peace building, but their perspectives on how to achieve and sustain peace are ignored.  

CHAPTER 10

Counting the Days
The Kachin Ceasefire and the Emergence of a New Graphic Medium

Helen Mears

Despite the emphasis given to episodes of violence in Burma by political commentators, conflict should not be considered the country's endemic condition, nor is violent conflict the only form of resistance available to those opposed to the country's military government. Indeed, in the context of Burma's ethnic politics, a focus on open conflict can serve to mask the long existence and recent strengthening of civil society in many of Burma's ethnic borderlands. Community networks and other forms of social organisation offer possibilities both for undermining the hegemonic claims of the authority of the military state, as well as providing spaces for reconciliation in divided societies.

The 1994 ceasefire agreement between the Tatmadaw and the KIO frustrated the hopes of Kachin people for meaningful participation in a national political dialogue by instituting a 'not-quite-peace' before a clear political framework had been agreed. However, in providing respite from thirty years of conflict, the ceasefire also established the conditions for an 'undeniable revival in social mobility and energy' according to Martin Smith, earlier in this volume. Nonetheless, the

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backdrop remained extremely challenging. Kachin State continued to lack adequate infrastructure and, alongside the extensive and disruptive natural resource extraction driven ultimately by the interests of the Burmese government, as so vividly described by Kevin Woods and Lee Jones, there were continuing and aggressively enforced restrictions on many freedoms. These included longstanding constraints upon travel and association, but they also included control over new areas of urban life that were crucial to a burgeoning civil society in a modern context, such as desktop publishing and the use of communication technologies. However, 'potent change did seem in the air' as Smith notes, and furthermore the peoples of Burma had become adept at finding ways to circumvent official controls during many decades of military government. The developments in IT, communications technology and publishing that emerged when Burma's borders started to open to greater foreign trade created a new situation that local people were quick to exploit in creative ways, despite the ongoing constraints and limitations. The possibility of disrupting, if not transforming, military state rule felt tangible if the opportunities offered by these new media technologies could be harnessed effectively.

Martin Smith's chapter earlier emphasised how significant new spaces of civic interaction developed in the Kachin region following the signing of the 1994 ceasefire, enabling the emergence of a newly strengthened civil society. As noted in many chapters in this volume, the social changes that grew in relation to these spaces have been very important in the years following 1994; they also help to explain the strength of popular resistance to signing a new ceasefire agreement since June 2011 in the absence of substantial assurances that political progress will follow. This chapter will consider the role that a new local print culture had on representations of Kachin ethno-political identity in the post-ceasefire years as an important part of that new civic space. This print culture developed out of urban Kachin settings from 1994 onwards and grew in relation to the changes in digital technologies that started to become available. Looking in particular at how developments in local print technology and desktop publishing quickly led to new opportunities for civil–political interaction in Kachin society reveals a great deal about how Kachin society reconfigured and reshaped its understanding of itself during the years after 1994. Moreover, it did so in ways that were

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Largely beyond the view of mainstream national politicians and yet today these issues continue to influence the political dynamics and outcomes of the region.

In early 2005 I was in Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin State, to attend the annual manau festival held on 10 January, Kachin State Day.1 Ho T'ui-p'ing and others2 have discussed the significance of the cultural politics of the manau festival as a medium that forged new practices of cross-border connectivity in the period after 1994; the print culture that I will describe has also been deeply intertwined with the development of the manau after the ceasefire. In this chapter, however, I explore not the public spectacle but 'the ordinariness of resistance in [Kachin] social life'3 that this print culture enabled. It describes a cultural politics that exists when the manau festival has finished and the participants have returned home.

