group 2011, Mydans 2012), to the change of rebel group's opportunity costs in the context of Myanmar political transition since 2010. Alternatively, the shifting strategy of the KNU could be explained as a result of the internal dynamics of the KNU (Brenner 2018). Previous chapters have conceptualised the mechanisms through which the cohesion or lack thereof can affect the capacity of the rebel group to conduct different strategies. The seminal study of Wendy Pearlman (2011c) analysed how cohesive and united organisations qualify for organising non-violent activities as they have the organisational capacity to mobilise many disciplined recruits for a coordinated strategy. In contrast, fragmentation in a rebel group may lead to violent activities as each faction is competing to become relevant and be selected to sit at the

negotiations table with the state (Cunningham *et al.* 2012, Seymour *et al.* 2016). They are also more likely to use violence against civilians to gain control over the population they claim to represent and/or punish them for supporting opposing factions (Humphreys and Weinstein 2006, 2008, Cunningham *et al.* 2012, Wood and Kathman 2015). This chapter argues that, consistent with these theoretical mechanisms, in 2012, the state's strategy to open talks with one faction of the KNU who had existing grievances, which following chapters will show were fuelled by transnational actors, against the faction in power. These grievances gave rise to factional rivalries within the movement, with a new leadership driving a rapprochement with the government and an internal opposition which stands opposed to the new conciliatory line.

This chapter first highlights the limitations of existing explanations focusing on opportunity costs to explain the KNU shift in strategies. Then it traces how the state counter-insurgency strategy resulted in the fragmentation of the KNU, which, in turn, led to a change in the movement's strategies.

6.2. The limitations of the opportunity costs perspectives to explain the KNU shift in strategy in 2012

The election of a semi-civilian government in November 2010 represented a key step in the democratic transition imagined by the Myanmar government. Some commentators, influenced by the 'political opportunity structures' and 'ripeness' arguments, saw this political transition as the main driver of changing the KNU strategy (International Crisis Group 2011, Mydans 2012). It is assumed that the KNU leaders negotiated a ceasefire as the political context was favourable for peace. However, the Myanmar Government's policy to open ceasefire negotiations with armed groups is not necessarily linked to the democratic transition and could be understood as the continuation of a counter-insurgency strategy which has been implemented since the 1990s. The following demonstrates that the regime transition has led to the breakdown of ceasefire agreements in other parts of Myanmar, notably in the Kachin state, discarding the presence of the political opportunity structures and ripeness mechanisms. Finally, there has not been a third-party mediator who could

have solved the commitment problem of the bargaining process, discarding the presence of the 'third-party mediator' mechanism.

In 1989, following the collapse of the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) regime, the Tatmadaw seized the control of the government as the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) and claimed its role would be to be the guardian of the state (Smith 1999, Callahan 2007, South 2008, Thawnghmung 2011, Jones 2014c, Jones and Jones 2016). The SLORC pledged to organise the return to formal civilian rule that would safeguard its unitary vision of national stability. There were three attempts to create a successor regime to the military junta. First, in 1990, the regime organised elections, which the opposition, the National League for Democracy (NLD), won by a landslide, by securing 392 of the 485 seats (Tonkin 2007). Following the election, the SLORC undertook the Declaration No. 1/90 to help with the convening and formation of the National Assembly in order to draft a new constitution(Tonkin 2007). The NLD declined the invitation as they demand an immediate and full transfer of power with legislative, executive and judicial authority. This led to a deadlock and the SLORC remained in power (Smith 1999, Ganesan and Hlaing 2007, Jones 2014a, 2014b, Ganesan 2017, Huang 2017). In a second attempt, in 1992, the regime convened a National Convention to draft a new constitution. However, the regime established strict guidelines for the National Convention; it was to work towards establishing a strong central state with a leading role for the military. These terms pushed the NLD to walk out of the National Convention in 1995. Facing these challenges in organising the democratic transition, the SLORC reorganised itself into the State Peace and Development (SPDC) in 1997 (Ganesan and Hlaing 2007). The regime's third attempt at regime transition was a seven-step roadmap to democracy drafted in 2003 and led by General Khin Nyunt (Pedersen 2011, Huang 2013). The roadmap included convening a National Convention to finalise the principles of a new constitution that would be approved by referendum. This would be followed by the organisation of free and fair elections which would allow the convening of parliament under the new constitution, and finally, the building of a modern, developed and democratic nation. This process started in 2002, when the government convened a National Convention to draft a new constitution.

In 2008, the Constitution was created, leaving reserve domains for the military; and in 2010, elections were held to elect a semi-civilian government (Huang 2013). When President Thein Sein took office in March 2011, he started a series of liberalisation reforms. Notably, the president met with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in August 2011 and some political prisoners were released in November 2011The new semi-civilian government also made announcements on initiating a peace process led by Minister U Aung Min which would secure lasting peace in the country (International Crisis Group 2011).

In this context of democratisation, the KNU signed a ceasefire agreement in January 2012. Some observers have argued that the ceasefire agreement between the KNU occurred as the situation was ripe for negotiations (International Crisis Group 2012, Mydans 2012). Theoretically, the ripeness mechanism sets that rebel conflict will switch from violent to peace talks when they expect to achieve more by negotiating than fighting. These situations may occur when fighting reaches a "mutually hurting stalemate" (Zartman 1989); that is both parties are locked in a conflict from which they cannot escalate to victory. The deadlock is equally painful for both parties, giving them both incentives to seek an alternative solution. This situation is then ripe (Zartman 1989), and the rebel group will engage in negotiations. If this mechanism is present, the empirical observable implication will be the absence of significant military victory from both sides before the ceasefire negotiations. In addition, the government and the rebel group would both acknowledge the impossibility of a military victory. Following such periods with a lack of military victory, it is expected that both parties will engage in negotiations. The following shows that the evidence suggests that this ripeness mechanism was not at play in the KNU shift of strategies, as following military victories, the Myanmar Government engaged in ceasefire negotiations with some rebel groups and renewed military offensives with others.

From 1989, the Tatmadaw engaged in a period of large military offensives along the Thai border against the KNU, the Karenni National Progressive Party, the New Mon State Party, and along the China border against the Kachin Independent Organisation (KIO), which led to several important victories for the Myanmar Government (Smith 1999, South 2008, Kramer 2009, Huang 2013). In the

Karen state, the Myanmar Government reclaimed control of large portions of the KNU territory following the creation of the KNU splinter group, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Association (DKBA) in 1995 and the fall of the KNU headquarters in Mannerplaw (South 2008). Following these military victories, the military regime used two main counter-insurgency strategies. One of the Tatmadaw counter-insurgency strategies was to open a new era of ceasefire agreements with individual armed groups. As explained in the previous chapter, the military intelligence (MI), led by Gen Khin Nyunt, negotiated individual ceasefire deals with ethnic armed groups since 1989 (Hlaing 2005, Hlaing *et al.* 2005, Kramer 2009, Lall 2016). The Myanmar Government negotiated ceasefire deals and reached unwritten gentlemen agreements with a total of 40 ethnic armed groups from 1989 and 2010 (Oo and Min 2007, Oo 2014, Lall 2016). The only official ceasefire agreement was signed with the KIO in 1994 (South 2008, Beehner 2018). The ceasefire settlements generally established a basic arrangement: in exchange for suspending the armed struggles, the armed groups would receive government development assistance, business concessions and retain arms and certain territory (Woods 2011, Jones 2014c). According to some scholars (Woods 2011, Brenner 2015), these ceasefire agreements established a 'ceasefire capitalism'. The ceasefire groups set up business companies as the government granted resources concession to private parties. This created a new type of peaceful governance in the Kachin border lands, by which the Myanmar Government gained a greater territorial control as the ceasefire groups had business incentives to maintain peaceful ties with the government (Oo and Min 2007, Woods 2011, Oo 2014, Beehner 2018). Meanwhile, in the Karen state, the Tatmadaw's counter-insurgency tactics were radically different. After having regained control of large parts of the Karen state and having secured political victories with the ceasefire agreements with other rebel groups in 1995, the Myanmar Government and the KNU engaged in ceasefire negotiations (South 2011). This contradicts the ripeness mechanisms that would expect that with military and political success, the government will not engage in ceasefire negotiations as they could expect to put an end to the conflict through military means. However, none of the attempts to hold talks was successful, and both parties returned rapidly to guerrilla warfare (Taw 2005). From 1995, the

Tatmadaw's offensives notably affected the KNLA central Brigade, Brigade 7, which used to be the logistical centre of the KNU (South 2008). The 7th Brigade, located in Pa-an district, used to comprise the KNU headquarters of Mannerplaw, as well as the main trade routes and gates (South 2011, Brenner 2018). Although these counter-insurgency campaigns eroded greatly the KNU's power and control of the Karen state (South 2008, Brenner 2018), the lack of control the Tatmadaw had on the borderlands meant that it was not able to secure a military victory which could put an end to the conflict (Jones 2014b). Despite an expansion and modernisation of the its military force post-1988 (Callahan 2010, Myoe 2015, Beehner 2018), the counter-insurgency in the Karen state resembles guerrilla warfare attacking civilians to cut the supplies and resources of the KNU (South 2011, Beehner 2018). To counter the Tatmadaw counter-insurgency strategy, the KNU pursued guerrilla warfare with hit-and-run tactics (Kenny 2010). This resulted in low-intensity guerrilla warfare that lasted until January 2012, the KNU leadership signed the ceasefire agreement. The Tatmadaw counter-insurgency strategies since the 1990s, therefore, contradict the ripeness mechanism theoretical expectations, according to which we would expect that the military successes would not enable ceasefire negotiations as the state can expect a military victory. The Tatmadaw's military successes in the 1990s led simultaneously to ceasefire negotiations with some ethnic armed groups, notably with the Kachin Independent Organisation (KIO), and the intensification of guerrilla warfare in the Karen state.

Another explanation of why the KNU and the Myanmar Government finally concluded a ceasefire agreement could be the political opportunity theory. According to this mechanism, it is expected that the democratic transition would have favoured peace negotiations, as ethnic armed groups may have had new avenues to further their cause. From 2007, the Myanmar regime has taken steps towards a democratic transition and the election of a semi-civilian government in 2010. Yet, in Myanmar, the democratic transition has simultaneously favoured ceasefire negotiations by some ethnic groups, including the KNU, and the breakdown of long-lasting ceasefire by others, notably the KIO.

This section shows that despite the democratic transition, barriers for ceasefire negotiations, as between 2011 and 2012, the Tatmadaw involvement in the civilian government's steps towards

nation-wide peace was limited (Oo 2014, Lall 2016, Bertrand *et al.* 2020). This fragmentation of power within the Myanmar regime limited the legitimacy of the opportunities for peace, leading some groups to engage in the ceasefire talks and others to resume fighting. Hence, the case of Myanmar provides limited evidence for the political opportunity theory.

The election of President U Thein Sein, and with it of a semi-civilian government, brought some changes in the regime's approach to concluding nationwide peace (Lall 2016). The new government needed to end the violent conflict to achieve its economic and political goals. One of the presidential priorities, which was highlighted by President U Thein Sein's inaugural speech, was to initiate peace with all ethnic armed groups as he claimed that peacebuilding was necessary for the democratisation process. In early March 2012, in a speech at Pyi Htaung Su Hluttaw, President U Thein Sein further stated that it was the desire of the "government to share the rights among the national race and enjoy equality" (Htun *et al.* 2015, p. 28). He explained that peace would be conducted as a three-step process (Htun *et al.* 2015, p. 28):

(1) Start dialogue at the State level

(2) Dialogue at the Union level, including cooperation development activities, opening liaison offices and engaging the political process

(3) An agreement signed in Parliament with all political stakeholders

To drive this process that put a new emphasis on political dialogue, the new semi-civilian government appointed Union Minister U Aung Min to lead the ceasefire negotiations in the south of the country, U Aung Thaung and U Thein Zaw in the northern part of the country (Lall 2016). By offering opportunities for political dialogue without giving up arms, the new government made unilateral concessions, sending strong signals for confidence-building to the ethnic armed groups (Bertrand *et al.* 2020). In light of these offers to peace talks that included political dialogue, several ethnic armed groups engaged in ceasefire negotiations, including the KNU (Htun *et al.* 2015, Lall 2016, Bertrand *et al.* 2020). At first, the KNU took part in the peace talks as a member of the United

Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC), an alliance of 11 ethnic armed groups formed in 2011, including the KNU, the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS) or the KIO (Jolliffe and South 2014, Oo 2014, Lall 2016). This alliance was formed upon the Committee for the Emergence of a Federal Union (CEFU), a coalition of six ethnic armed groups that included the KNU and the KIO (Lall 2016, p. 112). The KNU had a first initial meeting with a government peace representative in Mai Sai in November 2011 (Lall 2016). These peace talks were led by the KNU but included various members of the Karen civil society, including transnational communities (c.f. Chapter 9, p.184). As such, these talks were attended by organisations such as the Karen Peace Committee, the Karen Baptist Convention and some members of the Karen diaspora such as KNU European representatives (Lall 2016). Despite the first initial meetings, disagreements and mutual distrust persisted (Lall 2016, p. 102). This distrust resulted from the perception that the talks lacked legitimacy as they did not have the backing of the Tatmadaw. The Tatmadaw did not take part in the initial stages of the peace negotiations. According to Lall (2016, p.106), they did not take part because "they did not believe it would succeed". Yet, the lack of participation of the Tatmadaw in the initial peace dialogue, hindered the legitimacy of the peace process. KNU members and members of Karen transnational communities (Interview 9, Interview 8) expressed fear of the ceasefire negotiation being merely a way for the government to "talk peace while waging war" (Lall 2016, p. 102). Hence, KNU incumbent leaders, as well as transnational Karen communities, remained sceptic in seeing a favourable outcome to these ceasefire talks.

This scepticism among the KNU incumbent leadership was all the more heightened as fighting resumed between the Tatmadaw and ethnic armed groups around the country. This reinforced views among KNU leaders that the Tatmadaw used the same strategies it had used in the 1990s (Myoe 2009), "between the accommodationist policies and aggressive uses of blunt forces" (Beehner 2018, p. 13). However, from 2010, the situation in the country was reversed in that groups who had concluded ceasefires resumed fighting and groups who had previously fighting signed ceasefire agreements. In the north of the country where the Tatmadaw had secured formal and informal ceasefire agreements, adopting an accommodationist policy by offering the groups land concession and trading licences, the

situational deteriorated when the Tatmadaw tried to place the groups who had concluded formal and informal ceasefire agreements under its command as Border Guard Forces (BGF) (Kramer 2009). The BGF scheme was meant to legalise the ceasefire agreements concluded and secure peace in the borderlands (Oo and Min 2007, Oo 2014). However, the announcement of the creation of the BGF had the opposite effect. Although many small ceasefire groups accepted the transformation into BGF, the larger groups with stronger political agenda, such as the KIO or the Karen ceasefire groups (DKBA or the KPC) refused such changes. This led to the renewal of hostilities in Kachin and Karen states. Notably, the KIO ceasefire broke down in June 2011 when the Tatmadaw attacked the Kachin troops in Tarpein, which led to intense fighting (International Crisis Group 2012, Brenner 2015, Sadan 2015). The fragmentation of power within the Myanmar government and the lack of inclusion of the Tatmadaw in ceasefire talks limited the legitimacy of the opportunities for ceasefire dialogue and peace talks initiated by the civilian government (Htun *et al.* 2015, Lall 2016). In other words, this lack of legitimacy of U Thein Sein's peace initiatives limited the opportunities for ethnic armed groups to further their cause through new non-violent avenues and resulted in mixed record in terms of ceasefire agreements: while some ethnic armed groups signed ceasefire agreements with the government, others resumed fighting with the Tatmadaw. This mixed record discards the political opportunity mechanism as the sole driving force to changes in ethnic armed groups' strategies and suggests that other mechanisms were at play in explaining why the KNU has changed its strategy.

Furthermore, the case of the KNU does not provide robust evidence to show whether third mediator mechanisms were at play. On 18 August 2011, the Myanmar government formally invited all ethnic armed groups to secure lasting peace in the country (Oo 2014). This announcement did not trigger immediate outreach from the ethnic armed groups. However, a selected number of the KNU leaders engaged in talks with the government, which led to the signing of the 2012 historical ceasefire (Jones 2014b, South 2018a).Only after the conclusion of the ceasefire, the government institutionalised peace-making bodies, which could lessen the information and commitment problem. In 2012, it created the Union Peace Central Committee (UPCC) led by the president and members of

the National Defence and Security Council, and the Union Peace Work Committee led by the Vice President. In 2012, the Myanmar Government inaugurated the Myanmar Peace Centre, funded by a number of partners including European Union and the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) (Lall 2016), which served as the government's vehicle to negotiating meetings with the ethnic armed groups and reaching a nationwide ceasefire deal (Ganesan 2017). Rather than being bodies that could build up the trust of ethnic groups in the government, they were created as a result of the ceasefire agreement concluded. This discards the presence of the third-party mediator mechanism stating that third parties which could help lessen commitment problems, to explain why the KNU ceasefire agreement was signed.

As the ripeness mechanism, political opportunity, and third mediator mechanisms do not provide a compelling explanation to understand why the KNU signed a ceasefire agreement in 2012, the next section investigates whether this strategic change resulted from the group's internal dynamics, as in 1995.

6.3. The shift in the KNU tactics as a result of existing divisions among the KNU

This section shows that the KNU's change of tactics from guerrilla warfare towards ceasefire negotiations is the result of a simultaneous divide and concede government strategy, playing on existing divisions, allowing some factions to advance their interests.

Before the new round of ceasefire negotiations which followed the 2010 elections, the KNU was experiencing internal divisions regarding the war strategies, which the following chapters explain were furthered by the transnational communities. The first faction, which scholar Kim Jollifffe (2016) named the politics first faction, was led by central KNU leaders in 2010, including Vice Chairperson P'doh Naw Zipporah Sein, President General Saw Tamla Baw, Vice President P'doh Saw David Thackabaw, and leaders of the 5th Brigade, including General Saw Baw Kyaw Heh, the KNLA vice-chief of staff (Brenner 2018). This faction's leaders had the support of northern brigades that were rather protected from

the Tatmadaw counter-insurgency offensives and where the KNU continued to rule as a quasi-government, as well as from the active transnational Karen communities. According to the leaders of this faction, ceasefire talks with the Myanmar Government needed to follow a clear process which could solve the political issues underlying the conflict as it had traditionally promoted by the charismatic leader of the KNU General Saw Bo Mya (Interview 6, Interview12, Jolliffe 2016). Notably, these leaders stated that political agreements on regime change and nationwide ceasefires were pre-requisites for deepening the relationship with the government (Jolliffe 2016). These leaders reported being particularly wary of beginning economic development cooperation and opening business ventures with the government before clear political agreements, as they feared that these business activities may allow the state to slowly further territorial control in Karen state (Interview 6, Interview 12). They pointed to the ceasefire agreements in Kachin state, claiming that the ceasefire agreement did not evolve into a meaningful political agreement and merely allowed the government to gain more control over the Kachin territory, or as Jolliffe (2016, p. 41) notes that the term ceasefire was seen as "synonymous with surrender, and the term development as a code word for personal profit".

On the other hand, the development first faction was led by the two prominent leaders of the KNU, General Saw Mutu Sae Poe and P'doh Saw David Taw (Jolliffe 2016, Brenner 2018). This faction had the support of the Central and Southern Brigades, notably Brigade 7 which was the logistical backbone of the KNU and operated where the KNU's authority was contested, with different armed groups competing for political legitimacy and sovereignty (South 2018b). This subgroup had been advocating for ceasefire negotiations with the Myanmar Government since the mid-2000s (Taw 2005, Jolliffe 2016). For P'doh Saw David Taw (2005), a prominent figure of the development first faction, ceasefire negotiations were necessary to prevent further erosion of the KNU's military and stop human rights violations. These development first leaders also claimed that the KNU needed to open the Karen state to development programmes, like the KIO had done, to ensure the organisation survival and the wellbeing of the Karen society (Taw 2005). During my interviews, leaders of this faction insisted that the opening of the Karen state had become inevitable and that the KNU had to sign ceasefire

agreement to remain a relevant stakeholder in economic development (Interview 18, Interview 19). Furthermore, these leaders had already been in talks with key development actors, notably the Italian-Thai Development Company, who were starting development projects in the Central and Southern Brigades before the 2012 ceasefire (Jolliffe 2016). The existing divisions within the KNU allowed the Myanmar Government to use the divide and concede strategy (Cunningham 2011) and secure a ceasefire agreement with the KNU.

Before 2012, the politics first faction dominated the KNU. The politics first faction's emphasis on the need for political agreement as a prerequisite for ceasefire meant that attempts to hold ceasefire talks had successively failed as political agreements could not be found (South 2011). This only led to growing discontent among the development first faction (Taw 2005, South 2008). When the semi-civilian government opened a new round of nationwide ceasefire preliminary talks in 2011, it began negotiating with the faction with whom it would be less costly to achieve its goal of peace. Indeed, in 2011, the KNU started preliminary talks with the government to negotiate a monitoring system to hold ceasefire talks. These talks were conducted by a delegation led by the leaders of the development first faction, General Saw Mutu Sae Poe and P'doh Saw David Taw. However, the KNU leaders promoted a careful approach in negotiating with the Myanmar Government. The incumbent leaders from the politics first faction reiterated their strategy of putting a moratorium on all development projects and focused on ensuring that their political demands were met. For instance, P'doh Saw David Thackabaw claimed: "We will talk about a ceasefire at the Pa-an meeting, but we can't do it imprudently. We have to be systematic and disciplined. We have to go from a ceasefire to genuine political dialogue. What we want is lasting peace, so we have to do it step-by-step with carefully worked out principles" (Karen News 2011a). However, the development first tried to further the strategy for which it had been advocating and build on the momentum to gain political power within the KNU. In January 2012, the KNU incumbent leaders were distraught when the Myanmar Government announced that the KNU delegation had signed a historic agreement in Pa-an. This was refuted by the KNU incumbent leaders, who claimed that the delegation had overstepped its authority (Karen News 2012a). During the

following months, the delegation multiplied ceasefire initiatives with the government without the consent of the KNU leadership. General Saw Mutu Sae Poe, Major Saw Roger Khin, and P'doh Saw David Taw opened a liaison office with the government in Pa-an on 21 August 2012, without permission from the KNU Executive Committee (Karen News 2012b, The Irrawaddy 2012a). Ignoring various meetings called by the KNU Executive Committee, a group of members from KNLA Brigades 4, 6 and 7, led by General Saw Mutu Sae Poe, P'doh Saw David Taw and Major Saw Roger Khin, on 29 September attended a ceremony inaugurating the liaison office. The ceremony was also attended by Myanmar Government officials including U Aung Min (The Irrawaddy 2012a). Then, rather than negotiating with the whole KNU, and ensuring the support of the politics first faction for the ceasefire negotiations, the Myanmar Government continued to negotiate with the faction with whom they could find an agreement at the least cost. This strategy allowed the Myanmar Government to ensure partial peace in the Karen state (Jolliffe 2016), however, it also triggered the fragmentation of the KNU, which could be a challenge in ensuring the duration of the ceasefire agreement. The following explains how the ceasefire negotiations led to the KNU fragmentation.

