Defending Society, Building the Nation: Rebel Governance as Competing Biopolitics

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Rebel groups govern significant parts of territory worldwide. They often deliver crucial public goods and services to populations under their control. Scholarship on rebel governance commonly explains this with the need for armed groups to generate local and international legitimacy. We argue that this understanding of rebel governance as an instrumental means to power is insufficient. Instead, we propose a novel conceptualization of rebel governance as *competing biopolitics*. Tracing biopolitical technologies of rebel rule reveals the productive functions of war-time social orders for molding populations into imagined communities in direct opposition to the existing nation state. We develop this perspective by mobilizing Foucault's work in conjunction with Chatterjee's postcolonial understanding of governmentality in contexts of postcolonial state- and nation-formation, and empirical research on the *Pat Jasan* in northern Myanmar. Linked to the Kachin rebellion, this movement has fought against a devastating narcotics crisis with biopolitical interventions that form the Kachin nation body amidst protracted ethnonational conflict. Beyond shedding light on one of the world's longest running but least-researched civil wars, this offers three distinct contributions to international studies: exploring non-state armed groups as actors of public health, theorizing the sociological underpinnings of rebel governance, and developing the concept of biopolitics beyond the nation state.

Los actores armados no estatales gobiernan partes importantes del territorio en todo el mundo. A menudo brindan bienes y servicios públicos esenciales a poblaciones bajo su control. Estudios recientes sobre la gobernanza de los rebeldes suelen justificar estas instituciones en tiempos de guerra por la necesidad de los grupos rebeldes de generar legitimidad local e internacional. Consideramos que esta concepción de la gobernanza rebelde como un medio instrumental para alcanzar el poder es insuficiente. En su lugar, proponemos una interpretación novedosa de la gobernanza rebelde como biopolíticas competitivas. Rastrar las tecnologías biopolíticas de los gobiernos de rebeldes revela la función productiva de los órdenes sociales en tiempos de guerra de colocar a las poblaciones en comunidades imaginadas en contraposición directa con las naciones-estado existentes. Desarrollamos esta perspectiva al movilizar el trabajo de Foucault junto con la comprensión poscolonial de Chatterjee sobre la gobernabilidad en contextos de formación de estados poscoloniales e investigaciones empíricas detalladas sobre la Pat Jasan al norte de Myanmar. Vinculado con el conflicto de Kachin, este movimiento ha luchado contra la devastadora crisis de narcotráfico en medio de la prolongada guerra civil. Además de arrojar luz sobre una de las guerras civiles de mayor duración y menos investigada, este trabajo ofrece tres contribuciones distintas a los Estudios Internacionales: explorar los grupos armados no estatales como actores de salud pública, teorizar sobre los principios sociológicos de la gobernanza rebelde y desarrollar biopolíticas por fuera de la nación-estado.

Les acteurs armés non étatiques gouvernent des parties considérables du territoire mondial. Ils fournissent souvent des biens et services publics cruciaux aux populations qui sont sous leur contrôle. De récentes recherches sur la gouvernance rebelle expliquent généralement ces institutions de temps de guerre par le besoin des groupes rebelles de se générer une légitimité locale et internationale. Nous suggérons que cette compréhension de la gouvernance rebelle en tant que moyen instrumental de pouvoir est insuffisante. Au lieu de cela, nous proposons une nouvelle compréhension de la gouvernance rebelle en tant que biopolitique concurrente. Le fait de retracer les technologies biopolitiques de la gouvernance rebelle révèle les fonctions productives des ordres sociaux en temps de guerre lorsqu'il s'agit de modeler les populations en communautés imaginées en opposition directe à l'État-nation existant. Nous développons cette perspective en mobilisant le travail de Foucault conjointement avec la compréhension postcoloniale de la gouvernementalité de Chatterjee dans des contextes de formation d'États postcoloniaux tout en nous appuyant sur une recherche empirique détaillée sur le Pat Jasan dans le nord de la Birmanie. Associé à la rébellion kachin, ce mouvement a lutté contre une crise des narcotiques dévastatrice au cœur de la guerre civile prolongée. Au-delà d'offrir un éclairage sur l'une des guerres civiles les plus longues mais les moins étudiées, cet article apporte trois contributions distinctes aux études internationales: une étude des groupes armés non étatiques en tant qu'acteurs de la santé publique, une théorisation des fondements sociologiques de la gouvernance rebelle et un développement d'un concept de biopolitique allant au-delà de l'État-nation.

Introduction

In recent years, northern Myanmar (Burma) has become the site of a fierce war on drugs. Located at the heart of Southeast Asia's Golden Triangle, these far-flung borderlands are not only a major hub of global narcotics production. Locally, the cheap availability of opiates and methamphetamines has fueled a public health crisis among already marginalized ethnic minority populations in the context of protracted civil war. In northern Myanmar, however, it is not the *state* that wages the local war on drugs. The campaign against narcotics is fought by a *non*-state movement, known as *Pat Jasan.* Since 2014, its members have eradicated opium poppy fields, arrested drug dealers, mobilized public health campaigns, and operated rehabilitation facilities for detained drug addicts. The *Pat Jasan* is linked to the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), one of Myanmar's most important ethnonational rebel movements. But why? Why would a rebel movement involve itself in a public health campaign against drugs, especially in a context where many other armed actors fund themselves through the drug trade? And what kind of political and social orders emerge from such interventions?

Rebel governance of public health remains an underresearched field. Extant research mirrors the wider scholarship on rebel governance. It commonly views rebel groups committing scarce resources to public goods in order to garner popular support, the key to winning guerilla warfare (e.g., Wickham-Crowley 1992; Mampilly 2012; Stewart 2018; Condra and Wright 2019). Scholars of rebel health governance consequently point to the potential propaganda gains, and hence legitimacy, which non-state armed groups derive from engaging in public health and emergency response (Furlan 2020; Breslawski 2021; Swed 2021). Strategic considerations certainly play a role for rebels' provision of public health. Yet, we suggest that reducing rebel groups' provision of public goods to the realm of transactionalism and instrumentalism is insufficient for explaining rebel governance of health, and rebel governance more widely. Instead, we propose a novel conceptualization of rebel governance as a form of *competing biopolitics.* Tracing the biopolitical technologies of rebel interventions in society reveals the productive functions of war-time social orders, including how they mold constituent populations into imagined communities in direct opposition to the existing nation state. In other words, rebels might not *only* or even *primarily* provide public goods in exchange for public support. Rather, we propose that rebels engage in governing populations because sustaining and optimizing life is precisely what establishes their sovereignty in the absence of formal statehood. Instrumental for this is the promotion of ethicopolitical counter-conducts to the existing nation state, which ultimately enable the alternative subjectification of rebel constituencies. In contrast to more conventional constructivist approaches, our framework thus urges closer attention to the making of meaning and forming of identities in analyzing war-time social orders.

To develop these arguments, this article will first discuss the literature on rebel governance with a special attention to rebel governance of public health. It will then build a framework for analyzing rebel governance as competing biopolitics by drawing on the works of Michel Foucault and Partha Chatterjee. The conversation between both thinkers calibrates our biopolitical understanding to the specific challenges of state- and nation-building processes in postcolonial contexts. The article will then mobilize empirical research on public health governance by the Kachin eth-

nonational rebellion in northern Myanmar. Specifically, we focus on the rebellion's struggle against the local narcotics epidemic, which can be understood neither as a merely regulatory nor as a disciplinary exercise. Rather, the "Kachin War on Drugs" governs Kachin subjectivities and their conduct through biopolitical technologies based on ethical discourses and practices. It is here where the Kachin nation comes into being in direct competition to Myanmar's ethnocratic nation state and other ethnonationalist projects.