Calendars and the construction of a visual counter-narrative

Having an interest in 'traditional' Kachin dress in my professional role as a museum curator, on my visit in 2005 I was struck by the widespread appearance of a popular form of printed calendar in which models wearing such modes of dress featured. Although in other contexts such calendars may appear to be ephemeral, cheap and disposable, they served as wall decorations in almost every Kachin home, school, business,
office and shop I visited. While printed calendars are popular across the whole of Burma and amongst different ethnic nationalities, it was apparent that only after 1994, in ceasefire conditions, could calendars of such relatively high quality be produced so readily and become so widespread. In reflecting on this, as well as on the tight governmental restrictions that pertain to the printing and circulation of publications in minority languages as well as in Burmese, I was prompted to reassess this apparently innocuous print medium. I came to realise that these visual representations of Kachin identity provided an important vehicle for ensuring the visibility of popular Kachin nationalist aspirations in a period otherwise marked by an increasing sense of disenfranchisement from the political mainstream, including not only from the Burmese regime but also from the KIO, which was facing heightened critical public scrutiny at this time, as noted by many contributors to this volume.

Printed calendars might seem an insignificant focus for the analysis of ‘community, politics and social change’ in the ceasefire period, which was the focus of the seminar from which this book has been developed. Yet I would argue that their very innocuousness makes them an ideal medium for conveying and maintaining Kachin nationalist sentiments in subtle yet nonetheless politically significant ways, especially in such a highly controlled social environment. Their ubiquity brings to mind Michael Billig’s observations on ‘banal nationalism.’ The ways in which they seem to penetrate the local urban environment in an all-pervasive yet subliminal manner could even be considered a Kachin equivalent to the Burmese government’s national slogans, which at the time appeared on billboards in public spaces across the country, including the urban areas of Kachin State under government control, such as Myitkyina. While the SLORC (later SPDC) used such visual strategies to present its rule as extending to every corner of public space and even into private life, Haynes and Prakash remind us that power is constantly at risk of being ‘fractured’ by the struggles of the subordinate. Perhaps, then, it might be appropriate to consider the visual challenge posed by such calendars as rooted in their ability to exploit a small chink in the façade of state rule by offering a visual counter-narrative to that of the hegemony of the military state.

The calendars provide evidence not only of the possibility of Kachin nationhood but also of the limitations of state rule. We see this in some of the subversive tactics that were effectively deployed to circumvent official restrictions on printing and to ensure wide distribution of such materials, as also discussed in a later chapter by Hkantha Sadan, who describes how student groups in earlier years used similar strategies with their publications. Although the freedom to teach and publish in minority languages had, in theory, been enshrined in law by the 1974 constitution, these freedoms were granted only if they did not ‘offend the laws or the public interest’ (Article 21). Effectively, this meant the virtual disappearance of minority languages in education and the dramatic reduction of publications in minority languages, except in areas under insurgent control. The only exceptions were domestic or religious-based texts, which were approved by censorship boards for circulation in limited numbers. Despite the limited freedom given to religious organisations to produce printed materials, which were assumed to be a-political, sensitivities nonetheless remained. For example, I was informed that if some words appeared on the calendars, such as ‘eternal’, this could ‘cause problems’ in this Buddhist-dominated state. Nonetheless, until 2000, most calendars that were produced for Kachin nationalist consumption tended to be associated with churches and theological organisations.

In principle, all items for publication had to go before a Press Scrutiny Board censorship committee at this time and throughout most of the ceasefire period. This was a process that could take several months and would invariably result in requested amendments as an assertion of power and control. However, the printing of 300 ‘draft’ copies of texts was permitted without the Board’s approval and created a loophole that could be exploited. Thus, canny designers added some text to their calendar designs to suggest that the item was one of a limited number of draft copies. Many calendars, therefore, included the English words ‘Limited Circulation’ despite the fact that several thousand copies might

6. In so many little ways, the citizenry are daily reminded of their national place in a world of nations ... a reminding so familiar, so continual, that it is not consciously registered as reminding’ (Michael Billig, Banal Nationalism (London: Sage Publications, 1995), 4.)


be printed. The use of the English language on calendars was also intended to reassure any governmental official encountering them. Being more likely to be able to read English than Jinghpaw, these officials would be able to grasp that it had been produced by a religious organisation, that it was explicitly Christian in emphasis and that it was one of probably less than 300 copies, thereby reducing the risk of incurring penalties, as well as, possibly, providing a safety net for local officials who might not care or be unwilling to pursue legal enforcement in all or most cases where they might consider the matter ‘trivial’ or for which they may prefer to receive a payment. All of these strategies enabled Kachin groups to exploit grey areas in the government system of control. In addition, the arrival of new desktop publishing and digital printing technologies following the loosening of border trade restrictions (see Jones, this volume) enabled the Gestetner copier to be dispensed with while enabling bright, attractive and higher quality publications with visual messages about the condition and aspirations of Kachin society to be circulated widely.