The ceasefire negotiations provided the opportunity for the development first faction to defy the existing KNU leadership dominated by the politics first faction, and further the rebel group's fragmentation. This coincides with the empirical expectation of the fragmentation mechanism which states that states' counter-insurgency strategies can further the group fragmentation as it can provide the opportunity to rearrange the power distribution within the group (c.f. Cunningham 2011). By concluding a ceasefire, the leaders of the development first were able to present themselves as politically relevant and take power. As a result of the development first leaders' insubordination and violation of KNU protocol, the KNU Executive Committee tried to take legal action against General Saw Mutu Sae Poe, Major Saw Roger Khin and P'doh Saw David Taw, who were dismissed from the KNU on 8 October 2012, formalising the fragmentation of the KNU (Karen News 2012b, The Irrawaddy 2012a). Yet, a few weeks later, the incumbent KNU leaders reinstated the leaders, as they feared the split of the group and wanted to safeguard its unity (Karen News 2012c, Jolliffe 2016). Then, the

leaders of the development first faction were reinstated in time for the 15th KNU Congress and elections in November 2012, during which General Saw Mutu Sae Poe was elected as president and P'doh Saw Kwe Htoo Win, leader of the 4th Brigade, secretary general. Among the 11 Executive Committee members, only two reflected the politics first faction of the KNU: P'doh Naw Zipporah Sein was elected vice president and General Saw Baw Kyaw Heh Deputy General of the KNLA and Committee Member (KNUHQ 2012). Power within the KNU therefore shifted in favour of those who had been pursuing the ceasefire talks and those who were pro-development. In the following election in 2016, the development first faction consolidated its dominance.

However, since the development first arrived in power, the fragmentation of the KNU has been acute, and has translated to the inability of the group to enforce organisational decisions. The politics first faction who lost power denounced the development first faction's signature of the ceasefire and further rounds of negotiations. For instance, in 2015, as the representatives of ethnic groups convened for a political strategy summit, the KNU openly displayed its divisions. In the summit, the development first faction represented the KNU. Leaders of the politics first faction, P'doh Saw David Tharckabaw and P'doh Naw Zipporah Sein, attended the summit but on behalf of the Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO). The KNDO is an armed group led by the politics first faction and which has openly been opposed to the ceasefire negotiations. During the summit, P'doh Saw David Tharckabaw publicly denounced the KNU leadership and explained that the KNDO had a different stance than the KNU as it did not want to sign a peace deal outside of the alliance of all ethnic armed groups: "The stance of our KNDO is that we wanted to see a nationwide peace agreement on the right track. The KNDO and the KNU have the same fundamental standpoint, but some leaders did not walk on the right path. Our right stance is that we need to work and cooperate with our alliance of ethnic armed forces. Then our alliance will fight for equal rights and the right to govern ourselves with self-determination for our ethnic region" (Weng 2015, p. 1). By stating their different interests and goals, the politics first have officialised the KNU's fragmentation and demonstrated the inability of the incumbent leadership to gain the whole group's backing and alignment on the strategies to conduct.

6.4. The 2012 KNU fragmentation and the KNU strategies

Understanding rebel group's internal dynamics may be key as they can determine the strategies a rebel group can conduct (Pearlman 2011c, Bakke *et al.* 2012, Seymour *et al.* 2016). Following the development first accession to power, each faction pursued different strategies. In contrast to the theoretical expectations, the fragmentation of the rebel group did not lead to each faction conducting violent activities. Rather, both factions conducted non-violent tactics: the development first faction engaged in conventional politics while the politics first faction favoured non-violent forms of protest.

The development first faction pursued negotiations with the Myanmar Government and after two years of talks, they signed a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) on October 2015. This agreement included eight other ethnic groups, including the KNU splinter group, Democratic Karen Buddhist Association (DKBA), and prepared the path for political dialogue which could lead to a peace agreement (Karen News 2015a, Jolliffe 2016, Thawnghmung 2017). It is worth noting that the NCA was not nationwide, despite its name, as major rebel groups in other areas of the country failed to sign it, including the KIO and the Shan armed groups, who at the time of writing are still involved in heavy fighting against the Tatmadaw (Sadan 2015). This agreement opened the door to political dialogue at the state level with the newly elected National League for Democracy (NLD) government. Alongside the negotiations held with the government, the development first faction of the KNU began to socialise itself to conventional politics. They visited the FARCS in Colombia and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) in Indonesia to gain insights and learn lessons from those peace negotiations (Burma News International 2013). They also invited speakers involved in the Bangsamoro group in the Philippines to share their experiences in peacebuilding in their country (KNU 2015). Hence, the KNU development first faction was undertaking a transition from armed conflict to negotiations. In addition, the KNU entered into economic ventures with the Myanmar Government. The first legally registered Karen KNU-owned company, the Moe Ko San Travel and Tour Company Ltd., was founded in 2013 to deal with export and import businesses (Karen News 2013a). The political reintegration of

the KNU moderate leaders into Myanmar politics is intertwined with their economic integration. In other words, there has been a de-radicalisation of the development first leaders, which has led to their demobilisation and integration into conventional politics. Therefore, the KNU development first faction's strategy is mostly focused on reintegrating into conventional politics. However, the de-escalation from violent conflict to conventional politics is partial as the KNU has not surrendered its arms. It has maintained its military bases, although they are not active.

In contrast, the politics first leaders have not demobilised but rather transitioned from violent methods to non-violent methods. Since General Saw Mutu Sae Poe took the KNU presidency, P'doh Naw Zipporah Sein and General Saw Baw Kyaw Heh engaged themselves in a non-violent campaign to denounce the KNU development first strategy. Therefore, they publicly demonstrated their opposition to the KNU leadership. For the Karen revolution day, P'doh Naw Zipporah Sein and General Saw Baw Kyaw Heh would not join the celebrations organised by the KNU leadership at the KNU headquarters in the 7th Brigade. Rather, they organised their own ceremony in the Mutraw district, controlled by General Saw Baw Kyaw Heh. This kind of event, attended by a large number of civilians, is the occasion for the KNU members to voice their goals and concerns. On the 65th Karen revolutionary day on 31 January 2014, P'doh Naw Zipporah Sein claimed: "It is not clear that the Burmese military are eager to support the rights of Karen people […] or to solve the political crisis. What the Burmese Government wants is to end the civil war and for all the ethnic rebels armed groups to surrender the fight for their own rights. They want the ethnic rebels to collaborate with them for economic development. This does not fulfil the desires and goals of the Karen people. The struggle, desire, and political goal of the Karen people is to have our own destiny, freedom to rule ourselves […] to build a federation of all ethnic groups to have equal rights in the same country. So, we have to continue our struggle until we achieve our aim and political goal" (Karen News 2014).

In addition, General Saw Baw Kyaw Heh has focused on gaining more support in the Karen state by denouncing and obstructing development projects (Karen News 2013b, Jolliffe 2016). He has highlighted that the government has pushed to accelerate development projects to gain control over

the Karen state to build an ASEAN east-west economic corridor, which is part of the AEC (ASEAN Economic Community) economic integration project (Karen News 2013b). He has shown his support and joined protests against development projects, organised by Karen communities (Karen News 2016a). Moreover, he has shown his opposition to the current negotiations by boycotting the KNU organised events, failing to show up to KNU meetings and ignoring moderate leaders' recommendations. This non-violent insubordination to the KNU incumbent leadership shows that, in contrast with theoretical expectations (Bakke *et al.* 2012, Seymour *et al.* 2016), the faction competition for political relevancy does not necessarily lead to an increase of violence against civilians. Non-violent strategies can be used by factions to express their discontent when factions are engaged in a political competition but do not want to split from the group. This point was highlighted in interviews with leaders of both factions (Interview 9, Interview 21). They stated that although they did not agree with each other's strategies, the memory of the consequences from the split with the DKBA was still fresh, and they wanted to avoid another split which could threaten the survival of the KNU. This reasoning displays a rational calculation of the costs/benefits of splintering and could lead us to conclude that factions will only split when they can gain more political and material resources from the split than from staying within the group.

6.5. Conclusion

Building upon the literature on conflict and non-violent tactics, this chapter aimed to identify how the state counter-insurgency strategy could lead to the changes of rebel strategies. The evidence of the studied case suggests that the KNU strategic changes, formalised by the historic signing of a ceasefire agreement, resulted from the state's ability to play on existing divisions within the KNU. By selectively conducting ceasefire talks, the state pulled the trigger on the KNU fragmentation, whereby different factions pursued their own strategies and organisational decisions were not enforced. Until 2012, the KNU remained mostly consistent in their insurgency tactics, refraining from engaging in ceasefire negotiation. However, this stance has found growing resistance among the group, as a

faction led by central Brigades' leaders who sought to compensate for their declining power through ceasefire negotiations and the opening of the Karen state to development projects, emerged. Then, when the government renewed its offer to negotiate in 2012, the development first faction unliterally held ceasefire talks, deepening the divisions among the rebel group.

As the Myanmar government was able to attract one of the KNU factions, it also led to an increase of non-violent tactics from both factions. In contrast to what I would expect based on the literature on fragmentation, the fragmentation of the KNU led both factions to favour non-violent tactics to voice their opposition without formally splitting the group. This chapter shows that key in the changes of the KNU tactics is its fragmentation. As shown in previous chapters, the fragmentation did not solely occur from the government's co-optation tactics. The government co-optation tactics would not have been successful without existing grievances among the KNU subgroups, to which as it has been shown in previous chapters the refugees' support to the KNU's politics first faction has fuelled. Therefore, this chapter highlights that the changes in rebel tactics can be understood by analysing the interdependencies between different rebel armed groups, government armies or militias, civilian actors and external supporters.

Chapter 7: Governing refugees: Karen refugees and KNU interdependence as contributors to the KNU split and the creation of the DKBA

7.1. Introduction

A key event in the history of the Karen National Union (KNU), a Karen ethnonationalist rebel group in Myanmar, has been the formation of a splinter group, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA, later renamed the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army). The creation of the DKBA marked the beginning of damaging defeats for the KNU (Bjorklund 2010): the DKBA allied with the Myanmar military to overthrow the KNU headquarters at Manerplaw in February 1995, and since then the KNU has lost control of almost all its territory inside Myanmar (McConnachie 2014). The driving mechanisms for the KNU split have often been analysed through a domestic lens like in the previous chapters, analysing the effect of the Myanmar Government and army's tactics on the KNU's cohesion, or lack thereof (Thawnghmung 2008, Kenny 2010, South 2011, Jolliffe 2016, Brenner 2018). The previous chapters highlighted that the KNU's changes in strategies which resulted in changes from conventional warfare to guerrilla tactics in 1994 resulted from its fragmentation. It showed that the government built upon existing dissent between Christian and Buddhist factions to co-opt the Buddhist faction, which led to a splinter Karen Buddhist rebel group. Although acknowledging that domestic factors are key to explain the KNU's fragmentation, this chapter aims to add analytical leverage in understanding the KNU internal politics and show that the involvement of Karen refugees in the KNU politics was also significant in the creation of the DKBA in 1995.

This chapter highlights that interdependence and social networks are essential to understanding how Karen refugee communities in Myanmar influenced the lack of KNU's cohesion and, in turn, its strategic choices. The interdependence between the Karen refugee communities and the KNU transformed the Karen refugee communities into politically organised groups whose frames were aligned with the KNU's conflict frames. South (2008, p. 96) notes that until the end of the 1990s, "it was impossible to work with the refugees and not be aware that their plight and daily life was

intimately connected to the social, military and political situation across the border". Then, the refugee camps became important sources of political and material support for the KNU rebellion (Cline 2009, Horstmann 2011b): Karen refugees became important agents of proselytising, who used networks with the Karen state to diffuse KNU ethnonationalist frames and the Karen refugee camps became shelters for insurgents.

Furthermore, this chapters shows that in the build-up to the KNU's split in 1995, this transnational support did not benefit all the KNU sub-groups equally. Rather, it heightened power asymmetries between the Christian and Buddhist factions of the KNU. The Karen refugees who shared more ties with the Christian factions diffused the Christian pan-Karen nationalism to domestic and international audiences. Similarly, the Karen refugees' economic support mostly benefited the Christian faction of the KNU. This transnational support has then politically and economically heightened the domination of the Christian faction over the Buddhist faction. By furthering the power asymmetries within the group, transnational Karen communities have fuelled grievances of perceived religious discrimination. It is on this growing discontent over the sense of religious discrimination against the Buddhist KNU members that the government has built to co-opt and fragment the KNU. In other words, the government's counter-insurgency strategies triggered the fragmentation of the rebel groups by playing on the existing grievances fuelled by refugees' support.

This chapter delineates the origins of the different social networks between the Karen refugees in Thailand and Myanmar in the build up to the KNU's split in 1995. This allows examining how the Karen refugees were mobilised and became supporters of the KNU rebellion. In a second section, the chapter analyses how refugee support exacerbated the power asymmetries between existing factions, fuelling the split of the KNU.

7.2. Dispersed, connected, and aligned: the genesis of the Karen refugee support of the KNU

According to the theoretical framework developed in previous chapters, transnational ethnic communities are expected to have an influence on the cohesion (or lack thereof) when they are

connected to the rebel groups through social ties which supports the diffusion and socialisation of transnational ethnic communities to the conflict frames. This process of frame alignment enables transnational communities to take an interest in the conflict and provide their support to the rebel group. This section aims to uncover whether such mechanisms have been at play in the case of the Karen refugees. To do so, it compares the ties and frames of Karen refugees and other Karen communities in Myanmar. Empirically, it expects the community which has regular encounters with the KNU to share its conflict frames.

From their creation, the Karen refugee camps were closely associated with the KNU, notably with its Christian faction, which allowed the Karen refugees to become hubs of proselytisation of a Karen ethnonationalist with Christian influence (Smith 2007, South 2008, Horstmann 2011b). Such frame alignment did not occur with different Karen groups residing inside Myanmar, outside of the KNU-held areas (Thawnghmung 2012). Despite being confronted with a similar social and political national context, these 'other Karen' (Thawnghmung 2012), developed grievances and frames that are different from the KNU. Analysing this dichotomy in frame alignments will help understand how Karen refugees become one of the social bases upon which certain KNU leaders have built their rebellion.

The KNU's frames of the conflict have been built around two main ideas: (1) the natural opposition between the Karen and Burmese, and (2) the united Karen. The Karen armed conflict, which emerged in 1949, aimed to realise the KNU's aspiration for "an independent Karen state and to protect the Karen people from a renewal of violence that had ruptured the Karen and Burman communities during the Second World War" (Thawnghmung 2008, p. 4, South 2011). The armed resistance is justified through collective memories of oppression of Karen under the Burmese kings in precolonial times (Rajah 2002, Thawnghmung 2008, Gravers 2015). Dr San C Po, the pioneer advocate for an independent Karen state, was the first Karen personality to overtly call for a separation of the two 'races' (Po 1928). He stated that: "The Karen are shy and backward, and often lacking in the spirit of competition, while Burman are usually assertive, forward and aggressive" (Po 1928, p. 18). This discourse was sustained over the years, and the KNU continues to argue that the Karen people are the

victims of long-lasting oppression from the Burmese. The KNU booklet 'The Karens and their struggle for freedom' (Karen National Union 2006) has similarly argued that the Karen and Burmese are two different civilisations; the Karen descending from the Mongolians, while the Burmese descend from the Tibeto-Burman, and therefore cannot evolve towards a common nationality. Similarly, an analysis of the KNU official discourses available on the KNU old and new website (KNUHQ 2012, 2013a, 2013b, KNU 2014, 2015, n.d.) shows that KNU leaders produced narratives presenting the Karen as peaceful and anti-belligerent. The word peace has been systematically associated with the Karen and their efforts to negotiate for peace. For instance: "By nature the Karen are peace-loving people, who uphold high moral qualities of honesty, community, and loyalty" (KNU 2014); "By nature the Karen are simple quiet, unassuming and peace living people, who uphold the high moral qualities of honesty, purity, brotherly love, co-operative living and loyalty, and are devout in their religious beliefs" (Karen National Union 2006). In contrast, in KNU speeches, the Tatmadaw has been associated with expressions portraying them as antagonistic and belligerent. The word 'offensives' has been systematically associated with the Tatmadaw. For instance: "Once again the Karen National Union's attempts at securing a peace for its people has been met by further Burmese Army offensives" (Karen National Union 2006).

The second idea upon which the KNU framing of the conflict is built is the existence of a coherent and unified Karen nation (Horstmann 2010, Gravers 2015, Sharples 2015). The Karen national identity and the idea that all Karen shared a common, homogeneous and united identity grew out of Christian missionaries in the 19th and 20th centuries and was promoted by the Sgaw Karen Christian elite (Gravers 2007, Thawnghmung 2008, 2012). Before the arrival of Christian missionaries, the Karen, who comprise diverse sub-ethnic groups, did not share a common political identity (Cheesman 2002, Harriden 2002b, Kuroiwa and Verkuyten 2008). To facilitate the conversion of the diverse Karen groups, Christian missionaries created a Karen history and origin narratives with biblical and religious references (Rajah 2002), as well as a literate tradition by introducing a written language, Sgaw Karen (Smith 1991). The Christian missionaries generated the theory of the Karen being one of the lost tribes

of Israel and of a pristine Christian-Jewish origin, laying the foundation for the national consciousness of the Karen (Gravers 2015). The creation of a Karen history contributed to creating a unified Karen imagined political community (Anderson 1991), which laid the foundations for the Karen nation-building project. After Myanmar's independence from the British in 1947, the Karen nationalist movement, which was renamed the KNU, gained momentum and emerged as a broad-based movement supported by a sizeable proportion of the Karen population of different backgrounds. Despite the stated ambition of uniting all Karen, the KNU was led by a Christian elite who spread the Karen nationalism originally advocated by Christian missionaries (Rajah 2002, Platz 2003, Thawnghmung 2008). In all aspects of the Karen national identity, to this day, Christian references remain – the historical origins, the language, and even the national anthem which contains Christian sentiments.

These two narratives which compose the KNU frames of the conflict have been prominent in the Karen refugee discourses (South 2007, Brees 2010, Horstmann 2011c, McConnachie 2014, Hargrave 2015). Major Karen refugee institutions have conveyed the KNU Christian elite's ideals, namely that the Karen people form a coherent nation which has grounds to claim control over their own territory. The history of the Karen taught in the refugee schools matches the historical accounts and narratives promoted by the KNU, highlighting the common Karen experience of the oppression under the Burman (Metro 2006). The history curriculum covers the entrance of the Karen in Myanmar in 742 BC, to highlight that Karen are indigenous to Myanmar and continues through the Karen revolution until the present. The history curriculum furthermore argues that the Karen are a lost tribe from Israel that has constantly been persecuted and oppressed. It has presented the Karen as a virtuous and naïve community that has been forced to move continuously (Metro 2006, Kingsbury 2011, Lall and South 2014). These historical accounts on the Karen nation are in line with the narratives of the Karen nation promoted by the KNU. These KNU ethnonationalist narratives which convey the unity of the Karen nation and its undeniable opposition to the Burmese were, according to experts on the KNU, before 1994, mainstream (South 2008, Sharples 2015, Interview 8, Interview 11). In addition, the Karen

refugees' institutions have reproduced frames of the narratives of the conflict framing the intrinsic opposition between the Karen and the Burman. In the Karen Refugee Committee (KRC)'s monthly reports, the word peace is systematically associated with the Karen, arguing that the Karen in Myanmar have been "longing for peace" or that the "refugees are dreaming of peace" (Karen Refugee Committee 1993). Then, despite being separated by a national border, the KNU and the Karen refugees' agendas and narratives have overlapped. The Karen refugees, in contrast with the silent Karen, by sharing the political beliefs on the necessary opposition between Burman and a united Karen nation, have become one of the social bases upon which the KNU leaders can construct their rebellion.

Yet, such frame alignment did not occur with different Karen groups located in Myanmar. Many studies on the Karen struggle and the international community focus on the Karen refugee communities who share the KNU nationalist frames (Smith 1999, Walker 2001, Gravers 2002, Harriden 2002b, Rogers 2004, Fong 2008b, South 2008, 2011, Cho 2011, Harkins 2012, McConnachie 2012). The Karen in the Delta region have developed agendas and narratives which differ from the KNU's frames (Thawnghmung 2012). The government has restricted access to media and has filtered any information coming from the borderland. Hence, according to the current leaders of the KNU, the younger generation of Karen are mostly ignorant of the Karen rebellion, its history, and the KNU politics (Interview 4, Interview 13, Thawnghmung 2012). In addition, although the relations with the Burman may be conflictual, these Karen have mostly been spared subjugation to human rights violations and violence; they can have amicable relations with the Burman population and do not perceive the antagonism presented by the KNU, and they have had the opportunity to obtain high-ranking civil service positions. They have had fewer opportunities to develop grievances against the Burmese to accept the KNU's claims. Thawnghmung (2012) recorded accounts of different Karen living in Myanmar outside of the KNU-held areas. She demonstrates that these "silent Karen" may have a positive view of the KNU however they reject the armed struggle against the Burmese, among the young generation who have not been socialised to the KNU promoted the history of the Karen. They

do not perceive as a liberator or an insurgent force. "I don't perceive the KNU either as a liberator or an insurgent force. The problem is that I don't know what they stand for. I need to have a dialogue with them to find out what they stand for and whether they represent my interest. However, I respect them as an organisation, which is fighting to promote its own cause" (Thawnghmung 2012, p. 72). Some of the Karen in the Delta have even denounced the methods and goals adopted by the KNU, as they seek a peaceful resolution to the conflict (Thawnghmung 2012). Hence, inside Myanmar, the KNU has had to face competition from the United Karen League, the United Karen organisation and the Karen Congress, whose leaders served in important government positions (Taylor 2009, Thawnghmung 2012). For instance, the Union Kayin League was one of the five parties that contested the 1990 elections. It promoted cooperation with the government in the economic sector as it aimed to bring prosperity to the Karen people (Mizzima News 2010). The party secretary U Saw Rufus stated that: "our party has always been pro-government since its founding in 1948" (Maw Maw 2010). Similarly, the Karen National Congress for Democracy (KNCD) was formed in 1990 as a political party to mobilise and nurture the Karen community in Myanmar (Taylor 2009). Instead of promoting a rebellion to free a united Karen nation from the oppression of the Burmese, the Karen organisations in Myanmar are involved in more traditional political claims.

This dichotomy between the other Karen and the Karen refugees' frames alignment with the KNU's ideas of what the conflict is about can be explained by differences in the ties that connect them with the rebellion. The connection between the Karen refugee camps and the KNU were originally institutional. The Karen refugee camps were incrementally created along the Thai-Myanmar border at different times on an ad-hoc basis, drawing on pre-existing patterns of village governance in Eastern Myanmar (Bowles 1998, Brouwer and van Wijk 2013). Initially and until the mid-1990s, the refugee camps were unofficial settlements created by villagers. When clashes occurred in areas under the KNU's authority, entire villages tended to flee together following the village leader and escorted by KNLA soldiers (Bowles 1998, Horstmann 2011a). Once they reached the Thai side of the border – an area where none of the regional actors, the Burmese/Myanmar and the Thai governments, exercised

full-scale influence – they recreated their villages with the KNU's patterns of governance (Bowles 1998, Lee 2012). As the population of the refugee settlements grew, institutions reflecting the political organisation of the KNU were created, affirming the KNU's influence and authority over the refugee population. Institutionally, each camp comprised committees which ruled over every aspect of camp life – administration, education, health, social welfare, security, women, and youth (McConnachie 2014). Karen refugee leaders explained during interviews that each of these committees was overseen by a corresponding sister organisation within the KNU, with whom they would regularly meet or contact (Interview 9, Interview 10, McConnachie 2014). For instance, the Karen refugee schools' curriculum was created under the auspice of the Karen Education Department, and refugee schools and schools in the Karen state shared the same curriculum (ZOA Refugee Care Thailand 2010, Lall and South 2014). Similarly, the legal system in the camps was supervised by the KNU department of justice, with cases being referred to the KNU leaders (McConnachie 2014). The overarching organisation of the refugee camps, the Karen Refugee Committee (KRC), had strong ties with the KNU: the KRC representative were selected by a process combining elections by the camp committees and nominations by the KNU leaders and the KNU was initially recognised as the mother organisation of the KRC (Lee 2012, McConnachie 2014). National days linked to the KNU struggle are recognised in the Karen refugee camps, including Karen National Union Day, Karen National Liberation Army day, or Karen Resistance Day. Accounts from interviews with Karen refugees, KNU leaders and experts, state that on these days, a ceremony was organised, with KNU leaders visiting and partaking in the celebrations (McConnachie 2014, Interview 7, Interview 9, Interview 13, Interview 22). The refugee organisations institutionalised ties with the KNU which challenged the popular images of refugees who cut ties with the homeland and provided a great deal of continuity between the governance and management practices in the refugee settlements and within the KNU areas.

