



# Accord

an international review of peace initiatives

INSIGHT 4

## Borderlands and peacebuilding **A view from the margins**

November 2018 // Editors

Sharri Plonski and Zahbia Yousuf

**Accord Insight** presents cutting-edge analysis and contemporary peacebuilding innovation by re-examining key challenges and practical lessons from Conciliation Resources' Accord publication series.



**Accord Insight // [www.c-r.org](http://www.c-r.org)**

Published by Conciliation Resources, to inform and strengthen peace processes worldwide by documenting and analysing the lessons of peacebuilding

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Published by

**Conciliation Resources**

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Charity registered in England and Wales (1055436).

Company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (03196482)

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[www.soapbox.co.uk](http://www.soapbox.co.uk)

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Cover photo: Collage of borderlands images includes Axel Drainville/  
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ISBN: 978-1-905805-27-3

ISSN: 2397-558X

**Acknowledgements**

Accord's strength and value relies on the expertise, experience and perspectives of a range of people who contribute to projects in a variety of ways.

We would like to give special thanks to Aaron Griffiths, Abdulkader Kurabi, Adam Baron, Aden Abdi, Angela King, Annette Idler, Anwar Jaber, Ariel Caine, Benjamin Dix, Catriona Dowd, Charlotte Morris, Clare Richards, Diana Klein, Elettra Pellanda, Gum Sha Aung, Hastings Donnan, Hugh Lamarque, Janet Mohammed, Jeremy Lind, Jerome Drevon, Jon Sack, Jonathan Cohen, Judith Vorrath, Kalpana Jha, Kate Meagher, Katy Hayward, Mandy Sadan, Mariam Abdel Baky, Michael Eilenberg, Michel Thill, Mira Sovakar, Mohamed Abdi Rage, Natalia Mirimanova, Orzala Ashraf Nemat, Patrick Barron, Rabia Mubashir, Rana Khalaf, Richard King, Sujeet Karn and Tom Rodwell.

This publication draws on research and ideas developed through the 'Borderlands, Brokers and Peacebuilding in Sri Lanka and Nepal: War to Peace Transitions viewed from the margins' (funded by the Economic and Social Research Council number: ES/M011046/1).

We also gratefully acknowledge the use of illustrated materials produced through the Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded project, 'Living on the Margins: Using literary comics to understand the role of borderland brokers in post-war transitions' (grant number: AH/P008216/1).

Research for the article 'Peacebuilding amidst war in northern Myanmar', by Patrick Meehan, was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council [grant number: ES/P009867/1: Building sustainable peacetime economies in the aftermath of war].

Opinions expressed by authors are their own. This report is an output of the Political Settlements Research Programme, funded by UK aid from the Department for International Development for the benefit of developing countries. The views expressed and information contained in it are not necessarily those of or endorsed by DFID, which can accept no responsibility for such views or information or for any reliance placed on them.

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# Contents

<b>Acronyms</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Spatialising political settlements</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Accord Insight</b>	
Peacebuilding in borderlands: a view from the margins	20
<b>Case studies</b>	
The changing nature of local peacebuilding in Kenya's north-eastern borderlands	26
Peacebuilding amidst war in northern Myanmar	34
Administering a borderland at war: Bab al-Hawa in Syria	42
Madhesi borderland brokers and Nepal's post-war transition	48
Peacebuilding in Tunisian border regions: a missing piece of the transition process	56
Ukraine's Donbas region: how borderlands became battlefields, and boundaries became frontiers	64
Brexiting borderlands: the vulnerabilities of the Irish peace process	72
<b>Further reading</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>The Accord series</b>	<b>81</b>

# Acronyms

**AS** – Ahrar al-Sham  
**CPB** – Communist Party of Burma  
**CPN** – Communist Party of Nepal  
**CSO** – Civil society organisation  
**EU** – European Union  
**GAD** – General Administration Department  
**GCA** – Government-controlled area  
**GCoE** – Garre Council of Elders  
**GDP** – Gross domestic product  
**HTS** – Hayat Tahrir al-Sham  
**ICBAN** – Irish Central Border Area Network  
**IDP** – Internally displaced person  
**IS** – Islamic State  
**KIA** – Kachin Independence Army  
**LTTE** – Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam  
**MJF** – Madhesi Janadhikar Forum  
**NATO** – North Atlantic Treaty Organization  
**NCA** – Nationwide ceasefire agreement  
**NGCA** – Non-government-controlled area  
**NGO** – Non-governmental organisation  
**NSU** – Nepal Students' Union  
**OSCE** – Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe  
**PSA** – Political settlements analysis  
**UNDP** – United Nations Development Programme  
**WPDC** – Wajir Peace and Development Committee

# Introduction

## Conflict and peace in borderlands

Sharri Plonski and Oliver Walton

**Sharri Plonski** is a lecturer in International Politics at Queen Mary University of London. Her expertise is in the politics of Palestine/Israel, which she examines through the lens of borders, infrastructure and anti-colonial resistance. Her current research project is on the impact of logistics, trade and transport corridors on Middle East political and geographic landscapes. Alongside (and long before) Dr Plonski's academic career, she worked in a variety of civil society and human rights organisations, centred around the politics of Palestine.

**Oliver Walton** is a Lecturer in International Development at the University of Bath. His research focuses on the political economy of war-to-peace transitions, civil society, NGOs and NGO legitimacy. He is principal investigator for the PACCS-funded 'Living on the Margins: The Role of Borderland Brokers in Post-War Transitions' project and a co-investigator on the 'Borderlands, Brokers and Peacebuilding' project.

This fourth Accord Insight publication focuses on peacebuilding in borderlands – regions that straddle an international border. Building on Accord 22 (2011), *Paix sans frontières: building peace across borders*, the publication develops understanding of how peace and transition processes incorporate borderland regions and the interests of communities living there – or, as is more often the case, how they neglect or exclude them.

Applying a 'borderlands lens' challenges some key assumptions that underscore current peacebuilding policy

and practice: that power and order radiate outwards from the centre of the state; that border zones are resistant to national peacebuilding and statebuilding projects because of a lack of security, development or governance infrastructure; and that more development and greater state presence can therefore resolve challenges faced by borderland communities. Seven case studies of peacebuilding in borderlands are presented here – north-eastern Kenya (bordering Somalia and Ethiopia); Shan and Kachin states (Myanmar/China); Bab al-Hawa, Idlib (Syria/Turkey); the Tarai (Nepal/India); Medenine and Tataouine

### BOX 1

#### Nepal's Tarai borderland

The Tarai, or southern plains region of Nepal, shares an 'open' border with India, across which span dense webs of interaction between the communities living on both sides. Nepalis and Indians cross daily in order to buy everyday goods, work, and visit friends and relatives. People living on the Nepali side of the border watch Indian TV and use Indian currency and mobile phone networks. Political leaders and armed groups in the Tarai often rely on cross-border support. These cross-border connections have contributed to a perception among dominant groups from the central hill regions of Nepal that Madhesi and other ethnic groups from the plains have split allegiances and are not 'true Nepalis'.

Nearly a decade after the end of the armed conflict, in August 2015 a wave of protests across the Tarai began against new constitutional proposals that threatened to further marginalise the people of this region. The protests took different forms, with the most violent incidents initially taking place in the western Tarai after severe police repression against protestors seeking an autonomous Tharuhat province. In the mid- and east Tarai, protests were led by Madhesi political parties that felt the

constitutional proposals which emerged after a 2006 peace agreement between Maoist and government forces ignored their demands. In order to ratchet up pressure on Kathmandu, these groups, with the covert backing of the Indian government, imposed an 'unofficial blockade' at various border crossings along the Tarai, but centred on the town of Birgunj, where around 70 per cent of Nepal's petroleum products are imported from India. For over four months, protestors enforced the closure and no goods were allowed to pass.

The blockade had rapid and spiralling ramifications for the Nepali economy, prompting shortages of cooking oil, fuel and medicines. Long queues of cars, trucks and motorcycles formed around the petrol stations of Kathmandu, and a thriving black market for petrol quickly developed. People stockpiled fuel in garages; others took to their bicycles. Although the protestors (and the Indian government) hoped the blockade would force political leaders in Kathmandu to cede to Madhesi demands, the blockade in fact provided a boost to nationalists who railed against Indian bullying and violation of Nepali sovereignty. Prime Minister KP Oli spoke about strengthening ties with China. Eventually an amendment was agreed which allowed India to save face but did little to address Madhesi demands.

(Tunisia/Libya); Donbas (Ukraine/Russia); and Northern Ireland. These demonstrate how transition processes are very different when viewed from the margins – with important implications for peacebuilding policy and practice.

The Nepali blockade described in Box 1 vividly illustrates the central role of borders and borderlands in post-war transitions, how changes at the margins of the state can shape decision-making and power relations at the centre, and how transition dynamics are influenced by multiple actors from both sides of an international border.

### Why borderlands?

The common assumption that borders refer to political partitions between recognised entities is challenged by the fact that they are often disputed, and that the formal lines used to delineate states and citizenship seldom map neatly onto the boundaries that define social, ethnic, linguistic and political groups. Boundaries, at their most basic, describe the informal lines drawn to differentiate between ‘us’ and ‘them’, or friend and foe. Formal borders overlap with a range of invisible or informal dividing lines. A frontier describes the pliable political space that emerges through conquest and territorial acquisition, which a border is meant to close down and settle. Yet in practice, frontier dynamics continue long after nation states define their territorial limits. Such dynamics are often central to the way borderlands are treated in national and international policy, in particular seeing borderlands as ‘exceptional’ zones that warrant ‘exceptional’ kinds of intervention.

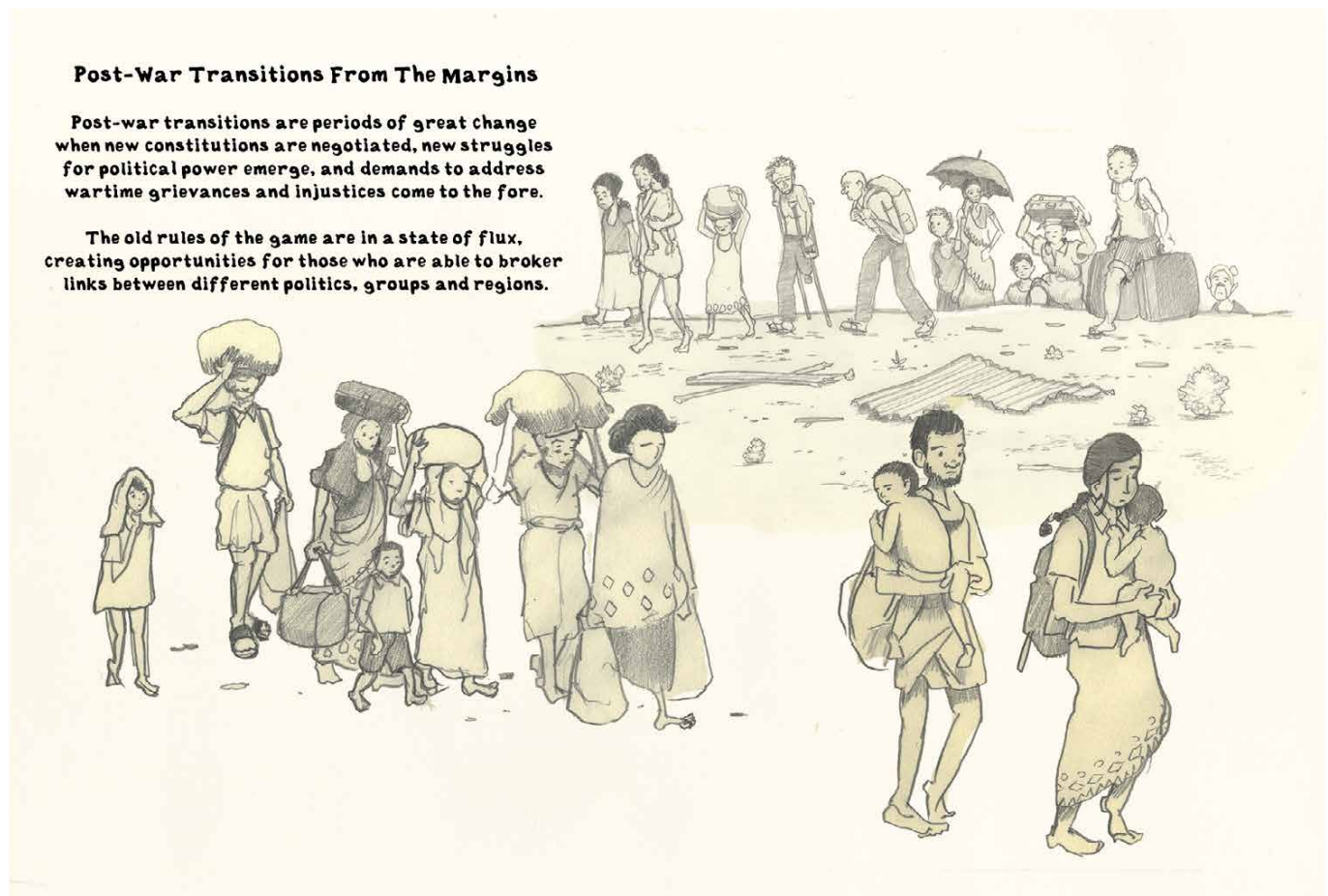
A distinct set of conflict relations emerges in borderlands. State presence is often limited. Borderlands are commonly home