With these chinks in the armour of the censorship system, rapidly exploited, the calendars rapidly became ubiquitous in Kachin public and private spaces. Indeed, their ubiquity in the private domestic sphere also connects them to Laur Kik's discussion in this volume on popular analyses of conflict: they visualise narratives of opposition that are circulated and disseminated widely in ways not easily controlled by external political authorities. These kinds of visual representation not only reflect but also shape and confirm popular analyses of the situation and condition of ‘Kachin society’ in the present; they may also express a sense of collective aspiration. Inevitably, the calendars produced during the ceasefire also reflected many of the frustrations felt by Kachin communities at this time.

The calendars also made visible the changing relationships and interactions between Kachin and Jingpo communities, which developed in new directions during this period; in some cases these multiple discourses combined, feeding into the ‘spectrum’ of cross-border comparisons to which many authors in this volume have referred. For example, a 2005 calendar I collected produced by the Zaiwa Literature and Culture Committee points to an extension of pan-national and pan-ethnic relationships across the Kachin–Yunnan border which, as Ho Ts’ui-P’Ing highlights, has brought a new dimension to pressures for cross-border diplomacy on the Chinese government by local Jingpo elites (Figure 10.1). Like many of the six calendars, produced by the Zaiwa Literature and Culture Committee, consists of a cover page of gloss-printed full-colour paper (500 x 380 mm) backed with four sheets of thin paper printed in red and blue, bound together at the top edge.
Kachin groups, the Zaiwa community straddles national boundaries but, in this case, it also forms a significant population in south-west Yunnan, where it dominates within the Jingpo national minority identity in China. Most Jingpo people are, in fact, Zaiwa. Many Jingpo calendars were also circulated in the Kachin region during these years and they were often published as part of the manau-related activities Ho Ts’ui-P’ing describes; the exchange of such calendars across the border was one of the ways in which the new connections and cross-border comparisons she outlines began to take shape, as people used them to visualise the condition of their cross-border compatriots. Nonetheless, while Kachin calendars were able to evoke these pan-national, pan-ethnic alliances, Kachin people also related them to a ‘local’ Kachin topography. On the cover page of the Zaiwa calendar, for example, a photograph of a young couple in recognisably ‘Zaiwa’ dress has been superimposed onto a background image of a river with forested banks and with a snow-laced mountain range just visible in the distance. The river image was probably taken near Mali Zup, the confluence where the Mali Hka and Nmai Hka meet to form the Irrawaddy, which has become the contested site of the Myitsone Dam. We can see, therefore, that there is a complex interplay of local and cross-border issues in the production and circulation of calendars such as this.

The evocation of places of great emotional importance to Kachin communities that the above calendar also references became a characteristic of many calendars circulated during the ceasefire. Places such as the confluence of the Irrawaddy river or the bum sum shi (‘thirty mountains’) area near Kutkai became common visual tropes in Kachin calendars, and they were also referenced extensively in other popular art forms, including buga shakawm mahkawn ni (‘homeland praising songs’), a Kachin music genre.10 Notably, these environmental tropes appeared at a time when the Burmese government was using the ceasefire agreements to ‘extend its authority and control over the borderlands’ according to Lee Jones, earlier in this volume. Many of these same sites became infamous as locations for highly-contentious government-driven milita-

10 My thanks to Gunther Hkangla for drawing my attention to these songs.

with a thin metal strip with a red cotton loop inserted. Each of the four sheets provides a grid calendar for three months. The calendar was purchased at the Shatapyo manau ground, just outside Myitkyina, Kachin State, on Kachin State Day, 10 January 2003.