A closer analysis of the connections between the KNU and the refugee camps shows that the Karen refugees have been mostly linked to the Christian faction of the KNU. Christian institutions have been key to connect the KNU and the Karen refugee elite (Horstmann 2010, 2011a, McConnachie 2014,

Jung *et al.* 2015). As the refugee settlements grew, religious aid organisations, which made up the Consortium of Christian Agencies, organised themselves to provide humanitarian assistance to the Karen refugees (Horstmann 2010). Christian Karen refugee leaders became the natural partners for these humanitarian organisations, giving them a leadership role. The KRC, in charge of the camp administration and humanitarian aid distribution, was mainly made up of Karen pastors, and the Bible School and Christian churches, notably the Kawthoolei Karen Baptist Convention, became central institutions of the cultural and political life in the camp (Horstmann 2011a). During interviews members of the KNU and leaders of the Karen refugees stated that, as the Christian refugees took on the leadership of the refugee camps, they brokered connections between the KNU Christian faction and the refugees (Interview 7, Interview 8, Interview 28, Horstman 2011a). Due to their religious affiliation, before their displacement the Karen refugee leaders had particularly strong ties with the KNU Christian elite. Most of the Karen refugee leaders had been members of the KNU and had close relationships with the KNU Christian leaders (Horstmann 2011a). These relationships were maintained despite their displacement and the Christian leaders of the Karen refugee camps acted as a proxy for the KNU Christian leaders. Therefore, the Karen refugees are strongly linked to members of the KNU Christian faction in formal organisations and associations. These ties have created the social terrain upon which the KNU leaders, mostly from the Christian faction, could diffuse their ideas of what the war should be about.

In contrast, the silent Karen remaining in a government-controlled area lack ties with the KNU, which explains the lack of frame alignment, and in turn the lack of active support to the KNU. The silent Karen are located in Rangoon, the Irrawaddy Delta, in Pa-an, Moulmein or Mandalay (Thawnghmung 2012). At the beginning of the Karen struggle, immediately after Myanmar's independence in 1947, the KNU who had gained some momentum in advocating for the independence of the Karen state, attracted both soldiers from contested or KNU-controlled areas where the worst forms of human rights violations occurred, and more educated members from Rangoon or the Delta region (South 2008). The leadership comprised individuals from Rangoon or the

Delta regions, such as P'doh Saw Htoo Htoo Lay (still in power), P'doh Saw Mahn Shah (assassinated in 2008) and P'doh Saw David Taw (who died in 2012). All three were educated in Rangoon in the 1950s and joined the insurgency after their studies. However, as the counter-insurgency campaign of the Burmese Government intensified in the 1950s and throughout the 1990s, the KNU slowly lost any connections with the Karen remaining in the Delta areas (Interview 4, Interview 13, Thawnghmung 2008). In the government-controlled areas, no relay organisations have maintained connections between the KNU and the Karen in the Delta regions. Compared to the KNU and Karen refugees' alignment of frames, the lack of support to the KNU from the Karen communities within Myanmar shows that ethnicity understood as the essential attributes of an ethnic group is not a sufficient condition for frame alignment. Frame alignment is rather triggered by a constant diffusion of information on the conflict frames which occurs when two groups share sustained connections (Strang and Meyer 1993, True and Mintrom 2001, Forsberg 2014). The ties between the Karen refugee communities and the KNU have supported the diffusion of information from one group to another across the state borders which have allowed Karen refugee organisations and the KNU to share similar agendas and narratives of the conflict. The Karen refugees have then become a social base, who share the KNU's political beliefs. The observation that Karen refugees are part of the KNU networks is key to understand how the KNU leaders have built their rebellion. The theoretical chapters have shown that the mobilisation of transnational community can be one of the sources of rebel group's fragmentation which, as it has been uncovered in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7, results in changes of rebel strategies. The following section shows that the Karen refugee by being social bases of the KNU Christian leadership mobilised to provide ideational, social and material support that the KNU Christian leaders could use and which has fuelled to its split.

7.3. Karen refugees' selective support as a source of religious fragmentation

7.3.1. The Christian KNU faction - the main beneficiary of refugee support

The Karen refugees, by sharing ties with the Christian leadership, became de facto a constituency of the Christian faction. For the KNU Christian faction, building a social network with the Karen refugees has meant they could benefit from the political or material resources the Karen refugees had to offer. In the building up to the KNU fragmentation in 1995, Christian KNU members, especially those living in the borderlands, were generally wealthier than their Buddhist counterparts. The Christian faction of the KNU increased their wealth through two avenues. First, the Christian leadership had wider access to borderland trade (Brenner 2015). In the 1960s, U Ne Win's establishment of the Burmese Way to Socialism and the nationalisation of all the sectors of the Burmese economy led to a shortage of major commodities and a general impoverishment of the Burmese population (Lintner 1999, Smith 2007, Fong 2008a). The main avenue to acquire commodities was through Thailand, and the cross-border informal economy was strengthened. The main route to transport the commodities from Thailand to central Myanmar was through the KNU-held territories. Hence, the KNU opened several custom gates and trade posts at the border with Thailand to control the trade of goods and imposed a flat 5% tax on most goods being traded in its territories. The first trade post was opened at Phalu just outside of the Burmese-controlled Myawaddy, located directly in front of the Thai town of Mae Sot. The main trade post, which became an important KNU base, was open in Kamoorah in the 7th KNU Brigade area. The KNU Christian leaders were the main beneficiaries of these revenues, while the low-ranking soldiers rarely saw the benefits of such trade (Smith 1991). A trivial observable implication of this wealth disparity is that during this period, several Christian leaders bought land and built houses in the Thai borderland in the vicinity of Mae Sot or Mae Sariang. To this day, the easiest way to access the KNU leaders is through Thailand, rather than in the Karen state in Myanmar.

The second avenue, which highlights the role of transnational communities, was through the Karen refugee camps (Brouwer and van Wijk 2013). The deep embeddedness of the KNU, notably Christian leaders, in the refugee camps meant that the KNU Christian members were able to access the refugee camps and benefit from the few advantages they could offer to avoid war fatigue. During the 1970s and 1980s, KNU members, especially those who were operating in zones where the KNU had weaker control and where clashes could easily occur, crossed the border to escape the Tatmadaw's counterinsurgency offensives which usually occurred during the dry season. KNU members and KNLA high-ranking officials, mostly Christians, placed their families in refugee camps until the end of the government's offensive (Horstmann 2011c, Lee 2012, McConnachie 2014). At the end of the offensive, the displaced families would return to their homeland. Nevertheless, at the end of the 1980s when the government's offensives became longer and more intense, the KNU members and their families settled along the Thai border, creating the first permanent refugee camps (Lee 2014). Hence, the refugee camps became safe havens where some of the KNU members - usually those operating the closest to the borderland or the most high-ranking officers, usually Christian - could rest, convalesce before the offensive season, do business with Thai merchants, and safely leave their families.

More than a haven, the refugee camps also provided the KNU access to humanitarian aid provided by aid organisations (Brouwer and van Wijk 2013, Decobert 2015). Karen refugee camps received a significant increase in international awareness after the uprising in Yangon in 1988. This increased international awareness of the situation in Myanmar, which subsequently increased aid budgets. Technically, humanitarian organisations do not provide aid to the militants. However, the humanitarian organisations who first arrived in the camps found a well-developed system of governance. For efficiency purposes, the humanitarian organisations relied on the KRC and other CBOs to distribute humanitarian aid (AGRER Consortium *et al.* 2008). In most camps, the section leaders were, and still are, both in charge of determining the humanitarian needs of the population and of distribution processes (AGRER Consortium *et al.* 2008). This has contributed to the misappropriation of aid (i.e. surpluses may be rerouted) and allowed the KNU members who entered the camps to

receive humanitarian aid which they may have not received if the aid was managed solely by UNHCR (Interview 5, Décobert 2015). In addition, even when the humanitarian aid was not rerouted, by mere access to the refugee camps, KNU Christian members had access to more public goods than the KNU members who did not have access to the borderlands. The Christian leaders who had families in the refugee camps benefited from higher quality refugee public services than those found in the Karen state. Schools, health care facilities, and shelter to which the Christian elite had access were funded by humanitarian aid agencies and were therefore better equipped than any facilities in the Karen state.

Furthermore, some aid organisations not only provided humanitarian aid to refugees but also operated from Thailand to provide cross-border aid to the KNU (Décobert 2014). This cross-border aid indirectly strengthened the inequalities between Buddhist and Christian factions of the KNU. They recruited Karen refugees to re-enter the Karen state and provide support to the KNU-held areas (Horstmann 2010, 2011a, Lee 2014). The aid organisations, which were originally mostly Christian, relied on existing religious networks (churches, schools, and KNU pastors) to provide the material support (Interview 5, Interview 10, Horstman 2011a). KNU areas with Christian institutions were the most active and benefited the most from the cross-border humanitarian aid. A prominent example of this border-crossing aid is the support provided by the Free Burma Rangers. The Free Burma Rangers was founded by a US army general and provides emergency relief support as well as evangelises displaced people in war zones (Horstman 2011). The organisation provided health and spiritual training to Karen refugees who then re-enter Myanmar to assist Karen displaced people. Most of the aid goes to the Christian faction of the KNU with whom the FBR shares strong links. Similarly, the Karen Teacher Working, the Backpack Health Workers, or the Karen Baptist Convention recruits Karen refugees in Thailand who have an intimate knowledge of the Karen state to re-enter Myanmar by foot and distribute material resources (Interview 10, Décobert 2015). Hence, the connections between the KNU and the refugees allowed KNU members, in particular the Christian faction, to benefit from humanitarian aid necessary to sustain the rebellion and prevent war fatigue.

In addition to material support, the refugee camps functioned as a base of political support for the Christian faction of the KNU, with institutions instilling the Christian Karen national project (Horstmann 2010, Lee 2012, McConnachie 2012). The Karen refugee camps have been hubs for the legitimisation of the KNU Christian national narrative (Brees 2009, Horstmann 2010, Lee 2012, McConnachie 2012). The Karen refugees have been active actors in instigating the general assumption among the Karen population but also among the international community that the actions of the KNU Christian leaders are "desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions" (Suchman 1995, p. 574). These legitimation strategies are inherent to any rebel group who wishes to achieve civilian compliance and build a community willing to live under the KNU's auspices (Terpstra and Frerks 2017). The legitimation of the KNU Christian faction included a series of actions - speech, writing, ritual display- whereby the rebel organisation can justify its actions or express its identity (Barker 2001). In the camps, the main legitimation strategy has been to highlight that the KNU is the main representative of the aspirations of the Karen people. Indeed, the claims of the KNU as a mother organisation which represent socio-economic and political aspirations of the whole Karen community have been conveyed through all year-round events and the displaying of symbols (Thawnghmung 2008, McConnachie 2014). The KRC organises regular events to celebrate and glorify the Karen revolution (McConnachie 2014). All the national days celebrated in the refugee camps are related to the KNU's struggle: KNU Day, KNLA Day, Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO) Day, KWO Day, KYO Day, Kawthoolei Day, and Karen Resistance Day. For each celebration, speakers from the KNU, KNLA or KNDO make an appearance. In addition, everywhere in the camps there are exhibitions of nationalist symbols, such as the Karen flag and pictures of KNU leaders such Saw Ba U Gyi or General Bo Mya (South 2008, McConnachie 2012, Sharples 2015). These are particularly visible in public spaces, but they are also present in most active Karen refugees' homes. In addition, refugee institutions, and in particular the church, which is the cultural hub of the camps, have conveyed the Karen nationalism promoted by the Christian faction of the KNU. This Christian interpretation of the national narrative conceals internal diversity and is relayed in most of the refugee

institutions (Brees 2010, Lee 2012, McConnachie 2012, Sharples 2012, 2015). For instance, the most influential pastors in the camps that participated in the consolidation of the KNU Christian narrative's legitimacy are Pastor Robert Htway, head of the KRC, and Pastor Simon Saw, head of the Kawthoolei Bible School, who were supporters of the KNU (Horstman 2011b). They promote the idea that the KNU was the mother organisation and that the Karen people are united in their cause. They make constant references to Kawthoolei. In every aspect of camp life, references to Kawthoolei, the Karen's promised land, are made. For instance, the Karen Baptist organisation in the camp is named the Kawthoolei Karen Baptist Church and Bible school. Similarly, the judicial system in the camp is referred to as the Kawthoolei law (McConnachie 2014). These constant references to the KNU, and in particular its Christian leaders, have contributed to present the KNU as the dominant force in the Karen nationalist movement, as well as to provide backing to the KNU Sgaw Karen Christian leadership.

Furthermore, the Karen refugee camps were the only face and source of information of the KNU struggle to the international community. With this front-facing role, the Karen refugees were able to promote the Christian Karen national narrative to the international community, reinforcing the political authority of the Christian faction of the KNU. Through this international recognition, they asserted their leadership role and shadowed the Buddhist Karen's interests and nationalist narratives. To raise money from western donors, Christian aid organisations simplified the story of the Karen insurgency and presented the Karen refugees as victims of the Burmese Government who was fighting the KNU, a defender of a unified Karen nation, led by a Christian elite. Such narratives were relayed in the first report from the Consortium of Christian Associations who provided humanitarian relief to the Karen; it presents the Karen as the largest minority who migrated to "Burma from Mongolia in the 6th and 7th century before the Burmans arrived in the 9th century" (Consortium of Christian Assocation 1984). The report also highlights that the Karen were victims of persecution from the Burmese: "They [The Karen] were not highly regarded by other Burmese groups and were subject to frequent raids" (Consortium of Christian Assocation 1984). The report also claims that "many Karen" are Christians, which explains their antagonism with the Burmese. These accounts of the Karen and their rebellion

were relayed to donors and the public opinion in the west, increasing the legitimacy and profile of the Christian leadership among the international community. For instance, in an article published in the Guardian in 1984, the Karen were presented as a Christian unified minority: "Sunday is not the best day to arrive at Mannerplaw, headquarters of Myanmar's rebel Karen National Union perched on a hillside overlooking the fast-flowing Moei River that marks the border with Thailand. Converted to Christianity by American Baptists in the last century, the Karen spend the morning at church and the afternoon at home" (Cumming-Bruce 1984). The refugee camps relayed the KNU's nationalist goals to humanitarian aid organisations who provided the international legitimation of the Christian faction of the KNU.

The Karen refugees' ties to the Christian leadership translated in the Christian faction gaining more support from the refugees than the Buddhist faction of the KNU. Understanding who within the KNU benefited from the Karen refugees' support is key, as theoretically it is expected that ideational and material support can undermine the organisational strength of the group, by triggering in-group competition over political and economic resources. The following section will show that the Karen refugees' support has fuelled the split of the KNU triggered by the government's counter-insurgency strategies.

7.3.2. The KNU Buddhists' perceived relative deprivation: how refugee ties affected the balance of power in the KNU

The Karen refugee support to the KNU Christian faction of the KNU, while it prevented war fatigue and partly sustained the rebellion, had also more damaging consequences on the organisation of the KNU. As the Christian faction of the KNU benefited from the Karen refugee political and economic resources, discontent and perception of relative deprivation rose within the rebel group. By emphasising the narratives of the Christian faction of the KNU, the humanitarian aid agencies shadowed the presence of Buddhist Karen within the KNU, overriding their aspirations. The NGOs accepted the KNU Christian elites "unquestioningly as representative of a linguistically and religiously diverse Karen community" (South 2011, p. 35) and have, in turn, empowered them. With such

attention brought to the Christian leadership, the lack of access to political power and influence of the Buddhist Karen became more apparent. Yet, the Buddhists make up for the majority of the KNU members, even though they are not necessarily in the leadership. From the end of the 1980s until the mid-1990s, Buddhist members of the KNU accused the Christian leadership of trying to undermine the Buddhist Karen identity, noting the absence of a proper pagoda at the KNU headquarters in Manerplaw (Gravers 2002). They portrayed the KNU Christian elite as being predatory and fuelling a war without considering the interests of the majority Buddhist population (Gravers 2002, Harriden 2002b, South 2011). Not only were the interests of these Buddhist KNU members obscured in the KNU discourses and ethnonationalist narratives, they also lack the resources that the Christian Karen were able to get from the refugee camps. While the Christian leaders of the KNU were able to find refuge in the borderlands, the Buddhist Karen suffered great hardships from the Tatmadaw with limited access to education or medical services (Gravers 2002, Interview 5). Buddhist Karen on the frontlines complained of carrying the burden of the KNU insurgency while the Christian leaders led a safer life at the border (Gravers 2002, Harriden 2002b, South 2011). The economic and political benefits the KNU Christian faction could benefit from the refugee support highlighted a perceived relative deprivation for the Buddhist faction.

As the Buddhist Karen comprised the lower classes who resented the privileged and paternalistic KNU Christian leadership, Buddhism became the collective identity of frustrated Karen nationalists (Gravers 2002). The competition between the Christian and the Buddhist faction was described by U Thuzana (DKBO 1995) as follows: "There was a clash between the majority of the followers who wanted peace and the minority of avaricious, selfish leaders, which seemingly [not intensive] was on the verge of exploding". Hence, in the wake of the creation of the DKBA, there were reports of KNLA soldiers under the leadership of U Thuzana looting Karen civilians, in particular Christian Karen, to increase their revenues (Gravers 2002, Interview 14). In the context of growing political and economic disparities, U Thuzana cemented the divide between Buddhist and Christians. U Thuzana is a Karen, who became a monk after serving as a courier for the KNLA and was related to the KNU President

General Bo Mya. He was praised for his charisma and founded the 1970s Myaing Gyi Ngu Old city, a large temple complex where his followers could follow his precepts. Over the years, U Thuzana became a key figure of the Karen community as he travelled across the Karen state restoring and building Buddhist pagodas through donations and alms, as part of a project to restore Karen Buddhist tradition (Gravers 2002). He built pagodas and monastic centres forming a religious network of 'moral communities' following *dhammas* precepts. From 1980 to 1993, U Thuzana built over 50 pagodas and 28 ordination halls (Swe 1999). This religious project was linked to a political programme. Indeed, U Thuzana aimed to impose an alternative Karen nationalism in complete opposition with the Christian Karen pan-nationalism, which rather than focusing on the autonomy of the Karen people, promoted millennial themes—such as peace, education to increase knowledge of Karen traditions, and material welfare. In 1990, U Thuzana tried to build a pagoda in Thu Mwe Hta, a strategic place in the KNU-controlled area at the confluence of the Salween and Moei Rivers on the Thai-Myanmar/Burma border. According to his biography, when he inaugurated the pagoda, he claimed that the pagoda would be a place of "peace and tranquillity in this part of the world" and "enmity and animosity [would be] removed and goodwill, benevolence and understanding restored" (Swe 1999, p. 107)). This discourse contrasted greatly which the KNU's narratives, which emphasised the antagonism with the Burmese and the necessity to fight for the survival of the Karen identity. U Thuzana's biography reports a conversation which occurred in 1993 with the then KNU's President General Bo Mya which illustrates such antagonism. U Thuzana reports arguing the need to construct pagoda to "have peace", while General Bo Mya reportedly argued that the KNU was "fighting for [their] cause, [their] progress, for the betterment of [the] Kayin nation", adding that "if it is deemed to fight, [they] will go on fighting" (Swe 1999, p. 111). Such antagonism between U Thuzana and the KNU Christian leadership led to a competition for the recruitment of supporters. U Thuzana engaged in the competition for supporters through two avenues: by diffusing its alternative Buddhist Karen nationalism, and by providing material goods to the poorest Karen people. As U Thuzana built pagodas and monastic centres across the Karen territory, he also aimed to provide access to education by building monastic schools which

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could promote a Buddhist Karen nationalism. This brought the ire of the KNU, who asked the monk to refrain from opening further monastic schools (Swe 1999). U Thuzana's monastic schools — which officially aimed to teach Karen people to "become cultured and disseminate knowledge" (Swe 1999, p. 137) — taught the Buddhist scriptures as well as the Burmese language. This was strongly opposed by the KNU, whose education system was seen by U Thuzana and his followers as a strong vehicle to transmit the Karen pan-transnationalism (Swe 1999). Furthermore, U Thuzana was able to attract recruit by providing material goods, in particular, free shelter and free food to civilians or internally displaced Karen who joined his monasteries (Swe 1999, Interview 1). Areas around U Thuzana's monasteries were largely exempted from the Tatmadaw attacks, which allowed civilians to live sheltered from fighting, an attractive destination for Karen civilians after more than 20 years of conflict. By providing these benefits, U Thuzana was able to create a social base for a KNU Buddhist faction with whom he could share his ideology and facilitate the reproduction of his ideas of the insurgency.

However, as U Thuzana cemented a social base of Buddhist KNU members who felt deprived of the benefits that the Christians received, the KNU Christian leadership lost its ties with parts of its Buddhist social base. The perception of relative deprivation from the KNU Buddhist members, and the ability of U Thuzana to build strong ties with them facilitated the creation of a politically active Buddhist faction. Subsequently, as the Christian leadership lost touch with the Buddhist social base, it lost the ability to provide "incentives, governance and services that can be used to mobilise broad civilian support" (Staniland 2014, p. 27). This weakened the ability of the central KNU leadership to control the enforcement of organisational decision and give a sense of unity and purpose among its members. Therefore, the KNU became a fragmented organisation that could not routinely achieve organisational control at either the central or local levels and lost the capacity to maintain or expand the rebellion. In this context of increased in-group competition, the Tatmadaw was able to co-opt the Buddhist faction and favour the creation of a splinter group, as explained in the previous chapter.

7.4. Conclusion

This chapter has aimed to analyse whether, and through which mechanisms, the Karen refugees participated in the split of the KNU in 1995. This chapter has first shown that Karen refugees have been active in providing support to their rebelling ethnic kin. The Karen refugee camps were bases of political legitimation for the KNU. The Karen refugees organised a series of events, held rituals, and displayed symbols, which highlighted that the KNU was the sole representative of the aspirations of the Karen people. This strengthened the perception among the Karen civilian population but also among the international community, that the KNU, and in particular its Christian leadership represented the authority of the Karen people. In addition, the Karen refugee camps were rear bases of the KNU, where KNU members, notably high-ranking Christian KNU officials, could seek refuge during the Tatmadaw offensives. These KNU members could also benefit from humanitarian aid.

Such support for the KNU, rather than any other Karen organisation, was enabled by the strong ties established between the Karen refugee camps and the KNU. Indeed, the institutional connections between the KNU and the Karen refugee camps have facilitated the alignment of their frames. The Karen refugees, despite the fleeing experience, maintained the idea that the KNU protects the Karen people – perceived as peaceful and naïve - against the belligerent Burmese. The alignment of frames between the KNU and the Karen refugees is remarkable therefore alignment was non-existent with the Karen population living in Burmese/Myanmar Government-held territories in central Myanmar.