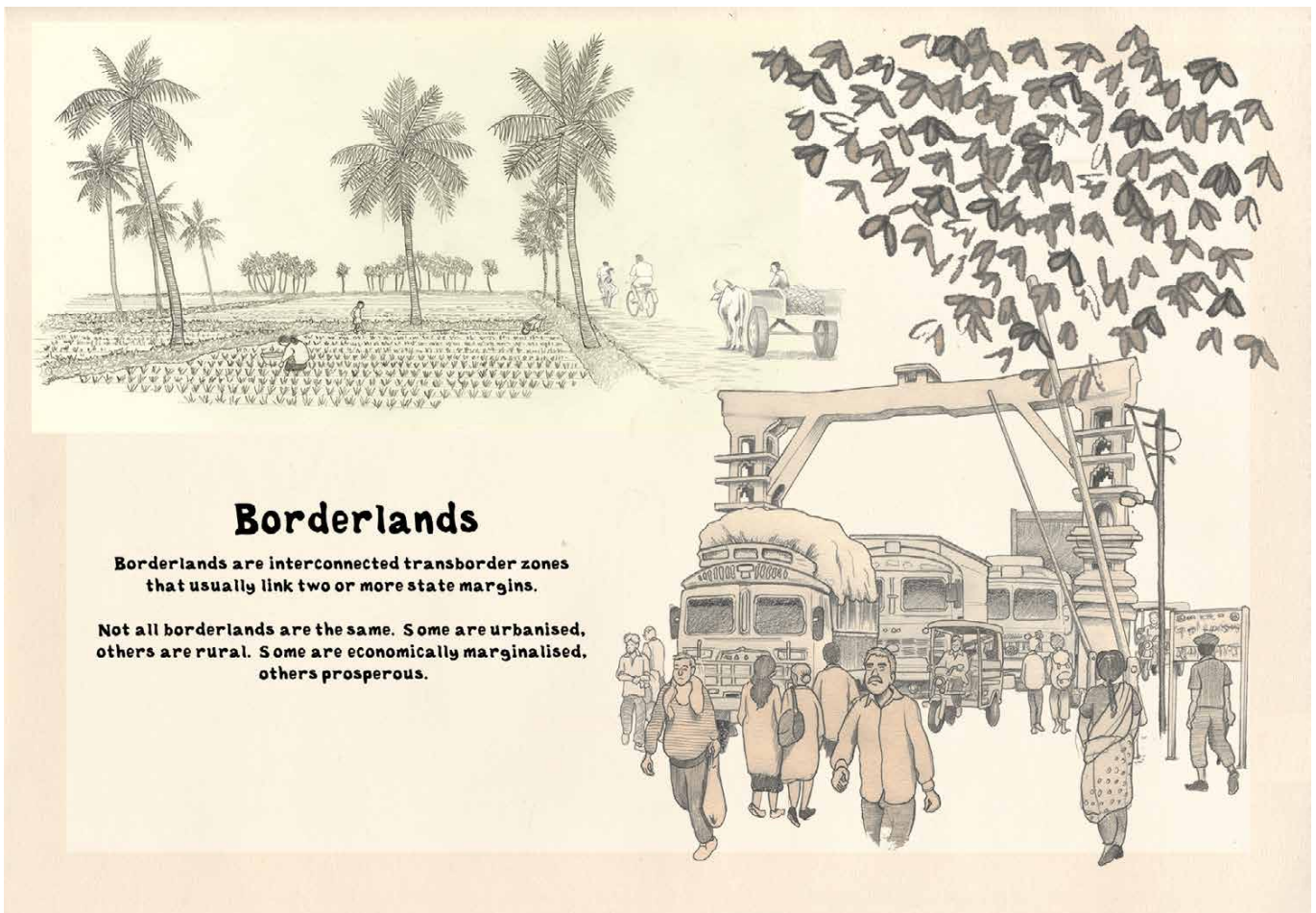
to ethnic, linguistic and kinship groups that straddle the border, facilitating flows of trade and movements of people, and those living in borderlands may see the other side of the border as more significant than distant capitals and economic centres.

**“ Borderlands can be contested spaces that become havens for resistance movements and where non-state actors clash with state institutions.”**

Some borders are relatively open, porous and unregulated. Others are heavily securitised. And, as the description of the Tarai blockade above illustrates, soft borders can quickly harden. Borderlands can be contested spaces that become havens for resistance movements and where non-state actors clash with state institutions. They may experience persistent violence and sharp economic inequalities, but may also foster new modes of development, extraction and trade.

Borderlands are often either overlooked or viewed negatively in statebuilding and peacebuilding interventions, seen as lagging or ‘disruptive’ zones that threaten state integrity and development processes, and that are only noticeable when violence escalates. Despite growing interest in inclusive peacebuilding, responses to borderland instability tend to prioritise security, overlooking historical processes of marginalisation or complex cross-border political, economic and social interdependencies. Common approaches have





been centrally-driven, to pacify and regulate borderlands, seal them off, or negotiate deals with local power-holders that do little to empower borderland communities. In Myanmar, for example, local militias have been used to outsource violence and establish state authority over contested and 'uncontrollable' borderland areas.

Yet, borderlands are not inherently marginal and perceiving border regions as constraints on rather than opportunities for peaceful change creates gaps in both understanding and practice. Their strategic location at the intersection of states means they can be important for accessing regional economic markets, facilitating trade flows and shaping diplomatic relations and national security. Case studies in this publication show how, for example, borderlands in Ukraine, Kenya, Myanmar and Northern Ireland have been key to enhancing the economic reach and potential of the state, and integral to national growth and development.

The Madhesi blockade on goods coming across the border from India featured in Box 1 above is a stark example of the economic risks of failure to address borderland grievances. The case studies more broadly show how border regions function in different ways in peace and transition processes: as strategic zones – for various armed actors in Syria; as buffer zones – the Tarai between Nepal and India; or zones of symbolic importance – as a bellwether for peace in Northern Ireland. Conflicts such as in Syria, Libya and Somalia traverse national boundaries, through trade routes, illicit economies, movement of weapons, armed groups and people, or ideologies.

Borderlands can become sites of regional and international power plays – as with Myanmar's northern border regions for China, or the Donbas for Russia, the EU and Ukraine. Borderlands are also gendered zones, where specific identity groups may be included or excluded in times of crisis and stability, and structures and institutions are used to maintain such power relations. Borderland communities are not homogenous. Some borderland groups may benefit from tighter regulation of the border – for example the deals reached among armed groups to formalise the Syria-Turkey crossing point at Bab al-Hawa. Others will seek to promote freer movement of people and goods. These complex experiences of borders and borderlands produce multiple challenges for peacebuilding interventions to align with the needs of borderland communities.

### Structure of the publication

The publication is organised in two sections. Section one begins with this introduction and addresses key concepts, explaining how analysis and practice shift when looking at peace transitions through a 'borderlands lens'. In the subsequent article, Goodhand and Meehan present an analysis of 'spatialised political settlements', which explores the implications of borderlands for understanding how political settlements are negotiated and agreed. Political settlements analysis has become an influential policy tool over recent years and has been used to challenge the conventional view that effective peacebuilding is underpinned by good governance and establishing the 'right institutions'. A borderlands perspective emphasises the important spatial dimensions of bargaining between political groups and draws attention

## BOX 2

### Challenges to working in borderlands: policy and practice perspectives

In February 2017, Conciliation Resources hosted 35 policy-makers, practitioners and academic researchers for a 'Joint Analysis Workshop' to explore themes relevant to this publication. A key point of discussion was the difficulty practitioners and policy-makers face working in borderlands, and the need for better analysis, frameworks, methods and tools for doing inclusive peacebuilding work with borderland communities. Below are abridged versions of reflections presented by a peacebuilding practitioner and a UK policymaker on the challenges they face working on borderland issues in conflict contexts.

#### Peacebuilding practitioner

'Working in contested borderland regions presents a number of practical challenges. Some are logistical – trying to gain access to securitised, politically closed borderland areas can have security risks and other obstacles, including difficulties in trying to bring people together and ensure representation when they may have travel restrictions or passport issues. We also have to navigate conflicting, contrasting and often officially sanctioned narratives about why or even if a border exists. It can be difficult to unravel the embedded, subjective accounts and histories in order to understand what the conflict dynamics are.

We can also come under suspicion for being seen to challenge these accepted narratives. This information economy also mediates the ability to engage people in the process – what

people feel safe or willing to say and in which environments. In the contexts where we operate, elites from the centre can feel threatened by our work, which questions their positions. They often interfere with progress on the ground, viewing peacebuilders with suspicion and hostility.'

#### UK policymaker

'Many conflicts have sub-national or cross-border dynamics, which make them complicated for policymakers to get to grips with – we are used to working with and through the state. Borderlands often suffer historical patterns of political and socio-economic marginalisation, but policy institutions and response mechanisms only 'see' the edges of state when they become a serious security threat – and are therefore reactive rather than preventive. There are lots of things we could and should be doing to prevent problems from arising in the first place.

There is also a prevailing view that border security and management including barriers are the only remedy to borderland challenges, despite examples that these do not necessarily work and can even be counter-productive in many situations. Current policies developed as part of the dominant counter-terrorism agenda solidify this view. Another reason policy struggles to incorporate sub-national areas in political processes is that there is often nervousness about providing special measures for certain territories. This then results in generic decentralisation approaches, which can ignore the specific histories of exclusion in these areas.'

to how sub-national political processes are central to the making and unmaking of political order at regional, national and international levels.

The section ends with an article by Yousuf, which draws out key lessons for peacebuilding policy and practice from the case studies. The article analyses particular risks associated with peace transitions in borderlands: of aggravating rather than alleviating violence and exclusion; of contributing to the fragmentation of local political leadership; and of stimulating negative narratives of borderland communities. Yousuf then draws out priorities for peacebuilding in borderlands, stressing that analysis must capture borderland dynamics, that space for peacebuilding in borderlands needs to be safeguarded, and that peacebuilding needs to create connections – between the centre and the periphery, within borderlands and across borders.

The second section comprises seven case studies of peacebuilding practice in borderlands. Abdi and Lind first examine the north-eastern Kenyan borderlands with Somalia, tracing the evolution of conflict and peacebuilding from the post-independence period through the early 2000s to today. Through a historical analysis of relations between the margins and the centre, the article explores how conflicts in this region have shifted from localised tensions and competition between clans to become increasingly bound up with elite competition

for political power and territorial control, influenced by transnational flows of people and goods. It further looks at how peacebuilding approaches in the region have adapted to overcome new challenges to governance and security with the changing political economy, and the establishment of new county governments.

Meehan then provides an analysis of Myanmar's north-western borderlands with China and Thailand, critically reflecting on the overly optimistic framing of Myanmar's so-called 'triple transition'. The article explores why a nationwide ceasefire has been so difficult to reach, and how peacebuilding, humanitarian and community development initiatives in Kachin State and northern Shan State continue to face huge challenges despite the country's democratic transition and formal peace process. While statebuilding, development and peacebuilding have been instituted from the centre, this has in fact provoked new modes of violence in borderland areas as national and sub-national elites have sought to consolidate power there. Reflecting on the hybrid authorities and multiple international, national and local actors that must be navigated and appeased, the author suggests how international actors can re-orient their engagement with the peace process.

The third case study by Drevon and Kurabi offers an in-depth look at Syria's Bab al-Hawa border crossing with Turkey. Based on interviews conducted by the authors in Turkey and Syria,

the article focuses on the slow process of re-institutionalising and regulating the border-crossing at Bab al-Hawa, after the area's liberation from the Syrian government, and as different armed groups with divergent interests vied for control. The article demonstrates that while greater regulation has facilitated trade flows, it has been underpinned by increased militarisation as the border gained strategic importance. This has undermined the voice of civil society and local populations in decision-making processes, while the link between military and political power has endured.