Rebel Governance of Public Health

Non-state armed groups are important actors of international politics. This is the case in situations of civil war and contexts of limited statehood more generally (Vinci 2008; Krause and Milliken 2009; Staniland 2012). In fact, the projection of state power is rather limited in large parts of the world. Non-state armed actors regularly fill this void, governing significant parts of territory and population (Vinci 2008; Arjona, Kasfir, and Mampilly 2015). In these contexts, nonstate armed groups can also become crucial actors of public health. In the context of COVID-19, for instance, a wide variety of non-state armed groups—from Afghanistan's Taliban to urban gangs in the favelas of Brazil—engaged in disease-control measures (Sieff, George, and Fahim 2020). Scholars (and practitioners) in the field of humanitarian relief, civilian protection, and peacebuilding have thus long urged international development interventions and emergency responses to engage more closely with non-state armed groups (Hofmann 2006; Hofmann and Schneckener 2011; Saul 2017).

This notwithstanding, IR scholarship in the field of global health governance has not concerned itself with non-state armed groups as actors of public health. This is despite the field's explicit focus on non-state actors and actors beyond the nation state, such as pharmaceutical companies, expert networks, international foundations, subnational bureaucracies, and international organizations (Harman 2010; Roemer-Mahler 2013; Hameiri and Jones 2015; Elbe 2018). While highlighting this complex assemblage of governance actors, most literature on global health—and nontraditional security in general—assumes the nation state as the sovereign over territory and population. As per Hameiri and Jones, the contested history and nature of state sovereignty in most parts of the world remain in fact "overlooked by IR scholars—including many wideners—deepeners in security studies—who typically take the territorial configuration of 'nation states' for granted" (Hameiri and Jones 2013, 466).

To derive a better understanding of non-state armed groups' engagement in public health, we thus look to the emerging scholarship on political ordering processes in civil wars, especially the literature on rebel governance. Having moved away from understanding civil war simply as the breakdown of political order, scholars have increasingly come to explore the multiplicity of alternative sociopolitical orders that emerge in contexts of protracted conflict and contested statehood (e.g., Staniland 2012; Arjona 2016; Baczko, Dorronsoro, and Quesnay 2018; Brenner 2019). One core debate in this field is over the motivations of rebel groups that provide public goods and welfare services to populations in areas under their control. Why do the Taliban deliver justice in rural Afghanistan? Why does the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) distribute bread in Syria? Analogously, why do non-state armed groups engage in public health? This is anything else than self-explanatory. After all, providing public goods and services diverts scarce

resources away from the asymmetric frontlines against militarily superior states.

Yet, it is precisely this asymmetric nature of warfare that scholars highlight in explaining rebel governance. Because state armies are usually superior to rebel groups on the battlefield, successful guerrilla warfare depends on stable support networks in local communities for mobilizing recruits, shelter, and intelligence. For building stable support networks, however, pure coercion of civilians is not sufficient. Instead, rebels need to create a willingness among the civilian population to obey and submit themselves to rebel rule (Kalyvas 2006, 115; Schlichte 2012). In other words, rebel movements need to build legitimate authority relations with local communities, in ways that are not dissimilar to state rule after all. Foundational scholarship on rebel governance consequently conceptualizes the interactions between rebels and local communities as implicit social contracts, in which reciprocal exchange relations—protection and/or welfare against support—play the key role (Wickham-Crowley 1992; Mampilly 2012; Stewart 2018; Condra and Wright 2019).[1] In most influential accounts on rebel governance, it is precisely this need for legitimacy that motivates non-state armed groups to provide health and welfare to populations in the territory under their control (cf. Loyle et al. 2021).

Within the field of rebel governance scholarship, public health has hitherto received little attention. In fact, attention to rebel health governance has only increased in the context of COVID-19 (Furlan 2020; Breslawski 2021; Swed 2021). The conceptual arguments in these preliminary discussions largely mirror the transactional and instrumentalist understanding of rebel governance. Scholars argue that armed groups utilize the pandemic to legitimize their rule by demonstrating their ability to provide public health to a more effective degree than the state (Furlan 2020; Breslawski 2021). In doing so, health interventions by rebel groups are mainly understood as propaganda stunts aimed at two different audiences: local populations and the international community. On a local level, analysts maintain that non-state armed groups mainly take an interest in diverting scarce resources to public health in order to garner support from local communities (Furlan 2020; Parkinson as in Sieff, George, and Fahim 2020). On the international level, researchers argue that armed groups seek to use health interventions in order to legitimize their de-facto control of territory through cooperating with states and international organizations, such as the World Health Organization (Furlan 2020, 15; Jackson 2020). The fact that non-state armed groups have attempted to use COVID-19 and public health more generally for their own propaganda purposes is most likely true. In fact, this would not seem surprising. Fierce propaganda wars surrounding questions of capabilities and responsibilities have after all become a prevalent feature of the international politics surrounding COVID-19 (Von der Burchard, Deutsch, and De La Baume 2020). Moreover, it seems uncontroversial to argue that non-state armed groups utilize welfare gaps of the state to increase their own power. Rebels are strategic actors after all.

Yet, we believe that rebel provision of healthcare and rebel governance in general are more multifaceted. Sociological scholarship has, indeed, complicated the dominant transactional and instrumentalist understanding to rebel governance in two significant ways. First, scholars

have pointed out that rebel governance entails more than just transactional exchange relations. Equally important for gaining legitimacy among local communities seem to be symbolism and discourse, which often relate to performances of statehood. These include the use of uniforms and flags as well as the singing of anthems or the construction and maintenance of military cemeteries as, for instance, the case with the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka (Mampilly 2015). Subsidized bread distribution by rebel groups in Syria is not only a material practice that generates legitimacy. Bread distribution is performed in ways that are reminiscent of the Bha'athist state and "discursively (re)produce political authority" (Martínez and Eng 2018, 237). In a similar vein, ISIS produced propaganda videos directed at potential recruits in the United Kingdom in which they advertised the Islamic State Health System (ISHS) with a symbol that closely resembled the logo of the British National Health System (NHS; Callahan 2020, 111–12).

Second, sociological accounts of rebel governance have complicated instrumentalist explanations of rebel governance, which implicitly assume a clear distinction between rebel rulers and rebel-ruled—whether materially or symbolically. Instead of locating rebel power inside rebel groups and their governing institutions, relational sociologists show the decentered workings of power in contexts of rebel governance (Brenner 2018; Hoffmann and Verweijen 2019). By paying attention to the ways in which rebel movements are embedded within a wider social context, they argue that rebel power resides in everyday practices and discourses that shape people's subjectivities in the karaoke bars of northern Myanmar or at spiritual practitioners of eastern Congo (Brenner 2018; Hoffmann and Verweijen 2019). In their analysis of Mai-Mai rule, Hoffmann and Verweijen demonstrate the usefulness of this approach by adopting a Foucauldian governmentality framework for understanding the rationalities of power involved in rebel governance. From a governmentality perspective, they write,

> Rebel governance refers not so much to a set of specific social and political institutions as to a cluster of techniques of power that draw upon and transform existing regimes of truth and practices and rationalities of power that are (re)produced throughout the social body as a whole. (Hoffmann and Verweijen 2019, 373)

Building on these insights, this article seeks to further develop a sociological understanding of war-time orders by exploring rebel governance as a form of competing biopolitics.