Furthermore, the political legitimation and the economic resources provided by the Karen refugees to the KNU precipitated the fractionalisation of the KNU and the creation of a splinter group, the DKBA. By legitimating the authority of the Christian leadership and providing resources mostly to the Christian KNU members, the Karen refugees' support enhanced the structural inequalities between Buddhist and Christian KNU members and boosted the Buddhist Karen's grievances. Such grievances were used by the monk U Thuzana to create the DKBA, representing

alternative Karen national ideals and goals of the rebellion U Thuzana built a network of KNU

Buddhist members who had grievances against the KNU leadership, which became the basis for new

fighting units who did not share the sense of purpose of the Christian leadership. It is upon these

divisions that the state counter-insurgency strategy of divide and conquer became successful.

Chapter 8: Karen refugees as political constituencies preventing a unified political front

8.1. Introduction

On 12 January 2012, the KNU signed a ceasefire agreement with the Myanmar Government. The ceasefire received much international praise as the KNU was the oldest active ethnic armed group, and observers saw in this initiative the consequences of Myanmar's wider political transition from authoritarian military rule to semi-democratic borderland (Jones 2014c). Previous chapters have shown that the group's rapprochement with the government resulted from the internal power struggle between two rival factions. This chapter aims to add some analytical leverage in understanding the KNU's internal dynamics by tracing the impact of the Karen refugee communities on the movement.

This chapter shows that after 1994 and following the creation of the DKBA, the divisions within the KNU along religious lines became politically irrelevant. Rather, factions were created along with the choices of strategies to adopt when the Myanmar Government opened ceasefire negotiations with rebel groups. Two factions were created: politics first and development first (Joliffe 2015). Each faction drew their legitimacy from the support of different and distant local constituencies. While the development first was backed by local communities in the Karen state, the politics first faction was largely supported by the refugee communities. These grassroots constituencies or social bases provided factions with the legitimacy to influence the overall rebel group's strategies, but also limited the range of strategic choices each faction could make (Staniland 2014, p. 23). Each faction made strategic decisions that would meet their supporting constituencies' interests. Yet, those grassroots constituencies built different agendas as they had different experiences of the conflict. The Karen refugees, influenced by human rights discourses promoted by international organisations in the refugee camps, promoted a political solution to the conflict which would ensure the political rights of the Karen people. In contrast, Karen communities that had to bear the burden of the conflict

promoted development projects which could alleviate poverty in the Karen state. Having to meet the diverging interests of their supporters, the KNU factions' leaders were unable to remain united when the government opened negotiations. Therefore, the focus on transnational support adds analytical leverage to the understanding of the KNU's fragmentation, by showing that although the KNU's fragmentation was triggered by the government's offer of negotiations, it stemmed from divisions which were fuelled by the Karen refugees' support.

The following first outlines how the Karen refugee communities remained connected to the KNU, in particular with KNU leaders who had lived and trained in the refugee camps. It shows that there has been a constant flow of information between the Karen refugees and the KNU. However, this diffusion of information has not resulted in a perfect alignment of frames. Rather, the Karen refugees have built hybrid frames of the conflict which highlight human rights violations. As a result of these hybrid frames, the Karen refugees have supported the KNU by recording human rights violations perpetrated by the Myanmar Government that would help secure international support. This type of support meant that the Karen refugees have advocated for a solution to the conflict emphasising the political rights of the Karen people. It limited the range of strategy the KNU leaders could undertake if they wanted to secure refugees' support.

8.2. The Karen refugees as a covert social base of the KNU: the 'new' mobilisation of the Karen refugee communities

8.2.1. The Karen refugee communities - the invisible social base of the KNU

In contrast to 1995 when the refugees were openly a social base of the KNU, in 2012, the Karen refugees tried to hide their links to the KNU (McConnachie 2012, 2014, Sharples 2015, 2016). However, an analysis of the KNU transnational networks and a comparison of the KNU and Karen refugee organisations' frames show that the Karen refugees remained linked to the KNU and their ties upheld the diffusion of information between Karen refugee organisations and the KNU.

After 1995, the Karen refugee communities developed different, more overt connections with the KNU as they became more connected with the international community. The creation of the Democratic Karen Buddhist Association (DKBA) who viewed the refugee camps as a bastion of KNU support, organised military campaigns to destroy the refugee infrastructures and forcibly move refugees back to Myanmar, in DKBA or Myanmar Government-controlled territories. Between 1995 and 1998, the DKBA conducted over 100 trans-border attacks on the refugee camps in Thailand (KHRG 1998a, 2007). These attacks forced the Thai authorities to consolidate their authority along the border and in the camps. Consequently, they closed the smaller camps, relocating refugees into bigger and more secure camps, such as Mae La whose population grew from 5,000 refugees in 1995 to 30,000 in 1998 (KHRG 1998). As part of the strategy of consolidating its control in the border areas, the Thai government also called upon the UNHCR and international NGOs to manage the refugee camps. It is precisely the introduction of the international aid agencies that entered the camp that changed the nature of the ties the Karen refugees had with the KNU. When the international agencies entered the refugee camps, they encountered a strong and sophisticated system of governance fit to distribute humanitarian aid (McConnachie 2012, 2014). Rather than imposing external structures of governance, the humanitarian actors maintained existing refugee organisations, such as the Karen Refugee Committee (KRC), the Karen Women Organisation (KWO), and the Karen Youth Organisation (KYO), to allocate humanitarian aid. However, as the Karen refugee organisations received funding from donor governments, they received new constraints (UNHCR 2014). One of the most important donors was the United States, who had been warry of close links between the Karen refugee organisations and the KNU as they did not want to inadvertently fund the rebellion (Consortium 2008). This issue of links between Karen refugees and the KNU became even more acute when the first Karen refugees were resettled to the United States. Between 2001 and 2006, the US implemented a restrictive policy on admission of refugees to the US territory, strictly defining what constituted a terrorist organisation and their supporters. Under the 2001 Patriot Act, any organisation who used, threatened or conspired to use any dangerous device with the intent to endanger, directly or indirectly, the safety of individuals

or damage property, would be considered a terrorist organisation. In terms of this definition, the KNU was labelled as a terrorist organisation. With the KNU having been defined as a terrorist organisation, the Karen refugees in Thailand were not able to qualify for resettlement. The US administration established that the Karen refugees, because of their ties with the KNU, were seen as providing "material support" to a terrorist organisation (The Karen Women's Organisation *et al.* 2008, Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011). To allow more refugees to qualify for resettlement and remain relevant in the aid distribution governance system, the Karen refugees had to distance themselves from the KNU and portray the refugees as civilian victims in need of humanitarian aid.

The Karen refugee organisations remodelled their identity to fit their international audience's expectation and standards of neutrality (Sharples 2015). The Karen refugee organisations' identity shifted from a KNU-backed organisation towards a politically-neutral organisation representing solely the refugees' interests and their humanitarian needs. A leader of a refugee organisation interviewed stated: "KRC is not a political body, only involved with humanitarian activities and [just has] the obligation to manage the refugee camps in Thailand" (Interview 28). In the presence of international actors, such as NGOs, the Thai officials, or foreign representatives, the refugee organisations have presented themselves as a "situational community" of refugees (McConnachie 2014, p. 41). All the refugees interviewed stressed that they were simple refugees who lacked resources, and who were avoiding antagonising Thai citizens and authorities. They wanted to prevent external actors from attracting negative attention to them (Interview 10, Interview 28). The refugee organisations interviewed refused to be identified as political entities (Interview 25, Interview 28). Confirming findings from other scholars (Brown 2012, McConnachie 2014, Sharples 2015), the refugee organisations interviewed presented themselves as purely humanitarian organisations in charge of distributing aid to refugees. They stated that they try to abide by humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence (Brown 2012). Another manifestation of the detachment of the Karen refugees from the KNU is the formal 'purge' of the KNU from any of the Karen refugee institutions. The KNU was removed as the supervisory organisation of the KRC and was replaced by a

board of elders (Interview 25, McConnachie 2014). Similarly, in 2009, the KRC created an independent education department, at least in appearance, from the KNU Department of Education (KED), called the Karen Refugee Committee Education Entity (KRCEE) funded by NGOs (i.e. Childs' dreams, World Education, Save the Children Thailand). The KWO began representing itself as a welfare and advocacy organisation promoting women's rights through education and training programme. The Karen refugee remodelling strategy was fruitful. The US Department of Homeland Security issued a waiver for Karen refugees from Tham Thin camp in 2006, despite their material support to the KNU (Bureau of Public Affairs 2006). This opened the way for 96,206 Karen refugees on the Thai-Myanmar/Burma border to be resettled, the majority (75%) in the US (TBC 2014). This apparent purge of the KNU from the Karen refugee camps would theoretically lead to a reduction in the mobilisation of the Karen refugees to support the KNU as there is a lack of ties which can support the diffusion of the KNU's conflict frames and trigger the refugees' mobilisation. Yet, scholars have shown a high level of awareness of the KNU activities in the refugee camps (Harkins 2012, McConnachie 2012, 2014, Sharples 2015, 2016). So, how did the Karen refugees remain supporters of the KNU?

Despite the apparent emancipation, the Karen refugees have remained a rebel social base, a "captive constituency" (McConnachie 2014, p. 99), whose most active members have been linked to the rebel group. Although the Karen refugee organisations have rebranded themselves as apolitical entities, the KNU's influence over the refugee organisational processes has been maintained. Therefore, while officially the education of the Karen refugees is managed by the refugees themselves, in practice the syllabus taught in the refugee schools is similar to the one taught in KNU schools in Karen state (Metro 2006, Interview 26). Likewise, the Karen Health and Welfare Department operates at the district level in the Karen state through mobile teams and also manages the clinics in refugee camps (Fong 2008b). Similarly, the KNU still retains decision-making power in the camps, in particular on the future of the refugees. The KNU has been included in most of the official talks on refugee repatriation (Karen and Committee 2013, Joliffe 2015). The KNU leaders also have toured the refugee

camps to organise and explain plans for refugee returns (Karen News 2013c). The formal presence of the KNU in the camp, although more diffuse and covert, remains.

Furthermore, and most importantly, elite ties between the Karen refugee organisations and the KNU leadership remain strong. The Karen refugee organisations' leaders are still firmly part of the KNU elite. These horizontal elite ties have been key to connect and diffuse any information from the KNU to the Karen refugees. Members of refugee organisations regularly attend the KNU Congress and some are part of the KNU Executive Committees (McConnachie 2014). The former KWO secretary-General Naw Zipporah Sein, illustrates the connection between Karen refugee and the KNU elite. Naw Zipporah Sein, who was a teacher in the refugee camps, joined the KWO in 1999. She became a prominent leader of the KWO in the refugee camp and was invited to attend the KNU Congress in 2000 and 2004. During the 2004 KNU Congress, she was elected to serve on the KNU Executive Committee, which has 11 members consisting mostly of the highest-ranking authorities of the organisation (Thawnghmung 2008, Blackburn and Ting 2013). She further consolidated her influence over the KNU, when during the 2008 KNU Congress, she was elected general secretary of the KNU by the executive committee members. She was perceived as an asset for the KNU leadership; she could advance the funding and diplomatic strategy of the KNU through her international links with foreign media and NGOs. Similarly, Saw Robert Htway, the KRC chairperson re-elected in 2016, has also been widely involved in KNU politics. He participated in several KNU events, KNU Congresses, and the Karen Unity and Peace Committee (KUPC) seminars. The latest KUPC was held in January 2013 to provide guidance to the KNU leadership on how to achieve sustained peace and development while unifying all Karen groups (KNUHQ 2013b). Another example of the connivance between the KNU and the Karen refugee elite can be exemplified with the KWO chairperson, Blooming Night Zan, who was also involved in KNU politics as she was part of the delegation in charge of negotiating the preliminary ceasefire in 2012 (Karen News 2012d). The links between the KNU and the Karen refugee elite have even in certain instances been strengthened, as there have been more opportunities for contact between the Karen refugee and the KNU elite. Most of the KNU leaders are residing in Thai border towns, either Mae Sot

or Mae Sariang. Therefore, some of the KNU teams are based in Thailand - for instance, the KNU communication and media team is based in Mae Sot. Then, a bulk of the KNU political events take place in Thailand, rather than in the KNU headquarters in the Karen state. The presence of the KNU elite in Thailand gives the refugee organisations wider access to KNU politics. Karen refugee leaders have more frequent face-to-face meetings with the KNU leaders, whether it is during official meetings or in more informal gatherings, for instance during religious events. In addition, the Karen elite has been active in organising events and creating institutions which could ensure that ties between Karen refugees and KNU members remained despite the changes in the refugee camps. The KNU Central Committee established a Karen National Unity Seminar in January 1999 as a platform for the KNU to present its political programme to Karen CBOs, Karen religious leaders, Karen Youth and Women organisations, and Karen political parties. This seminar took place regularly from 2002 to 2014. During each seminar, the KNU was able to present their political programme and ensure the alignment of the Karen refugees' narratives. Another initiative taken by the KNU to ensure the survival of a network with the refugees has been to create the Karen Unity Building Group in 2012. During these seminars, KNU officials were able to present their political programme, notably in 2012 the ceasefire and peace talks, to religious leaders and members of Karen community-based organisations, in the Karen state and abroad (Karen News 2012e)). According to KNU leaders, the religious and CBOs leaders are key actors in enabling wide support for the KNU's activities and policies, as they are well-respected members of the community with social authority and control (Karen News 2012b, Interview 4). Similarly, the Karen Youth Organisation organises summer camps in Karen state, during which trainers teach about "politics, federalism, the constitution, the KNU's directive and procedure, security of social communities, basic physical education and leadership and management skills" (Karen News 2018). All these initiatives have participated in strengthening the network linking the rebel group to the refugee communities despite challenging circumstances.

The ties between the Karen refugees and the KNU have allowed the Karen refugees to remain a constituency of the KNU, who shares the KNU's frames of the conflict and is aware of the KNU's

activities. Theoretically, if there is a diffusion of the KNU frames to the Karen refugees, it is expected that groups sharing ties will share similar frames of the conflict, and that any changes in the frames of the conflict in one group would be replicated in the other group. Discourses and narratives of the Karen refugee organisations and the KNU show similar frames built upon the idea of a unified Karen nation, and the refugee frames and discourses show awareness of changes in the KNU frames. The KNU has been consistent in justifying the rebellion against the Myanmar Government as a necessity to preserve the Karen national identity. Since its creation, the KNU has advocated for a pan-Karen nationalism, which asserts the existence of a coherent and unified Karen nation (Horstmann 2010, Gravers 2015, Sharples 2015). Central to this national identity is a sense of oppression and a self-characterisation as uneducated, virtuous, and peace-seeking. The analysis of the KNU presidents' statements between 2010 and 2013, shows that KNU leaders convoke the ideals of a Karen imagined political community (Anderson 1991), stressing the unity of a Karen nation concerned with guaranteeing peace and freedom of its people. A word frequency analysis shows that in the KNU statements, the word 'Karen' is the most frequently linked to the words 'peace', 'revolution', 'resistance', 'national', 'unity', and 'freedom'. Further examples of the KNU leaders advocating for a unified Karen nation can be found in the KNU presidential statements. For instance, the KNU President elected in 2012, General Saw Mutu Sae Poe highlighted in a letter released in the occasion of the 65th anniversary of Karen National Day, that the Karen people could be qualified as a nation, implying that their ethnic rights should be guaranteed: "We, the Karen people, are a free people with all kinds of splendour and have all the characteristics of a nation. We want to raise the standard of social life of our people with freedom, without fear, without anxiety and according to our own aspirations" (KNUHQ 2013a). This discourse is consistent with the KNU's discourse before the split in 1995. What has changed in recent years, especially in the build-up of the ceasefire negotiations, is that the Karen nation is not necessarily portrayed in opposition to the Burmese nation. Rather than stressing the opposition between the peace-loving Karen people and the belligerent Burmese, the KNU narratives emphasise the necessity of cooperation between ethnic nationalities. A word frequency analysis of

the KNU leaders' statements shows, that in comparison with discourses before the fall of Mannerplaw, the theme of cooperation and dialogue with the Myanmar Government is dominant. The antagonism with the Myanmar Government and nation, which was a dominant theme before the fall of Mannerplaw, is downplayed to justify the move towards political negotiations for a peace deal.

Institutions in the refugee camp actively relay narratives on the existence of a unified Karen nation, represented by the KNU. Refugee schools have been a vehicle for the diffusion of the KNU frames in the refugee camps. The school history curriculum taught in the refugee camps' schools since the creation of the KRCEE in 2009 is identical to the KED curriculum. Consequently, the UNHCR reported that some of the challenges of refugee education included "the inherently political nature of the content and structures of refugee education [which] can exacerbate societal conflict" (Dryden-Peterson 2011, p. 62). The curriculum produces narratives legitimising the Karen rights to autonomy (Lall and South 2014). In addition, churches or Bible schools are places where the children learn about KNU history and the sacrifices KNLA soldiers have made fighting to protect the Karen nation (Interview 10, Interview 9). Hence, one of the refugee religious leader interviewed stated: "It's important for our children to know our history, so they understand why we need to fight for our rights" (Interview 9). Similarly, the refugee organisations, including the KRC, KWO, or KYO have promoted narratives defending the existence of a unified Karen nation (Sharples 2015). For instance, a leader of one these organisations interviewed stated: "KNU [is] fighting for their Karen people to free them from Burmese military oppression. You cannot separate Karen people from KNU movement. KNU movement is based on a national cause. Every human is in love [with] their nation. Why French vs British? Both armies are loyal to their nation" (Interview 28). Further evidence of diffusion mechanisms can be found in Karen refugee organisations' statements issued in reaction to KNU's changes of frames. When the KNU changed its frames of the conflict highlighting the peace-loving nature of the Karen people, the Karen refugee organisations also highlighted the need for lasting peace. For instance, when the 2012 ceasefire was signed by the KNU, in its monthly newsletter, the KRC welcomed the initiative taken by the KNU:

The changes of Myanmar's political situation which started in early 2012 is ought not to forget. The agreement of ceased fire that have been taken place between the government and ethnic arms group is a significant first step that heading toward a long expecting peace which will enable the refugee to return home. The sign of happiness reflects on many faces with hope to go home soon, but perhaps, they forget that there is still a long and complicated process to undergo. For the time being, wishing and praying for true and ever last peace is the only mean which the refugee can do (KRC 2012).

The diffusion of information between the Karen refugees and the KNU show that the KNU transnational networks are still active. These networks have linked and anchored the KNU in the Karen refugee communities and created a social terrain upon which the KNU could gather political support.

8.2.2. "We are neutral": how the Karen refugees' interactions with international actors modelled the Karen refugees' frames of the conflict.

Despite being aware of the KNU frames of the conflict, the Karen refugees have been critical of the KNU leadership framing changes. Rather than being completely aligned with the KNU leaders' ideas of the conflict and how it should be fought, namely engaging in ceasefire negotiations, the Karen refugee leaders have called for caution in negotiating with the Myanmar Government and more focus on human rights violations. This framing discrepancy, which contrasts with the perfect frame alignment before the 1995 split, can be understood when analysing the different components of the Karen refugee frames. What such analysis shows is that as the Karen refugees built new networks with the international agencies, they modelled their frames of the conflict with ideas inspired by the international agencies' frames. This shows that transnational communities create their frames of the conflict not only from the information they receive from the rebel group, but also from the information they receive from host country actors with whom they build ties. The Karen refugee communities have built their independent narratives which stress their shared experience of persecution and displacement and are framed through human rights discourses (Sharples 2015). Since the end of the 1990s, when there has been an increased presence of international agencies in Karen

refugee camps, there has been, among Karen refugees, an increased emphasis on a human rights framework to address Myanmar's conflict. This has been translated by a multiplication of community-based organisations aiming to improve the Karen's social and political rights. For instance, the Karen Teacher Working Group (KTWG) was created in 1997 to support the Karen Education department's initiatives; the Back Pack Health Worker Team (BPHWT) was founded by a prominent Karen refugee who fled to Thailand, Dr Cynthia Maung; and the Karen Environmental and Social Action Network (KESAN) was founded in 2001 to promote the Karen people's environmental and social rights (KESAN n.d.). In addition, an analysis of the Karen refugee organisation's statements, including the KRC and the KWO, shows increased support of human rights and a political resolution. Rather than focusing on direct support to the rebellion, the narratives of the Karen refugee organisations emphasise, at least publicly, the human rights violations conducted by the Myanmar Government, with a heightened concern about the international support the refugees receive. A word frequency analysis of the Karen refugee organisations statements reveals that the themes discussed by the refugee organisations are no longer directly linked to the rebellion. Rather they focus on refugees' welfare, and the need for peace in the Karen state to guarantee safe refugee returns. This focus on human rights in the Karen refugee organisations' narratives reveals a process of hybridisation of the Karen identity in the refugee camps (Sharples 2015). Rather than exactly replicating the Karen identity as promoted by the KNU, the Karen refugees have constructed a Karen refugee identity which connects narratives on the Karen pan-transnationalism with discourses on human rights protection, usually diffused by humanitarian organisations. Such changes in transnational ethnic identities have been theorised by diaspora scholars, notably Vertovec (2001), who have argued that displacement brings about deep-rooted changes in cultural and identity patterns, awaking dual and hybrid identities. The narratives of refugee grassroots are not only built with the information diffused by the KNU, but also by external actors with whom they interact regularly.

The discrepancy between the KNU and the Karen refugee organisations can have important implications for the influence the Karen refugees have had on the KNU. The lasting network between

the Karen refugees and the KNU has secured diffusion of information, making the Karen refugee community one of the social bases upon which the KNU could rely to conduct the rebellion. Although they may share the same ideas of what the conflict is about, they have developed their own ideas about how the conflict should be fought. Then, refugees have become a constituency who limit and constrain the actions of the KNU leaders. Theoretically, if rebel leaders want to secure future support of the refugee social base, they will need to conform to their ideas on conflict strategy. Support from local communities gives the faction the legitimacy to influence the overall rebel group's strategic choice; it "determines the ideational and social resources insurgent leaders can mobilise" (Staniland 2014, p. 23). However, ties with the local communities also define and limit the range of strategic choices each faction can make. The following section shows how the Karen refugees framings of the conflict have limited and constrained the activities of the KNU and how it has fuelled the KNU fragmentation.

8.3. The Karen refugees' activism as a source of organisational change

As explained in the Chapter 6, after the split of the KNU in 1995, two main factions within the KNU appeared, the politics first and the development first factions. Each faction advocated for different strategies of rebellion, which led to its fragmentation when the Myanmar Government opened negotiations. This section shows that the Karen refugees also fuelled the KNU divisions and fuelled the KNU's fragmentation. The Karen refugees shared ties with the politics first faction of the KNU and constituted its main base of support. In contrast, the development first faction shared ties with local communities within the Karen state. As the Karen refugees developed frames of the conflict which highlighted the human rights abuses conducted by the Myanmar Government, they promoted a non-conciliatory approach to resolve the conflict. In contrast, local communities in the Karen state who had to carry the burden of the conflict, supported an approach which would relieve the hardship. As both factions received support from local communities with different interests, their ability to find a compromise was limited, which led to the KNU's fragmentation where two factions have little unity

of purpose and the organisation has weak coercive capacity to enforce the leadership's decision. Therefore, although the government's counterinsurgency strategies are central to understand rebel groups' fragmentation, a full picture of the rebel group's fragmentation also requires analysing the role of transnational communities in the in-group politics.