Goodhand, Walton, Karn and Jha then examine the political contestation and negotiation that emerged over constitutional reform in the Tarai region in Nepal's southern borderland with India after the signing of the 2006 Comprehensive Peace Agreement. The article focuses on the life histories of two 'borderland brokers', exploring the varied ways in which such figures can mediate relations between different groups, spaces and interests and how their motivations and networks affect post-war transition processes.

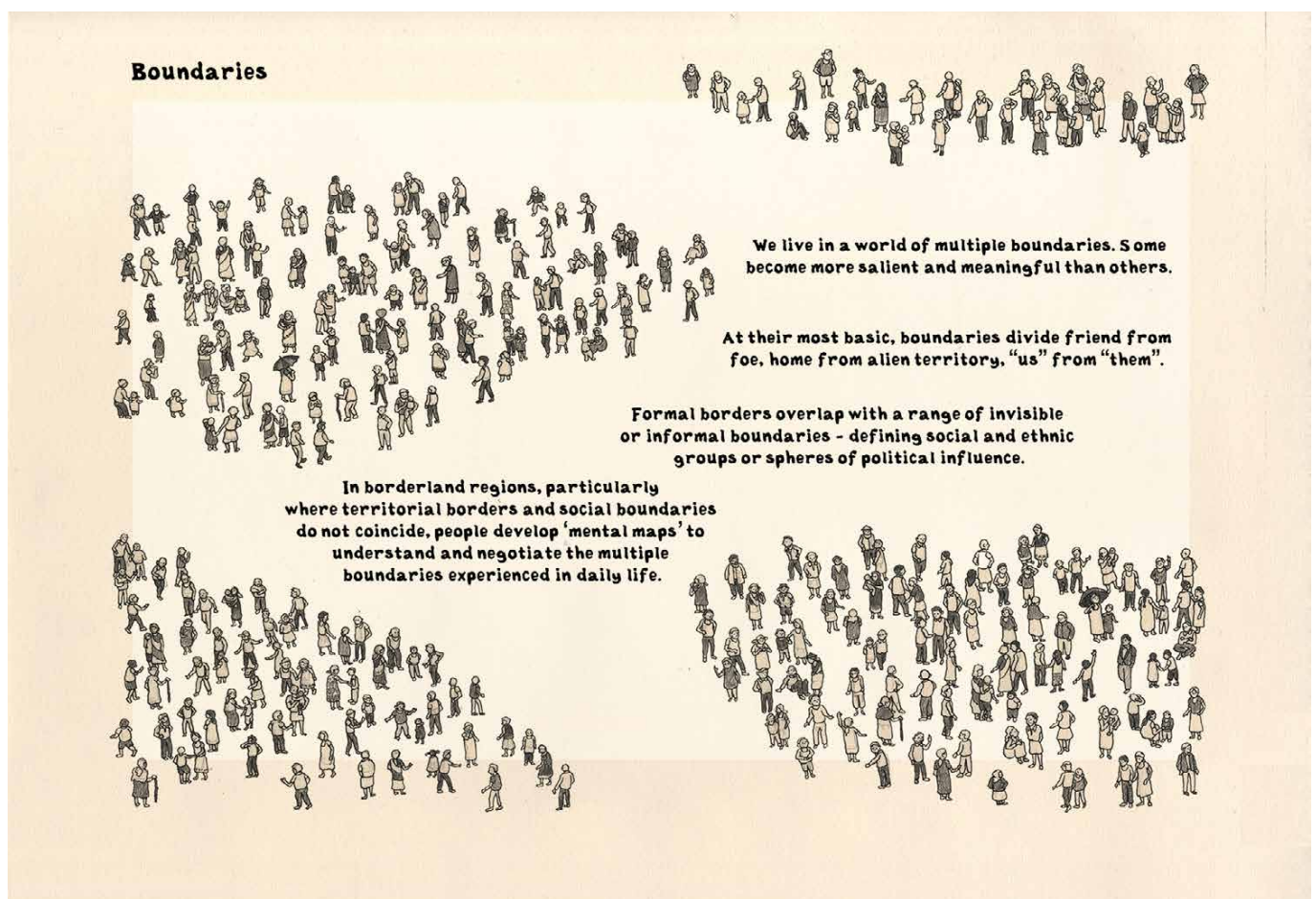
The fifth case study looks at Tunisia's southern borderlands with Libya. Abdel Baky examines the legacies of under-development and marginalisation in the Medenine and Tataouine governorates from the perspective of communities living there. The article analyses the impact of changes in border governance – particularly in light of a developing national anti-terrorism discourse – on the livelihoods of borderland populations, youth aspirations and regional disparities between Tunisia's coastline and its interior. Based on surveys and a range of peacebuilding interventions conducted by International Alert, an international non-

governmental peacebuilding organisation, it reflects on how bottom-up approaches to strengthening governance in borderland areas can empower communities historically excluded from the national sphere.

In the sixth case study, Mirimanova describes developments in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine, bordering Russia. This contested region broke away from Ukrainian control in 2014 and with Russian military and financial assistance established two self-governing 'republics'. The article explores the complex identities of the Donbas region and how the border became increasingly significant as tensions rose in Ukraine. It reflects on how cross-border interests have played out and national narratives have hardened to further isolate the region. Mirimanova asks why progress in the official peace process has been so slow and looks at what international actors and local NGOs have done to build peace at the grassroots level.

The final case study explores the re-emergence of the borderlands in Northern Ireland since the Brexit vote of 2016 and the anxieties that the referendum triggered among border communities contending with an uncertain future. Hayward describes the significance of European Union (EU) membership to the peace process, centred around the Belfast Agreement in 1998, and the challenges related to the border. Based on a study conducted by the author, the article looks at how local communities in the central Irish borderland region perceive the potential impact of Brexit on a still-fragile peace.

In addition to these written pieces, the concepts, geographic relations and human experiences that comprise borderland conflict and peace dynamics are brought to life through



## BOX 3

### Illustrating borderlands

**Elettra Pellanda**

**Senior Research and Education Consultant, PositiveNegatives**

There are acute challenges to accessing information on and in borderlands: such places may experience weak governance, heightened security measures or lack of infrastructure, and data may be unavailable, unreliable or difficult to collect. Innovative methodologies such as comic strips provide opportunities to uncover hard-to-access knowledge and data, incorporate multiple voices, including those that are often silenced, and facilitate greater understanding of the complex dynamics and personal stories of communities living there.

PositiveNegatives – a non-profit organisation based at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London – combines ethnographic research with storytelling and illustration, adapting personal testimonies into art, education and advocacy materials. The charitable arm of PositiveNegatives, *Why Comics?* brings these stories and other contemporary humanitarian and social issues (such as racism, conflict, migration, trafficking and climate change) into classrooms around the world. This approach provides an effective means to present the experiences of those living in conflicted borderlands in new ways and to new audiences.

PositiveNegatives' method is based on participation: comics are developed through a series of conversations with participants and are drawn by local artists wherever possible. For each project a research team member travels to interview the people behind each story. They spend time with each person, trying to collect detailed information not only about their life experiences but also about them as individuals and the way they interact with the world. The researcher also collects visual material – an extremely useful

resource in the process of turning the real context into an illustrated narrative. Participants are also involved during the drafting process.

But why turn testimonies into comics? There are three factors that help answer this question. The first is an ethical concern around safety. The comic format protects the identities of the people interviewed, allowing them to speak freely about their experiences of different humanitarian or social issues. When working on the draft, the artist edits names and other identifying details to ensure participants remain anonymous. This way, they feel able to share their story without fear of negative consequences for themselves and their families. Secondly, a significant proportion of PositiveNegatives' storytellers are from marginalised communities, including from border regions; they need their voices amplified but are not always in the position to do so under their own name. Third, the illustrative element adds visual depth to often overly-simplified and imposed narratives, enabling the reader to appreciate these personal narratives in their complexity. Illustrative storytelling increases accessibility, as visual narratives can transcend age, gender, cultural differences and literacy levels.

The storytelling approach can help capture lived experiences of conflict and peace, humanising narratives for audiences in a non-confrontational manner, and facilitating understanding of how conflict affects people in different ways. They are a rich medium to capture and reveal layers of memory, trauma and personal angst. Comics can also be presented in many media, including newspapers, magazines and online platforms, which opens up discussions to non-specialist audiences and the wider public.

All comics and animations produced by PositiveNegatives and *Why Comics?* are available for free on their websites: [positivenegatives.org](http://positivenegatives.org) and [whycomics.org](http://whycomics.org)

illustrations, maps and images. These appear alongside each case study. They help readers visualise the lives and experiences of borderland communities, which are often difficult to access or presented inaccurately. Elettra Pellanda of *PositiveNegatives* explains in Box 3 how more illustrative story-telling became a central facet for working with different, often contentious views of conflict zones, while reaching out to local communities who may have been left out of peacebuilding work.

**“As the case studies clearly demonstrate, working in borderland regions requires engaging with historical and contemporary politics.”**

This Accord Insight adopts this approach with illustrated maps. Working with a graphic artist, the editors sought new methods for exploring the complex dynamics of borderland lives and

spaces. As the case studies clearly demonstrate, working in borderland regions requires engaging with historical and contemporary politics, elites and non-elites, and international alongside local and national actors. The illustrations help to understand what is happening inside borderlands and how they connect to other spaces and groups. They also help to navigate the diverse economic and development opportunities that emerge during transition processes, as well as the different interests that shape and obstruct them.

### Peacebuilding through a borderlands lens

This Accord Insight offers new ways of thinking about and working with borderland spaces, communities and conflicts. It highlights the specific challenges of building peace in borderland regions and advances discussion on how policy and practice can adapt to respond more effectively, for example by engaging with borderland groups that are often left out, and by recognising that some of the roots of problems at the margins may lie a long way from the border itself. Peacebuilding initiatives have different impacts and resonances in borderland regions, and efforts to secure and regulate governance, development and cross-border economies can be detrimental to local lives and livelihoods – and thus to the sustainability of

peace processes – if they do not consider the historical relations between centre and periphery. Different actors play important roles to navigate social networks and gender relations that exist within and beyond borderlands. A ‘borderlands lens’ offers some important lessons for peacebuilding practice and policy:

- It brings into focus the interaction of international, national and sub-national political settlements and the tensions between them – looking at the distinctive dynamics of borderlands, but also beyond these into the ways in which relations at the centre of states are shaped by and contingent upon relations in the margins, and vice versa.
- It draws attention to the brokers who help shape relations between levels – international, national and sub-national: the actual and potential junctures and dissonances between interests and groups; and the individuals who fill gaps and blind spots to ensure connections are built, needs are met and flows of goods and people continue.
- It changes how violence in borderlands is both understood and responded to. Multiple forms of structural and direct violence exist in borderlands, stemming as much from national efforts to control statebuilding, development and resource extraction in borderlands, as from non-state actors and dissident armed groups operating there.
- It looks beyond the state to better understand the relevance of cross-border relations to national politics, highlighting and helping to unpack the critical influence of international interventions, regional conflicts and global power relations in shaping local dynamics.
- It encourages a deeper examination of the impacts of policy on a range of communities in post-war contexts, paying attention to the inequalities that exist among borderland groups, and between such groups and decision-makers in capitals.
- It re-examines assumptions about the impact of interventions by central governments or international actors – especially the expectation that what works for the centre will work for the margins – pointing to the need for a historically nuanced approach to power, elite bargains, violence, governance and inequality.

# Creating margins at the centre: Israeli bypass roads in the Palestinian Beit Hanina neighbourhood, East Jerusalem

Anwar Jaber

Anwar Jaber is a PhD researcher in Architecture at the Centre for Urban Conflicts Research in the Department of Architecture, University of Cambridge. Her research focuses on current spatial developments in the Palestinian city of Ramallah under the Palestinian statebuilding project. She previously practised as an architect and urban planner in Jerusalem.

Many of this publication's case studies focus on borderlands that sit at the geographic margins of a country, far from state capitals, and are overlooked in transition processes. Conversely, Jerusalem is a place where the border is very much at the political, economic and cultural centre. As one of the world's most contested cities, spatial means of control and securitisation are key features of it. Following the mass displacement of Palestinians and the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, Jerusalem was physically divided into Arab-controlled East and Israeli-controlled West under the 1949 Armistice Green Line Agreement. After the Six-Day War in 1967, Israel occupied the eastern part of the city and annexed it to the western part, claiming a one-sided unification. Ever since, there has been no further formal division of the city, nor any physical barriers constructed between the two parts, such that the Green Line became irrelevant. However, the built environment, architecture and infrastructure of the city has played a major role in preserving and extending the 1967 Green Line divisions.