Rebel Governance as Competing Biopolitics

A Foucauldian approach to the study of rebel governance seems promising. After all, Foucault's work has provided fruitful devices for highlighting the multiplication of power and modes of control beyond the state (e.g., Leander 2006; Dillon 2007; Aradau and Blanke 2010; De Larrinaga and Doucet 2010). In line with Foucault's own work, much of this scholarship deconstructs and marginalizes the state when analyzing power relations and power rationalities. For Foucault, "the first methodological principle is to move outside the institution and replace it with the overall point of view of the technology of power" (Foucault 2007, 117). Notwithstanding this attempt at decentering state power, state institutions remain an important focal point for Foucauldian analyses. This is particularly so with regard to Foucault's concept of biopolitics, which seeks to grasp the way in which power operates in modern nation states.

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[1] Similarly, debates surrounding welfare provisions and ethnic/sectarian politics suggest that non-state authorities deploy welfare strategically to attract legitimacy and support from particular communities (e.g., Cammett 2014).

In fact, his lectures on *Security, Territory, Population* trace the emergence of biopolitics to the consolidation of European nation states (Foucault 2007). In *Society Must Be Defended,* Foucault describes this development as the move away from *sovereign* power—understood as the sovereign's "right to kill"—to *bio*power, which for Foucault is ultimately about the "power to make life" (Foucault 2003, 240–47). Technologies and practices of biopower thus differ from sovereign power in the way that they are not about disciplining through violence and coercion but about the optimization of life in relation to people's physical and mental health as well as the general welfare of populations. In doing so, the state molds populations in ways that ultimately legitimate and reproduce the state itself. Despite the commitment to enhancing life, biopower for Foucault is thus ultimately about the "subjugation of bodies and […] control of populations" (Foucault 1979, 93). Key to biopolitics then are institutions and authorities that normalize people's conduct in a variety of social fields, including the school, the prison, or the hospital.

While biopolitics contributes to the diffusion of power across society, in many contexts it does so under the administrative aegis of institutions that are intimately entangled with the state. Even when biopolitical technologies are enacted by actors outside the state and its apparatus—such as, for instance, humanitarian agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)—they often reproduce state power nevertheless (Sending and Neumann 2006; Aradau and Tazzioli 2020). In mobilizing the notion of biopolitics for the study of rebel governance, we explore non-state biopolitics that not only unfold beyond the state but also stand in explicit competition with the state. The optimization of life in rebel schools and rebel hospitals works to craft population bodies that stand in a conflicting relationship with the population body of the existing nation states. In fact, many contemporary rebel groups seek to represent constituencies that are best conceptualized as non-state nations.

This is most obvious in the case of ethnonational movements that seek independence or greater autonomy from the existing nation states, as for instance the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, the Kurdish movement in the Middle East, or, in our case, the Kachin rebellion in Myanmar. Parallels can, however, also be drawn to organizations that are commonly viewed as inspired by religion. Many movements that are presently viewed under the prism of global jihad such as the Taliban or Moro Muslim rebels in the Philippines have strong ethnonational underpinnings linked to imperial state-formation processes (Mamdani 2002; Barkawi 2004). Even movements that mobilize in the left-wing internationalist tradition—such as the Zapatistas in Mexico or the Naxalites in India—unfold within the tension between the postcolonial state and indigenous populations (De Angelis 2000; Shah 2019). A biopolitical analysis of rebel governance then guides our view to the ways in which the regulation of populations by rebel movements crafts *imagined communities* beyond the existing nation state.

In adopting Benedict Anderson's (2006) conceptualization of the nation as an imagined community, we also seek to highlight the need to take nationalism more seriously in the study of biopolitics. Alluding to Anderson's prominent critique that "nationalism has proved an uncomfortable anomaly for Marxist theory" (Anderson 2006, 3), we suggest that the study of nationalism also sits uncomfortably with most Foucauldian approaches. This is even though Foucault traces the very genealogy of governmentality and of biopolitical mechanisms of power back to the birth of the nation state and to the emergence of the population as an object of government (Foucault 2007). As a result, the *state* and *state*-formation feature prominently in Foucault's analysis as well as the governmentality literature in general (e.g., Burchell, Gordon, and Miller 1991; Bröckling, Krasmann, and Lemke 2010; Walters 2012). Yet, *nationalism* and *nation*-making processes remain underexplored. This elision of non-state nationalisms from governmentality analyses, however, limits the possibility of addressing the biopolitical interventions of rebel groups who seek to represent imagined communities beyond the existing nation-state polity.

For developing a biopolitical analytic that is more attuned to the role of rebel governance in the formation of these imagined communities beyond the European nation state, we follow the work on governmentality in postcolonial state formation (Chatterjee 2004; Legg 2008). This is because we appreciate the limitations of Foucault's writings with regard to non-European contexts (Cepek 2011; Samaddar 2013), non-European archives (Stoler 1995), and non-European epistemologies (Chakrabarty 2008). Rather than simply dragging Foucault to rebel-ruled territories of Southeast Asia, we mobilize our empirical archive of Myanmar to highlight shortcomings in the literature on biopolitics and open new spaces for engagement, particularly with regard to non-state and state-in-formation contexts. We do so with particular attention to Partha Chatterjee's work who has notably remarked that "the governmentalisation of the state" (Foucault 2007, 109), which has characterized the functioning of nation states in contemporary Europe, "secures legitimacy not by the participation of citizens in matters of state but by claiming to provide for the well-being of the population" (Chatterjee 2004, 34).

In *The Politics of the Governed,* Chatterjee, however, argues that in contrast to Europe, where biopolitics only developed with the formation of the modern nation state, "technologies of governmentality often predate the nation-state" in large parts of the Global South (Chatterjee 2004, 36). In fact, his work on state formation in colonial and postcolonial India shows how governmentality developed differently in the postcolonial world. In the absence of citizenship, colonial rulers and postcolonial nationbuilders rendered populations legible for biopolitical interventions by "classifying groups of people into suitable targets for administrative, legal, economic, or electoral policy […] Thus caste and religion in India, ethnic groups in Southeast Asia, and tribes in Africa remained the dominant criteria for identifying communities among the populations as objects of policy" (Chatterjee 2004, 37). Following Chatterjee by mobilizing the grid of governmentality in postcolonial context, we question the figure of the citizen as the object of government. Instead, we shed light on the biopolitical mechanisms that craft imagined communities beyond the nation state.

Developing a biopolitical reading of rebel governance thus concurs with Chatterjee's radical questioning of the figure of the citizen in nation-making processes. We, therefore, propose the concept of *competing biopolitics* to analyze conflicting biopolitical interventions between opposing state and non-state actors engaged in crafting, disciplining, and governing differently defined imagined communities. In doing so, we relate to the idea of "biopolitics multiple" (Aradau and Tazzioli 2020), which highlights the importance of heterogenous modes of governing population. As per Aradau and Tazzioli, biopolitical technologies cannot be reduced to commonplace binaries surrounding the formula of biopolitics versus necropolitics or the politics of making life versus the politics of letting die (Aradau and Tazzioli 2020, 23). In addition, the notion of *competing* biopolitics sheds light not only on the multiplicity of

biopolitical technologies but also on how these might be conflicting with each other. We thus situate biopolitical technologies of rebel groups within the broader context of governmentality, conceived at the conjuncture of multiplicity of powers, practices of resistance, and ethical–political relations among subjects.