Two KNU factions emerged in a rapidly changing domestic context in Myanmar. Following the 2010 elections in Myanmar, and the formation of the government led by President Thein Sein, achieving peace was made a key priority of the administration (Crisis Group 2015). In several speeches, President U Thein Sein stated that he was "holding out an olive branch" and "opening the door to peace" (Fisher 2016). The process was launched in August 2011, with the announcement inviting the ethnic armed organisations for ceasefire talks. Considering the democratic opening of Myanmar, the KNU led by P'doh Naw Zipporah Sein and her father General Saw Tamla Baw, entered into ceasefire negotiations. The first preliminary meeting took place on 9 October 2011 between the incumbent KNU leaders and Myanmar Government representative, notably the railways minister and envoy of the President U Thein Sein, U Aung Min. On November 2011, the KNU leadership formed a KNU Committee for the Emergence of Peace, led notably by P'doh Naw Zipporah Sein, P'doh Saw David Thackabaw, General Saw Mutu Sae Poe, and Major Saw Roger Khin. This committee reached an initial ceasefire agreement during January 2012 in Pa-an, which resulted in an 11 points proposal, including calls to reduce troops in Karen state, to cease military operations in active war zones, the protection of human rights, and the release of political prisoners ((KNUHQ 2012). This initial ceasefire agreement was followed by a Code of Conduct signed on 6 April 2012, agreeing to international monitoring of the ceasefire, demining activities, and resettlement of refugees (KNUHQ 2012). Following the apparent initial unity, deep-seated dissensions and rivalries emerged when the KNU leadership had to decide on a strategy to adopt following the signing of the preliminary ceasefire agreement. Two main blocs emerged - the politics first and the development first factions - each embedded in, accommodating the demands from, and drawing legitimacy from different rebel constituencies.

One KNU faction promoted development first—a claim which was formed from grievances due to a shift in the internal balance of power (Joliffe 2015). This bloc was led by KNU leaders from the southern KNU brigades, including the 4th, 6th and 7th Brigade (as confirmed by one of the development first leader (Interview 4), experts (Interview 7) and Brenner (2018)), and from members of the KNU Executive Committee which formed the economic committee in charge of managing development projects (Joliffe 2015). The development first bloc was led by General Saw Mutu Sae Poe, leader of the 6th Brigade, his chief of staff Saw Johnny leader of the 7th Brigade, and P'doh Saw Kwe Htoo Win, former leader of the 4th Brigade. These brigades had traditionally been in control of smuggling routes and had been the organisation's powerhouses. Since the fall of Manerplaw and the multiplication of Burmese offensives to gain control of the KNU's sources of revenue, their constituencies carried the brunt of the war (Brenner 2018). The Myanmar Government also aimed to take control of these territories to build development programmes, such as the Dawei Special Economic Zone an estimated $50 billion industrial complex with a deep seaport, industrial estate and a road, pipeline and rail link which will extend 350 kilometres to Bangkok through the Karen state (Karen News 2011b). With their revenues decreasing and their control over their territories weakening, the local KNU leaders had no real power to stop development programmes initiated by the Myanmar Government or, according to a KNU leader interviewed, to sustain the rebellion through violent means (Interview 4, Brenner 2018). Development first leaders interviewed therefore claimed that to remain relevant, to ensure the organisation's survival, and for the welfare of the Karen people, the KNU had to become a stakeholder in the development programmes (Interview 18, Interview 19, Brenner 2018). In fact, some of the development first bloc had already been cooperating with investors of the development projects. Notably, P'doh Saw Kwe Htoo Win had been holding talks with the Italian-Thai Development Company and oversees the Dawei Development Project, to ensure that environmental and social impact assessment surveys were conducted before the road construction across the Karen state (Karen News 2012g). Influenced by the claims of the local constituencies, the development first faction favoured a settlement of the rebellion and cooperation with the government.

The other KNU faction, the politics first bloc (Joliffe 2015) was led by the incumbent KNU leaders who were those at the helm of the organisation before 2012: President P'doh Saw Tamla Baw, Vice President P'doh Saw David Thackabaw, and General Secretary P'doh Naw Zipporah Sein. This faction promoted a political settlement as the first step to peace (Jolliffe 2016). It advocated for blocking the opening of the Karen state to development projects until a peace deal was signed. This faction was embedded in two main constituencies. The politics first faction received the support from the KNLA leaders of northern Karen Brigades, Brigade 5, General Saw Baw Kyaw Heh, and of Brigade 2, who favoured a cautious approach to the ceasefire negotiations and a moratorium on government-led development projects in the Karen state. The backing of General Saw Baw Kyaw Heh was valuable support for the KNU Executive Committee, as General Saw Baw Kyaw Heh is believed to have between 1500 to 2500 soldiers under his command from the approximate total of 10,000 KNLA soldiers (Naing 2012). General Saw Baw Kyaw Heh is also the leader of one of the richest brigades with natural resources such as gold (Interview 9, Naing 2012) and has a strategic geographic location with the shortest overland route to the Myanmar capital Naypyidaw and northern Thailand. General Saw Baw Kyaw Heh is highly regarded by the Karen community, including among the Karen refugee organisations, as he is not suspected of having conflicting business interests (Karen News 2013b). Secondly, the politics first rely on the support of the refugee communities, who through their advocacy work and humanitarian support were able to impose themselves as a relevant constituency, from which the incumbent KNU leaders could draw legitimacy. P'doh Naw Zipporah Sein lacked support internally as the development first faction controlled five of the seven brigades in the Karen state, and suffered from a lack of legitimacy within the KNU (Jolliffe 2016, Brenner 2018). Henceforward, she sought popular support among the refugee organisations, with whom she maintained strong links due to her former KWO membership. She gained their support by including them in negotiations and KNU politics generally. Therefore, she insisted that: "The KNU meeting with the government is critically important to all Karen people and it is vital for the KNU to get the opinions and views from a wide range of Karen organisations (Karen News 2011c). From this, the KNU invited the Karen refugee

organisations such as the Karen Refugee Committee (KRC), Karen Women Organisation (KWO), and Karen Youth groups to attend the first round of preliminary ceasefire talks between January and April 2012 (Karen News 2011c). Through such involvement in the KNU politics first activities, the Karen refugee became a key source of the legitimacy for the politics first faction.

Not only did P'doh Naw Zipporah Sein included the refugees in the KNU political process, she also worked to meet their demands to retain their support. This mechanism of social bases' constraints on rebel group's factions has been theorised by Staniland (2014). Social bases are key for rebel group's factions, and the rebel group overall, as it is upon them that they can draw the necessary resources, material or political, needed to conduct the rebellion. For instance, a social base can provide a faction with the legitimacy in advocating for a strategy, or it can provide with the food or equipment necessary to fight the war. However, the support from a social base is a double-edged sword (Staniland 2014). As much as social bases are key for factions to be politically relevant, they are also factors limiting the extent of possible actions. Faction leaders who want to secure further support from a social base are accountable to their expectations and must model their actions to their social basis and ideas of what the conflict is about and how it should be fought. Yet, when different factions of rebel group draw their legitimacy from social bases who have different expectations, they are likely to promote different strategies of rebellion. In other words, the lack of overlap in social bases' expectations can trigger a dynamic of polarisation within the rebel group. This mechanism can be seen as a source of the KNU fragmentation in 2012.

The politics first faction's strategies were constrained by the Karen refugees' expectations. According to the Karen refugee leaders interviewed, Karen refugee organisations had been calling for peace in the Karen state (Women League of Burma 2011, Interview 28) and for immediate nationwide ceasefire talks with all ethnic armed groups. Consequently, the Karen refugee organisations welcomed the round of preliminary talks on a ceasefire agreement in April 2012 between the KNU led by P'doh Naw Zipporah Sein and the Myamar Government: "We welcome the Karen National Union (KNU)'s four-step roadmap regarding the ongoing peace talks with the Burmese Government. We […] will

support the ceasefire and peace talks between the KNU and Burmese Government as best as we can" (Karen News 2012h). This was echoed in the KNU incumbent leaders' discourses. For the politics first leaders, there was an urgency to stay loyal to the initial goals of the rebellion – regime change towards federalism, where the political rights of all ethnic groups would be respected (Interview 16, Interview 20). Vice President P'doh Saw David Thackabaw claimed before the Pa-an meeting: "We will talk about a ceasefire at the Pa-an meeting, but we can't do it imprudently. We have to be systematic and disciplined. We have to go from a ceasefire to genuine political dialogue. What we want is lasting peace, so we have to do it step-by-step with carefully worked out principles" (Karen News 2011b). The Karen refugees also expressed concerns about human rights implications of the development projects. For instance, the KWO lobbied the US Department of State to pressure the Myanmar Government to provide information on the Dawei project's impacts (KWO 2013): "Economic development projects, such as hydroelectric dams, mines, pipelines and industrial areas, are […] linked to human rights abuses" (KWO 2013). They also reiterated the importance of maintaining international pressure on the Myanmar Government and monitoring human rights violations in the Karen state (Karen News 2012h). They called for a cautious approach in dealing with the Myanmar Government as distrust remained on the sincerity of the government's intentions (Karen News 2011a). This was echoed by KNU General Secretary P'doh Naw Zipporah Sein, who also proclaimed that the new political developments in Myanmar were just a façade, and that real change had not come yet. She argued it was not the time to remove sanctions and for the international community to maintain pressure on the Myanmar Government until the ethnic conflicts were resolved (Karen News 2011b). She also voiced concerns about the potential environmental, political and social impact of the Dawei project, fearing the project would result in more population displacement and forced labour (Interview 7, Karen News 2013a): "The KNU's position on foreign development projects in Karen state is to assess what the impact of development will be on civilians' livelihood, their indigenous way of life, the environment and security. Now there is no peace in Burma, the government refuses to hold political dialogue; it makes it difficult to carry out mega-development

projects" (P'doh Naw Zipporah Sein in Dawei project Watch 2012). Henceforth, the KNU incumbent

leaders' political strategy was to put a moratorium on all development projects and focus on ensuring

that their political demands were met. Hence, the embeddedness of the KNU incumbent leaders in

the Karen refugee communities, has resulted in the KNU leadership endorsing and accommodating

the Karen refugee communities' claims and strategies.

The politics first faction consideration for the Karen refugees' expectations resulted in a regain of

mobilisation from the Karen refugees. For example, since 1999, the Karen Women Organisation (KWO)

has been active, formally and informally, in the peace process and has engaged in projects enabling

dialogue between the Myanmar Government and the KNU. As an active member of the Women's

League of Burma (WLB), the KWO took part in the 1999 National Reconciliation Programme (NRP), set

up by the Euro-Burma Office (WLB 2012). The NRP aimed to prepare the rebelling ethnic nationalities

for peace negotiations and anticipate their participation in a tripartite dialogue between the Myanmar

Government and the opposition NLD. In 2012, the KWO was invited to attend the preliminary ceasefire

talks between the KNU led by P'doh Naw Zipporah Sein and the Myanmar Government. They also took

part in 2014 with the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT), a structure established in 2013

when seventeen ethnic armed organisations held a conference in Laiza, the KIO headquarters, to

represent ethnic armed organisations with the government in the first joint meeting between all

ethnic armed organisations (KNUHQ 2013a). This meeting was the first of its kind in Myanmar,

allowing all parties to travel to a KIO-held territory (Lall 2016). . In addition, the KWO has established

the "Karen community-based peace support network" which came together to discuss and analyse

the ceasefire agreements the KNU concluded with the Myanmar Government in 2012, and presented

the KNU with their concerns in particular regarding the inclusiveness of women and refugees (KWO

2013). The KWO has formed its own Peace Team dedicated to the analysis of the peace process and

identifying key areas for improvement. The KWO also provided support to the KNU health and

education department to discuss the refugees' situation and their potential return (KWO 2013). The

KWO and the KHRG also monitor the situation in the Karen state and record human rights violations

perpetrated by the Tatmadaw or the KNLA. The KWO and Karen Human Rights Groups produce quarterly briefing papers and magazines documenting human rights violations in the Karen state.

However, by favouring the demands of its refugee base, the politics first faction fuelled grievances from the development first factions, as the expectations of its social bases for economic development remained unmet. The discontent of the development first faction manifested itself by several acts of insubordination to the incumbent leadership in 2012. This marked the beginning of a fragmentation process by which the faction's leaders lack a unity of purpose and the organisational decisions were enforced across the group. The development first faction started to individually enter discussions with the Myanmar Government, granting them access to conduct development projects in the brigades they controlled. For example, P'doh Saw Kwe Htoo Win, leader of the 4th Brigade, allowed the Dawei Company to build a road across his Brigade. Additionally, General Saw Mutu Sae Poe, Major Saw Roger Khin and P'doh Saw David Thaw, opened a liaison office with the government in Pa-an on the 21st August 2012, without permission from the KNU Executive Committee (Karen News 2012a, The Irrawaddy 2012b). Ignoring various meetings called by the KNU Executive Committee, a group of development first members from KNLA Brigades 4, 6 and 7 led by General Saw Mutu Sae Poe P'doh Saw David Taw and Major Saw Roger Khin on 29th of September attended a ceremony inaugurating the liaison office. The ceremony was also attended by Myanmar Government officials including the head of the government's peace negotiation team, U Aung Min (The Irrawaddy 2012b). The KNU Executive Committee led by the General Secretary P'doh Naw Zipporah Sein and Vice President P'doh Saw David Tharckabaw, had no organisational power to prevent this initiative. Therefore, the KNU Executive Committee issued the following statement a month after the opening of the liaison office in Pa-an lambasting General Saw Mutu Sae Poe's initiative and the attempt to fragment the KNU:

> As this trip [i.e. to open the liaison office] is not arranged by the Karen National Union (KNU) as well as by the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), the KNU Supreme Headquarters does not have any knowledge of agenda of the group. In the negotiation meetings, every agreement signed by the two sides has been performed as the agreement

between the Burmese Government and the KNU. It is not a special, separate agreement

between the KNLA and the Burmese Government. The KNLA is under the administration of

the Defence Department, which is one of the 14 departments of the KNU (KNUHQ 2013b).

The statement also reaffirmed the politics first faction's approach to the ceasefire negotiations:

"The KNU has firmly resolved to achieve genuine peace by resolving the political problems by overtly

political means. To achieve that end, the KNU has laid down a program to conduct negotiations

progressively and systematically" (KNUHQ 2013b). As a result of the development first leaders'

insubordination and violation of KNU protocol, the KNU Executive Committee took legal action against

General Saw Mutu Sae Poe, Major Saw Roger Khin and P'doh Saw David Taw, who were dismissed

from the KNU on October 8th 2012 (Karen News 2012b, The Irrawaddy 2012a). The insubordination

and the dismissal of the main KNU leaders exemplify the inability of the KNU to ensure central

discipline and control factions' feuding.

The fragmentation of the KNU did not stop with the dismissal of the three development first

leaders. Despite being in power, the KNU incumbent leadership's choice to dismiss the development

first leaders did not get wide support among the Karen voters. Although it benefited from strong

support the Karen refugees, the Karen refugees did not have voting rights, and the politics first faction

suffered a series a political defeat. General Saw Mutu Sae Poe, one of the dismissed leaders, benefited

from the support of the leaders of KNLA Brigades 1, 3, 4, 6, and 7 which allowed him to call for an

emergency meeting (Bangkok Post 2012, Interview 9). During the emergency meeting, the three

dismissed leaders were reappointed to their previous positions, in time to attend the elections for the

new Central Executive Committee during the 15[th]Congress of the KNU (The Irrawaddy 2012a).

Between 26 November and 26 December 2012, 245 elected Karen representatives, including refugee

and overseas CBOs, attended the KNU Congress. The Central Standing Committee then elected the 11

members of Central Executive Committee, including the five top positions (president/chairperson, vice

president/vice chairperson, general secretary, joint secretary 1 and joint secretary 2), the 14 Head of

Departments (forestry, transportation, health and welfare, organising and information, education and

culture, breeding and watery, defence, mining, justice, alliance affairs, foreign affairs, interior and religion, finance and agriculture departments) and the leaders of the KNLA. During the election, General Saw Mutu Sae Poe was elected as president and P'doh Saw Kwe Htoo Win, leader of the 4th Brigade, Secretary General. Among the 11 Executive Committee members, only two members reflected the politics first faction of the KNU: P'doh Naw Zipporah Sein was elected Vice President and General Saw Baw Kyaw Heh Deputy General of the KNLA and Committee Member (KNUHQ 2012). The election of the development first faction in key roles furthered the KNU fragmentation.

Following the elections, General Saw Mutu Sae Poe organised a KNU delegation to meet with the Myanmar President, Defence Minister, and Minister of Commerce Mining and Railways, on the 5th of January 2013 in Naypidaw (Mizzima News 2013). The informal meeting, the first of a long series of informal consultations, was the occasion for President U Thein Sein to meet the newly elected KNU leadership and discuss the implementation of development projects and a ceasefire agreement, which was finally signed with eight other armed groups on the 15th of October 2015 (KNU 2015, Reuters 2015). The signing of the ceasefire agreement was highly criticised by the politics first faction, who criticised the lack of transparency in the negotiation process and expressed concern about the government co-opting moderate leaders. The politics first faction interviewed accused the Myanmar Government of offering economic incentives to manipulate moderate KNU leaders into signing a ceasefire while expanding the Tatmadaw's presence in the Karen state (Interview 16, Interview 17). In addition, the signing of the ceasefire did not include all armed groups, as heavy fighting had resumed since 2010 between the Myanmar Government and the Kachin Independence Organisations (KIO), as well as the Shan armies. This was a major hurdle for the KNU politics first interviewed who believed peace would not be guaranteed unless it was nationwide (Interview 16, Interview 17). From this, the KNU accelerated the launch of development projects in the Karen state, including hydro-power dams, gas pipelines and highways. To manage these projects, the KNU formed Thoolei Company Ltd, which signed an agreement on February 2016 with the Myanmar Ministry of Electricity to prepare the construction of a dam within two years.

The strategy chosen by the development first faction furthered the KNU fragmentation as it was negated and contested by the politics first faction. It led them to conduct their own activities promoting a political solution to the conflict as expected by the Karen refugees and prevented the KNU incumbent leaders from enforcing organisational decisions. As soon as General Saw Mutu Sae Poe was in power, refugee organisations were no longer invited to the negotiation table, showing the lack of ties between the Karen refugees and the incumbent leaders. Refugee organisations called for more transparency and demanded their interests be considered in the negotiations. The Karen refugee organisations accused KNU leaders of not following democratic procedures when signing agreements with the government (Karen News 2015, Interview 22). In accordance, the KWO spokesperson Naw K'nya Paw stated: "We are all concerned because although the KNU statement claims that the KNU Central Executive Committee and Central Standing Committee emergency meeting was called, according to the KNU's own working procedures and rules, important decisions cannot be made without a majority of Central Standing Committee members being present at the meeting. In this case the majority were not present in any such meeting. How the meeting was called, is also questionable and a cause for concern" (Karen News 2015b). The refugee organisations have also been very active in advocating against development projects like the hydro-power dams on the Salween River. Since 2012, refugee CBOs have organised protests against the KNU leadership in the village affected by the dam projects (Karen News 2014)The KWO, KYO, alongside another Thailand-based environmental organisation, the Karen Environmental and Social Action Network (KESAN), met in March 2015 to voice their concerns over the dam projects agreed by the KNU. They argued that the projects would increase human rights abuses, displacing Karen populations and allowing the Myanmar Army to pursue the militarisation of the Karen state (Karen News 2016). The politics first leaders also pursue their activities to manifest their opposition to the leadership negotiations. General Saw Baw Kyaw Heh attended those protests and accused the Myanmar Government of securing the contentious dam sites by increasing the number of government troops and its militia, the Border Guard Forces, in the area. This legitimised his strategy of obstructing all development projects in the

Brigade he controlled (K5) and continuing a military training programme (Interview 19, Interview 17, Karen News 2016). While the KNU's development first faction focused on negotiating with the government, the politics first faction disengaged itself from the ceasefire negotiations, boycotting meetings and even suspended communications with the moderate leaders. However, the fragmentation of the KNU did not lead to a split. The politics first leaders preferred adopting a passive wait-and-see strategy. Indeed, they feared that the fragmentation of the KNU was the goal of the Myanmar Government to weaken and overpower it. This divide and rule strategy was thought to have been used by the Myanmar Government on several occasion; in particular, when the DKBA split from the KNU in 1994 (Interview 7, Interview 16, Interview 23). Therefore, rather than forming a splinter group, the politics first leaders preferred expressing their discontent within the group.

8.4. Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the mechanisms linking the Karen refugees to changes in the KNU activities following the 2012 ceasefire negotiations as a two-part process (Adamson 2013), and demonstrated that in accordance with the theoretical expectations, Karen refugees' support has participated in the fragmentation of the KNU by instilling internal divisions. This chapter has demonstrated that, as expected, the links between the KNU and the Karen refugees are key to understand the Karen influence on KNU politics. In appearance, the KNU is no longer the organisation overviewing the management of the refugee camps, as it was before the fall of Mannerplaw. The KNU leaders have been removed from the management board of the refugee camps, their education department no longer directly runs the education facilities in the refugee camps, and the refugee local organisation present themselves as apolitical. Nevertheless, further investigation shows that the refugee organisations have retained direct links with the KNU, notably with the politics first faction of the KNU whose most prominent members lived in the refugee camps. The Karen refugee and the KNU political elite are in constant contact with each other. Therefore, the diffusion of information on the KNU activities is easily diffused to the Karen refugee organisations. However, this mechanism of

diffusion has not resulted in a perfect alignment of frames between the Karen refugees and the KNU. Because of their contact with the international organisations and the necessity of reshaping their identity, the Karen refugee organisations have in their narratives and discourses placed a stronger emphasis on human rights protection. As a part of the new frames developed, the Karen refugees have strongly advocated for a political solution to the conflict which could secure political rights for the Karen. This contrasts with the interest of local communities in the Karen state, who, affected by years of conflict, have advocated for putting some emphasis on economic projects which would alleviate poverty and improve economic conditions.

The increasingly diverging interests of the local constituencies sowed the seed for the KNU fragmentation. As a result of the fall of Mannerplaw, the KNU became increasingly decentralised with greater autonomy for each Brigade. This led each Brigade developing different interests embedded in the local constituencies from which they draw their legitimacy. This polarised the KNU politics, extending the gap between the two factions. As a result, the development first faction opened unauthorised negotiations with the Myanmar Government, further fragmenting the KNU. These findings show that transnational groups can constitute rebel constituencies influencing the rebel group's structure. Factions of rebel groups can rely on transnational constituencies to increase their legitimacy in exchange for fulfilling their demands. By only meeting the demands of the constituencies with which they are embedded, factions fuel divergent interests and political polarisation. When a common goal is absent, solidarity is no longer valued, and cooperation is no longer beneficial for their individual interests, conflicts between factions arise.

Chapter 9: Karen diaspora and KNU's fragmentation in 2012

9.1. Introduction

The previous chapter has focused on the role the Karen refugee communities have played on the KNU's fragmentation which occurred when the ceasefire negotiations were opened with the Myanmar government in 2012. However, in 2012 another transnational actor may have influenced the KNU politics: the Karen diaspora. The Karen diasporas grew after 2005, when the Thai Government eased the restriction of international organisations' access to the Karen refugees. Upon its involvement with the Karen refugees, the UNHCR started resettlement programmes to a third country (The Karen Women's Organisation 2008). The UNHCR's programme resulted in the resettlement of 96,209 refugees to 12 countries, including the US (72,142), Australia (8,944), Canada (4,279), Finland (1,478), Norway (1,040), and the UK (230) (TBC 2014). Between 2005 and 2010, the UK received 230 Karen refugees under the Gateway Protection Programme after the assessment of whether their human rights and security were at risk, their family status, and their health condition (Refugee Council UK 2008). Added to the Karen who have immigrated to the UK outside of the resettlement programme, there is a diasporic community of 500 Karen in the UK who mostly reside in Sheffield, Bury, Bolton, and London (Thailand Burma Border Consortium 2010, Interview 27).