**Figure 1: A map of Jerusalem highlighting the location of Beit Hanina neighbourhood and the 1949 Green Line in relation to some major bypass roads.**



Source: Author, adapted from Google Maps.

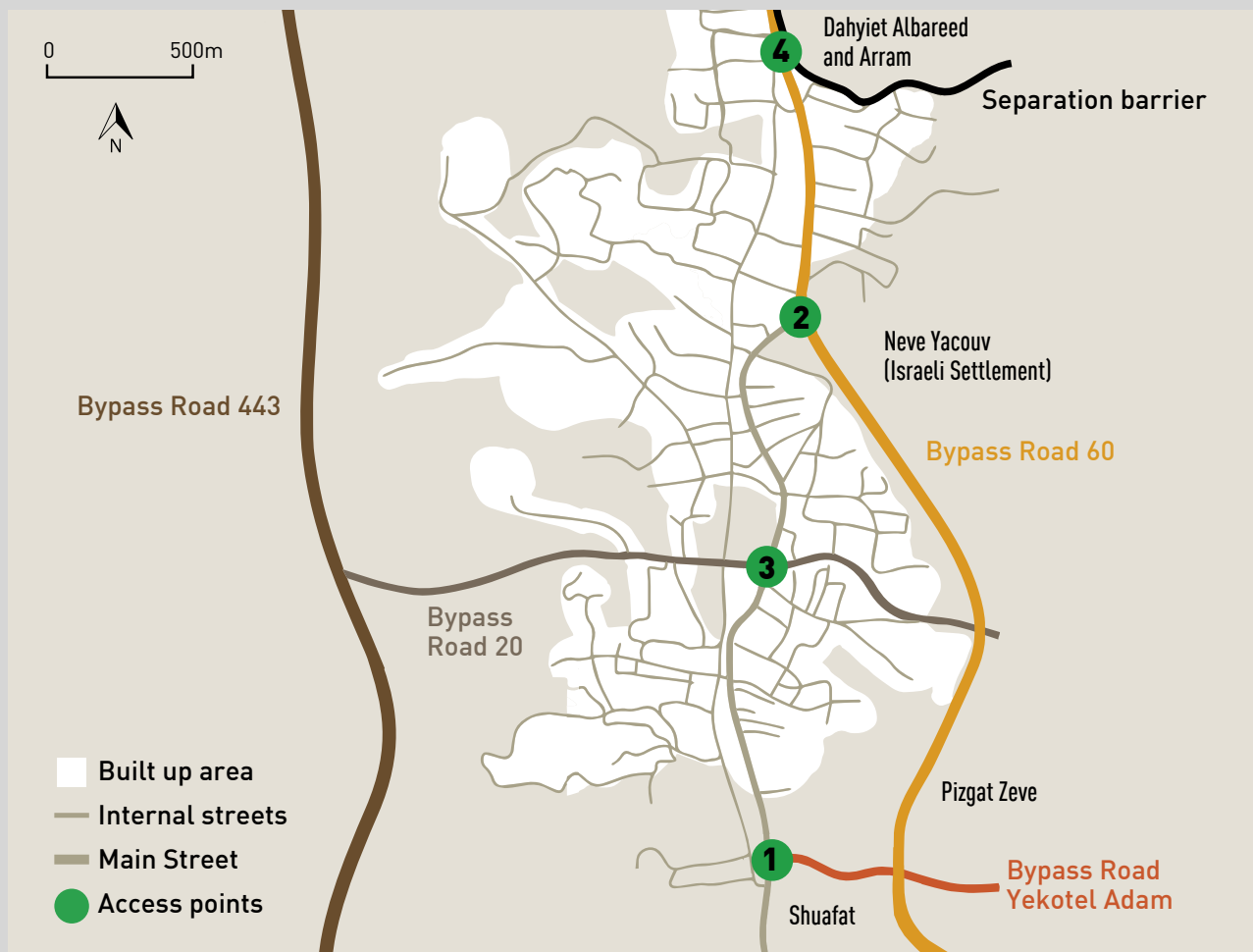
This has transformed East Jerusalem into an urban borderland that is both at the centre and the edge of contested space. The city's urban fabric and built infrastructure offer key insights into how a border that cuts through a city operates, as well as how it continues to evolve due to the structures that maintain it.

The Palestinian neighbourhood of Beit Hanina in East Jerusalem highlights these particular 'borderland' dynamics. The neighbourhood, which is not commonly considered a site of direct conflict and confrontation between Israelis and Palestinians in the city (figure 1), is bordered by three bypass roads with a fourth going directly through it (figure 2). The bypass roads are designed exclusively to connect Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem with one another, with the western part of the city, and with the rest of the country. In Beit Hanina, these roads not only facilitate the mobility of Israelis but also form an urban edge that hinders any Palestinian urban expansion and development of the neighbourhood. An investigation of the spatial relationships between these roads and the rest of the neighbourhood reveals that they are rarely connected with one other. In most cases, a large wall separates Beit Hanina from the bypass roads (see photo), isolating Palestinians while providing a fast and secure space for Israelis to travel without realising that they are near or in a Palestinian community.

In places where these roads do connect with Beit Hanina's main street, they form large junctions or access points within the neighbourhood (figure 2). These points are larger than other junctions and visually and physically discordant with the neighbourhood's normal flow of people and life. Hence, these access points open Beit Hanina to Israeli penetration and control. At the same time, Beit Hanina remains enclosed, spatially limited and isolated. While the bypass roads physically connect the eastern and western parts of the city, they also create uneven border relations between populations living on either side, and extend into the eastern part beyond the green line demarcation (figure 1).

The 1967 war transformed the borders of the state into the urban fabric of a living city, shaping the daily lives of people on both sides, and making the isolation of one group and mobility of the other contingent on one another. The bypass roads – and Jerusalem more broadly – illustrate how borderland spaces do not only exist at the periphery of the state, or in relation to

Figure 2: Map of Beit Hanina neighbourhood in East Jerusalem, showing the nearby Israeli settlements and bypass roads that limit its urban expansion and provide key access and control points to the neighbourhood.



Source: Author, adapted from Google Maps.

internationally recognised boundaries. They also show how the built environment and infrastructure are used to control and securitise populations. This presents particular peacebuilding

challenges given how different communities are impacted, and highlights the centrality of the city's status to any conflict resolution, development or statebuilding discussions.



# Spatialising political settlements

## Jonathan Goodhand and Patrick Meehan

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In recent years, political settlements analysis (PSA)<sup>1</sup> has helped development agencies advance their understanding of the relationship between stability, conflict, development and political change.<sup>2</sup> It focuses attention on the distribution of power in society, exploring how power shapes formal and informal institutional arrangements, the distribution of resources (political, economic and social), and the legitimacy of these arrangements. Political settlements are not consciously engineered but are the product of historical bargaining processes between elites, and reflect the prevailing power within society at a given point in time.

PSA challenges development actors to move beyond a technical focus on designing the 'right' interventions, emphasising that any intervention will be shaped by power relations and political interests and thus must be resilient to these pressures. It also warns that policy interventions and programmes will be ineffective or, worse, cause harm, if they ignore the interests of powerful elites. In doing so, PSA provides an important corrective to liberal peacebuilding models, which view the signing of peace agreements and the creation of formal institutions as the key determinant of post-war transitions. In contrast, PSA demonstrates the importance of focusing on the (mis)alignment between formal peace processes and underlying configurations of power, and warns that in contexts where formal peace negotiations do not reflect the underlying balance of power, there is likely to be renewed violence.

Development agencies increasingly use this type of analysis to ask whether certain types of post-war political settlement can lead to more or less progressive outcomes over time. Much attention has been paid to levels of inclusivity (both 'horizontal

inclusion' between different elites, and 'vertical inclusion' between elites and the wider population) in post-war political settlements, as well as the trade-offs between stability and elite buy-in, and more 'progressive' and socially inclusive settlements. The elite bargains needed to stabilise violent conflict may create problematic legacies, allowing elites to 'capture' the benefits of peace, providing little scope for sustained progressive change. However, efforts to push for more transformative social and political change in highly fragile contexts have also generated further instability where such reforms represent a threat to the interests of powerful elites.

**“ Much attention has been paid to levels of inclusivity in post-war political settlements, as well as the trade-offs between stability and elite buy-in, and more 'progressive' and socially inclusive settlements.”**

In spite of these important insights, PSA lacks an explicit analysis of space and territory, which limits its value in relation to borderlands. In this article we set out a more spatially sensitive analytical framework for understanding political settlements and post-war transitions. We first explore the limitations of PSA, and then highlight how an

extension of the framework to incorporate an explicit focus on borderland dynamics can provide insights that can strengthen understanding of and responses to subnational and transnational violent conflict.

### **Political settlements analysis: a spatial critique**

The most fundamental limitation of PSA is the fact that it takes the nation state as its sole frame of reference. The underlying conceptual framework is one of elites bargaining at a national level within a territorially defined state. This reinforces the statist approach adopted by development agencies, and is reflected in the way that the development industry organises itself, including the division of the world into country teams, national planning and budgeting processes, statistics aggregated at the national level, and the location of country offices in capital cities – all of which limit understandings of borderland dynamics.

This nation-state framework of analysis is problematic for three reasons:

*First, it underplays international and regional dimensions of political settlements.* Domestic elites' strategies to secure their interests are often oriented outwards, particularly in regional conflict systems in which violence, networks and flows (of weapons, goods and people) operate across borders. The political survival of national elites in such circumstances depends upon capturing transnational resources, building alliances with external patrons and mobilising cross-border political or religious networks. Domestic political settlements are thus often heavily shaped by neighbouring states. Myanmar's political settlement, for example, is deeply influenced by the country's relationship with China, while in East Africa the domestic political settlements within Kenya, Somalia and Ethiopia are all interconnected. Power dynamics do not fit within the 'container' of the state but are intimately shaped by transnational power structures, networks and flows.

*Second, PSA underestimates the importance of subnational bargaining processes.* These often differ significantly from those at the centre but play a key role in shaping national-level political settlements. Greater understanding is needed of the specific challenges that borderlands pose to ruling elites, including: histories of weak state control and contested legitimacy of state authority; and the challenges of co-opting borderland elites into national coalitions when the availability of cross-border sources of weapons, revenue and support give borderland elites significant power and disruptive potential. In this sense, border regions can be understood as 'special political zones' that frequently occupy a disproportionate amount of the attention of ruling elites and where repeated challenges to the overarching political settlement are likely to arise. PSA does not provide clear entry points for engaging with conflicts where relatively stable political settlements at the national level co-exist with high levels of subnational borderland violence.

*Third, PSA is rarely attuned to the significance of shifting centre-periphery relations in post-war transitions.* It assumes that once order is established at the centre, this will provide the foundations for peace throughout a country's territory.

In other words, political order radiates outwards from the centre into unruly peripheries. However, many conflicts emerging from the state's margins are driven by contestation for control of borderland regions and longstanding grievances against central state authority (often linked to ethnic, religious and linguistic differences). Post-war bargaining therefore revolves around questions of political representation and inclusion/exclusion, distribution of resources, and access to services and government positions. In many post-war countries there may be a level of stability and settlement at the centre alongside ongoing conflict and 'unsettlement' in borderland regions. For instance, in Nepal in 2006, as discussed elsewhere in this publication (see p.48), there appeared to be a broad and inclusive settlement forged in Kathmandu, but this was not accepted in parts of the Tarai – the southern plains region bordering India, where two-thirds of the population identify as 'Madhesi' – leading to violent contestation.

**“ In many post-war countries there may be a level of stability and settlement at the centre alongside ongoing conflict and ‘unsettlement’ in borderland regions.”**

There is a need to bring analytical frameworks that focus on power, institutions and resources more explicitly into conversation with approaches that deal with space, place and territory. Taking the state margins as the starting point from which to understand processes of state contestation, fragility and development addresses a number of key weaknesses in how PSA is being used in peacebuilding policy and development interventions, by:

1. clarifying the drivers and dynamics of borderland violence
2. providing tools to analyse the agents and dynamics of change in borderland regions
3. emphasising the importance of the ideas and beliefs of borderland communities to the dynamics of war-to-peace transitions

We go into greater detail of how these operate below.

#### **1. Analysing borderland violence**

PSA adopts a reductionist view of violence, viewing it as a tool used instrumentally by actors (invariably elites) to re-shape or protect political settlements. This framework does not capture the varied causes and functions of violence in conflict-affect countries, how violence is mobilised and constrained by traditions, beliefs, norms and ideologies, or the ways in which it can remain central to the post-war order even after a political settlement has stabilised. As outlined above, a state-centric PSA framework assumes that elite agreement at the centre creates the foundations for re-establishing order in unruly borderlands – overlooking why borderlands

can become important sites of contestation, and the specific challenges they pose for stabilising violent conflict.