For exploring this biopolitical competition, Chatterjee's work is again instructive in pointing us to the importance of investigating the role of counter-conducts. In *The Nation and Its Fragments*, Chatterjee highlights such questions for the anti-colonial nationalists in pre-independence India. In his analysis, they were in fact central to the production of a sovereign domain by Indian nationalists before formal independence. According to Chatterjee, Indian nationalists distinguished between two spheres of sovereignty. The external, material sphere was concerned with studying and replicating Western technological superiority. More important, however, was the *internal* sphere of sovereignty—where Indian intellectuals debated social institutions, practices, and moral conducts of the Indian nation that contrasted with the Western colonizers. For Chatterjee, this is where true national sovereignty lies. He writes in reference to Anderson: "If the nation is an imagined community, then this is where it is brought into being. In this, its true and essential domain, the nation is already sovereign, even when the state is in the hands of the colonial power" (Chatterjee 1993, 6).[2]

Chatterjee's analysis of non-state nationalism guides us back to Foucault's notion of "counter-conduct," which Foucault introduced for analyzing practices of resistance and biopolitical technologies that are enforced in opposition to the state. In his words, counter-conducts designate struggles "against the processes implemented for conducting others" (Foucault 2007, 201). As emphasized by Foucault's writings on the techniques of the self, analyzing conduct and counter-conduct necessitates attention to the relation between governmentality, morality, and ethics. Society codifies what it identifies as good or bad moral conduct. It enforces this code through governmental practices, including biopolitical ones, which leads to the moral subjectification of individuals by establishing model practices for the relationship with themselves (Foucault 1990, 25–32). Counter-conducts then are conceivable in a variety of ways, including subversion of or noncompliance with the existing prescriptive codes or the development of alternative codes of moral behavior, including practices that allow for an alternative moral subjectification.

Two important points need be noted here. First, Foucault stresses that alternative subjectification might not only be about moral prescriptions and legal codes in terms of what is forbidden and what is allowed. At least equally important seem to be everyday practices used by individuals to change their relations to themselves and others. Foucault conceives of this in non-normative ways as ethics (rather than morality), which is not about "a code that would tell us how to act" but about "the relationship you have to yourself when you act" (Foucault 1994, 131). Second, Foucault highlights that counter-conducts rarely consist in the straightforward refusal of set norms nor are they located in a position of total exteriority to them: counter-conducts are formed by practices that alter existing norms and, in so doing, refuse a certain way of being governed. As Foucault remarks to explain the meaning of counter-conducts: "the struggle was not conducted in the form of absolute exteriority, but rather in the form of the permanent use of tactical elements" (Foucault 2007, 125). There thus remains a partial continuity between

conducts and counter-conducts, as long as they "share a series of elements that can be utilized and reutilized, reimplanted, reinserted, taken up in the direction of reinforcing a certain mode of conduct or of creating and recreating a type of counter-conduct" (Davidson 2011, 27).

By proposing to analyze rebel governance as competing biopolitics, this section suggested that viewing the health and welfare activities of rebel groups through a mainly instrumentalist lens misses a fundamental point: rebel governance establishes biopolitical sovereignty. In other words, rebels might not *only* or even *primarily* engage in governing populations to garner support for their fight against the state. Rebels engage in governing populations because sustaining and optimizing life is precisely what establishes their sovereignty in a biopolitical competition with the state. More so than simply sustaining just any form of life, rebel governance then becomes the very basis for forming alternative subjects and imagined communities in opposition to the ones prescribed by the existent nation state. The making of the alternative nation then is not an abstract idea but relies on concrete biopolitical technologies that optimize life and shape people's conducts. Of crucial importance throughout this process seem to be the ethicopolitical underpinnings of rebel governance, in particular governmental practices that serve to enact a moral counter-codification and open the space for alternative moral subjectification among the rebel constituency. Our framework thus urges more attention to the making of meaning and forming of identities in analyzing war-time social orders and the imagined communities that they can produce.

Researching Myanmar's Borderlands

To illustrate, explore, and further develop this understanding of rebel governance as competing biopolitics, the remainder of the article mobilizes empirical research on public health governance by the Kachin rebellion in Myanmar. Myanmar's borderlands are home to one of the world's longest running but least-studied civil wars in the world. In fact, scholars of civil war have largely ignored this decades-long conflict, as is the case with armed conflicts in Southeast Asia more generally (Brenner and Han 2022). That said, the study of Myanmar cannot only produce important empirical knowledge on a forgotten conflict and its humanitarian consequences. Researching such commonly ignored cases can also help to challenge the conceptual paradigms that govern our understanding of conflict, violence, rebellion, and arguably rebel governance. This is because these paradigms have emerged from a limited set of select cases that are mostly located in sub-Saharan Africa, the Balkans, and the Middle East (Brenner and Han 2022). In fact, Myanmar presents an extremely rich archive for studying rebel governance, as numerous rebel groups have established extremely elaborate states within the state in border areas that have never been controlled by actual authorities of the Myanmar state (Brenner 2019, 29–46). Instead of testing the existing hypotheses through a large-*n* research design, our in-depth case thus seeks to inform future theoretical directions in the study of rebel governance by exploring micro- and meso-level processes of rebel governance (cf. George and Bennett 2005, 19–22).

Specifically, we focus on what we call "the Kachin War on Drugs," a fierce *non*-state campaign against the escalating narcotics crisis in northern Myanmar. Our research is based on fieldwork on the *Pat Jasan*, an anti-narcotics movement that is linked with the Kachin rebellion. This was conducted by one of the authors (Brenner) for

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[2] We are indebted to Sanjay Seth for pointing us in this direction.

three weeks in January 2017 in the provincial capital of Myitkyina and surrounding localities. It included seventeen formal key-informant interviews and numerous informal conversations with a range of actors, such as *Pat Jasan* members, Kachin rebel officers, student activists, drug addicts, community leaders, and representatives from different ethnic populations, including from the Kachin-identifying community and non-Kachin-identifying communities, such as Burmans, Gorkhas, Shanni, and non-Kachin identifying Lisus. In choosing interviewees, we aimed to hear a variety of differently positioned perspectives, including voices from different ethnic communities as well as elite and non-elite actors. Fieldwork also included ethnographic observations during overnight stays in a training camp of a *Pat Jasan* unit, and visits to four rehabilitation camps where the *Pat Jasan* detained and treated drug addicts (two camps were located inside and two outside Myitkyina). Fieldwork, moreover, took place in the streets of Myitkyina. Access to and research within the *Pat Jasan* were facilitated by members of the movement, who also acted as interpreters for the local Jinghpaw Kachin language. Access to non-Kachin identifying communities was facilitated by a locally based research associate.

The key for facilitating access and enabling responsible research in the context of civil conflict was Brenner's continuous engagement with conflict-affected communities in Kachin State since 2013. This included previous research as well as supporting technical capacity-building of local civil society initiatives, educational projects, and research institutions. This commitment was particularly important to mitigate the limitations and challenges, including ethical challenges, which we faced as outside researchers from Europe (cf. Cronin-Furman and Lake 2018). Importantly, a grounded understanding of the local context and relevant social networks allowed us to navigate the conflict-ridden environment without posing extensive risks to our interlocutors. Continuous post-fieldwork engagement with local associates was, moreover, important for addressing ethical challenges on publishing research about a dynamic and sensitive political context (cf. Knott 2019).