The theoretical chapters has shown that several scholars have studied the involvement of diasporic communities in civil conflict (Al-Ali *et al.* 2001, Wayland 2004, Bercovitch 2007, Demmers 2007, Smith and Stares 2007, Orjuela 2008, Pirkkalainen and Abdile 2009, Koinova 2011). This scholarship shows that diaspora may have different effects on the homeland conflict. They may have a positive role in the conflict cycle by contributing to peace in their homeland (Fair 2005, Bercovitch 2007, Shain 2007b). However, the diasporic community can also be a peace-wrecker and contribute to the radicalism of the rebel group in the homeland and the purchase of arms (Skrbiš 2007, Koinova 2011). The diaspora can alternatively refrain from becoming involved in the homeland conflict (Bouvier 2009). This scholarship has been highly valuable for conflict studies as it has shown that a conflict cannot be

thoroughly understood without considering the role of diaspora communities (Safran 1991, Clifford 1994, Horst and Van Hear 2002, Bercovitch 2007, Cohen 2008). Nevertheless, these studies have yet to explain under which circumstances the diasporic communities have a positive or negative impact in the homeland country besides particular case studies (Koinova 2011). In view of evidence from particular case studies, they have only been able to show that diaspora could support violence in the homeland in some cases and act more peacefully in others, without uncovering the specific mechanisms through which diaspora may give rise to violence. This is because these studies have focused mainly on the characteristics of diaspora in the host country without necessarily referring to the processes linking diaspora to the rebel groups in the homeland. Hence, this chapter aims to uncover the mechanisms through which diasporas can have an influence rebel group, by analysing the effects of diasporas on the cohesion (or lack thereof) of a rebel group, an in turn its strategies.

The following first analyses the mechanisms explaining how the Karen diaspora have become a social base upon which leaders of the KNU could draw resources to conduct the rebellion. Theoretically, this chapter aims to show that Karen diaspora have, despite displacement, retained ties with the KNU, which have favoured the diffusion and alignment of the KNU's and Karen diaspora's conflict frames. By building this network and favouring the alignment of frames, the KNU have transformed the Karen diaspora in one of their social bases from whom they could gain political resources used to sustain the rebellion. Secondly, this chapter aims to demonstrate that the involvement of the Karen diaspora community in the conflict in the homeland has fuelled internal division within the KNU. Similar to the support provided by the Karen refugees, the diasporic support triggered a mechanism of polarisation between existing KNU factions. Such divisions sowed the seed for the fragmentation of the KNU, which became even more acute when the Myanmar Government offered ceasefire negotiations.

9.2. Dispersed but connected: the Karen diaspora as an active social base of the KNU rebellion

9.2.1. The genesis of the Karen diaspora support

How can the Karen diaspora be a social base upon which KNU leaders can draw political resources despite the geographical distance? Intuitively, one would expect that once resettled in a third country, the diaspora loses interest in the conflict in the homeland as they are preoccupied with their integration in the host country. However, the case of the Karen diaspora shows that Karen diaspora have created a sophisticated network to bind them to the KNU. These strong ties have favoured the diffusion of information to the Karen diaspora, which allowed them to maintain active and prominent interest in the conflict. The following shows that despite the geographical distance, the Karen diaspora was able to knit an intricate network linking them to the rebel group. Through this network, the Karen diaspora have imposed themselves as one of the social bases of the KNU and became one of its sources of support.

Two main processes can explain how Karen diaspora have maintained ties with the KNU. First, the criteria of resettlement that created the diaspora favoured individuals who had long-lasting strong ties with the KNU. Although some Karen have individually immigrated to the UK since the British colonial rule, the bulk of the Karen diaspora members arrived with the resettlement programmes since 2005 (Green and Lockley 2012). While in theory it is open to all registered refugees, in practice the resettlement programme benefited the Karen refugee elite. Educated and skilled refugees have resettled in larger numbers (Banki and Lang 2007). Between 2005 and 2007, 11.5% of those with secondary education or higher departed the camps with the resettlement programmes. In comparison, only 2.4% of the refugees with no education have been resettled (Banki and Lang 2007). The educated Karen refugees, who were also most likely to be employed by NGOs or hold managerial positions in the camps' governance institutions, have been more likely to enter the process of resettlement as they have more access to information on the resettlement processes and speak better English, a skill which is valued by host countries concerned with integration (Banki and Lang 2007).

Yet, this Karen refugee elite qualifying for resettlement were also the Karen refugees who were more likely to hold leadership positions in the camp institutions embedded with the KNU. As shown previously, the KNU's involvement in the foundation of the refugee camps meant that the Karen refugee organisations were overseen by the KNU and that the Karen refugee elite maintain constant contact with the KNU leadership. Hence, the resettled Karen refugees were those who were already in closest contact with the KNU leadership. Furthermore, upon resettlement, the Karen refugees — who now can be characterised as diaspora as they are now settled in a third country with little interest in returning permanently to their home country (Shain and Sherman 1998, Safran 1999, Sheffer 2003, Brubaker 2005, Cohen 2008, Baser and Swain 2009) —have sustained regular contact with the refugee grassroots groups in Thailand and the KNU (Green and Lockley 2012). Interviews with Karen refugees have shown (confirming findings from the study conducted by Green and Lockley (2012)) that the Karen diasporic community in the UK, as well as in other resettlement countries, seek to maintain contact with members of their community in Thailand and Myanmar/Burma (Interview 23, Interview 27, Interview 19, Interview 4). They use a wide range of internet-based technologies to not only keep in touch with family, but also to liaise with refugee organisations and KNU members to remain informed of the political situation. As the Karen diaspora members have more access to communication means, they have become "super-communicators" (Green and Lockley 2012, p. 12), using an array of technologies, such as Skype, WhatsApp, YouTube videos, emails or Facebook, to remain in contact with members of their family or community in Myanmar and Thailand (Interview 16, Interview 23, Green and Lockley 2012). Obvious barriers to communication are the limited access to phone and computers with internet in Myanmar and Thailand. However, individuals working in the Karen refugee governance institutions or with NGOs usually have internet access and become intermediaries between Karen communities in Myanmar and Thailand and the Karen diaspora (Banki and Lang 2007). These personal connections between individuals of the Karen diaspora and the KNU leaders have been essential to knit a transnational network.

In addition to personal ties with the KNU, the Karen diasporic communities have created institutions favouring ties with the KNU. Upon resettlement, the new diaspora members who held leadership positions in the refugee camps reproduced organisational structures from the refugee camps. They created the Karen Community Association UK in April 2006, with three branches in Sheffield, London, and Bolton and Bury. The Karen Community Association UK (KCA-UK) comprises a few organisations which have ties with corresponding organisations within the KNU and in the refugee camps (Green and Lockley 2012). For instance, the Karen Youth Organisation UK communicates through social media with the KYO at the Thai-Myanmar/Burma border (Interview 27). Karen refugee leaders interviewed have stated that the refugee organisations, who themselves are in contact with the KNU, serve as intermediaries between the Karen diaspora and the KNU, relaying news and information (Interview 16, Interview 23, Interview 28, Interview 29). The Karen diaspora in the UK has also formed the European Karen Network (EKN) in 2009 to bring together Karen people across Europe and maintain communication channels with the Karen organisations in western countries, Myanmar, and Thailand (KNU n.d., Green and Lockely). In addition, interviews with the Karen diaspora members and experts have indicated that the British Karen diaspora has created the KNU-UK, an in-country delegation of the KNU, overseen by the KNU foreign department (Interview 23, Interview 24, Interview 27, KNUHQ n.d.). The KNU has encouraged all resettled refugee to create formal Karen community organisations, such as the KNU-UK in host countries, to remain in contact. All these diasporic organisations communicate regularly with their counterparts in Myanmar or at the border, strengthening the transnational network of the KNU. These institutional ties have allowed the KNU to visit the Karen diaspora in the UK. The KNU leaders visited the Karen diaspora communities in resettlement countries. P'doh Naw Zipporah Sein, as KNU leader has been actively engaged in meeting with Karen diaspora communities (Thawnghmung and Cho 2013) . For instance, updates of the Facebook accounts of the Karen diaspora groups show that P'doh Naw Zipporah Sein travelled to Sweden in 2012, Norway in 2015, and the US in 2016 where she met with the local Karen diaspora association. In addition, a delegation of KNU organisations' leaders visited the Karen Community

Association UK in 2014 at the Mount Tabor Methodist Church in Sheffield to update the Karen diaspora about the situation in Myanmar. A KNU delegation visited the KCA-UK in 2013 to discuss the situation of the Karen people and meet with senior leaders and negotiators from Northern Ireland and the British government who have been involved in reconciliation work in Northern Ireland (Karen Community Association UK 2013). The online presence of the KNU General Secretary, the KNU's visits to Karen diasporic communities, as well as regular events uniting Karen organisations in western countries and in Myanmar and Thailand are occasions for strengthening the network between the KNU and diaspora communities.

Religious organisations have also contributed to maintaining communication channels and sustaining ties between the Karen diasporic communities, the Karen refugees, and the KNU (Green and Lockley 2012). Upon resettlement in western countries, Karen refugees formed European Karen Baptist fellowships. In the UK, they have formed the Karen Baptist Fellowship London based in Woodberry Down Chapel in North London, and the Karen Baptist Fellowship in Sheffield. These religious organisations have, according interviews with the Karen diaspora and Karen religious leaders, become hubs of transnational communication (Green and Lockley 2012, Interview 23, Interview 27). The most active members of the Karen community in the UK, Christian or not, meet there every Sunday. According to the Karen diaspora members interviewed (Interview 27, Interview 23), church services provide communication opportunities for exchanging news each member was independently able to gather or meet visitors who have recently travelled to the refugee camps or to their Karen villages in Myanmar. Additionally, members of the Karen Baptist Fellowships in the UK are in constant contact with the Karen Baptist Convention in Myanmar and the Kawthoolei Karen Baptist Convention operating in the KNU areas and in the refugee camps, who are themselves in contact with the KNU (Lee 2012). According to a leader of the Kawthoolei Karen Baptist Convention interviewed (Interview 22), they maintain contact either through social media, or by meeting face-to-face once a year during the Conference Global Karen Baptist Fellowship held in Bangkok or Chiang Mai. During this conference, all the Karen Baptist fellowships come together to share views on the situation in

Myanmar and strengthen relationships among themselves. Consequently, through the different secular and religious organisations, Karen diaspora in the UK aims to preserve the unity of the resettled Karen community as well as to conserve the ties with the Karen organisations in the refugee camps and the KNU. In other words, resettled refugees expanded, stretched, and institutionalised the networks linking them to the KNU when they resettled in western countries.

The Karen diasporic communities do not seem to have developed similar institutionalised ties with regular contact with other Karen insurgent groups such as the DKBA. According to experts and members of the UK Karen diaspora, in the UK only two families have maintained ties with Karen insurgent groups other than the KNU, notably the KNU/KNLAPC (Interview 22, Interview 24, Interview 27). Those ties were mainly personal, as those families were directly related to leaders in the splinter Karen insurgent group (Interview 24). Those families have not created diasporic organisations specifically maintaining ties with the splinter Karen insurgent groups. There has been no evidence found of the institutionalisation of ties with splinter Karen insurgent groups.

The connections between the Karen diaspora members, the Karen refugee organisations, and the KNU has created a tripartite relational structure, which was conceptualised by scholars on transnational politics in other contexts (Strang and Meyer 1993, Tilly 2006, della Porta and Tarrow 2012), linking the three, which has ensured a regular flow of information about the KNU and maintained the interest of the diaspora in the KNU' struggle. This is consistent with the theoretical expectations that diffusion of conflict frames occurs when transnational communities and rebel groups share ties. External sources of information on the KNU activities have been limited - there are only a handful of news outlets reporting on the KNU affairs regularly and they are run by Karen or Burmese diaspora communities abroad. Yet, the Karen diaspora communities have reproduced the KNU frames highlighting the existence and unity of the Karen nation. The communities in Sheffield and London have organised activities celebrating Karen nationalism and revolutionary history. The Karen community in Sheffield and London, but also in other European countries, the US and Australia, celebrates the KNU's most important holiday (KNU n.d., Interview 23, Interview 27). For instance, in

Sheffield, the KCA-UK, every August, commemorates the Karen Martyrs' Day, which marks the death of the first KNU leader Saw Ba Oo Gyi who was killed by the Burma Army in 1950, and the Karen Revolution Day in January, which celebrates the start of the revolution. For example, a cultural evening was organised by the KCA-UK at the St Ethelberga's Peace and Reconciliation Centre, and featured traditional dances, singing, traditional food and presentations about the Karen culture, traditions and current situation in the Karen state (Karen community Association UK 2013). They highlighted that the KNU was fighting for self-determination and a federal state, and that the Tatmadaw perpetuated human rights violations. During the event, Naw Thelma Gyi, the daughter of the Karen hero Saw Ba Oo Gyi reminded attendees that:

> We are celebrating our Karen culture, inherited and handed down from our forefathers. It is important to continue to pass it on to future generations no matter where we live in the world. Our culture is our identity, our language, our music, our dances, our way of life, and even our national character. Uphold it, honour it, respect it, and our Karen culture will never die (Karen community Association UK 2013)

The Karen communities in Sheffield also organise cultural and language courses to ensure the subsistence of the Karen community (Green and Lockley 2012). They organise summer exchange courses with Karen communities in Europe and in Myanmar. These courses, which were at first funded by the local councils, are occasions for the KCA-UK leaders to transmit a history of the Karen culture. Hence, the cultural events held by the Karen diaspora promote the KNU history and unity among the Karen.

In addition, an analysis of the Karen Community Association UK or the European Karen Network's statements reveals that activities conducted by the KNU are followed by statements from the Karen diaspora organisations, acknowledging and/or criticising the KNU's strategies. Before the 2012 fragmentation, the Karen diaspora community in the UK regularly relayed information about the KNU leadership' activities, in particular its initiative to sign a ceasefire. They published on their website and Facebook Page, KNU leaders' statements, and posts reacting to KNU's activities. For instance, the

Karen diasporic communities welcomed the ceasefire negotiations conducted by P'doh Naw Zipporah Sein in 2011 and 2012. Following the signature of a preliminary ceasefire agreement, an alliance of the Karen Communities Worldwide issued the following media statement acknowledging the KNU's activities (Karen Conference Worldwide 2012):

1. We welcome the Karen National Union (KNU)'s four-step roadmap regarding the ongoing peace talks with the Burmese Government.

2. We, Karen communities around the world, both inside Burma and oversea, will support the ceasefire and peace talks between the KNU and the Burmese Government as best as we can.

A nationwide ceasefire must be implemented. Ceasefire and peace processes must be conducted with transparency and involve third-party international observers. (…) (Karen Conference Worldwide 2012).

The Karen diasporic communities have expressed their support to the KNU rather than to any of the other Karen insurgent groups, such as the Democratic Karen Buddhist Association (DKBA). The word analysis of the EKN and KCA-UK's statements published on their social media from 2011 to 2015 shows that there are no records of the KCA-UK or the EKN backing the DKBA or recognising it as a representative organisation. Therefore, by comparing the mobilising frames the Karen diasporic communities have developed and the ties they maintained with the KNU and with the DKBA, it can be observed that the Karen diaspora has utilised frames similar to the KNU's mobilising frames, with whom they are linked through institutional ties. In contrast, the Karen diaspora has not adopted the DKBA's with whom they have not developed institutional ties. This shows that the diasporic communities do not adopt the mobilising frames of an ethnic rebel group randomly; their choice is influenced by the ties they share with the rebel group which allows the diffusion of information. In the case of the Karen diaspora, the ties they share with the KNU enables the KNU mobilising frames and the recognition of the KNU as a representing organisation. In contrast, the lack of institutional ties with the DKBA has translated into the lack of adoption of the DKBA's mobilising frames.

Furthermore, despite the diffusion of information, the Karen diaspora, in a similar process of hybridisation than for the Karen refugee organisations, have added a humanitarian lens to their narratives. The Karen diaspora organisations' discourse emphasises the Myanmar Government's human rights abuses in all ethnic states. For instance, the EKN issued a statement in 2013 when the Myanmar President U Thein Sein visited Europe: "Karen communities across Europe express concern over President U Thein Sein visiting countries and call on the European governments to reconsider their foreign policy in light of ongoing serious human rights abuses in Burma" (European Karen Network 2013). They also highlight the lack of democratic processes in Myanmar/Burma which deny the rights of ethnic nationalities: "The new constitution drafted by the dictatorship guarantees no rights or protection to ethnic nationalities." (Norwegian Burma Committee 2010). The EKN has also argued that the "dictatorship continues to target civilians in their military operations, which are in breach of the Geneva Convention" (Karen News 2011a) and the democratic reforms have not stopped "the Burmese Army committing human rights abuses". In contrast, they present the KNU as a "democratic organisation" (Karen News 2013c), which holds regular elections, and looks after the welfare of the Karen people. This discourse focusing on human rights and democratic claims is in line with the international norms or norms promoted in European countries which defend democracy and indigenous rights internalised the principles of democracy and that "ballots not bullets" could lead to power. Thus, although the diffusion of information remains between the KNU and the diaspora, the diaspora's frames have been modelled by the greater exposure to international norms. The mobilising frames that Karen diaspora build are the result of different claims diffused by different actors through various sets of networks in which the Karen diaspora actors are embedded. Despite this process of hybridisation, the Karen diaspora has adopted the threats faced by the KNU which has activated their mobilisation. The Karen diaspora has through this process become one of the social bases underpinning the KNU rebellion. The ties between the Karen diaspora and the KNU which remained despite the geographical distance, allowed the diffusion of the KNU's conflict frames and facilitated the mobilisation of the Karen diaspora for the conflict in the homeland. The following section

describes how the Karen diaspora have brought ideational and political resources the KNU leaders mobilised to sustain the rebellion.

9.2.2. The Karen diaspora's resources contributing in organising the rebellion

Despite distance and displacement, the Karen diaspora have remained an active KNU social base, such as Karen refugee organisations, who can provide political resources to KNU leaders. First, the Karen diaspora has contributed to the plight of the KNU by bringing the KNU's grievances to western states and international organisations, who may have more leverage to make change occur. In conformity with the Boomerang model (Keck and Sikkink 1998a), the Karen diaspora communities have formed transnational networks of activists, bound together by dense exchanges of information, who are looking to persuade and pressurise more powerful organisations or states with more leverage on the Myanmar Government to settle the conflict with the KNU. For example, in July 2013 the KCA-UK called on the former British Prime Minister David Cameron to pressure the Myanmar President U Thein Sein to withdraw his soldiers from the ethnic states. Additionally, one of the leading Burma campaign organisations, Burma Campaign UK (BCUK), has worked with foremost Karen activists, Zoya Phan and Bwa Phan. Hence, BCUK has campaigned for the release of political prisoners through a letter-writing campaign to the former Foreign Secretary William Hague. Similarly, BCUK campaigned for the European Parliament and the UN Security Council to pass a resolution to call for intervention in Myanmar. This campaign was backed by Desmond Tutu and the former Czech President Vaclav Havel (BCUK 2005, Interview 23). Zoya Phan also launched, through BCUK, a campaign calling the European Commission and DFID to fund cross-border aid to the Karen state. In June 2010, more than 1000 supporters of the BCUK wrote letters to Kristalina Georgieva, the European Commissioner responsible for European aid, calling on the Commission to review its policy of refusing to fund cross-border aid to Myanmar (Interview 28). BCUK and KCA-UK have also organised several protests in front of the Myanmar Embassy to raise awareness on the situation in the Karen state (Interview 28). The Karen communities in Europe have also issued several statements calling for international pressure

on the Myanmar Government to respect their ethnic rights and install a federal democracy. An example of this was in 2010, when the KCA-UK and other Karen communities worldwide organised a global day of action calling the international community to take measures to stop attacks by the Tatmadaw against Karen civilians. They issued the following statement:

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) must demand an immediate end to the attacks, which break international law; Governments, including the European Commission, must provide funding for cross-border aid, which is the only way to get food, medicine and shelter to those on the run from the new attacks. The United Nations (UN) should set up a Commission of Inquiry into war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by the dictatorship. Karen people have been under attack for more than 60 years. The new wave of attacks is linked to the Burmese dictatorship's fake elections due later this year. The dictatorship is trying to crush all resistance forces to their rule. They are following the doctrine of the Burmese Army: 'One Blood, One Voice, One Command'. **The new constitution drafted by the dictatorship guarantees no rights or protection to ethnic nationalities**. In fact, it is a death sentence to ethnic diversity in Burma. The international community must stop ignoring what is happening to ethnic peoples in Burma. We, **the Karen Communities Worldwide, desire genuine democracy, peace and national reconciliation**, but not military threats and attacks by the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) army to destroy our homeland and our dreams for a peaceful federal Burma. Karen Communities in the United Kingdom, Norway, Sweden, Germany, Canada, the United States, Australia, Japan, Malaysia and Korea coordinate the day of action, which is supported by people from Burma and human rights groups (Norwegian Burma Committee 2010).

In addition, Zoya Phan, who has become the main Karen activist in the UK, has also been present in British media to ask the British government to take the lead in an intervention against Myanmar/Burma (BBC 2009, Grice 2009, David Calleja 2010, Phan 2012a, 2012b). She wrote a book retelling the story of her father, a leader of the KNU, and her journey fleeing a Burmese attack on her

village to the refugee camps in Thailand and in the UK (Phan and Lewis 2009). She also met several times with David Cameron and Gordon Brown and addressed the Conservative Party Annual conference in 2007 and 2006 (Grice 2009, David Calleja 2010). Similarly, the Karen diaspora in the UK maintained the KNU website to advertise the KNU's activities among the Karen people and to the international community. These various events and activities are opportunities for Karen activists to raise awareness on the Karen situation and gain international support for a federal Myanmar and the protection of ethnic rights. Consequently, diaspora activities enhance the KNU's international notoriety and back the validity of its claims. It is interesting to note that when addressing the international community, the Karen diasporic organisations do not often directly refer to the KNU. Rather, they focus on the unlawfulness of the Myanmar Government and army. They raise awareness of the human rights violations against civilians in Myanmar. This is in line with international norms, as described in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights or the 1949 Geneva Convention, which emphasises the protection of civilians' rights. The Karen activists try to match the international community's expectations and frames to increase the efficiency of their actions. Nevertheless, the Karen diaspora's statements, even without mentioning the KNU, match the KNU's claims. Also, when off record, the Karen activists tend to show more clearly that their goals are to create a federal Myanmar Government where the Karen state would be administered by the KNU. This support would have been useful to the KNU to publicise their cause internationally. Such activities have given the Karen diaspora some leverage to have a seat at the table in KNU internal politics. These findings on Karen diaspora's support to the KNU highlight that rebel groups can be equated to political parties, who seek popular support like a governing actor. Equating rebel groups to political parties also means that rebel groups are not necessarily unified actors, and can experience intra-party competition between different factions, which may have consequences on the organisation of the rebellion. As grassroots groups of the rebel group, the Karen diaspora can influence such fractionalisation of the rebel group.

9.3. Karen Diaspora's support as a contributor to the KNU fragmentation

The transnational support can be a double-edged sword for rebel groups. As one of the social bases underpinning the KNU rebellion, Karen diaspora have provided useful resources for the KNU to conduct their rebellion. However, this support is linked to some expectations about what the conflict is about and how it should be fought. If the rebel group, or some of its factions, want to secure future support from the diaspora, they need to meet their demands. Where the rebel group and the diaspora conflict frames are perfectly aligned, and there is an overlap in the demands of all the rebel groups' social bases, meeting the diaspora's expectations may be easy. However, when some discrepancy in the frames arise, the rebel group faction who has the most links to the diaspora may need to change its strategies to accommodate the diasporas' demands and secure its support. This can trigger a process of polarisation within the rebel group, where each faction is looking to meet the demands of its social base. It is the discrepancy between the Karen diaspora with other KNU faction's social base which has led the fragmentation of the group.