In order to better conceptualise the varied causes and functions of borderland violence, we draw on research by Cheng, Goodhand and Meehan to distinguish between three broad types of violence: **competitive**, **embedded** and **permissive** violence:<sup>3</sup>

- *Competitive* violence occurs between warring elites to contest the distribution of power in society, and is the kind of violence prioritised in PSA.
- *Embedded* violence is entrenched in how a political settlement works. The privileges elites gain by committing to a political settlement are not only economic (e.g. control over certain resources, import licences) or political (government positions) but also include the 'right' to use violence. These 'violence rights' determine who has the 'right' to enact violence, upon whom, for what reasons, and with what level of impunity. Embedded violence can have distinctly gendered dynamics and in many conflicts – notably El Salvador and Guatemala – wartime strategies of gender and sexual violence became embedded in the peacetime tactics deployed by security forces to enforce deeply inequitable forms of post-war order.
- *Permissive* violence relates to activities, such as forms of criminal violence, that occur in areas where the state lacks a monopoly of violence, but which neither challenge the political settlement nor become embedded in how it works.

None of these forms of violence are unique to borderlands, although they may be distinct in such regions. Addressing forms of competitive violence can be especially challenging in borderlands since these regions are often central to processes of statebuilding and economic development *and* zones where state authority is heavily contested. Borderlands are often also valuable sites of cross-border trade, especially where different systems of regulation and commodity valuation heighten the exchange value of goods on different sides of the border and make cross-border trade especially profitable. This can increase competition for control over cross-border networks and flows, especially in countries such as Myanmar where border regions are themselves the site of lucrative resources.

Borderland regions also provide practical advantages for those challenging state authority. Cross-border spaces can offer protection from government attacks, either through arrangement with neighbouring governments or with other armed groups operating in the margins of neighbouring states. The supposed inviolability of international borders limits state authorities' efforts to curb activities beyond their boundaries. Attempts by governments to co-opt borderland elites may be particularly difficult in contexts where borderland elites are able to access cross-border support systems, strengthening their autonomy and negotiating power. For example, in Afghanistan and Tajikistan, central governments have struggled to co-opt borderland elites whose power is derived from their control over illicit cross-border economies.

Forms of embedded violence can be particularly pronounced in contested borderlands where government attempts to gain control are reliant on coercion and violence, and lead to

suspending rather than extending the rule of law. Such responses often create forms of protracted cyclical violence. In Colombia and Myanmar, attempts by central governments to extend authority rely on alliances with paramilitary-style organisations. In these contexts, stability is less about bringing an end to violence than franchising out violence to secure control over contested territories. In some cases, stability at the centre may rest on agreements that tolerate or even exacerbate violence in borderland regions. In Myanmar, the rampant extraction of and exploitation of resources – especially timber, jade, drugs and land – in the country's borderlands underpins the political settlement that has emerged. Bargains between military elites, national and transnational business elites, and in some cases leaders of non-state armed groups, have stabilised armed conflict in many areas but have subjected borderland populations to violent dispossession of land, environmental destruction and the negative consequences of illegal drugs.

“ **Disaggregating forms of borderland violence points to the need for a systemic reappraisal of current conflict resolution and peacebuilding policies.**”

Disaggregating forms of borderland violence points to the need for a systemic reappraisal of current conflict resolution and peacebuilding policies. In particular, it emphasises the need to understand how violence can become an important component of post-war state consolidation and economic development, rather than being caused by the absence of the state or the economic marginalisation of borderland regions. This warns against the assumption that peacebuilding, economic development and the expansion of state authority are necessarily mutually reinforcing and emphasises the need to understand the trade-offs that often surround these policy goals.

## **2. Brokerage: agents of change**

PSA tends to be based on a structuralist understanding of political change and development, and struggles to make sense of the dynamics of change and sources of agency within political settlements. Political brokerage provides a lens to understand the shifting dynamics of political settlements. Borderland brokers are the go-betweens, gatekeepers or representatives that span spatial divides between competing elite coalitions or connect political elites to their constituencies. They seek to occupy and monopolise a 'deal space' – a point of friction and an interface – which links the centre to periphery, the (trans)national to the local. The dynamics of brokerage and the nature of the deal space are shaped by three key factors: timing, space and scale.

First, the 'deal space' is usually extremely time-sensitive. As noted by Bell and Pospisil (2017), periods of post-war transition are often characterised by periods of protracted 'unsettlement' and include moments of rupture when new

rules of the game are renegotiated. These periods of flux create an opening and a demand for actors that can mediate between different levels, spaces, and social and institutional boundaries. For example, in post-war Nepal, Madhesi elites in the Tarai borderland mobilised against the new constitution, making demands for more substantive federalism. A new deal space was opened up by a violent movement in the Tarai, which was followed by an economic blockade that Madhesi brokers were integral to. Conversely, over time, the space for brokerage may close down as new power-sharing agreements are forged or the central state establishes a stronger foothold in previously 'unruly' borderland regions.

Second, brokerage is shaped by the distinct characteristics of each borderland space, including the degree and form of institutional and social hybridity. In the post-war period, the (re)negotiation of centre-periphery relations shapes formal debates related to constitutional change, transitional justice and economic development, as well as the informal bargaining linked to the distribution of rents and political positions. This is an uneven and 'ragged' process – some borderlands are more salient to the central state than others, which means that some brokers have greater or lesser significance. Political brokerage therefore differs according to the spaces and 'synapses' that brokers occupy.

*Apex brokers* are from borderlands with high salience. They constitute the spine of a political system, linking the centre to core coalitions and constituencies. They have privileged access to key figures in the central state, to major on-budget or off-budget resources and to crucial sources of information and intelligence. They may have a major role in the use of 'competitive violence' to enforce or renegotiate the terms of the political settlement. Nangarhar province in the eastern borderlands of Afghanistan, for example, with its powerful tribal structures and strategic location on the Pakistan border, has always been home to apex brokers who could make and unmake national political settlements. On the other hand, *tertiary brokers* are located either in less salient borderlands or they broker relationships within borderland regions rather than directly with the central state. They facilitate the circulation of power, ideas and resources in spaces that do not determine the overall stability or otherwise of the national political settlement; here, 'permissive violence' can feature without being a significant concern to ruling elites.

**“ Cultural norms and belief systems are inseparable from notions of place, space and territory, and frequently border regions are at the nexus of clashing or incommensurate world views and belief systems.”**

Third, as well as connecting different spaces, brokers operate across and frequently jump between different scales. For example, those involved in illicit economies circumvent

## BOX 4

### Gendering conflicted borderlands\*

Borderlands, particularly those affected by conflict, are sites of contestation but also constant negotiation. Maintaining, containing and securing borderlands may benefit some constituencies to the detriment of others, and produce violence, some forms of which may be less visible or more disguised than others. A gendered borderlands lens focuses attention on specific identities (masculinities, femininities, sexuality, race and class), and how these intersect to shape processes of inclusion and exclusion. It is also a tool for understanding how borders and associated structures and institutions in borderlands are used to maintain power and gendered inequalities.

Therefore, 'gendering borderlands' helps increase understanding of the distinct relationships that diverse social groups have to the border, as well as the kinds of movement the border enables – or disables. This raises important questions about who has control over the border – who has access to movement, and who is contained and imprisoned by it. It also looks at how and why certain groups – such as rural women and men, ethnic minorities and young people – and power relations are left out of national development and peacebuilding processes in borderlands. A gender perspective highlights the fact that the 'international borderline' is only one component of a network of different types of boundary. Gendering borderlands reveals the multiple physical, virtual, legal, personal and political boundaries that diverse groups and individuals experience and negotiate as part of their lives on the margins.

A gendered borderlands lens also highlights resistance – how those excluded at the margins resist agents and systems of domination, and the spaces that open up to transform structures that perpetuate the exclusion of particular groups.

*\* With contributions by Dr Mandy Sadan (Reader in the History of South East Asia, SOAS)*

the central state and directly 'plug in' to regional and international markets. Gaining access to international aid and connections may open up the deal space of borderland brokers vis-à-vis the state. These brokers are therefore not constrained by the 'national order of things' and, though they may be locally embedded, they operate in a regional and international environment.

### 3. Ideas, ideologies, discourses and beliefs

A further criticism of PSA is its reductionist analysis of elite interests and incentives. Elites are assumed to be driven by the pursuit of wealth and power, and political settlements are presumed to be the result of conflict and negotiation over material resources. This understates the foundational role of traditions, ideologies, beliefs, cultural norms and notions of legitimacy. Although none of these issues are unique to borderland regions, they do have important spatial dimensions.

Cultural norms and belief systems are inseparable from notions of place, space and territory, and frequently border regions are at the nexus of clashing or incommensurate world views and belief systems. On the one hand, national identities and state-based discourses about citizenship may not resonate with or may be weakest in borderland areas, where the history of state authority has been limited and contested. For example, the ethnic minorities who occupy borderland regions in Myanmar, or the Madhesi population in Nepal's Tarai region, have alternative histories, visions and cultural practices that clash with central elites' efforts to forge exclusivist national identities and ideologies of rule. Conversely, forms of extreme nationalism and ethnic chauvinism may flourish in the periphery, as for example Sinhala nationalism in Sri Lanka, which emerged from the state's southern periphery and was mirrored in turn by the emergence of Tamil nationalism from the north-east. The nationalist political imagination has depended on the constant invocation of border threats and dangers to the territorial integrity of the nation.

Borders, as well as being containers of nationalism, are also conduits of transnationalism. People, ideas and commodities cross and challenge the border, and ideologies and visions of security and development do not stop at international borders. For example, diaspora communities may pursue alternative visions of post-war reconstruction that challenge state-based narratives. On a much larger scale, China's vision of security and development extends well beyond national borders into the borderlands of Myanmar, Laos and beyond.

In the post-war moment, when the political settlement is being renegotiated and people's understandings of the world around them are in a state of flux, there are heightened opportunities for brokers to mediate across competing narratives and fields of meaning – the deal space is not only about negotiating rents, but also about 'translation' and sense making. For example, when the Taliban came to power in Afghanistan in 1994, it drew upon local clerics, religious education, shari'a law and rural village culture to mobilise support and draw key constituencies in the eastern borderlands into the new political settlement. This is illustrative of the fact that mobilising legitimacy (as well as capital and coercion) – particularly in strategically important peripheral regions – may be key to establishing stable political settlements.

**“ The power of borderlands elites is linked not only to their access to resources and the means of coercion, but to their ability to represent and vocalise the demands and beliefs of borderland populations.”**

Similarly, the power of borderlands elites is linked not only to their access to resources and the means of coercion, but to their ability to represent and vocalise the demands and beliefs

of borderland populations. This is especially important for understanding inclusion and exclusion at the margins of states. PSA concentrates mostly on the importance of 'horizontal' inclusion – i.e. inclusion of competing elites – to stabilising violent conflict, but it provides little scope for analysing the dynamics of 'vertical inclusion' – i.e. inclusion of the interests of non-elites.

Exploring the role of ideas, ideologies and beliefs also draws attention to factors that mitigate or exacerbate exclusion at the margins of the state, such as whether borderland elites can act independently of the populations they claim to represent, or whether their power is conditional upon delivering certain promises or services. For example, political negotiation, brokerage and ideologies can become hyper-masculinised in conflict-affected borderlands in ways that marginalise women from decision-making and ensure that their interests are not an important factor in shaping how elites mobilise support and compete for power. However, the need for borderland elites to offer credible alternatives to state authority can also heighten the importance of service delivery – such as health, education and justice – as a source of legitimacy for borderland elites. This suggests that external peacebuilders need to better understand the vernacular of local politics and in particular local understandings of legitimacy.

## Conclusion

PSA has helped develop a more rigorous political economy analysis of the drivers of violent conflict and the trajectories of post-war transitions. However, the nation-state spatial framework that underpins PSA has limited the insights it can provide on borderland violence and post-war transitions. Addressing this analytical gap involves thinking about the interconnections between power, space and time – which do not generate a simple set of policy prescriptions. To some extent it reinforces what is already known to be good practice: taking context and history seriously, and understanding power relations. And perhaps its chief value to policymakers is to provide another analytical lens – along with several others, including gender, conflict and the environment – that can be deployed in contexts where borderland dynamics are a significant factor. This should lead to more targeted, contextually attuned policies, which are cognisant of processes on both sides of the border.