Long-term engagement with Kachin State and Myanmar, moreover, shaped our understanding of the Kachin War on Drugs. The underpinning research for this article was carried out over a total period of six years. Fieldwork trips lasted from three weeks to nine months. This included fieldwork in territories controlled by the KIOs as well as government-controlled areas. Research in other border areas of Myanmar, specifically in areas controlled by the Karen National Union (KNU) on the Thai border, also informs our understanding of rebel governance in Myanmar. Throughout this time, Brenner conducted more than one hundred formal interviews with rebel leaders and other local elites. Importantly, our understanding is shaped by ethnographic observations gathered through participant observations in both the Kachin and the Karen movements, and countless informal conversations and interactions with non-elite actors, including rank-and-file members of both movements, grassroots activists, and ordinary people from local communities. These interlocutors were, however, more than mere "sources of data." On the contrary, we are deeply indebted to them for sharing their own sophisticated analyses with us, including on the politics of rebellion, the narcotics crisis, and how these issues relate to Myanmar's multilayered ethnic conflict. Unfortunately, the authoritarian, insecure, and violent context in which they live mandates the protection of their identities. We keep all our interlocutors anonymous.

The Kachin War on Drugs

The War on Drugs is commonly associated with the protracted anti-narcotics campaign waged by US policymakers since the 1970s. In a much less-prominent context—Myanmar's war-torn Kachin State—a different war on drugs has intensified over the past years. Located on Myanmar's north-western frontier, Kachin State is located just next to Southeast Asia's infamous Golden Triangle. Tugged between Myanmar, China, Thailand, and Laos, the Golden Triangle has emerged as one of the world's most important hubs of narcotics production during the Cold War (McCoy 1972). While the Cold War ended, drug production has continued to flourish in Myanmar, particularly in its borderlands. These regions are home to the world's longest running civil war, which has given birth to a bewildering mix of armed groups, including powerful ethnonational rebel movements, smaller sized ethnic militias, criminal syndicates, and semiautonomous counterinsurgency commands (Brenner 2019, 29–46).

Many of these armed actors are deeply invested in the country's drug trade, most of which is located in the Shan State but some also in neighboring Kachin State (Lintner and Black 2009; Chin 2011; Meehan 2011). Shan State has for a few decades been the world's second largest source of illicit opium and has now become one of the world's major sources of methamphetamines (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2019, 43–45). The prevalence of drugs has led to a major public health crisis among the conflict-affected local population. In war-torn Kachin State's towns and villages, mining sites, and war-displaced people's camps, a shot of heroin costs as little as one US dollar. This has taken a massive toll on local communities, most of which are ethnic minorities. While sparsely populated Kachin State only houses three percent of Myanmar's population, UNAIDS estimates that it is home to 23 percent of the country's drug users (UNAIDS 2020). As needle-sharing is prevalent, the narcotics crisis turned Kachin State, especially its jade-mining areas, into the epicenter of Myanmar's HIV/AIDS crisis. The agency estimates that about forty percent of the people who inject drugs in Kachin State have contracted HIV (UNAIDS 2020).

The Kachin War on Drugs thus plays out against the background of a public health crisis as well as protracted ethnic conflict and civil war. In comparison to the US War on Drugs, it is however not fought by state actors. The state in Myanmar or, more precisely, Myanmar's military—known as the *Tatmadaw*—is itself deeply implicated in the narcotics trade (Meehan 2011). In Kachin State, major opium cultivation sites are under military control or in areas controlled by its proxy militias (Transnational Institute 2019). The Kachin War on Drugs is fought by the Kachin ethnonational movement—including not only the KIO and its armed wing, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), but also wider networks across Kachin society.

Social Networks of Rebel Health Governance

The Kachin rebellion has struggled for autonomy from Myanmar's ethnocratic state and for ethnic minority rights since 1961. While many armed actors in Myanmar profit from the country's drug trade, the KIO has taken a dedicated stance against narcotics. Throughout their long history, Kachin rebels at times also produced opium. Since 1991, the KIO has, however, started to fight against the growing drug epidemic, which has also taken a heavy toll on its own recruits. In its attempt to curb the narcotics epidemic,

the KIO established a Drug Eradication Committee in 1993. The committee has since implemented a variety of antidrug policies in KIO-controlled territory along the Chinese border, including the prohibition of poppy farming and incarceration of drug-addicted KIO soldiers in rebel-controlled rehabilitation centers.[3] This campaign is part of the wider health and welfare system of a rebel movement that operates its own health department, which runs a nursing school to train medical staff who then work in its hospitals and sick stations in towns, villages, and displaced people's camps. This parallel health system provides basic healthcare to local communities in rebel-controlled areas, including maternal and child healthcare, vaccination programs, humanitarian aid to displaced people, and physical rehabilitation facilities for landmine victims. In a region where preventable diseases, such as malaria, dengue, tuberculosis, or influenza, pose terminal health risks every year, rebel groups have also engaged in disease-control and -prevention measures. In southeast Myanmar, for instance, the parallel healthcare system operated by Karen, Mon, Karenni, and Shan rebels is estimated to employ around 3,000 healthcare workers in 139 clinics and 93 mobile medic teams that serve about 600,000 people (Davis and Jolliffe 2016, 10).

At the same time as rebel health providers work in competition with the Myanmar state, their governance infrastructures are closely intertwined with an assemblage of local and international actors. The KIO Health Department, for instance, has a well-established relationship with the China Center for Disease Control and Prevention (China CDC), with which it coordinates cross-border health concerns, including the spread of HIV/AIDS as well as COVID-19.[4] That said, international support to health provision in Myanmar's borderlands, including humanitarian relief aid, is extremely limited. This is not least because the Myanmar government blocks international relief organizations from operating in many parts of Myanmar's border areas (UNOCHA 2019). Most international aid efforts thus rely on local intermediaries, such as church organizations, to bring basic relief aid to the tens of thousands of war-displaced people living in KIO-controlled territory.[5] These manifold community-based organizations are instrumental in providing healthcare in Myanmar's non-state borderlands and often do so in close coordination with ethnonational rebel organizations (Davis and Jolliffe 2016; Debarre 2019).

This points to the need for appreciating that the Kachin rebellion is not only made up of the KIO and its armed wing, the KIA. Instead of understanding the Kachin ethnonational movement as an armed organization with clear in-and-outgroup boundaries, it is more fruitful to conceptualize it as a social figuration that is deeply embedded in different parts of Kachin society and entails a variety of institutions beyond its manifestation in an armed organization (Brenner 2019, 13–28). Equally important as the KIO—and at least equally as forceful in its demands for Kachin autonomy from the Myanmar state—are local churches, such as the Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC) or Kachin student associations (Tu Sadan 2016; Brenner 2019, 85–86).[6] Moreover, the analytical distinction between rebel rulers and rebel-ruled that is often drawn by the rebel governance literature collapses in Myanmar's borderlands. Kinship relations between civilians and rebels are strong in a context where protracted armed conflict has haunted generations and rebellion has "become a way of live" (Smith 1999, 88). The provision of health and welfare has been instrumental in embedding the Kachin rebellion inextricably within local communities in a context where state institutions have either been absent or largely worked to marginalize Kachin communities (for similar observations in the contexts of the Karen and Wa movements in Myanmar, see Brenner 2019, 47–74; Ong and Steinmüller 2021). For analyzing the biopolitics of rebel governance in Kachin State, it is important to appreciate this wider social figuration of the Kachin rebellion.