local and national levels.13 However, the extent to which it was possible during the ceasefire period to explore the cultural distinctiveness of ‘sub-ethnic identities’ within the broader Kachin ‘super-ethnic category’ was limited. This was because of the risk of political fracture in a setting where the conditions of peace were considered unstable. The tensions between different elements of the Kachin community, particularly those caused by perceptions of Jinghpaw dominance among them, have to some extent been managed internally by the self-conscious adoption of the term Wampawng, as discussed so evocatively by Laur Kilk previously.15 The calendars, in many cases, offered oblique commentary on this issue, often in their use of groups of models photographed together, each in different forms of ‘Kachin’ ethnic dress. Yet this underlying concern about the vulnerabilities of the Kachin to regime-led ‘divide and rule’ tactics meant that any agency, whether Kachin or non-Kachin, that might wish to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the ceasefire to engage with Kachin people in new civic spaces had to be prepared to negotiate the complexity and heightened political sensitivity engendered by debates on Kachin ethnic identity. This was certainly the early lesson that was learnt by my own institution, Brighton Museum & Art Gallery, whose interactions with Kachin communities during the ceasefire will be discussed below in relation to calendar production.

One of the changes brought by the signing of the ceasefire, as noted in Martin Smith’s chapter, was that after many years of relative isolation, it now became possible for civil society groups within the Kachin region to make tentative connections with foreign donors and other organisations. The ceasefire created new opportunities for (limited) international engagements and reconnections, which in turn influenced the development of Kachin civil society during these years. Brighton Museum & Art Gallery’s interactions with Kachin communities developed in this context. While many foreign NGOs and others were directly concerned with social and economic development projects, arguably the interaction of Brighton Museum with Kachin cultural researchers during the mid-late 1990s represented the most significant cultural intervention in the ceasefire setting, of as much relevance to a burgeoning Kachin civil society as any directly social-development oriented involvement by outside agencies at that time.

Writers on nationalism have noted that its effectiveness relies on the appearance of ‘the nation’ as a solid, reified entity that has existed from time immemorial as an apolitical reality that is there regardless.16 For ethnic nationalities in Burma, an additional challenge is to evidence a history that is culturally recognisable, desirable and distinctive from the Burman and Buddhist-centric national historical account. Kachin calendars of this time drew on a number of visual strategies to situate recent manifestations of Kachin nationalism within a longer historical narrative, including through the use of historical images, as is apparent in the Nung Lungmi calendar that will be discussed here. This was a new kind of historical visual capacity, as the quantity and quality of historical visual material available to local communities before the ceasefire was extremely limited.17

The calendar produced by a newly formed Nung Lungmi Cultural Committee in 2002 sought to bring new social recognition to the distinctiveness of the Nung Lungmi as a sub-group of the Kachin (Figures 10.2 and 10.3).18 The 2002 Nung Lungmi Cultural Committee calendar reveals how these tensions between Kachin (sub-)groups could now be

17. This 2002 calendar produced by the Nung Lungmi Cultural Committee is formed of two gloss colour printed sheets (715 x 405 mm). The calendar was acquired in Myitkyina in early 2002 and has been discussed elsewhere by Sadan (Mandy Sadan, ‘Textile Contexts in Kachin State’, in Textiles from Burma, eds. S. Dudley and E. Dell (London: Philip Wilson Publishers with the Green Centre for World Art, 2003), 176. Mandy Sadan, ‘Historical Photography in Kachin State: An Update on the James Green Collection of Photographs’, South Asia: The Journal of
informed through the use of historical materials. Indeed, it was through enabling access to these historical materials that the involvement of Brighton Museum & Art Gallery was manifested. To this end, discussions about the relation of this ‘new’ identity to the identity Kachin as a whole were undertaken; indeed, it could be said that it further enriched representations of and understandings about the historical Kachin cultural environment. However, such an outcome was not inevitable and it was fraught with uncomfortable possibilities that fissure might be created within the Kachin ethno-nationalist movement.