A borderland perspective leads to a set of questions with valuable implications for international peacebuilding practice:

### **To what extent do formal structures and institutional arrangements align with existing configurations of power?**

A borderland perspective focuses explicitly on the spatialisation of power and how political settlements have subnational and transnational dimensions. Although international actors have neither the capacity nor the legitimacy to micro-manage political settlements or empower borderland elites, they do need to better appreciate underlying power relations and their spatial dynamics and the vernacular and idioms of local politics. Interventions can perhaps create the conditions for more productive 'conversations' between states and borderlands – or at the very least not create disincentives for such conversations to take place.

**How do brokers influence the relationship between centres and borderlands? How can brokerage arrangements promote security and, in the long-term, support more progressive and inclusive post-war orders?**

Engaging with these questions does not mean fixating on finding 'good' brokers to support while avoiding 'bad' brokers. Rather, it should be based on an understanding of the environments brokers work in. This provides a starting point to explore how interventions can influence the incentive structures of brokers to reduce the use of violence as a negotiating tool, and how service delivery – including to marginalised groups – can become a more important foundation for power and legitimacy.

**What are the trade-offs between different sets of policy goals and interventions?**

A borderland perspective calls into question several mainstream assumptions, including that: statebuilding and peacebuilding are synonymous with each other; extending the state footprint into borderlands will bring peace and stability; economic integration will reduce insecurity and poverty in border regions; and promoting good governance will help stabilise borderlands. There is therefore a need for more conscious deliberation on the trade-offs between different goals, and who bears the costs of various interventions.

**Is borderland insecurity generated by policy regimes and decision-making in metropolitan centres?**

A borderland perspective exposes the links between insecurity and poverty in borderland regions, and stability and prosperity in metropolitan centres. Therefore the 'pathologies' of the margins are generated by – and need to be addressed by – policy regimes and initiatives emanating from the centre.

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<sup>1</sup> See for example: Khan, Mushtaq. *Political Settlements and the Governance of Growth-Enhancing Institutions* (Unpublished, 2010), available at <http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/9968/>; Di John, Jonathan and James Putzel. *Political Settlements: Issues Paper*. (Birmingham, GSDCR, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Political settlements analysis has been at the forefront of DFID's work on 'Building peaceful states and societies', as well as a key focus of major DFID-funded research projects, notably the Political Settlements Research Programme based at Edinburgh: [www.politicalsettlements.org/](http://www.politicalsettlements.org/)

<sup>3</sup> This typology of violence is based on research covering a wide range of cases as part of the recent 'Elite Bargains and Political Deals' project completed by the UK Government Stabilisation Unit. See: Cheng, Christine, Jonathan Goodhand and Patrick Meehan. *Securing and Sustaining Elite Bargains that Reduce Violent Conflict* (London: Stabilisation Unit, 2018).

# Accord Insight

## Peacebuilding in borderlands: a view from the margins

Zahbia Yousuf

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CR staff and partner organisations to develop practice based-research activities. She has also been a Teaching Fellow in Violence, Conflict and Development at SOAS University, and Kings College London, and completed a PhD in Comparative Peace Processes in 2010 with a focus on Northern Ireland, Israel/Palestine and Kashmir from Kings College London.

As a practice-based peacebuilding organisation, Conciliation Resources has long supported peacebuilding work in border regions that are deeply affected by conflict and often neglected, securitised or misgoverned. From east and central Africa to the Caucasus and Kashmir, peacebuilding in borderlands involves going against the grain of official narratives about why violence persists, supporting the agendas of people who have been marginalised by one state and instrumentalised by another, and sustaining relationships across psychological and physical divides.

The case studies presented in this fourth Accord Insight highlight the distinct challenges facing borderland communities affected by violent conflict and how policy and practice can be re-oriented to better respond to these. While political borders are essentially artificial, dividing local populations with historic social, familial, linguistic, cultural and economic ties, they have very material effects. Customs posts, military checkpoints, licit and illicit trade, markets, migration, and refugee flows that gather around border areas impact on the political, social and economic life of borderland

### BOX 5 – KEY FINDINGS

#### Understanding peace and transition processes in borderlands

**National transition processes that ignore borderlands or attempt to absorb or pacify them risk aggravating violence and exclusion.**

The consolidation of national-level political settlements encourages an over-emphasis on short-term stabilisation in borderlands, which can experience ‘selective integration’ while remaining excluded from commitments to rights or the rule of law.

**Efforts to support local governance in borderlands risk fragmenting political leadership and exacerbating conflict.**

Strategies by central governments to cede key political, administrative or security functions to local non-state institutions have often contributed to the fragmentation of local political leadership in regions with historical experiences of state exclusion.

**Peace and transition processes can prompt negative narratives of borderland communities that reinforce their exclusion.**

Constructed and reconstructed over many years, divisive narratives typically focus on cultural, religious and political differences and an assumed lack of commitment to national ideals and identity.

#### Priorities for peacebuilding in borderlands

**Ensure conflict and peacebuilding analysis captures borderland dynamics.**

Analysis should include how different groups in borderlands experience national transition processes, looking out for common pitfalls such as the potential for elite capture or failure to build on existing peacebuilding capacities and mechanisms.

**Make space for peacebuilding in borderlands: navigating constraints, identifying entry points and working with brokers.**

International actors can support peacebuilding in borderlands by mediating between local organisations and national governments to facilitate the development of mutual options for progress. Local brokers can help navigate murky borderland politics and identify who is best placed to advance particular agendas with different powerholders.

**Connect peacebuilding at the centre, in borderlands and across borders.**

Influencing change at the centre can require alliances with national media, political parties and civil society, and with international NGOs. Supporting mobilisation locally requires maintaining legitimacy and relevance with different local constituencies amid shifting dynamics and competing agendas.

populations, often violently. The publication focuses on conflict-affected borderland regions and how they are affected by national-level war-to-peace transitions. But it is important to acknowledge the diversity of borderlands: not all are politically marginal or conflictual; some are more economically or geopolitically significant than others; and their relationship with the centre can shift, often rapidly.

The introductory articles in this publication argue that a 'borderland lens' is crucial to understanding how historical development processes affect contemporary conflict and peacebuilding. There is often a failure to acknowledge that statebuilding at the centre has been built on exclusion, violence and resource extraction in the periphery. The case studies illustrate the risks to national peacebuilding of failing to address political, social and economic exclusion in borderland regions. They point to the importance of relations between central authorities and those living at the edges of states; of the networks, negotiations and agreements among multiple actors both within and between borderlands; of the brokers who help shape these various relationships; of the violent and non-violent contestation in borderlands; and of the impact of different forms of intervention. The publication is concerned with different excluded groups. It has not been possible to provide a comprehensive gendered analysis of borderlands, which is an area that remains in need of further exploration.

**“ Post-conflict borderlands can experience selective integration while remaining excluded from the kinds of rights or rule of law enjoyed by those living more centrally.”**

This article draws out lessons for international actors supporting post-war transitions in borderlands, grouped under two headings: (1) *understanding peace and transition processes in borderlands* – how borderland communities experience these processes differently and the challenges for building peace and stability in border regions; and (2) *prospects for peacebuilding in borderlands* – how peacebuilding initiatives can better respond to these challenges. It emphasises the need for interventions that bring the margins into national level peacebuilding processes and are responsive to cross-border dynamics.

## **Understanding peace and transition processes in borderlands**

### **National transition processes that ignore borderlands or attempt to absorb or pacify them risk aggravating violence and exclusion**

Peace and transition processes often prioritise the consolidation of national-level political settlements. This encourages an over-emphasis on short-term stabilisation in borderland regions. Post-conflict borderlands can experience selective integration – into systems, infrastructure, and flows of trade, resources, capital, for instance – while remaining excluded from the kinds of rights or rule of law enjoyed

by those living more centrally. For example, democratic transitions in Myanmar and Tunisia that have been celebrated globally for bringing an end to longstanding autocratic regimes have yielded little benefit for some borderland communities and have even brought further securitisation and militarisation.

‘Given the precariousness of state finances, stability was vital in order to accelerate resource extraction from the country’s resource-rich borderland regions and expand formal cross-border trade.’

*Myanmar case study*

National transitions can therefore lead to a series of trade-offs or contradictions in relation to borderlands: negotiations or ceasefire arrangements at the centre versus coercion and securitisation at the margins; political reform agreed in the capital versus political fragmentation at the periphery; or economic benefits for central elites versus disruption of local economic ties. For example, from 2011 the Tunisian government sought to pacify economically deprived areas bordering Libya by tolerating informal cross-border trade, the backbone of the local economy. But after a rise in armed attacks in the region, border security was strengthened, leading to more insecure livelihoods and steep drops in local incomes.

Decentralisation is a key feature of many peace negotiations to secure or integrate conflict-affected borderlands into national transition processes. The case studies in this Accord Insight illustrate tensions that can be associated with it. Strategies need to look beyond technical choices between different forms of devolution and focus much more on how these reforms intersect with the local political economy in decentralised areas. Decentralisation may provide potential avenues to improve economic opportunities, bring services closer to people, and include borderland communities in decision-making. However, it is often captured by elites and may be primarily concerned with expanding central state power and bureaucracy into borderland areas where state legitimacy is contested – making instability more likely.

The introduction of devolved government structures in north-eastern Kenya in 2013 occurred alongside significant socio-economic changes, including larger-scale regional and cross-border investment and trade. This raised the stakes for local clans contesting territory and access to resources in the area, with devolved offices providing another opportunity for them to secure their interests. Clan divisions have since sharpened and inter-clan conflict has increased, with localised power-sharing arrangements used to divide up political offices. This has benefitted some clans more than others, emphasised elite deals rather than broader accountability and inclusion, and undermined existing clan-based conflict resolution mechanisms.

Post-conflict transitions can set in motion a new set of conflict dynamics in borderland regions. For example, in Myanmar increased resource extraction in some border regions has led to land dispossession and widespread displacement. Peace processes tend to focus on the cessation of large-scale violence through centralised processes of demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration, and formal security sector reform. This can leave little appetite to address emerging and

complex forms of violence. International actors supporting such processes are therefore often ill-equipped to develop effective conflict prevention interventions in borderland regions, particularly where the argument for safeguarding national security and economic growth is compelling. Interventions should challenge simplistic narratives of how violence emerges and is sustained, and be aware of the winners *and* losers from peace and transition processes, including how different forms of integration may produce new forms of exclusion.

### **Efforts to support local governance and conflict resolution in borderlands risk fragmenting political leadership and exacerbating conflict**

Different forms of state and non-state authority operate in borderlands to provide resources and security or resolve conflicts. The challenges that central governments face in asserting authority in peripheral regions often lead them to pursue strategies of hybrid governance – sharing or ceding some political, administrative or security functions to local non-state structures, especially in borderland areas where customary and traditional institutions are strong. However, such strategies have contributed to the fragmentation of local political leadership in regions with longstanding historical experiences of state exclusion and where non-state institutions are well-established.

**“ Particularly for local peacebuilding organisations, initiatives to reach marginalised populations may rely on connecting with services provided by non-state armed actors.”**

Attempts to ‘formalise’ informal borderland structures have exacerbated conflict in different ways – encouraging elite capture of resources and increasing rewards and incentives for competition. In Tunisia, central state recognition of informal cross-border trade routes in Medenine and Tatouine governorates brought these to the attention of local elites, who then sought to control them by imposing taxation on longstanding users. The case study on north-eastern Kenya describes how peace committees had historically provided an effective resource for mediating and resolving clan tensions. But efforts to recognise them more formally and bring them into the public sphere intensified competition for resources and administrative posts among local clan leaders, shifting the committees’ focus away from conflict resolution. The case study authors warn against a blanket assumption that the ‘localisation’ of conflict resolution mechanisms or political administration is naturally stabilising or peaceful.

The potential for lucrative economic opportunities around borderlands, such as cross-border trade, is often said to encourage violence. Yet in Bab al-Hawa, Syria, various armed

groups cooperated to formalise the border crossing. This in fact reduced violence around the crossing, increasing revenue from the border and enhancing the security of the local population by reducing the need to deal with conflict among multiple competing armed groups.

Engaging with armed groups to provide governance presents ethical, political and practical dilemmas for peacebuilding. Particularly for local peacebuilding organisations, initiatives to reach marginalised populations may rely on connecting with services provided by non-state armed actors. Attempts to dismantle or an inability to recognise such structures therefore risk making life more insecure for borderland populations or local peace activists. But while armed groups may be effective in delivering certain services, working with them risks potentially strengthening their presence and control of a particular region. Supporting the improvement of state systems may also be problematic, however, as these may lack local legitimacy or capacity, while peacebuilding processes themselves can risk replacing local non-state systems for service delivery and resource allocation. In Myanmar, local ceasefire arrangements in some parts of the country have sought to overcome this through ‘interim arrangements’ that do not acknowledge the legitimacy of the services provided by armed groups but accept them as a temporary reality under the terms of the ceasefire.