Defending Society, Building the Nation

In 2010, the KIO officially announced that it will escalate its "war against drugs" to government-controlled territories. A KIO spokesperson explained that the government's failure to address the drug epidemic in government-controlled territories of Kachin State was not incidental. Rather government inaction was a targeted campaign against Kachin youth, especially young men, at a time when the KIO sought to revitalize its own ranks by recruiting a new generation of revolutionaries from government-controlled parts of Kachin State with its Education and Economic Development for Youth (EEDY) mobilization program. The KIO's spokesperson consequently accused Myanmar's military rulers of "using drugs as a weapon to counter attack the KIO's EEDY program by destroying Kachin youth with drugs" (Lahpai 2010). The expansion of the Kachin War on Drugs into government held-territory, however, still took until 2014 after war returned to Kachin State after a seventeen-year-long ceasefire between the KIO and the *Tatmadaw* had broken down in June 2011. Since 2014, however, the Kachin War on Drugs has rapidly expanded across most government-controlled parts of Kachin State and neighboring northern Shan State (where many Kachin people live as well).

The campaign has been led by a Kachin movement that is locally known by its Kachin Jinghpaw language name *Pat Jasan*, which can be translated as "to stop and clean up" or "to ban and clear."[7] The *Pat Jasan* has sometimes been described as a grassroots movement. Oosterom et al. for instance conceptualize it as "a counter-narcotic vigilante movement" (Oosterom, Maran, and Wilson 2019, 1730). Thinking of the *Pat Jasan* as a community-organized vigilante movement reflects an account that can often be heard on the streets of Kachin State's government-controlled capital Myitkyina. According to this, the *Pat Jasan* was founded by elderly women in northern Shan State. Disillusioned with lacking government interventions in the escalating narcotics crisis, the women banded together and started burning the ever-ubiquitous poppy fields. Inspired by the courage of these women, local civil society organizations, the prominent Kachin churches (Kachin society is mostly Christian and predominantly Baptist), and above all Kachin youth groups mobilized society more widely for the Kachin War on Drugs.[8]

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[3] KIO Officer, interviewed in drug eradication center outside the KIO capital Laiza on March 27, 2014.

[4] Kachin humanitarian worker based in Laiza, telephone interview, October 12, 2020.

[5] International Committee of the Red Cross staff, conversation in Myitkyina, January 22, 2017.

[6] As with some other ethnic minorities across Myanmar—namely the Karen, Karenni, Naga, and Chin—Christianity has been crucial to ethnic identity formation in the borderworlds of Southeast Asia ever since missionaries arrived in the nineteenth century (Smith 1999, 44–45; Sadan 2013, 381–82; Brenner 2019, 34–35).

[7] The Jinghpaw are one of six sub-categories of the people who are often referred to as the Kachin in Myanmar. Jinghpaw is also the dominant language, often used as a lingua franca among Kachin-identifying people.

[8] Kachin student activist, conversation in Myitkyina on January 10, 2017.

While the Pat Jasan has a strong grassroots character, conceiving of the movement as a self-organized and autonomous vigilante is misleading. It is more accurate to see it as a social movement that was unified and scaled up from a variety of grassroots initiatives that emerged over the years in response to the local drugs crisis (cf. Dan et al. 2021). Instrumental to this process was the social figuration of the Kachin ethnonational movement, particularly its two main pillars: the KIO and the KBC. Both organizations did not only finance the *Pat Jasan* but also provided the infrastructure spanning across rebel and government-controlled areas of Kachin State that made a unified Kachin War on Drugs possible in the first place.[9] As with the wider Kachin rebellion, the *Pat Jasan* is a complex social movement that involves a variety of actors and practices, including for instance the invisibilized labor of women or the spiritual support of priests (Maran and Sadan 2021). That said, its most visible incarnation are young men who arrest drug users, run rehabilitation camps, and burn down poppy fields. They are equipped with batons and walkie-talkies and often trained in *kahprek*, a local version of karate. Their camouflaged vests feature the symbol of the *Pat Jasan*: the outline of Kachin State's boundaries, which is filled with narcotics, including poppy flowers, needles, and pills, all of which are crossed out with a red bar (identical to the symbol employed by the KIO Drug Eradication Committee). While the *Pat Jasan* does not hide its proximity to the KIO, it would be incorrect to think of the movement as simply the KIA boots on the ground in government-controlled territory. As above, it is important to remember that the Kachin ethnonational movement cannot be reduced to the KIO/KIA but comprises a wider social figuration, including church networks or student associations.

The *Pat Jasan* then is best conceptualized as an ancillary force of the wider Kachin national project. This is reflected in its leadership. The movement's Myitkyina secretary in 2017, for instance, previously acted as the head of the KBC youth wing.[10] Kachin nationalists view the *Pat Jasan* as the last line of defense for the Kachin society whose very existence is often perceived as threatened by the narcotics crisis. Indeed, to many Kachin, the crisis cannot be reduced to a public health issue. Instead, the narcotics epidemic is often referred to as a weapon that the government intentionally uses for waging a "cold war" against the Kachin nation. Many Kachin people also refer to the narcotics crisis as "ethnic cleansing" or a "slow genocide" with which the Myanmar state seeks to exterminate the Kachin people.[11] Defending Kachin society from the scorches of narcotics then becomes a national duty to the extent to which the fight against the drugs becomes a prime vehicle for Kachin nation-building itself. In fact, this biopolitical discourse resolves itself in biopolitical practices aimed not only at saving Kachin bodies but also at molding the Kachin population.

Youth inhabit a special place in this biopolitical discourse. This is not only because many drug users are young people but also because youth are ascribed a central role for building the Kachin nation. On the one hand, Kachin nationalists are concerned about demographics and there-fore biological reproduction of what is a relatively small ethnic community after all. The exact figures of Kachin demographics are impossible to establish, not least because of disagreements of who exactly identifies as Kachin and the politics of census-taking in a country ridden by decades of ethnic conflict, civil war, and displacement (Ferguson 2015). Most estimates, however, speak of only about one million Kachin people in a country of more than 51 million people (Minority Rights Group International n.d.). Even in the region called Kachin State, it is estimated that only less than half of the present population of Kachin State self-identifies as Kachin (Kiik 2016, 211–13).[12] Kachin State is, moreover, a popular destination for domestic labor migrants seeking employment in Kachin State's jade mines and other natural resource industries (Myanmar Department of Population 2015). Many Kachin fear that their population is rapidly decreasing in size compared to other ethnic groups, which challenges their claim to ownership over Kachin State. For Kachin nationalists, biological reproduction thus becomes an imperative. This was clearly expressed by the KIO statement above in which the organization voiced its concern about its youth wing. Similarly, an official from the KBC youth department told us in an interview how he stresses biological reproduction in public-awareness campaigns that he organizes for young Kachin:

> The common message that we give is that drugs are ethnic cleansing. This is going to extinguish our society. What we explain is that we might all disappear because of the drugs one day. You see, we might not be able to generate new generations anymore. In my village a father was using drugs and died from it, and his son was using drugs and died from it before he could marry.[13]

On the other hand, the biopolitical discourse ascribes an important leadership role to youth for building a future nation beyond mere biological reproduction. Not only numbers but also the health of population matters. As in other conflict-affected ethnic minority populations of Myanmar, youth leadership means to either become a soldier with the ethnonational rebellion who can defend the nation from external enemies or become an educated person who furthers the material and spiritual development of the nation. In the words of the KBC official, there are "two ways for youth: either you are joining the KIA or you are trying to do your best with education. But it's the same goal: Awmdawm! [freedom/independence!]."[14] Youth leadership then necessitates a strong body and a clear mind. The narcotics epidemic thus became a disaster for the Kachin national project precisely because, the official continued, "the youth's will is declining. The drug users don't want to study anymore, and they don't want to go to the KIA anymore. Like before I said, we only have two ways: whether you join the KIA or give your best for education. But drug users are hopeless. They are against the nation-building."[15] The KBC official mobilizes awareness campaigns to implore young Kachin to think of their future responsibilities: "If we as youth are using drugs

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[9] KIO spokesperson, interviewed in Myitkyina on January 11, 2017; *Pat Jasan* Myitkyina secretary, interviewed in Myitkyina on January 11, 2017. See also Sadan, Maran, and Dan (2021), 8).