At the heart of this new interaction facilitated by the slight opening up of the region after 1994 was a body of material that is typically referred to as the ‘Green Collection’. This collection, which entered Brighton Museum in 1992 on ‘permanent loan’ from the James Henry Green Charitable Trust, comprised visual and material culture collated by a British man, James Henry Green, who worked in northern Burma in the 1920s. Green was a recruiting officer for the Burma Rifles, as well as an amateur anthropologist. He worked alongside Kachin communities and his collection of 1600 photographs and 230 items of dress and accessories included many that record aspects of Kachin life in the early twentieth century. When the collection came to the museum in 1992, it brought with it the additional benefit of an annual endowment to the museum’s World Art section, which was entrusted with caring for it. Some activities around the Green collection took place in the early years it was with the museum, including a field collecting trip to South West China and small displays of items from the collection in the museum, but these were small factors in the World Art section’s overall work programme. This was also greatly influenced by the fact that in 1992 Burma was felt to be ‘off limits’ for obvious and well-known political reasons.

In 1996, however, a new Keeper of World Art, Elizabeth Dell, took the museum collection off in a new direction; this was only possible because of the signing of the Kachin ceasefire, although this regional orientation to Kachin state was rather more by accident than design in the museum’s planning. Nonetheless, the original desire to engage directly with the Green collection’s ‘source communities’ in Burma was influenced by Dell’s own experiences as an academic working within the highly politicised environment of the University of Witwatersrand (one of the most politicised universities in the country) in a South Africa then subject to international sanctions. The academic boycott in response to Apartheid was felt acutely and with frustration by many South African academics, who were themselves active in the anti-apartheid movement: ‘there was so much happening on the ground in South Africa that international academics couldn’t engage with’. As a doctoral student at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) at the University of London, Dell had also become aware of some existing academic partnerships between individuals in Britain and Burma. Motivated by these experiences and keen to use the Trust’s funding in ways that benefited the Green collection as a collection embedded in Burma directly and not tangentially, in May 1996 Dell reported at the Trust’s annual general meeting that, ‘[w]hile the political situation in Burma makes research interests in the area at best complicated, the Keeper feels that, under advice from a number of specialists in the field, it is possible to pursue research projects within Burma. The subsequent trajectory of these developments with Mandy and Hkanpha Sadan and others has been documented elsewhere, so suffice it to say here that it was the space opened up by the ceasefire that enabled these interactions to take place – and in turn for a large collection of hitherto locally unseen historical visual material to circulate in the Kachin region.

The story of the relationship of Brighton Museum with Kachin communities at this time reflects a particularly complex time in Burmese opposition politics. A set of new choices and dilemmas were posed to the external pro-democracy movement by the ethnic ceasefires,
although as Martin Smith notes in this volume the decision of armed ethnic organisations to engage in dialogue with the military regime often followed that of the NLD and was not counter to it. However, the external pro-democracy movement’s focus on an undifferentiated mass of ‘opposition’ made it seem unnecessary for these groups and their activist networks to have to engage with the fact that opposition was a complex, multi-faceted political movement in Burma, and that ethnic armed groups had their own agendas that did not always map neatly to those of the Burmese pro-democracy movement. The ceasefires, however, caused many activist groups to rethink their approach to issues such as direct engagement and cross-border aid in ways that reflected that all was not black and white.

The Museum’s attempts to collaborate with Kachin cultural historians in Burma through the research activities of Mandy and Khaingha Sadan presented considerable risks: all these individuals are in fact taking a great personal risk in having contact with us at all — it is illegal, after all, to make contact with unapproved foreign organisations. The research was developed carefully so as to utilise the advice and support of grassroots organisations rather than government ones, and, bar some criticism from some parts of the cultural sector which perceived any engagement with Burma as problematic, on the whole the museum, in the UK, was freer to align the work with a pro-democracy position. In 1998 Elizabeth Dell reported to the trustees of the James Henry Green Charitable Trust:

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


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

recognised the communities and even some of the individuals depicted
in these historical photographs. The photographs had become available
to the community as a visual resource through their reproduction in
a museum publication about the Green collection, which was distrib-
uted to organisations and individuals in Myitkyina. The several hundred
‘Green’ photographs reproduced in the publication appear to have been
eagerly appropriated by the Kachin community at large and became a
conspicuous feature of Kachin print media.