### **Peace and transition processes can prompt negative narratives of borderland communities that reinforce their exclusion**

Periods of conflict and transition can trigger or amplify negative national narratives or portrayals of borderland communities. Constructed and reconstructed over many years, these typically focus on cultural, religious and political differences and an assumed lack of commitment to national ideals and identity. For example, the Donbas region of Ukraine enjoyed political representation at the centre and thrived economically for many years after independence. But as tensions rose in relation to the 2014 Maidan Revolution, nationalist narratives and stereotypes resurfaced, demonising and isolating Donbas communities and emphasising their links with Russia. The Donbas has subsequently been portrayed as a ‘world apart’ from the rest of Ukraine.

Dominant identity narratives can also occur within borderlands, masking the fact that borderlands are often inhabited by diverse communities and may themselves contain stark economic and political inequalities. In the southern Tarai region of Nepal, for example, recent political struggles have brought to the fore Madhesi claims for greater political autonomy. However, Madhesis are one of several major identity groups in the Tarai, each with different narratives about who they are, the nature of the border and their relations with the centre.

Apparently unrelated policy decisions can also trigger trauma associated with actions around the border. In Northern Ireland, the open border with the south has been a key component of the transformation of the conflict. But the potential return of restrictions on the Irish border prompted by the UK’s exit from the European Union has worried many border communities.

Memories of the uncertainty, insecurity and sense of division associated with the violent years of the 'Troubles' are still vivid, and it is feared that any restrictive border control will bring a return of conflict-era suspicions and communal divides.

'We're still on the path to reconciliation and [Brexit] is like opening a wound.'  
*Northern Ireland case study*

In response to narrowing national identity narratives, borderland communities may turn their attentions inwards, emphasising the 'local'. Communities living in border regions in Ukraine, Tunisia and north-eastern Kenya have developed economic ties, trade relationships, political affiliations and social relations at a very local level and across state borders with neighbouring borderland communities. This can lead local populations to feel disconnected from national processes and that they lack political voice. For example, some communities living in the Medenine and Tatouine governorates of Tunisia have been demonised and associated with 'terrorism' in the national media – exacerbated by sensationalist reporting of violent events. This has deterred local communities from speaking out against violence in their region for fear of aggravating suspicions, and has led to policy responses that ignore the more immediate forms of insecurity experienced by border communities.

'While local inhabitants were concerned about spillover from Libya, they saw restrictions on border trade and lack of development as the main causes of any insecurity, rather than a terrorist threat.'  
*Tunisia case study*

A commitment to inclusion should involve recognising how exclusionary narratives are triggered and operate during conflict and peace processes. The representation of borderlands in the national imagination influences how borderland communities are included in nationally led peace processes and how their concerns are negotiated in relation to other priorities.

## Prospects for peacebuilding in borderlands

### Ensure conflict and peacebuilding analysis captures borderland dynamics

Any peacebuilding effort should be based on coherent, up-to-date and politically attuned analysis that includes how different groups in borderlands experience national transition processes. Analysis should look out for common pitfalls, such as the potential for elite capture or failure to build on existing peacebuilding capacities and mechanisms. It should consider not just the incentive structures of different elite groups but also the nature of different borderland relationships – cross-border, transnational, centre-periphery, and within the borderland itself – and whether these are cooperative or conflictual. Assessing how the costs and benefits of particular interventions are spatially distributed can also disaggregate how different policies linked to security, counter-terrorism and economic extraction impact on inclusion, social development and violence reduction in borderland regions. This can help

clarify how policies developed far from borderlands and seemingly unrelated to conflict resolution affect borderland peace and stability.

**“ Any peacebuilding effort should be based on coherent, up-to-date and politically attuned analysis that includes how different groups in borderlands experience national transition processes.”**

Capturing these insights requires shifting the current configuration of the development and peacebuilding sector – with country teams and planning processes headquartered in national capitals and using official, rather than local, languages. Sub-national offices with a remit for cross-border analysis and programming is a key starting point. This does not mean replacing a country-level, national focus with a borderland one, but rather taking account of non-national histories and how local, national, transnational and global relations create outcomes in borderlands very different to those seen nationally.

Special attention should be paid to how sub-national modes of exclusion operate. Targeted analysis that disaggregates identity can help identify key 'exclusion variables', such as informal and formal barriers to inclusion, marginalised groups who need particular support, and influential local actors who can either champion or resist change. Understanding these dynamics can also help identify unexpected opportunities for change. For example, in Tunisia, in-depth political economy and community perceptions analysis allowed international peacebuilding organisations with strong relations to local peacebuilding networks to advocate on sensitive issues when democratic spaces opened up.

The design of transition processes, such as devolution, constitutional reform and national dialogues, should incorporate measures to mitigate against the unintended consequences of elite contestation and co-option. This could involve commitments to track the inclusion of different groups, the prevalence and incidence of different forms of violence, and service provision outcomes. Planning should also involve gender-sensitive conflict mitigation strategies that focus on civic engagement and education, and channels for non-elites to take political office. For example, emerging discussions on decentralisation in government-controlled areas of the Donbas region of Ukraine have sought to engage populations stigmatised in the post-2014 conflict, providing space for them to shape priorities and mechanisms for future political governance.

### **Make space for peacebuilding in borderlands: constraints, entry points and brokers**

While peace and transition processes may open up peacebuilding space at a national level, borderland areas can at the same time become heavily contested and constricted due to increased violence, securitised measures or geo-political wrangling. Local peacebuilders may have the greatest access and legitimacy among their communities but can also face suspicion and threats through their activities and associations. In Myanmar, the army's role in stabilising the Kachin and Shan states to facilitate resource extraction ensures it is the most powerful actor and authority. Local peacebuilding organisations have had to navigate a complex web of power relations to gain access and permission to work there.

'Personalities and personal ties continue to be much more important than formal structures and systems. Organisations are required to constantly assess where power lies in the country's bureaucratic structures and who best to approach, creating a system of perpetual uncertainty where the reasons for gaining or being denied permission remain opaque and are not easily replicated.'

*Myanmar case study*

International actors can play a key role in highlighting the contradictions between national and local peacebuilding spaces. They can also provide (discreet) analytical, logistical and financial support to local peacebuilding organisations, such as those looking to call attention to state violence, and help mitigate risks that such activities pose to an organisation's operations in other parts of the country. In areas where armed groups provide governance functions, international agencies can support community-based actors to avoid government sanction for engaging with them, or mediate between local organisations and national governments to help develop mutual options.

**“ Hybrid governance and institutions in borderlands means there may be multiple actors for peacebuilders to navigate and from whom buy-in must be sought.”**

Hybrid governance and institutions in borderlands means there may be multiple actors for peacebuilders to navigate and from whom buy-in must be sought. Shifting conflict dynamics in north-eastern Kenya have meant that different actors – clan based, religious leaders and women's networks – have had different roles in resolving conflicts at different moments. For example, while religious leaders were prominent in reducing clan tensions after 2010, they lacked credibility in mediating Al Shabaab-related conflicts. In Nepal, certain individuals have gained prominence mediating centre-periphery relations as different actors seek to influence transition processes. Such 'brokers' have been key to negotiating on behalf of

marginalised groups in borderlands and play important roles to support inclusion. In other places such as Kenya, Tunisia and Ukraine, brokers mobilise resources and mediate political positions across borders as well as with the centre, without necessarily reflecting broader community interests.

Questions therefore arise about who has legitimacy to effect peaceful change, reduce violence or speak on behalf of borderland communities. Different groups' aims can be contradictory in contested spaces, and it can be difficult to gauge who is relevant and effective at specific times. The case studies suggest that communities may be pragmatic as to whom they assign legitimacy to at different times – for example, looking to current service providers or to people with more traditional authority. A focus on the role of brokers can help navigate such murky territory, and identify those best placed to advance particular agendas with different powerholders – at the centre, and in and across borderlands.

### **Connect peacebuilding at the centre, in borderlands and across borders**

Support to peacebuilding in borderlands needs to acknowledge or link efforts within borderlands, across borders and at a national level. In Nepal, the two brokers described in the case study pursued contrasting approaches to representing the Tarai borderland region: while one sought to shape debates in the capital, Kathmandu, the other focused on building grassroots constituencies in the Tarai itself. Each faced a different set of challenges working at different levels and scales. Influencing the centre can require alliances with the national media, national political parties and national civil society, as well as international NGOs that may provide vital support but who may also dilute or co-opt local agendas. Sustaining mobilisation at a local level, on the other hand, requires maintaining legitimacy and relevance with different local constituencies amid shifting dynamics and competing agendas.

Working at multiple levels and scales is especially important where there are polarising nationalist narratives. The Ukraine case study highlights the lack of inter-community dialogue to dispel nationally driven misperceptions of Donbas populations. In Tunisia, international organisations have used the opening up of democratic space to challenge national media accounts of 'terrorist' borderland populations, highlighting instead their acute historic marginalisation and security concerns.

All of the case studies describe the importance of cross-border interaction for local communities, yet official peace and transition processes often struggle or neglect to incorporate this. Governments tend to focus on the financial potential of border regions for accessing transnational economic opportunities. But such opportunities do not necessarily include the communities living there and often fail to consider how local economies and livelihoods have historically been built around the border. Previously neglected by the centre, north-eastern Kenya is now a key regional trade route, for example, while Myanmar's northern border regions have become hubs for resource extraction.

Border management is an underexplored area for conflict prevention and peacebuilding interventions. Decisions such as whether to open or close a border are often decided centrally and determined by security concerns, neglecting the economic, social and political impact on populations and the 'choices' they make in response to uncertainties created by inappropriate border management. The Syria and Tunisia case studies suggest that while many people benefit from informal trade, borderland populations favour predictability and regularisation of cross-border movement. In Tunisia, any interruption of income from the border results in significant social upheaval, and the lack of predictability has drawn many young men towards informal and dangerous migration.

There are challenges to regularising cross-border institutions in areas where the state has previously ceded its functions, in particular risks of displacing informal arrangements. Peace committees across the Kenyan–Somali border that tapped into Somali clan networks lost their role as improved government relations allowed for the development of joint border-management policies. These were less effective in managing security challenges related to Al Shabaab, while other important benefits such as Somali children's access to schools in Kenya were also disrupted.

Further study could understand how movement across and activities around borders, such as local trade, are incorporated effectively into transition processes. This could include the informal 'back roads' that emerge around border restrictions, the impact on communities, including vulnerable groups such as refugees, and how such routes are exploited and secured by different sets of actors.

# Kenya

## The changing nature of local peacebuilding in Kenya's north-eastern borderlands

Aden Abdi and Jeremy Lind

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Kenya's north-eastern borderlands, which neighbour Somalia to the east and Ethiopia to the north, have seen periods of shifting stability and violence since the country's independence in 1963. This reflects Kenya's difficult experience with post-colonial statebuilding and incorporation into the wider political economy of the Horn of Africa. Effective peacebuilding efforts in north-eastern Kenya in the 1990s and early 2000s, where the authority and legitimacy of state-led initiatives were limited, emphasised the significance of local, informal approaches and leadership. However, the scope of local peacebuilding has become restricted over recent years as decentralisation has elevated the importance of sub-national politics, and economic ties between the borderlands and the centre have also strengthened.

This article traces the evolution of conflict and peacebuilding in Kenya's north-eastern borderlands – from the post-independence period, when state security forces violently quashed an insurgency; to the early 2000s, by which time the state sought to accommodate local efforts to strengthen and promote peace; and up to today. It looks at the shift from localised tensions and competition between clans that were addressed through local customary structures, to conflicts involving increased transnational influence and elite competition for political and administrative positions and territorial control. Peacebuilding approaches in the region have had to adapt to overcome new challenges to governance and security and the changing political economy, linked to growing transnational influences and the establishment of new county governments.

