

## REPORT ON THE MASTER THESIS

IEPS – International Economic and Political Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

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| <b>Title of the thesis:</b>    | <b>Analyzing the Effects of Ethnicity on Internal Armed Conflicts in Burma: Identity Crisis and the Struggle for Recognition</b> |
| <b>Author of the thesis:</b>   | <b>Myo Win Nyunt</b>   |
| <b>Referee (incl. titles):</b> | <b>Janusz Salamon, Ph.D.</b>   |

**Comments of the referee on the thesis highlights and shortcomings (following the five numbered aspects of your assessment indicated below).**

**1) Theoretical background:** Given the role of ethnic diversity in the conflict in Myanmar that is the main focus of the thesis, one might think that the concept of ethnicity is rather undertheorized by the Authors (on some 3 pages out of ca. 100). Certainly, it comes as a surprise that discussing the theories of ethnicity, the Author refers to Encyclopedia Britannica. One would expect some in-depth recent studies of ethnicity being referred to in what is at the end an excessively brief discussion of the theoretical aspects of ethnicity. Moreover, the four theories of ethnicity are presented early on do not seem to function to any significant degree as a theoretical basis for the analysis of the Burmese case of ethnic diversity and of an ethnic violent conflict. Apart from the shortcomings of the theoretical exploration of ethnic diversity as the backbone of the thesis, the phrase “identity crisis” that appears in the title of the thesis does not feature prominently in the thesis itself. Indeed, ex post one might even think that it is a misnomer to describe the situation in Myanmar in terms of “identity crisis”, given that arguably an overarching trans-ethnic identity has never existed in Myanmar.

**2) Contribution:** The thesis has a primarily ‘descriptive’ character, reporting the historical developments, as well as the more recent tragic events in Myanmar. While the central thesis (that ethnic diversity may be a source of troubles in a country which lacks a strong overarching ‘national’ identity) is presented and supported in a convincing manner, there is a sense that the chief value of the thesis rests on bringing together observations made by other authors on the sources of the current domestic conflict in Myanmar. It is not readily obvious to what degree the findings of this thesis could be extrapolated to other cases of multi-ethnic societies (as the Author seems to hope, stating bravely on page 14, that “one could replace ‘Burma’ with another case to study a similar phenomenon: i.e. ‘the impacts of racial bias on the internal militant ranking structure of the U.S Army.’

**3) Methods:** The Author describes his method as a case study research and justifies fairly convincingly why that is effectively the only method that could be adopted in this particular context, given the practical impossibility of any field study of the views and attitudes shared by members of the many ethnic groups in Myanmar. In practice, this method is applied very loosely, as when dozens of pages are filled with a straightforward narrative about the developments in the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial eras of the Burmese history.

**4) Literature:** The literature is very extensive, given the ‘local nature’ of the subject matter. It is, however, not always clear to what extent this extensive literature has been utilized in practice.

**5) Manuscript form:** The manuscript form highlights the imperfections of the execution of Myo’s research project by showing that more undivided attention would be called for to avoid at least some avoidable blunders. While the overall structure of the thesis is consistent with the chief aims of the thesis and gives the reader a sufficient sense of the general direction of thesis, this fairly long work includes countless stylistic infelicities (as well as occasional typos) which result in frequent distortions of the exposition of ideas and arguments. Just a few examples: (i) on page 15, explaining the case study research method, he writes: “The first step is to define the case itself, which serves as

the main unity of analysis”, while he meant to say: “the main unit of analysis”; (ii) on page 22, we read: “Tina Kempin Reuter, the author of Ethnic Conflict on Encyclopedia, argues ...” while “Tina Kempin Reuter, the author of the article on ‘Ethnic Conflict’ in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, argues ...” would be appropriate; (iii) on page 25: ‘In this view, Horowitz argues, “ethnicity and kinship are alike.” – it should read: “ethnicity and kinship are alike.”; (iv) on page 87: “The research findings from this study indicate that the concept of ethnic and ethnic groups have significant impact on internal armed conflicts in Burma.” – it should read: “... ethnicity and ethnic groups...”; (v) on page 93: “APPENDIX B: ANGOLA BURMESE WARS”. (NB. there are four appendices at the end of the thesis entitled: Appendix A, Appendix B, Appendix 3, Appendix 4. Moreover, Appendix A is entitled: “RACIAL MAP OF BURMA”, without explanation why the term ‘racial’ rather than ‘ethnic’ is used.)

**Box for the thesis supervisor only.** Please characterize the progress in the working out of thesis (e.g., steady and gradual versus discontinuous and abrupt) and the level (intensity) of communication/cooperation with the author:

The thesis has been written over a number of years of Myo’s prolonged Master’s studies. The present thesis is not the first one that has been submitted. It is telling that the three ‘hypotheses’ explored in the present thesis are for the most part significantly different from the hypotheses stated in the initial proposal included in the current thesis (and this was not the first formulation of the thesis proposal). Having said that, one has to take into account that Myo started working on this thesis long before the outbreak of conflict in Myanmar, thus the developments on the ground had an impact on the shift of focus of his research, while also making the realization of this research project more difficult in practice.

**Suggested questions for the defence are:**

- (1) How different would the analysis of the impact of the ethnic diversity in Myanmar on the current violent conflict be, if the British would not colonise Burma at all?
- (2) Given that 90% of the citizens of Myanmar are Theravada Buddhists, is the Burmese case showing that religious identities are, after all, not always the defining components of ethnic identities? What is the role of the religious identities in the current conflict in Myanmar?
- (3) What could the new trans-ethnic national identity in Burma/Myanmar be based on?

**I recommend the thesis for final defence.**

**SUMMARY OF POINTS AWARDED** (for details, see below):

| CATEGORY                                       | POINTS    |
|--|-----------|
| <i>Theoretical background (max. 20 points)</i> | 12        |
| <i>Contribution (max. 20 points)</i>           | 12        |
| <i>Methods (max. 20 points)</i>                | 13        |
| <i>Literature (max. 20 points)</i>             | 16        |
| <i>Manuscript form (max. 20 points)</i>        | 8         |
| <b>TOTAL POINTS (max. 100 points)</b>          | <b>61</b> |
| <b>The proposed grade (A-B-C-D-E-F)</b>        | <b>D</b>  |

**DATE OF EVALUATION:** 21.01.2022

*Janusz Salamon*

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**Referee Signature**