Each of the six official Kachin sub-groups – the most commonly
used terms for which are Lashi (Lachik), Rawang, Jinghpaw, Lisu, Azi
(Zaiva) and Maru (Lawngwaw) – has an official cultural commit-
tee which manages the group’s cultural representations, including its
members’ participation at manau festivals and the circumscribed forms
of ‘traditional’ dress associated with the group. The 2002 calendar pro-
duced by the Nung Lungmi Cultural Committee was part of a process
by which this group sought to verify its status as a distinct group within
the Kachin ethnic umbrella, in particular with a view to disambiguating
the Nung-Rawang connection by which in recent years these distinct
communities had been officially hyphenated. The Nung Lungmi group
hoped to do this by evidencing a distinct historical and cultural presence.
This, in turn, reflected the political processes by which groups might
be granted official recognition through evidence of distinct languages,
dress and other cultural forms; it is a practice that has commonalities


29. During my visit to Myitkyina in 2005 I saw Green’s images used in calendars,
in student magazines such as Myitkkyin, a magazine produced by students at
Kachin Theological College (KTC) and, on my return, on web pages produced by
the Kachin Today Group, a US-based Kachin media organisation. In 2011 I also
saw Green’s images reproduced as large graphics at the Shatapru manau festival
ground, flanking stages and forming part of a museum-styled display of heritage
items.

30. For more details on the role and impact of these cultural committees see Sadan,
and the Making of an Ethnic Category’, 63–64. Sadam, Being and Becoming Kachin:
Histories Beyond the State in the Borderworlds of Burma.

31. See Laith, ‘Peace Initiatives among Ethnic Nationalities: The Kachin Case’, 239,
and below [footnote 32] regarding Nung attempts to distinguish themselves from
the Rawang.

32. Mandy Sadan notes how Nung Lungmi attempts to gain official recognition as a
Kachin sub-group have included the creation of a modern ‘traditional’ costume to
represent their group. The woman’s jacket includes silver ai to reflect a common
Kachin identity. The new jacket is a way of incorporating notions of modernity,
development and ethnic unity through dress – all of which are contemporary
political concerns’ (Sadan, ‘Textile Contexts in Kachin State’, 176).

33. Martin Smith, Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity (London: Zed Books,
1999), 35–36.
Figure 10.2: First page of calendar produced by the Nung Lungmi Cultural Committee, 2002, incorporating photographs from the James Henry Green Collection held at Brighton Museum and Art Gallery.

Figure 10.3: Second page of calendar produced by the Nung Lungmi Cultural Committee, 2002, showing couple in modern versions of 'traditional' dress.
to restate the conventional narrative of the Kachin ethno-nationalist movement as a whole, rather than challenging it. It is one of the ways in which the Nung Lungmi Cultural Committee was able to situate their claims for group distinctiveness within a model of Kachin unity that prevailed within the dominant ethno-nationalist discourse, rather than challenging it.

Anthony D. Smith has emphasised the importance of historical materials to recent nationalist endeavours. He notes how nationalists 'make liberal use of elements from the ethnic past [to] ... answer present needs and preoccupations', concluding that, 'The present creates the past in its own image. So modern nationalist intellectuals will freely select, invent and mix traditions in their quest for the imagined political community.' In this case it is a community both distinctively 'Nung' yet also recognisably 'Kachin'.

The 2002 Nung Lungmi Cultural Committee calendar reflects some of the forces operating within and upon the Kachin community, especially in the early ceasefire period. In seeking to progress Nung Lungmi claims for ethnic distinctiveness whilst simultaneously reaffirming a broad Kachin ethno-nationalist identity, the calendar illuminates some of the tensions inherent in the pursuit of greater political autonomy on the basis of ethnic identity. The calendar's use of historical materials also reveals potential new 'spaces' created by new (limited) international engagements and reconnections, many of which would have enduring effects on civil-political life in the Kachin region.