Despite a general sense of loyalty to the KNU, the Karen diaspora organisations have built stronger links with the politics first faction, directing their support to back their political initiatives. Since 2008, the KNU was controlled by the politics first faction led by General Saw Tamalar Baw and his daughter P'doh Naw Zipporah Sein. P'doh Naw Zipporah Sein, who had long work with international organisations in the refugee camps as head of the KWO, believed that international diplomacy raising international awareness on the conflict, could pressure the Myanmar Government in reaching a fair peace deal (Thawnghmung and Cho 2013, Interview 16). From 2008, there has been a sharp increase in KNU statements and calls for international community action. After the election of P'doh Naw Zipporah Sein at the end of 2008, the increase in publications of KNU statements signified the willingness to raise international recognition of the KNU's activities. The statements called for the international community's intervention or reference to international norms. For instance: "We, the KNU, earnestly urge the United Nations, the EU, and other international communities to reject the result of Burma's sham elections and apply real pressure on the regime to stop the attacks on ethnic

civilians, and follow the demands of the United Nations to engage with all stake holders in tripartite dialogue for the resolution of all political problems" (KNU 2010). "We would like to call on the international community, including the U.S., UK, EU and UN agencies to call on the SPDC military regime to stop immediately the military attacks and gross human rights violations against the Karen people, who have been reduced to the status of one of the poorest peoples in Burma, because of decades of severe oppression by successive military dictatorships, in the never ending civil war" (KNU 2010). To raise international awareness, P'doh Naw Zipporah Sein relied on the Karen overseas with whom she has strong personal ties (Thawnghmung and Cho 2013). From the moment P'doh Naw Zipporah Sein was elected at the head of the KNU, the Karen diaspora activists multiplied their advocacy and lobbying activities. According to testimonies from members of the KCA-UK members, the KNU-UK, and the Burma Campaign UK, Karen diaspora activists were encouraged by the KNU leadership to give interviews to media in their host country (Interview 23, Interview 27). The KCA-UK and the EKN invested in social media, becoming active on Facebook and blog pages. An analysis of the Facebook posts of these two organisations from 2010 to 2012, show that the number of posts on Facebook from the EKN and the KCA-UK tripled. Securing Karen diaspora support was also a way for P'doh Naw Zipporah Sein to supplement the lack of legitimacy from which she experienced within the KNU (Interview 16, Interview 9, Thawnghmung and Cho 2013). As a former refugee, with no military background, several KNU leaders did not see her fit to govern or lead peace negotiations with the Myanmar Government (Interview 9, Interview 29, Thawnghmung and Cho 2013). As P'doh Naw Zipporah Sein sought support among transnational communities, she became embedded within them, aligning the KNU's strategies with their claims.

Therefore, when P'doh Naw Zipporah Sein started ceasefire negotiations with the Myanmar Government in 2011, the Karen diaspora in the UK welcomed the initiative: "Karen communities around the world strongly welcome the statement made by the Karen National Union on 15 September 2011, to call for peace in Burma on International Day of Peace on 21st of September.[…] Karen communities worldwide support the Karen National Union (KNU) for standing firm to defend

the Karen people and finding ways to look after the wellbeing of the Karen people" (Karen News 2011a). "We welcome the KNU's four-step roadmap regarding the peace talks with the Burmese Government. We, Karen communities around the world, both inside Burma and overseas, will support the ceasefire and peace talks between the KNU and the Burmese Government as best as we can" (Karen News 2012b). In addition, although the Karen diaspora favoured ceasefire talks with the Myanmar Government, they condemn any cooperation with the Myanmar Government on development projects: "The Burmese Government, after the ceasefire, wants to have developments – like economy developments such as big economic zones, dams and development projects that involve land confiscation, human right abuses against the local people and environmental destruction. These are not good for the local people" (Phan 2013). "EKN is deeply concerned about the existing and proposed development projects in Karen areas. We want economic development that will benefit local people and ensure the protection of the environment" (European Karen Network 2012). The 2010 KNU leadership stopped the development projects, increasing grievances from the KNU development first faction, whose social bases value the economic benefit brought by the development projects (Brenner 2018). In a context where the KNU's central institutions had little leverage to ensure the accountability of its brigades, increased grievances favoured each faction's self-seeking attitudes. With each faction meeting different demands from their social base, the process of fragmentation, where organisational demands cannot be enforced, was triggered. Therefore, the fragmentation of the KNU in the context of the 2012 ceasefire negotiations with the government, was not only led by domestic factors. The transnational communities, the Karen diaspora in particular, played a role in fuelling divisions which resulted in the KNU's fragmentation.

As the leaders of the politics first were in power and went against their grievances and demands, the development first faction became insubordinate to the KNU leadership. General Saw Mutu Sae Poe, P'doh Saw David Taw and Major Saw Roger Khin individually approached the government to discuss ceasefire agreements and implement development projects in September 2012. These initiatives were firmly condemned by the KNU Executive Committee led by P'doh Naw Zipporah Sein,

her Vice President P'doh Saw David Tharckabaw and the KNLA leader of Brigade 5 General Saw Baw Kyaw Heh. Similar actions of insubordination from the politics first faction were recorded when the development first faction was elected in power. After the 2012 election, the development first leader took the main position in the KNU. This gave them the opportunity to shift the KNU strategy towards negotiations with the Myanmar Government. A ceasefire agreement was finally signed with eight other armed groups on 15 October 2015 (KNU 2015, Reuters 2015). The signing of a ceasefire agreement precipitated the fragmentation of the KNU. While the KNU's development first faction was focusing on ceasefire negotiations with the government, the politics first faction disengaged themselves from the KNU, boycotting meetings and cutting off communication with development first leaders (Interview 16). They have since adopted a passive wait-and-see strategy to gain some support to win the following elections.

Through the fragmentation of the KNU, the development first faction has also distanced itself from the Karen diaspora as a social base, further highlighting that they did not draw any support from this transnational group. The signing of the ceasefire was highly criticised by the Karen diaspora. On 4 October 2015, the KCA-UK signed a statement condemning the ceasefire signed by the KNU. They highlighted that there was a lack of trust and inclusiveness in the negotiation process (Phan 2013, Phan et al. 2014). They pointed out that the ceasefire was nationwide and failed to include other ethnic armed groups. They also stated that the ceasefire lacked transparency and failed to be accountable to the Karen people. As a result of this criticism, the development first leaders who benefited from internal support ostracised the Karen diaspora and interrupted the diffusion of information to the Karen diaspora. A trivial example of the isolation of the Karen diaspora which was reported in the interviews from both leaders of the development first faction and the Karen diaspora, was the fact that the new KNU leadership wanted to regain control over the KNU website which had been managed by the Karen diaspora in the UK. However, the Karen diaspora in the UK allegedly refused to give them access to the website. Leaders from both KNU factions as well as the Karen diaspora stated that the new KNU leadership built a new website, to which the Karen diaspora in the

UK could not get access (Interview 4, Interview 23, Interview 27). Furthermore, the election of General Saw Mutu Sae Poe resulted in a disengagement of the Karen diaspora to provide support to the KNU (Interview 23, Interview 27). One of the Karen diaspora activists interviewed highlighted that there was a lack of inclusiveness in KNU politics since the development first faction had been elected (Interview 27). The Karen diaspora organisations did not receive any information on the KNU strategy in the peace negotiations and lacked instructions to build lobbying or advocacy campaigns. Therefore, there has been a decrease in the KCA-UK and EKN's online presence and activities in 2013 and 2014. Similarly, a respondent from the Karen diaspora community highlighted: "A lot of people became disillusioned and not really knowing what to do. So, in the last two years, the activities of the Karen community associations, and the political activities died off. They have a New Year event, they have martyr's day, but they don't really have any lobbying campaign, they don't come to London anymore for advocacy activities" (Interview 23). The ostracisation of the Karen diaspora from the KNU affairs reflects the fragile discipline at the centre of the organisation and the difficulty for a central leadership to establish local dominance and root out embedded factions.

9.4. Conclusion

This chapter has aimed to show fragmentation of a rebel group cannot solely be understood by domestic factors. Analysing the role of diaspora can add analytical leverage to the understanding of rebel group's fragmentation and in turn their strategies. This chapter has shown that despite geographical distance, the Karen diaspora has maintained ties with some factions of the KNU. It has shown that the resettled refugees who constitute the Karen diaspora have maintained the links to the KNU they had in the refugee camps. Elite and institutional ties have been created between the KNU and the Karen diaspora. This has allowed the Karen diaspora to retain the ethnonationalist narratives of the KNU rather than any other Karen group. As a result, the Karen diaspora has been active in providing support to the KNU. Such involvement of the Karen diaspora in the KNU has influenced the organisation of the group. It aimed to show that the Karen diaspora has acted as a social base from

which a faction of the KNU, the politics first faction, has drawn its legitimacy. As the faction has relied on the Karen diaspora's support, it has limited the range of strategies they could pursue if they wanted to secure further diasporic support. This heightened internal divisions as the opposing faction was embedded in local constituencies who favoured development project that could ease the economic conditions.

By uncovering that Karen diaspora's ties to the KNU influence patterns of rebellious activities, this research contributes to the literature on transnational attributes of conflict by showing how border-transgressing bonds can affect civil wars (Saideman 1997, Byman 2001, Salehyan 2008, Cederman and Gleditsch 2009, Salehyan *et al.* 2011). Furthermore, it provides important insights into the mechanisms influencing diasporic mobilisation. The literature on diaspora politics (Sheffer 2003, Brubaker 2005, Cohen 2008, Cochrane *et al.* 2009) can explain change in the homeland, but has not necessarily specified the mechanisms through which diaspora influence change in the homeland. The findings of this chapter reveal that ties with the rebel group are crucial to understanding when and why diaspora groups mobilise and provide support to the rebel group. Rather than ethnicity inducing an automatic transnational solidarity, ties with the rebel groups allow the diffusion of the rebel group's mobilising frames, socialising the diaspora communities to its cause which, in turn, may be a rationale for mobilisation. The findings of this chapter facilitate the understanding of why some diasporic communities may mobilise for their homeland and others may not.

Chapter 10: Discussion

10.1. Introduction

Scholarship on conflict and rebel strategies of resistance has tended to focus on local mechanisms; the rebel group's characteristics, its initial endowments, its military capabilities, the rebel group-government dyad, or its relationship with the local communities (Humphreys and Weinstein 2006, Kalyvas 2006, Fearon *et al.* 2007, Weinstein 2007, Wimmer *et al.* 2010). The present research aims to move away from this state-centric approach to analyse transnational mechanisms influencing a civil conflict. Building upon a body of literature on the transnational features of conflict (c.f. Saideman 1997, Austvoll 2005, Salehyan and Gleditsch 2006, Cederman *et al.* 2009, Harpviken 2012, Nome 2012, Checkel 2013, Bakke 2014, Krcmaric 2014), the literature on diaspora politics (c.f. Tölölyan 1996, Melvin and King 2000, Zunzer 2004, Fair 2005, Bercovitch 2007, Lyons 2007, Smith and Stares 2007, Koinova 2011, Adamson 2013), and the literature on transnationalism (c.f. Risse-Kappen 1995, Beissinger 1996, Benford and Snow 2000, McAdam *et al.* 2001), this dissertation aims to theorise processes through which diaspora and refugees can influence rebel groups and its strategies and analyse their application in the case of the KNU rebellion in Myanmar/Burma. This research focusses on the influence of the Karen diaspora in the UK and Karen refugees in Thailand on two instances of the KNU fragmentation in 1995 and 2012. It shows that the fragmentation of the KNU could not be solely explained by domestic factors, and that Karen refugees and diaspora had also a role to play in the KNU internal dynamics which influenced the strategies they have pursued. This chapter aims to summarise and discuss the findings of previous chapters and highlight avenue for future research.

10.2. Rebel groups' strategies as a result of its cohesion (or lack thereof)

10.2.1. Mechanisms leading to fragmentation of a rebel group

This dissertation's overarching question has aimed to understand how transnational ethnic communities can influence rebel groups' strategies. The starting point of the theoretical framework

was that group fragmentation is central factor affecting the strategies a rebel group conducts. Acknowledging that the group's internal dynamics is essential to understand rebel groups' strategies, this dissertation aimed to understand the causes of such fragmentation. It identified two factors which could influence the rebel group's cohesion (or lack thereof): the government's counterinsurgency and transnational ethnic communities. The government may influence rebel group's cohesion by using divisive strategies as a way to weaken the rebel groups and settle the conflict by conceding as little as possible. The government can play on the rebel group's existing divisions and provide incentives to some factions so they get higher return from cooperating with the government rather than remaining united. In addition, the government can prevent rebel groups' ability to retain loyalty of its sub-groups. Transnational support may also fuel rebel groups' fragmentation. Transnational support which promotes radical frames would increase the fragmentation of the rebel group as it would contribute to the dissension between 'hawks and doves'. Similarly, theoretical framework assumed economic support to hasten group fragmentation, as transnational ethnic communities can transmit economic resources to a selected number of factions and can give them the opportunity to mobilise against the central leadership or competing factions.

In the case studied, the KNU fragmentation in 1995 and 2012, there has been partial empirical evidence for the theoretical expectations. This dissertation uncovered the presence of main two mechanisms fuelling the KNU's fragmentation: the state counter-insurgency strategy and transnational support. First, the state counter-insurgency strategies have triggered rebel group's fragmentation when the state is able to either co-opt one of the rebel group's faction or selectively accommodate the demands of one of the group's faction. In 1995, the KNU was divided along religious lines (Smith 1999, Thawnghmung 2008, Kenny 2010, South 2011, Dukalskis 2015). Playing on these divisions, the government opened negotiations with the Buddhist faction of the KNU with whom it concluded a ceasefire agreement (Kenny 2010). The Buddhist faction created its own group, switched sides, and started fighting against the KNU (Fong 2008a). The Buddhist faction became a proxy army of the Tatmadaw, the Burmese Army, confirming the success of the co-optation strategy. In 2012, the

mechanism through which the Tatmadaw triggered the fragmentation of the KNU manifested slightly differently. Existing divisions existed within the KNU about the strategy to follow in challenging the state; one faction, the politics first faction, favoured a political agreement as a prerequisite to ceasefire agreement; while the development first favoured a ceasefire agreement which could bring development projects and economic prosperity to the Karen state (Jolliffe 2016). When the government renewed offers for ceasefire negotiations in 2011, the development first faction saw the opportunity to further its goals and interests and started negotiations (Brenner 2018). By negotiating ceasefire agreements with the development first faction, the government broadened the fragmentation of the KNU so that organisational decisions taken by the faction in power were not enforced among the opposing faction.

The empirical analysis has shown that the state triggered the fragmentation of the KNU by tapping into existing group divisions which were fuelled by the transnational communities. The analysis of the Karen transnational communities' support has shown that transnational Karen communities are rebel social bases, which, through their support, can influence rebel internal politics through two slightly different processes. First, transnational communities, by providing support to one faction rather than other, can heighten grievances. These grievances can be politicised creating a milieu conducive to faction rivalry with a spiral of outbidding of extreme positions and demands. The access to refugee camps by Christian KNU members meant that Christian and Buddhist had a different experience of the conflict (Smith 1999, Fong 2008a, Kenny 2010, South 2011). The Christian members had access to better education, health, and social services (Horstmann 2010, 2011a, Decobert 2015). The Karen refugee camps have acted as advocacy entities of the Christian leadership and strengthened its political power and authority (Lee 2012, Terpstra and Frerks 2017). These bolstered the Buddhist faction who not only felt the Christian members of the KNU had a greater access to material resources, but were undermining the claims of the Buddhist members of the KNU(Fong 2008a). These grievances were used by the political entrepreneur, U Thuzana, a Buddhist monk, who was able to round up the KNU Buddhist soldiers who deplored the benefits that the Christian faction of the KNU received. This

led to a mutiny against the Christian leadership and foundation of the splinter group, the DKBA. By supporting the Christian faction of the KNU, the Karen refugees have fuelled competition between the Christian and the Buddhist factions of the KNU for political power.

The second mechanism observed through which transnational communities can affect the rebel group's cohesion or lack thereof is by altering factions' strategies. Rebel group factions who share ties with transnational communities will alter their strategies to meet their demands and needs to secure their support. However, the demands of transnational social base may not overlap with the demands of other factions' social bases. Therefore, the faction modelling its strategy to transnational demands may alienate other factions who are driven by their own social bases' demands. The Karen refugees and the Karen diaspora, by acting as an active rebel social bases, have fuelled in-group competition between incumbent and aspiring leaders, triggering the fragmentation of the KNU (Jolliffe 2016, Brenner 2018). The 2010 KNU leadership, led by the politics first faction, in particular P'doh Naw Zipporah Sein, has encouraged and relied on the Karen transnational communities' support activities to find a settlement to the conflict, enhancing the weight of the Karen transnational communities in KNU politics. By relying on the support of the Karen transnational communities, the KNU leadership has favoured the demands of the Karen transnational constituencies at the expense of local constituencies. By emphasising the political issues important to the Karen diaspora, the 2010 KNU leadership increased the polarisation between two existing factions of the KNU who diverged on the strategies of resistance to pursue. The KNU leaders in power have adopted a more hard-line position on the strategies of resistance as advocated by transnational Karen groups, looking to secure political rights as a premise to any peace deals with the Myanmar Government. This strategy has alienated an opposing faction, who advocated reaching a quick peace deal which would allow the KNU to be an active actor in development projects in the Karen state. Furthermore, the heightened divergence of factions towards more ideological extremes has led each faction to conduct outbidding activities and resulted in the fragmentation of the KNU. While the leaders in power, backed by the Karen

transnational communities, stood by their politics first position, the opposing development first faction opened unauthorised ceasefire negotiations with the Myanmar Government.

In sum, the case studied revealed that transnational Karen communities' political support has favoured a dynamic of polarisation which fuelled the KNU's fragmentation. Polarisation refers to the politicisation of difference by elites or political parties. Elites or political parties attempt to outdo each other in a spiral of extreme bids (Brubaker 1996, Chandra *et al.* 2005, Devotta 2005, Gagnon 2008, Adamson 2013). The polarisation of the rebel group's politics begins when elites start focusing on the private incentives and those of their social bases, rather than on the common goal. They do so when they are highly embedded in their social bases and they draw more legitimacy from their local constituencies than from the central power (Boyle 2009). The inability of the rebel institutions to prevent self-seeking attitudes and ensure the accountability of the rebel factions to be loyal to the common goal fuels sectarian outbidding (Staniland 2014). In 1995, the Karen refugees mainly provided support to the Christian leadership, increasing their international legitimacy, diffusing their version of the Karen pan-nationalisms, and allowing them to take refuge in the refugee camps. The refugee support combined with the inability of the KNU institutions to effectively redistribute wealth gained from flourishing trade, created grievances in the Karen Buddhist communities. These grievances were politicised by the Buddhist elite, namely U Thuzana, creating a milieu conducive to faction rivalry. Therefore, the Buddhist leader engaged in a spiral of outbidding assuming extreme positions and demands. Similarly, in 2012, the Karen transnational communities favoured outbidding and the polarisation of the KNU politics. After the fall of Mannerplaw, each KNU Brigade became more decentralised, allowing them to develop demands and interests embedded in their social bases. The faction in power was embedded in the transnational communities, and continuously looking to secure their support (Boucek 2009). In the absence of institutions that can ensure the primacy of collective goals, the faction in power's incentive was to meet the demands of transnational communities rather than ensure intra-group cohesion.

Furthermore, the case study has revealed that fragmentation does not always lead to side-switching or infighting. Side-switching occurs when the incentives to join the enemy surpass the incentives from staying in the group. For the rebel factions, switching sides may be beneficial when they gain material recompense for their support to the government - increasing their military capabilities - but do not have to actually disarm or completely surrender to the government, and if the deal is broken, the faction can return to the insurgency (Stedman and Tanner 2004, Cunningham 2006, Driscoll 2012, Otto 2018). However, when the incentives to switch sides do not surpass the incentives of staying united, splits and infighting are unlikely to occur. In the case of the KNU, infighting occurred in 1995. The Burmese Government co-opted the Buddhist faction of the KNU, promising the governance of the Karen state to them if they helped "to destroy the KNU" (South 2008). U Thuzana created a splinter group with 1,000 to 2,000 KNLA soldiers, named the Democratic Buddhist Karen Army, whose stated goal was to reach peace at the expense of the KNU. This split did not occur in 2012. While the group was fragmented, as the organisational decision could not be enforced across the group, and each faction pursued its own strategy of war, the group did not formalise a split. Incentives to stay united were stronger than those to split.

10.2.2. Rebel groups' strategies

The theoretical framework further assumed that fragmentation of a rebel group could lead to an increase of violence against civilians, as different factions would resort to violence against civilians as a strategy to establish their political relevance. The empirical analysis of the Karen refugees and diasporas' influence on the KNU's fragmentation in 1995 and 2012 has shown partial evidence supporting these theoretical expectations of fragmentation leading to an increase of violence against civilians. In the case of the Karen refugee support in 1995, the fragmentation of the KNU induced a shift in the type of activities the KNU conducted. Following the fragmentation of the KNU, in 1995, both factions resorted to guerrilla warfare which increased the violence against civilians. the empirical analysis has shown that infighting leads to an increase of violence against civilians through two

mechanisms: competition for civilian support and exploitation of civilians for the groups' survival. First, in a logic of competition for civilian support and 'draining the sea' of their rival (c.f Valentino *et al.* 2004, Balcells 2010, Wood and Kathman 2015), the DKBA have forcibly relocated civilians on KNU areas to territory under their control. The DKBA has not only relocated civilians in KNU areas in Myanmar/Burma but has also attacked the Karen refugee camps at the Thai-Burmese border to force refugees back into Myanmar/Burma in territories under the Burmese/Myanmar Government or DKBA's control (Human Rights Watch 1995, KHRG 1998a, 2010, South 2011). The DKBA, who split from the KNU, partly resorted to violence against civilians to coerce their support and drain the KNU's support base. This coercive strategy was designed to inflict costs on the KNU in the effort to defeat it. The KNU targeted civilians through a different mechanism. The KNU did not resort to violence against civilians in a logic of competition for civilian support, as they already benefited from the Karen civilians' support. The KNU had an inclusive organisational structure which fostered strong ties with the local population. The KNU acted as a de facto government in the areas they controlled in a village-based electoral organisation (Thawnghmung 2008, South 2011). Within each village, a committee and a village head are elected. The village leaders within a township elect a township chairman, who selects the district committee. Every four years, the seven district committees (Thaton, Toungoo, Nyaglebin, Mergui-Tavoy, Duplaya, Pa-an, and Papun) send delegates to the Central Standing Committee to nominate the leaders of the KNU, including the president and vice president. Such democratic system fosters connections between civilians and the KNU. Furthermore, the KNU acts as a de facto government by providing public welfare, such as a police force, legal mechanisms, and health and education systems in the areas they control. The wide provision of public goods by the KNU and its inclusive regime ensure the loyalty of the local population through non-violent means (Jolliffe 2016). The KNU perceives the local population as a support base rather than "complicit civilians" (Goodwin 2006). Therefore, the violence against civilians is used as collateral damage of guerrilla warfare. The case of the KNU shows that rebel groups' factions are more likely to resort to violence against civilians in a logic of competition for civilian support or draining the sea of the opposing faction (e.g. Valentino

et al. 2004), when they perceive a lack of popular support. When rebel groups have an inclusive organisational structure and have been able to ensure civilians' support through non-violent means, they do not have an incentive to engage in violent competition for civilian support. This confirms Humphrey and Weinstein (2006)'s hypothesis stating that lower levels of violence against civilians should be apparent in territories where the rebel group has ties with the communities

In 2012, however, the fragmentation of the KNU did not conform to the theoretical expectations. The fragmentation of the KNU led to both factions conducting non-violent strategies. The development first faction engaged in conventional politics by entering into peace talks with the government. When the development first KNU leaders signed a ceasefire, they aimed to convert themselves into conventional political actors. Such conversion would allow them to gain political power to be perceived as legitimate political actors who could govern the Karen state when a peace deal was signed. The opposing faction, the politics first faction, rejected the ceasefire signed by the KNU development first leaders and refused to be connected to negotiations with the Myanmar Government. Thus, they continue to manifest their opposition to the Myanmar Government and the development first faction through non-violent forms of protest. The comparison with the shift in strategies after the 1995 and 2012 fragmentation suggests that the fragmentation of a rebel group does not necessarily result in factions conducting violence against civilians. Rather it is the co-optation of a rebel faction, and the split of a rebel group, rather than its sole fragmentation; which is linked with infighting and an increase of violence against civilians.