[10] *Pat Jasan* Myitkyina secretary, interviewed in Myitkyina on January 11, 2017.

[11] Kachin student activist, conversation in Myitkyina on January 10, 2017; KBC Youth Department official, interviewed in Myitkyina on January 17, 2017. See also Dan et al. (2021), 3–4). These framings resemble similar popular understandings of other crises in a community that has long felt under existential threat (cf. Kiik 2016).

[12] Other ethnic groups include Burmans, Shanni, Indians, Rakhine, Chinese, Gurkhas, and Naga. They also include people who are commonly counted as Kachin subgroups—by Kachin nationalists and outside observers alike—but do not always prefer to self-identify as Kachin, such as parts of the Lisu or Rawang communities (Kiik 2016, 211–13; Pelletier 2021).

[13] KBC Youth Department official, interviewed in Myitkyina on January 17, 2017.

[14] KBC Youth Department official, interviewed in Myitkyina on January 17, 2017.

[15] KBC Youth Department official, interviewed in Myitkyina on January 17, 2017.

now, imagine what will happen with us in the future, who will lead our society in 20 years?"[16]

For Kachin nationalists, the narcotics epidemic is bound up with a wider moral decay of Kachin youth and society. This is not simply because narcotics are viewed within a broader nexus of criminal and antisocial behavior as is the case elsewhere as well. More importantly, taking drugs violates the nationalist responsibilities of Kachin subjects. "Good" Kachin subjects do not take drugs. They are virtuous and healthy, which allows them to become soldiers and educated people of the nationalist rebellion. The Kachin War on Drugs has thus become about moral restoration. A *Pat Jasan* commander who leads the militia's operations to arrest drug users on the streets of Myitkyina expressed this by proudly reflecting on how his work has changed local youth and the Kachin capital for the better: "Myitkyina has changed because of *Pat Jasan*. Before *Pat Jasan* most youth were morally corrupted and useless for society. Now most youth are good. They are afraid of drugs. And they can become leaders of the society."[17]

According to him and the Myitkyina secretary of the *Pat Jasan*, the militia therefore expanded its role beyond policing narcotics.[18] This is also owed to the fact that local Kachin communities have little trust in the Bamar-dominated official police force, which is usually not present in Myitkyina's Kachin neighborhood, especially after dark. Rather than only arresting drug addicts, *Pat Jasan* members have—at the time of research—indeed, policed the neighborhood as local Kachin call their assistance to arrest petty crime, such as theft; more serious crimes, such as robbery and domestic violence; and what is seen as antisocial behavior, including alcoholism. Here again, moral conduct is of essence. In 2017, one local entrepreneur reported how the *Pat Jasan* has become a form of morality police. While he originally wanted to open a liqueur shop selling Kachin-style whiskey, he decided that this was not the right time due to fears of repercussion in an environment that has become increasingly hostile toward all forms of intoxicants and bodily leisure.[19] Similarly, the karaoke bars of Myitkyina—usually a popular haunt for many young Kachin to escape the dire reality of their conflict-ridden everyday—have taken a hit during the heydays of the *Pat Jasan*. As one young Kachin described to us, karaoke bars have come to be associated with moral degeneration since they concentrated alcohol, drugs, and prostitution, all of which stand opposed to the virtuous ideal of Kachin nationalist youth as soldiers and educated people.[20]

That said, the *Pat Jasan's* main activity has been the operation of a widespread network of rehabilitation camps for drug addicts. At the time of research, the movement operated more than seventy such camps across Kachin State under guidelines formulated by the *Pat Jasan* Committee, which is made up by Kachin churches, student groups, and civil society organizations.[21] These guidelines often contrast the official procedures by the Myanmar state and international NGOs that have engaged in local drug rehabilitation in ways that work as counter-conducts. The most prominent of these guidelines is the rejection of drug replacement therapy, such as the use of Methadone for detoxifying opiate addicts. The *Pat Jasan* argues that drug addiction cannot be cured with drugs but demands spiritual and bodily strength

to overcome in a sustainable way. Therapy for addictions ranging from heroin and methamphetamine to alcohol, thus, consists of cold detoxification followed by multiple months of bible teaching, physical exercise, and sometimes bodily labor. Camps, therefore, usually feature a chapel and a sportsground. Some offer martial arts training, and some have vegetable gardens in which occupants produce their own food. Most camp occupants were arrested by *Pat Jasan* members. However, some reported that their family members turned them in or even to have submitted themselves voluntarily.[22]

One of the camps was established in a small village outside Myitkyina in 2014. It was established and operated by the local church; the pastor in charge referred to the detainees as his students whom he is teaching in daily bible classes.[23] In January 2017, the camp counted about one hundred inhabitants, the majority of whom had finished their six-month treatment and stayed on as what was called volunteers. Some of them volunteered for a few weeks; others had stayed for two years. Some said that they feel as if they can contribute to a wider social cause by volunteering in the camp. Others mentioned that they did not want to go back to their communities for fears of being stigmatized as former drug addicts. Some also expressed their fear of getting back to old habits, including drug usage, when coming back to their previous social networks.[24] What emerged from these conversations was also that not all of the camp "students" were Kachin, which contrasts with arguments that the *Pat Jasan* has limited its operations to Kachin-identifying communities (Dan et al. 2021, 2). In fact, several detainees in two of the visited camps came from other ethnic and religious communities, including Buddhist Bamar, Buddhist Shanni, and Hindu Gorkha communities. Nevertheless, the camp director and pastor insisted on the power of bible teaching for anti-narcotics therapy and regularly baptized non-Christian students who had accepted Jesus. According to him, "the scripture provides guidance and strength to everyone who is lost."[25]

While the biopolitical practices of the *Pat Jasan* have unsurprisingly attracted criticism from human rights and health professionals, they need to be understood within Kachin nationalist cosmology. As argued by Sadan, Maran, and Dan, the *Pat Jasan* discourse and practice of saving the Kachin community from the threat of narcotics through religiously defined moral uplift are rooted in long-standing cultural attitudes, in which Kachin-identifying communities perceive their victimhood as part of their Christian identity (Sadan, Maran, and Dan 2021, 3). In doing so, spiritual redemption becomes the logical safeguard against existential threats. Religious practice including collective conversion and continuous theological regeneration campaigns have indeed underpinned the development of modern Kachin nationalism itself (Sadan, Maran, and Dan 2021). The authors show how the biopolitical discourse and practice of today's Pat Jasan movement in fact dovetails with previous Kachin nationalist campaigns. The Kachin Regeneration Campaign of the late 1930s, for instance, perceived the Kachin nation body to be threatened by moral decay in the form of drug abuse and syphilis, both of which were deemed to be related to what was seen as pre-Christian practices of alcohol and opium consumption as well as the unsupervised mingling of youth. Here also, the concern was for the

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[16] KBC Youth Department official, interviewed in Myitkyina on January 17, 2017.