The 2004 Kachin Theological College calendar: exploiting a new graphic medium

As noted earlier, religious organisations were permitted a privileged position within the state's censorship apparatus, but they were not entirely excluded from its attentions. A 2004 calendar produced by Nawng Nang Kachin Theological College in Myitkyina (Figure 10.4) demonstrates some of these issues further. It was produced by a committee of staff and students at the college, popularly referenced as KTC, and designed

34. Ibid. 18–19.
35. The KTC calendar is formed of a gloss-printed full-colour cover page (625 x 370 mm) and a single thin inner page on which the months have been printed in three colours. It is bound at the top by means of a thin metal strip with a white cotton
by ‘Ko Z’ (Zakhung Hkawng Gyiung), a Yangon-based Kachin graphic designer and artist responsible for a significant percentage of all print media produced by the Kachin community in and outside Burma. Images and text for the calendar were assembled by the KTC committee, a representative of which then delivered them to Ko Z. Concerns about official interceptions of the material meant that the postal system had to be avoided so the representative would wait to view proofs and then courier the printed calendars back to their organisation in Nawng Nang, Myitkyina, a two-day journey.

The calendar is typical of Kachin calendar design in showing a line of twelve young people, six pairs, wearing the traditional forms of dress associated with the six officially-recognised Kachin groups: (from left to right) Lashik (Lachik), Rawang, Jinhpaw, Lisyu, Azi (Zaiwa) and Maru (Lawnwaw) against a distinctively ‘Kachin’ topographical image. The models were KTC students and their clothes, I was told, were borrowed from people in Myitkyina. Htoo Awng, a Myitkyina-based commercial photographer who took the group image, told me that the choice of models in such calendars was not important. Although there was usually a correlation between the model’s own ethnicity and the outfit in which they were photographed, this was not a major concern. However, in Kachin calendars, the people represented did have to ‘be Kachin’, and in a small, highly cohesive community, it would be known if this was not the case.36

Images such as this, in which all six Kachin groups are represented, were some of the strongest visual expressions of pan-Kachin unity during the post-ceasefire years, and still remain so. Here the image is set against a dramatic mountain-scape, above which clouds swirl portentously. I was told that it is an image of Nkai Bum (a hill visible from the road between Myitkyina and Myitson) but it also evokes the mythical Majoi Shinga Bum (‘naturally flat mountain’) from which the Kachin community’s ancestors are said to have descended. Much as Burman nationalists

36. This contrasts with state-led cultural performances in which participants are more likely to be asked to perform a ‘type’. The state’s reduction of ethnic identity to ‘empty’ cultural marker is evident in initiatives such as the ‘National Races Village’ in Yangon as well as in government-run museum displays of ethnic dress.

37. Sadan, Being and Becoming Kachin: Histories Beyond the State in the Borderworlds of Burma.
post-1994 growth of Kachin diaspora communities (see below) - also generated visual evidence of the reach and appeal of Kachin nationalism.

The 2005 Tokyo Kachin Baptist Church calendar: creating connections with the diaspora

Economic conditions in Burma in the late 1980s and early 1990s led many to seek work overseas (see the chapters in the section 'Local to Global', this volume). After the 1994 ceasefire agreement, the loss of KIO control of the region's jade trade and the consequent dramatic reduction in income for many Kachin families, alongside a rise in drug use and incidence of HIV (see Smith, Woods and others in this volume), boosted the trend of Kachin families seeking to send a relative overseas. Japan, Thailand and Malaysia provided opportunities for those prepared to work illegally, and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), which had an office in Malaysia, facilitated the resettlement of members of the Kachin community and others from Burma in Australia, New Zealand, the US and northern Europe. Many of these diaspora communities, through their remittances and political campaigning through organisations like the Kachin National Organisation (KNO), have continued to play a significant role in Kachin economic, political and cultural life (see Mahkaw Hkun Sa, this volume).

A calendar produced by the Youth Department of the Tokyo Kachin Baptist Church (Figure 10.5) reflects how these forms mutually inflected each other as diaspora communities interacted with events at home during this time.38 Each of its six full-colour glossy pages features a young couple wearing outfits associated with one of the six Kachin subgroups. Each couple is pictured in an animated pose: playing music, reading the bible, kneeling in adoration, or adopting positions against an inspirational background image (a field of yellow flowers, the crucifixion scene, the nativity, a church, etc.). Below the image a biblical verse is reproduced, first in Jinghpaw and then in English (significantly the calendar includes no Japanese scripts). The biblical verse on the first

38. This calendar, produced by the Youth Department of the Tokyo Kachin Baptist Church, is formed of six gloss-printed full-colour sheets, each representing two months of the year, covered by an additional sheet of thin, matt paper (510 x 380 mm). It is bound with a white metal spiral binding at the top edge. The calendar was acquired from its designer in Yangon in January 2005.
location with those in the Kachin homelands. No visual acknowledgement is given to their adopted country of residence.