10.3. The transnational Karen communities' mobilisation

This research aimed to analyse the influence of transnational communities on rebel groups' fragmentation and war strategies. To do so, this research sought to first understand what drives transnational communities to become involved in the homeland conflict. It aimed to show that support from transnational communities is not a given and that individuals mobilise when they are part of a social network that is able to socialise them to a collective goal. Social networks, in particular

trust networks (Tilly 2007), enable the socialisation of transnational ethnic communities to the rebel group's collective goals as their ties enable the diffusion of the rebel group's frames of the conflict. The diffusion of frames is key to understand the support transnational ethnic communities provide to their ethnic kin because framing is the process through which transnational ethnic communities accept the threats to which the rebel group is exposed (Benford and Snow 2000). By assigning value to the goals of rebellion, the transnational communities are more likely to mobilise for their rebelling kin.

As expected by the theoretical framework, the analysis of the Karen transnational communities has revealed that the presence of ties between the transnational communities and the KNU has allowed the diffusion of information on the KNU's activities, which have incentivised the transnational Karen communities to mobilise and provide support to their rebelling kin. These transnational ties transform the transnational communities into a rebel group's social base upon which rebel leaders can draw political and material resources (Staniland 2014). In instances in which such ties were inexistent or disrupted, mechanisms of diffusion and transnational mobilisation did not occur. This creates a milieu conducive to polarised attitudes and group fragmentation.

As expected by the theoretical framework, the presence of a strong network connecting the transnational communities and the ethnic rebel group has in the three embedded cases been necessary for the diffusion of mobilising frames and transnational mobilisation. In the Karen refugees and Karen diaspora cases, the transnational communities have built strong networks with the KNU by creating transnational organisations which formed institutional ties with the KNU. Karen refugee or diasporic organisations were built as a relay of the KNU among the Karen diaspora and refugees. In contrast, the Karen refugee and diaspora communities have not built similar ties with other Karen rebel groups. Before 1995, the fleeing experience did not inflate the connections between the KNU and its previous constituents. As it helped the Karen civilians flee and settle on the Thai-Myanmar/Burma border, the KNU created refugee institutions that they could oversee, contributing to the institutionalisation of ties between the KNU and the refugees. The KNU assisted the creation of

camp management structures, combining representative systems and community-based administration, which were consistent with the governance structures the KNU put in place in its controlled areas in the Karen state (Bowles 1998, Horstmann 2011a, McConnachie 2014, Sharples 2015). The KNU was, until 2005, declared the head organisation of the Karen refugee camps' organisations (McConnachie 2014). This institutional network linking the refugees and the KNU was supplemented by religious organisations. Christian organisations acted as liaison points between the KNU and the refugee population. With the participation of the KNU in the creation of the refugee camps, institutional channels of diffusion between the refugee camps and the KNU were established (Horstmann 2011a). The trans-border ties between the KNU and the Karen refugees sustained by frequent meetings, allowed the diffusion of information from one group to another. Ties have diffused the KNU's frames of the conflict, portraying a necessary antagonism between the Karen and Burman and the existence of a united Karen nation, across state borders. Comparing the refugee and KNU narratives has shown that the refugees have, despite the distance to the conflict zone, adopted and reproduced the KNU discourses claiming the irreconcilable opposition between the KNU and the Burman.

The networks linking Karen refugees and the KNU changed from 1999, when international organisations, notably the UNHCR, opened field offices along the Thai-Burmese border to manage the refugee camps (Decobert 2015). The arrival of external actors in the camps forced the Karen refugee organisations to frame themselves as humanitarian, community-based organisations whose role is to record human rights violations and provide humanitarian relief to the displaced Karen population (Sharples 2015). Although the Karen refugee organisations have rebranded themselves as apolitical entities, the KNU's influence over the refugee organisational processes has been maintained. Institutional ties between the Karen refugees and the KNU have remained as the Karen refugee elite is in frequent contact with the KNU leadership, allowing the KNU to overtly overview the management of the camps. Nevertheless, the networks between the Karen refugee organisations and the KNU have created deep loyalties which favoured the diffusion of information. However, if Karen refugees show

awareness of the KNU's activities, the diffusion mechanisms have not led to a frame alignment. The Karen refugees have, through their interactions with external actors, developed their own frames of the conflict. The Karen refugees have developed their own hybrid identity which connects narratives on the Karen pan-nationalism with discourses on human rights protection, usually diffused by humanitarian organisations (Sharples 2012, 2015). The reshaping of the Karen refugee frames has meant that the Karen refugee organisations have not necessarily provided direct or open support to the KNU, through fundraising, or advocacy campaigns for the KNU' cause; rather the Karen refugee organisations have acted as grassroots which can ensure the checks and balances on the KNU's activities. By guaranteeing the conformity of the KNU's activities with international norms, the Karen refugees have been able to raise the KNU international legitimacy. In addition, they have provided cross-border humanitarian aid complementing the KNU's provision of public goods, sustaining the KNU's internal legitimacy.

Similarly, the Karen diasporic communities are conflict-generated diaspora that were formed following the resettlement programmes initiated in the refugee camps in 2005 by the UNHCR. The selection process for resettlement resulted in the formation of Karen diasporic communities composed of active members of Karen refugee grassroots groups who were previously involved in KNU politics. Upon resettlement, the ties between the newly formed Karen diasporic communities and the KNU did not dissolve. The Karen diasporic communities have recreated structures and organisations through which they were able to sustain contact with the KNU. Such institutions have allowed regular contacts between the Karen diaspora, the Karen refugees and the KNU, creating a relational triad. The contact between the Karen diaspora members, the Karen refugee organisations and the KNU has created a tripartite relational structure which can channel diffusion. Similarly, for the refugees, although the diffusion of information remains between the KNU and the diaspora, the diaspora's frames have been modelled by the greater exposure to international norms. The mobilising frames that Karen diaspora built are the result of different claims diffused by different actors through various sets of networks in which the Karen diaspora actors are embedded.

The social networks between the KNU and transnational Karen communities have allowed the diffusion of information. In 1995, the Karen refugees faithfully replicated the KNU frames highlighting the necessary antagonism with the Burman, and the need to protect a unified Karen nation. In 2012, the transnational Karen communities have systematically acknowledged the KNU's activities. However, as they interact with external actors, they have developed a hybrid identity. Such changes in transnational ethnic identities have been theorised by diaspora scholars, notably Vertovec (2001b), who argued that displacement brings about deep-rooted changes in cultural and identity patterns, awakening dual and hybrid identities. The narratives of refugee grassroots are not only built with the information diffused by the KNU, but also by external actors with whom they interact regularly. Furthermore, as expected by the theoretical framework, the comparison of the three cases of transnational Karen communities reveals that the presence of institutional ties between transnational communities and a rebel group are a necessity to provide support to the rebel group. The Karen refugees and diaspora share ties with the KNU, and have contributed to further their cause, through lobbying, advocacy activities, remittances, or humanitarian assistance. In contrast, the Karen transnational communities do not share ties of a similar strength with other Karen rebel group nor provide them with support. For instance, there is no evidence of institutional ties formed between the DKBA and the transnational Karen communities. As a result, there is only a minority of refugees sharing their frame of the conflict and no large-scale transnational support to the DKBA.

However, the analysis of the ties and diffusion of the KNU's mobilising frames in the three transnational Karen communities has shown the need to redefine the nature of the networks which are the base for the diffusion of frames. The theoretical framework conceptualised trust networks which comprise religious communities, political conspiracies, or kinship groups (Tilly 2007, p. 5), which would allow the diffusion of information. According to Tilly (2007), people rely on those networks to carry out crucial enterprises such as political commitment. In the case of the Karen transnational communities, the diffusion of mobilising frames from the KNU has relied undoubtedly on personal ties (through family or friends). However, the ties between family members cab distended, as access to

communication means is difficult in the Karen state. Therefore, transmission of information has taken place between organisations which have pooled resources to diffuse information. These political elite ties (Bakke 2015) comprise direct elite ties between organisations' leaders and institutional channels, which systematise the transmission of information. Karen refugee and diasporic organisations' leaders are often in contact with KNU officials (Thawnghmung and Cho 2013). Most refugee and diasporic leaders have personal ties with KNU officials, either because they have family and friendship ties, or because they are involved in the same community, enabling frequent and regular interactions and the diffusion of the KNU's mobilising frames. The diffusion of the KNU's frames has also relied on the creation of institutional channels connecting the KNU to the transnational Karen communities' elite. The Karen refugee and diasporic transnational communities have created representative organisations which have put in place systematic processes to transmit information. For instance, the Karen refugee and diasporic organisations participate annually in the Karen Unity Seminar, where they can keep current on the Karen state situation. Similarly, by establishing KNU delegations under the KNU foreign ministry in countries where there are Karen diasporic communities, the KNU has ensured the regular transmission of information on the situation in the Karen state. The creation of institutional ties linking the KNU and the transnational Karen organisations has enabled the durability of the diffusion of information. However, this form of diffusion may be unsystematic as the whole diffusion process depends on a few individuals and can therefore easily be disturbed. When in the aftermath of the 2012 KNU fragmentation, the development first faction leaders cut ties with the Karen transnational communities, channels of diffusion of information were affected. The Karen transnational communities were less informed on the KNU activities, and their mobilisation weakened.

The analysis of the transnational Karen refugee and diasporic communities' mobilising frames has also uncovered that mobilising frames are multi-dimensional. The transnational Karen communities have framed the KNU rebellion differently depending on their audience to ensure maximum resonance and support. In the literature on framing processes, collective frames are defined as the

means through which social movement participants negotiate a shared understanding of a condition they define as problematic to mobilise supporters and public opinion (Benford and Snow 2000, Polletta and Ho 2006, Autesserre 2009b). This definition is based on Goffman's work (1983), wherein he argues that frames organise and guide action by allowing individuals to "locate, perceive, identify and label" events and guide action (Snow *et al*. 1986, p. 464). The setting up of mobilising frames is the result of the diagnostic (identification of a problem), prognostic (suggestion of solutions) and motivational (rationale for action) framing tasks (Benford and Snow 2000). The adoption of a mobilising frame occurs when there is frame alignment between the original individuals' frames and the social movement's frame, producing the frame resonance among participants. There are different frame alignment processes (frame bridging, frame enlargement, frame amplification, frame extension, frame transformation) that can be used by movements to enlarge the recruitment of potential adherents. This literature has then considered the construction of collective frames principally with regards to the recruitment of participants. Nevertheless, the case of the Karen transnational communities has shown that the construction of frames is the result of diffusion of frames from different actors with which the rebel group shares ties. The adoption of a collective frame is not necessarily the result of top-down alignment processes to attract additional potential recruits. It has shown that a collective frame is built through a horizontal process, by assembling frames diffused by the different actors to which the group is tied to. If a rebel group is embedded in a network of ties with external actors, it will either ideationally, through emulation, learning mechanisms or strategically through coercion and competition mechanisms, adopt the external frames to ensure external actors' support. In other words, the master mobilising frame adopted by the transnational Karen communities is an assembly of different frames diffused from the KNU as well as from the international actors (Sharples 2015, 2016). Before the arrival of international actors in the refugee camps, the Karen refugee organisations directly endorsed the KNU, arguing the illegitimacy of the Burmese/Myanmar Government's policies and the need for an autonomous Karen state. This frame, which ensured the Karen refugees' mobilisation to provide support, was diffused by the KNU through

the networks of ties linking it to refugee organisations. After 1994, with the arrival of international humanitarian agencies in the refugee camps, the Karen refugee organisations strategically detached themselves from the KNU to secure further international funding and support. Similarly, the Karen diaspora filtered its support to the KNU through the lens of human rights and democracy. This frame was added to align and adapt their frames with the audience in western countries to gain further international support (McConnachie 2012, Sharples 2015). Indeed, the Karen diasporic activists do not use the framing in terms of human rights and democracy to the same extent when they are targeting the Karen population in Myanmar/Burma. Therefore, the mobilising frames adopted by transnational Karen communities are the result of the addition of multiple frames to secure the support of different actors to which they are tied, including international organisations. This shows the importance of a system of networks and diffusion processes in building frames and mobilising transnational communities, which could be more extensively analysed in future research. In addition, the mobilising frames will affect the type of support transnational groups can provide. A direct endorsement of the KNU and a perfect alignment of frames will allow the Karen transnational communities to provide direct economic and political support to the KNU. In contrast, the development of a 'hybrid transnational identity' (Vertovec 2001) which combines elements of different frames diffused by the actors in which the transnational Karen community is embedded, resulted in support to the KNU reshaped as humanitarian assistance, or advocacy to western states.

10.4. Generalising the results of the study

The Karen case presents some limitations which call for caution in generalising the results of the study. The Karen case presents particular characteristics and a typical case in the study of refugee camps which limits the generalisation of the mechanisms conceptualised in the theoretical framework. The ties between refugees and rebel groups have been analysed often in the literature through the prism of refugee militarisation, understood as part of an ongoing conflict which has spilled across borders into neighbouring states (Barber 1997, Lischer 2006, Jacobsen 2012, McConnachie

2012). Refugee militarisation has been a concern for the UNHCR who has reviewed refugee violence as a cause of conflict and prevention of durable peace in Africa (UNHCR 2006). The UNHCR has identified socio-economic factors explaining why refugees provide support for violence in their home country; proximity to the border, poor living conditions, and larger refugee populations explain why refugees provide violent cross-border support. Alternatively, Lischer (2006) suggests that the political context of the refugee crisis can explain refugee militarisation. She has shown that the origin of the refugee crisis, the policy of the receiving state and the aid provided by humanitarian agencies may influence whether refugees can organise themselves politically to provide violent support to rebel groups (Lischer 2006). It is possible to distinguish between several categories of refugees according to their cause of displacement and the level of political organisation. *Situational refugees* flee their homes to escape difficult conditions brought by civil war and are willing to return home as soon as the conditions are stabilised. Such refugees are not likely to have ties to any particular political organisation. *Persecuted refugees* escape the homeland as they are the direct target of the persecution and oppression, rather than the degraded conditions. As they are targeted because of a perceived group's ethnic, religious or political identity, this type of refugee is likely to pledge allegiance to political organisations defending their claimed group identity. The third type of refugee is a *state in exile*, where rebel leaders organise the refugee crisis as a strategy to avoid defeat in civil war.

According to Lischer (2006), the persecuted refugee and state in exile are the two types of refugees who are likely to provide support to a rebel group to maintain their war effort. These two types of refugees ought to seek credible protection guarantees or a military and political victory to return to their country. They are also more likely to create strong political organisations which enable their mobilisation (Lischer 2006). Therefore, refugee support to a rebel group depends on the cause of displacement. In the Karen case, the first Karen refugees were displaced due to their affiliation to the KNU or their presence in KNU territory. The first Karen settlements in Thailand were controlled by the KNU, who used the refugee camps as sanctuaries. Hence, the first Karen refugees were, according to Lischer's classification (2006), *persecuted refugees* who had strong ties with the KNU. Simultaneously,

the policy of the Thai government towards Karen refugees allowed the Karen refugees' support to the KNU. The policy of the Thai state, until 2005 and the arrival of international organisations in the refugee camps, had been to turn a blind eye to the Karen refugee camps and their strong ties to the KNU. The KNU became an ally to the Thai state against the Communist threat. The KNU, with its anti-Communist leaders, was an indispensable ally in assisting the Thai government's attempt to halt the Communist advance at its border regions (Smith 1999, Interview 4). Therefore, Thailand maintained cross-border trade with the KNU, which was a main source of income for the KNU to finance the struggle and the KNU leaders remained on close personal terms with senior Thai intelligence, police and army officers. Karen were often treated in Thai hospitals and the KNU was able to access Thailand. In sum, in the Karen case the host state did not have the willingness to prevent the refugees to maintain strong ties with the rebel groups. Therefore, the Karen refugees represent a type of refugee able to maintain strong ties with a rebel group, corroborating Lischer's (2006) argument. This also means that the Karen refugees are a particular case who have ties with a rebel group, and the mechanisms explaining their support to a rebel group are only valid to cases of *persecuted refugees* or *state in exile*, and cannot be generalised to other types of refugees, in particular *situational refugees.* In fact, the Karen refugee camps have, since the mid-2000s, welcomed more *situational refugees* who do not actively support the KNU, in turn diluting the role of Karen refugee camps as sanctuaries of the KNU. Furthermore, Lischer's (2006) argument could be expanded to the Karen diaspora; the Karen diasporic communities were generated from the Karen refugee camps and mainly represented *persecuted refugees* who maintained strong ties with the KNU. In other cases, where the diasporic communities are not generated by targeted counterinsurgencies but rather flee due to the difficult living conditions, the mechanisms leading to supporting a rebel group uncovered in the case study may not be valid.

Despite these limitations, the results of this research could be replicated and tested in other case studies, notably in the case of the Irish Republican Army (IRA). The conflict in Northern Ireland involves two main ethno-national groups, unionists who are the majority Protestant community and who

adhere to a British identity, and minority of Irish nationalist, who are in majority Catholic and wish to leave the United Kingdom and reunite with the rest of Ireland. A violent political conflict emerged in the late 1960s as a civil rights movement came into confrontation with the unionist government and spiralled into sectarian community conflict between nationalists and unionists. A low intensity conflict took place from 1969 to 1994, between republicans and unionists on the one hand, and republicans and the British state on the other, and displayed different conflict strategies. The IRA, the armed organisation dedicated to Irish republicanism, is one of the most extensively studied armed organisations, and few studies have highlighted that it has been prone to fragmentation notably in 1969, 1986, 1997 (Kenny 2010). Kenny (2010) has shown that the fragmentation of the IRA was driven by conflicts over the relative merits of different strategies. In addition, scholars have recorded the involvement of Irish diaspora (Irish-American in particular) in the conflict, highlighting that they have been a critical partner for the IRA to engage in peace processes (Cochrane *et al.* 2009). Hence, the case of the Northern Ireland displays characteristics similar to the case of the KNU: different conflict strategies, instances of fragmentation, and involvement of diasporic communities. Future research could then investigate the presence of the mechanisms uncovered in this thesis in the case of the IRA.

10.5. Conclusion

The discussion of the findings above highlights a number of contributions to our understanding of the transnational dimension of civil conflict that this dissertation has aimed to make. The main contribution of this dissertation has been to analyse the transnational dimensions of civil conflict through a focus on causal mechanisms. Analysing transnational mechanisms presents a number of challenges as these mechanisms are often covert and require engaging in a rigorous process tracing as a method that can help uncover key invisible mechanisms at work in a civil conflict. By using this method, this dissertation has shown that central to our understanding of civil conflict is the in-group dynamics of rebel groups. The cohesion (or lack thereof) is, according to this research's findings, a key factor shaping the rebel groups' strategies. A rebel group is not a unitary actor and any behaviour

it displays can only be fully understood by analysing how each sub-group within a group interacts with each other. The present study has demonstrated the relevance of the flourishing literature on the "organisational mediation" (Pearlman 2011) and of the theory of civil conflict which have emphasised the rebel group's structure to apprehend civil conflict dynamics. Such an approach has shown that the inclusion of different stakeholders and constituencies in the rebellion is necessary for a thorough understanding of conflict.

Furthermore, if the fragmentation of a rebel group is key in understanding it strategies, one may next focus on the causes of such fragmentation. This dissertation has highlighted two actors that can influence the fragmentation of a rebel group: the state and transnational ethnic communities. Both of these actors can concurrently affect the rebel group's cohesion (or lack thereof). The state can facilitate the rebel group's fragmentation through mechanisms of co-optation, providing incentives to dissatisfied sub-groups to challenge their leadership. Meanwhile, the transnational ethnic communities (i.e. diasporas and refugees) can fuel the rebel group's fragmentation through a process of increased divergence of political attitudes towards ideological extremes. The research has shown that transnational Karen communities have tended to provide support to one faction more than others. As a result, transnational communities became social bases for the rebel group's sub-groups upon which the sub-groups rely to draw their political and material resources. Through this support, transnational Karen communities have either fuelled grievances of rival factions, who do not get equal support, or they have enabled their faction to adopt more extreme positions. When institutions are not able to ensure the primacy of collective goals, each faction's incentive is to meet the demands of the local constituencies their embedded in rather than ensure intra-group cohesion. This creates a milieu conducive to polarised attitudes and a spiral of extreme bids, which leads to group fragmentation.

Furthermore, this dissertation has made a theoretical contribution in understanding why and when transnational communities become relevant in a conflict. The research has shown that the situation of the Karen transnational communities, notably their ties with the rebel group and their relationship

with the host state, has influenced the support they provide to the KNU. The ties with the rebel groups allow the diffusion of information on the rebel activities and the frames of the conflict, enabling the mobilisation of the transnational community. In addition, the relations of the transnational Karen communities with the host state also shapes their frames and models the type of support they deemed acceptable. This supports literature on diffusion in civil conflict context which has shown that diffusion of new frames, tactics, or resources have participated in changes in a rebel group (Strang and Meyer 1993, True and Mintrom 2001, Bakke 2014, Cunningham *et al.* 2016). This research has uncovered that a key condition for the diffusion mechanisms is the existence of networks linking both groups. Networks, in particular, institutionalised channels, are the support for diffusion of the rebel group's frames of the conflict and contribute to the mobilisation of transnational ethnic communities.

Such findings may have some policy relevance. International organisations tend to see such embeddedness as threatening, as it can militarise refugees and spread conflict (Terry 2002, Lischer 2006, McConnachie 2014, McConnachie 2012). The UNHCR has claimed that one of the foremost challenges to protect refugees has been that it has been difficult to ensure the security of the refugees who are confronted to sexual and gender-based violence or recruitment (UNHCR 2006). Yet, they must ensure the security of the refugees. The UNHCR policy has been to keep rebel groups away from the refugee camps by highlighting the importance of delineating combatant from civilian populations. Nevertheless, the case of the Karen refugee camps on the Thai-Myanmar/Burma border shows that in some cases, there is no clear separation between rebel groups and refugee populations. Therefore, in some contexts, it is possible to consider rebel groups as a partner in the protection of the refugees rather than a threat. Differentiating between rebel groups based on their treatment of refugees may allow building more efficiently a comprehensive refugee protection policy while ensuring the transparency and accountability of refugee-based organisations.

A second policy implication which can be drawn from this study is that the inclusion of transnational communities in the peace negotiations might be key for the sustainability of a peace treaty. When groups who partake in the conflict are left-out from the peace process, the longevity of

peace agreement can be threatened, as peace-spoilers are arise (Stedman 1997, Nilsson 2008). Therefore, it may be key for policy-practitioners to include all conflict parties, including transnational communities when they provide support to rebel groups. Transnational communities could be key to maintain or enforce peace.

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