[17] *Pat Jasan* commander, interviewed in Myitkyina on January 14, 2017.

[18] *Pat Jasan* Myitkyina secretary, interviewed in Myitkyina on January 11, 2017.

[19] Kachin entrepreneur, conversation in Myitkyina on January 16, 2017.

[20] Kachin student activist, conversation in Myitkyina on January 10, 2017.

[21] *Pat Jasan* Myitkyina secretary, interviewed in Myitkyina on January 11, 2017.

[22] Detainees at three *Pat Jasan* camps inside and outside Myitkyina, informal conversations on January 14, 2017.

[23] Camp director, interviewed on January 14, 2017.

[24] Detainees and volunteers at *Pat Jasan* camp outside Myitkyina, informal conversations on January 14, 2017.

[25] Camp director, interviewed on January 14, 2017.

bodily and spiritual health of young male Kachin (who sought enrollment in the colonial army of the time). And here as well, the remedy was seen in the moral uplift through religious self-reflection and practice (Sadan, Maran, and Dan 2021).

Beside international human rights advocates, the Pat Jasan has however also come under criticism from some local communities who feel threatened by the *Pat Jasan*. These feelings are expressed particularly strongly by non-Kachin-identifying communities in Kachin State, which is an ethnically highly diverse region (Dean 2005). Some Shanni nationalists, for instance, view the *Pat Jasan* as a new means for expanding the Kachin ethnonational project and expelling them from what they view as their own ancestral lands.[26] Similar resentments have also grown louder among some of the ethnic groups that are often classified as Kachin. Among the six ethnic groups, whom the Kachin ethnonational movement considers Kachin, some Lisu and Rawang communities have especially long felt alienated by what they experience as discrimination and marginalization by the Jinghpaw-dominated institutions of the Kachin rebellion (Fishbein 2019; Pelletier 2021). In this context, Lisu politicians and activists pointed out that the *Pat Jasan* has amplified this conflict, for instance, by discriminately targeting Lisu communities as alleged drug producers or drug users.[27] In parallel to the oft-heard reference to *Bamar* domination over ethnic minorities—*Burmanization*—some Lisu indeed referred to the *Pat Jasan* as a vehicle of *Jinghpawization* in Kachin State.[28] Future research will hopefully tend more closely to these clashing non-state ethnic nationalisms, which add another layer to the conflict over the molding of populations beyond the state.

In any case, it is evident that the *Pat Jasan* is more than a community-organized anti-narcotics vigilante or a transactional rebel governance intervention into a public health crisis. From a transactional rebel governance perspective, the Kachin War on Drugs serves a primarily regulatory function: the prevention of crime and disease to garner support from local populations for the Kachin rebellion. A biopolitical reading, however, guides our view to the productive function of the *Pat Jasan's* societal interventions. Not only do Kachin nationalists view it as their duty to fight narcotics to support the biological reproduction of the Kachin nation. Rather than just sustaining life, the Kachin War on Drugs is also about optimizing life by counteracting what is viewed as the moral decay of Kachin society and producing bodily strong, mentally fit, and spiritually devout nationalist subjects instead. The policing of drugs by the Kachin rebellion then is not so much about a regulatory, juridical concept of power, that is, what is forbidden and what is allowed. It also stands in contrast to Foucauldian scholarship on drug policies in the West, which insist on its primary function of controlling and disciplining populations (Fraser and Valentine 2008; Keane 2009). Kachin rebel governance of health seems to ultimately be about the crafting of an imagined community through biopolitical technologies that govern its subjects and their conducts. In fact, our study suggests that it is here where the Kachin nation body is formed based on ethical discourses and practices in direct competition with the Burmese nation of Myanmar's ethnocratic nation state and other ethnic populations and ethnonationalist projects.

Conclusion

Myanmar's contested borderlands are a rich archive for exploring the politics of sovereignty beyond the state, including rebel governance. Doing so is also crucial for understanding the nature and dynamics of one of the longest ongoing but least-researched civil wars in the world. Analyzing the Kachin rebellion's interventions in the region's narcotics crisis demonstrated that the movement's governance of public health cannot be understood in instrumental and transactional terms. Instead, Kachin rebel governance can better be understood as a productive biopolitical technology that molds a strong, healthy, and virtuous Kachin nation body. In fact, interventions such as the Kachin War on Drugs can be placed into a long historical genealogy, which helps in understanding that it is precisely here—in the practice and discourse of rebel governance—where the Kachin nation comes into sovereign existence despite the absence of formal statehood. Beyond our contributions to the study of Myanmar, our analysis allowed for intervening in debates on global health, rebel governance, and biopolitics in international relations and security studies.

First, our analysis of public health governance by rebel groups contributes to the growing field of IR scholarship on global health governance and health security. Critical security scholars have pointed to the complex assemblages of actors, institutions, and practices involved in the global governance of public health threats, such as pandemics. In doing so, they highlight how this has shaped international security practices as well as how the changing landscape of security, in turn, reflects the transformation of statehood itself (cf. Elbe 2012; Hameiri and Jones 2013). Nevertheless, non-state armed groups have not yet received scholarly attention in this field. Our analysis, however, demonstrates their significance as public health actors, urging a closer look at non-state armed groups as actors of global health.

Second, we intervened in the rebel governance literature, questioning commonplace accounts that view the relations between rebels and civilians primarily in transactional and instrumental terms. Instead of analyzing the provision of public goods by rebel movements as a means to legitimacy, we built on sociological perspectives that highlight the relational and decentered working of rebel power, shaping subjects and populations through practices and discourses (cf. Brenner 2018; Hoffmann and Verweijen 2019). By mobilizing Foucault's work on governmentality, biopolitics, and counter-conducts and Chatterjee's work on governmentality in contexts of postcolonial state formation and nationalist movements beyond the European nation state, we proposed to understand rebel governance as *competing biopolitics*. In doing so, we stress that government relations between rebels and local communities are best understood as productive technologies rather than instrumental or regulatory exercises. Our analysis suggests that rebels mold their constituent populations, including their conduct and subjectivities, in competition with the state. Of crucial importance in this process are biopolitical micro-practices and counter-conducts. These, we suggest, allow for the alternative moral subjectification of constituent populations, which ultimately enables the crafting of imagined communities through war-time social orders.

Last, by advancing the notion of *competing* biopolitics and highlighting biopolitical technologies beyond the European nation state, we contribute to the Foucauldian literature on biopolitical multiplicity and governmentality in postcolonial contexts (cf. Chatterjee 2004; Legg 2008; Aradau and Tazzioli 2020). Importantly, competing biopolitics does not simply indicate the multiplicity of biopolitical actors and

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[26] Members of the Red Shan Party, interviewed nearby Myitkyina on January 13, 2017.

[27] Lisu politician and members of the Lisu Youth Committee, interviewed in Myitkyina on January 12 and 14, 2017.

[28] Lisu politician and members of the Lisu Youth Committee, interviewed in Myitkyina on January 12 and 14, 2017.

technologies: it highlights the conflicting ways in which they mold populations, subjects, and conducts. In the context of rebel public health governance, competing biopolitics concerns conflicting codes of conduct and modes of governing health risks between state and non-state actors. By exploring rebel biopolitics in contexts of fragmented statehood, our research thus urges to move more firmly beyond the commonplace citizen/population distinction and attend more closely to the ethicopolitical role of non-state biopolitical technologies.

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