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

The Kachin diaspora communities that emerged in the post-ceasefire period have continued to promote forms of Kachin nationalism, and the appearance of calendars in the homes of many diaspora members (often carried by hand on return from visits to Burma or to other international Kachin communities) attests to the tight networks between Kachin people ‘at home’ and overseas. Whilst, as the Tokyo Baptist Church calendar and others (through the evocation of Kachin topography) reveal, tangible connections with ‘home’ remain important, Kachin diaspora communities are also making creative use of the spaces, materials, technologies and networks presented by their new environments to promote Kachin culture and identity, often in highly politically-inflected ways.39 This is something that has become even more marked since the breakdown of the ceasefire in June 2011, when the diaspora’s commitment to support and mobilisation has become even more marked and seeks to compensate for the constraints under which their relatives and friends ‘back home’ currently labour.

**Conclusion: ‘Difficulties are opportunities’**

It is clear, therefore, that the new print and digital technologies that entered the Kachin region in the years following the ceasefire agreement of

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39. The creation of new diasporic ‘spaces’ for the mobilisation of Kachin cultural forms for political purpose is the subject of my own current doctoral research with the University of Brighton.
Above them is a montage of brightly-coloured images of four Myitkyina college buildings, including its technological university and computer groups that has been experimented with since the ceasefire. However, as the Hkaku claim themselves to be Jingphaw, this doesn’t challenge the primary orientation of the sub-groups, but merely recognises their distinctive dialect and dress.

The last page of the calendar (Figure 10.7) draws together a series of images reflecting student activities over the years to construct an image of a coherent and self-sustaining community. These include (top left) an image of a student group at the 2014 Kachin Baptist Convention gathering at Hpakan (notably some of the women in the front row are holding small versions of the KIA flag, a provocative act of defiance that would not have been made so assertively before the collapse of the ceasefire). On the same line is a 1993 image of Myitkyina students fundraising in the Hpakan area and a 2006 image of recently qualified student teachers. Below this is a line of images from the 2011 ‘JLH Fresher Welcome and Farewell Lamang’ [Programme], followed by further lines of images showing student fundraising activities in Waingmaw, programmes of talks and events in Shatapru and a 2014 football match organised as part of an ‘International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking’. Not drawing this time on historical black and white images but on a collage of images of student activities spanning the period 1993 to 2015, the message seems to be of social and cultural survival despite political change and conflict.

Benedict Anderson has underscored the importance of the growth of print-capitalism to the development of ‘imagined communities’ of nation, observing how books and newspapers enabled members of these communities to maintain deep attachments to each other in the absence of face to face contact: ‘the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.’

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

Counting the Days

...a complex gloss on the word "meanwhile"."44 Anderson suggests that the old-fashioned novel, with its unique structures of address and omniscient point of view, becomes a device for the creation of a world in which characters largely unaware of each other nevertheless move together calendrically through homogenous, empty time – a world that may be considered a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which is also conceived as a solid community moving steadily up (or down) history."45 Kachin calendars fulfil the same purpose, allowing their consumers to feel part of a wider community consuming the same cultural product simultaneously in time. Furthermore, by drawing on a range of visual strategies and resources, they make visible and self-evident the basis of Kachin rights to self-determination and nationhood that failed to be realised in the ceasefire period, and they visualise current socio-political realities and aspirations. As a medium by which to create realities not yet in the world (see also Kiik, this volume), and yet one through which these realities might be made real and tangible in the minds of its consumers and viewers (if not also through their actions), the calendar continues to provide an effective vehicle for a unified, historically grounded and culturally distinctive pan-Kachin nationalist identity to sustain the community through turbulent times.

Printed materials achieved this through offering a shared experience of simultaneity modelled on the spatio-temporal organisation of print media that 'provided the technical means for re-presenting' the kind of imagined community that is the nation' by furnishing their readers with

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