### Conflict and peacebuilding up to the early 2000s

Conflict and peacebuilding in Kenya's north-eastern borderlands – an area encompassing Mandera, Wajir and Garissa counties – are shaped by a long history of separation, marginalisation and insurgency. Under British colonial rule, the region was part of the expansive Northern Frontier District, which was governed under separate and more

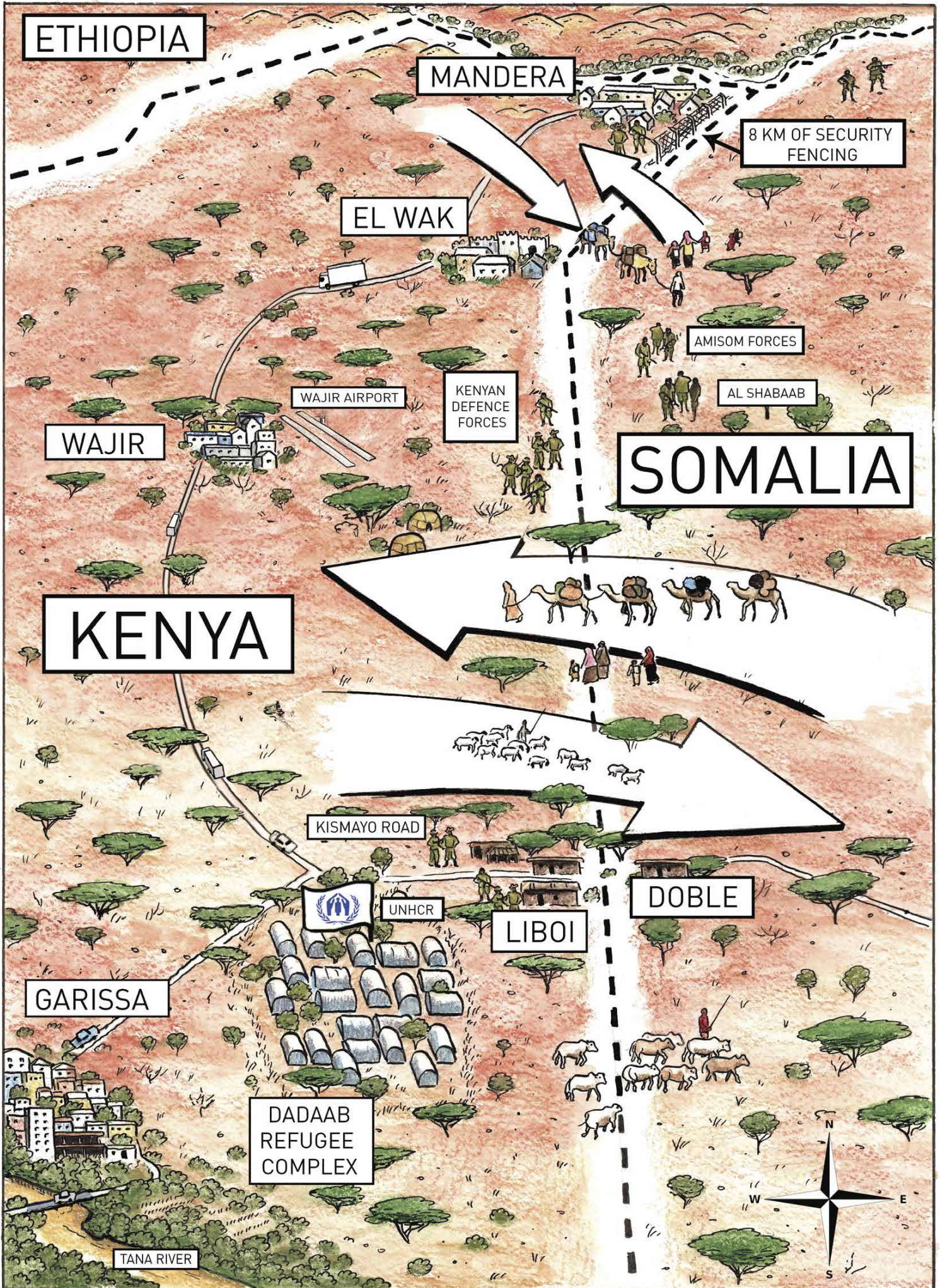
restrictive bureaucratic and security arrangements. While pre-independence consultations with residents of Mandera, Wajir and Garissa in 1963 yielded a preference for the mostly Somali-inhabited regions to join the Somali Republic, Britain instead decided to create a new North Eastern Province as part of an independent Kenya. As detailed by Whitaker (2015), local Somalis with the backing of the fledgling Somali Republic government started the Shifta insurgency (1963–67), in which an estimated 4,000 people were killed. Negotiations between Kenya and Somalia led to a ceasefire in 1967, slowing the insurgency. However, the exclusion of the local leadership from negotiations, Kenya's suspicion of Somalia's future intentions in the region, and continuing local resentment sustained high levels of hostility, and isolated incidents of violence persisted.

“**Post-colonial governments, like the colonial regime before it, used various strategies to establish a social order that effectively excluded Kenyan Somalis from full citizenship.**”

As a result, relations between the centre and borderland populations started on a contentious footing, and Kenya's bureaucratic state and military remained decidedly suspicious of ethnic Somalis. Post-colonial governments, like the colonial regime before it, used various strategies to establish a social order that effectively excluded Kenyan Somalis from full citizenship, including restrictions on their freedom of

**Illustration (opposite): Key features in the Kenya–Somali border region, including population centres and movements.**

© Jon Sack



ETHIOPIA

MANDERA

8 KM OF SECURITY FENCING

EL WAK

AMISOM FORCES

AL SHABAAB

KENYAN DEFENCE FORCES

WAJIR AIRPORT

WAJIR

SOMALIA

KENYA

KISMAYO ROAD

UNHCR

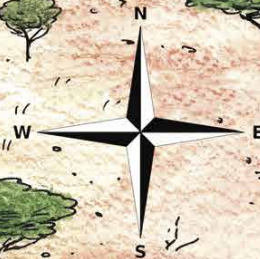
LIBOI

DOBLE

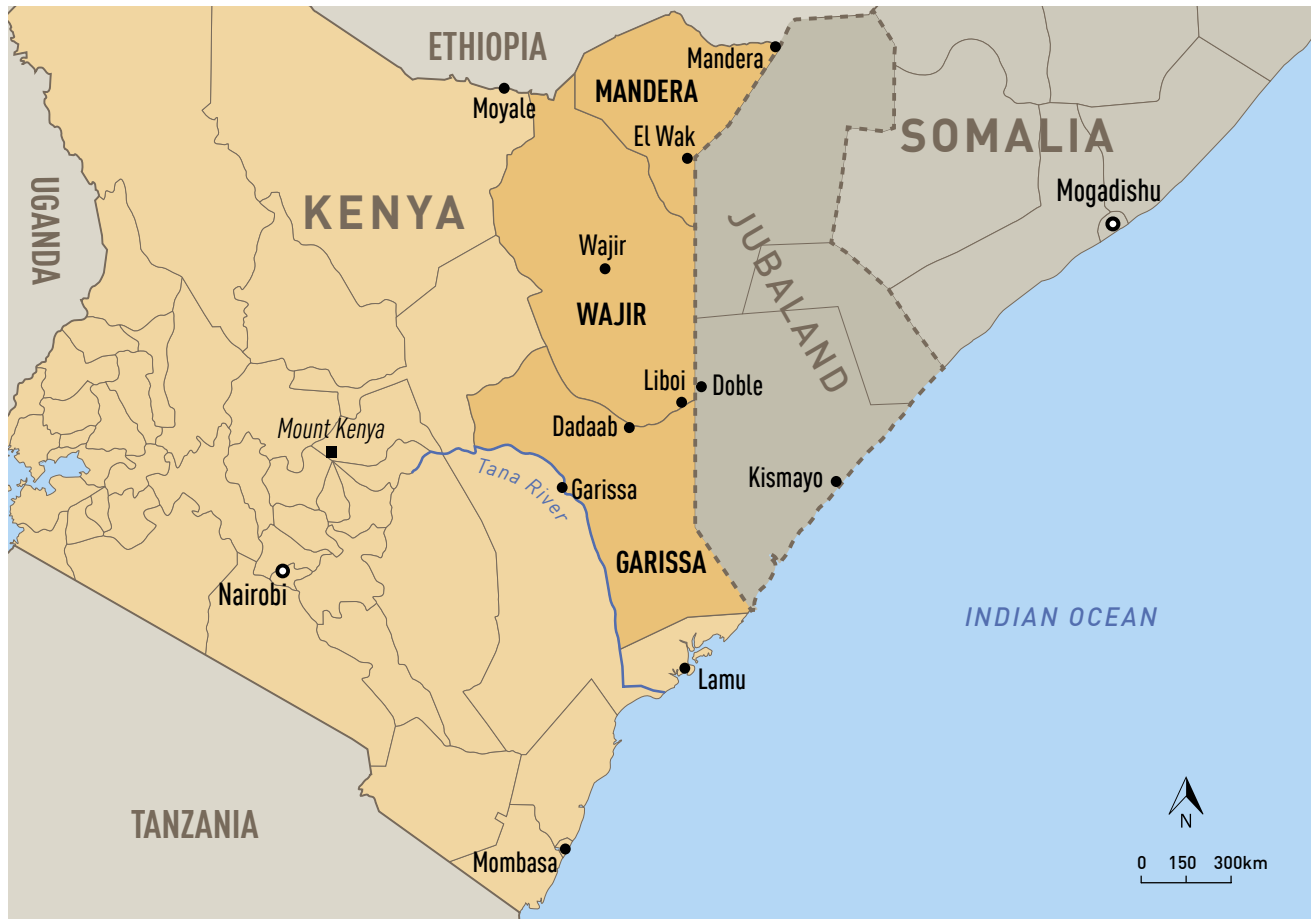
GARISSA

DADAAB REFUGEE COMPLEX

TANA RIVER



Map 1: Mandera, Wajir and Garissa Counties, northern Kenya bordering Somalia.



Map 2: Regional location of the border between Kenya and Somalia.



movement, forced 'villagisation' (the resettlement of nomadic and scattered populations into concentrated villages), military coercion and collective punishment. Such state violence continued long after the *Shifita* conflict ended, including the 1984 Wagalla Massacre – a collective punishment operation that Anderson (2014) reports took the lives of up to 3,000 men from the Degodia clan. Restrictions on freedom of movement and special identity requirements for Kenyan Somalis were only lifted in 1997, although in practice Kenyan Somalis have remained prone to routine police harassment and coercive payment of bribes. Restrictions also impacted cross-border relations between populations. While some communities living closer to the border were able to maintain family connections and travel, such as for business, schooling and livestock grazing, movement was mostly regulated through formal border crossings.

Conflict in the Kenyan border regions in the 1990s involved communal tensions within and among Somali clans. Such conflict was localised and included competition over grazing and water access as well as clan boundaries. Open fighting was typically short-lived and involved few casualties, and was addressed through local structures and processes involving customary and clan authorities with backing from local administration officials. However, the collapse of central government in Somalia in 1991 and associated violence spilled over into north-eastern Kenya, in particular through the hardening of clan identities, the proliferation of arms and influx of refugees. Clan divides, which were a key mobilising factor in the Somali war but had previously not been a significant political factor for Kenyan Somalis, began to play out on the Kenyan side, in particular border towns. Violence erupted between clan groups, particularly over control of towns and trade routes. By this time, the state had retreated from its role in managing security, with security forces (who were not trusted by most of the local population) becoming indifferent to conflict events in the region. The absence of effective state responses emphasised the role of local peacebuilding efforts.

Dekha Ibrahim, the Wajir peacebuilding pioneer, reflected in a 2010 interview on the shifting nature of conflict in north-eastern Kenya as the region became more integrated in wider affairs:

[T]he tensions were within the community and within Kenya. But over time they took on a regional dynamic. There were refugees streaming over the borders from Ethiopia and Somalia, as well as arms. We became keenly aware of the international dimensions of conflicts, including the Cold War. We could see signs everywhere around us. National and international politics played out in our community. Religious tensions were not at all obvious or pronounced in the early years, but they did emerge, within the Muslim community and beyond, as the broader world intruded more and more into our lives.

The advent of multi-party democracy in Kenya and the collapse of Somalia's central government in the 1990s opened up space for community mobilisation and leadership. Kenya's political and security leaders were no longer threatened by the possibility of covert Somali government support to resistance

in Kenya's north-eastern borderlands. Clan elders and Somali customary law (*Xeer*) provided ready leadership and mechanisms to resolve conflicts and encourage peace.

The perceived partiality of (male) elders towards their own clan interests led to a notable development in local peacebuilding efforts – the emergence of women as key interlocutors and mobilisers for peace. In 1993 a group of local women in Wajir led by Ibrahim began to identify ways to respond to worsening conflict. Initially they reached out to religious leaders and clan elders, and by doing so began to develop cross-clan support. Over time their efforts grew into the Wajir Peace and Development Committee (WPDC), formed in 1995. Critically, the Committee's efforts gained traction due to the strong leadership from women and their efforts to engage different local stakeholder communities, including civic leaders and administrative and security officials. International NGOs and relief organisations, which had a large presence in the region in response to the refugee influx from Somalia and chronic food insecurity, lent financial and other material support to the Committee. According to Menkhaus (2008), the WPDC was 'unquestionably instrumental in the remarkable turnaround of Wajir district from one of the most anarchic to one of the more stable border zones of Kenya'. In 2010 Interpol called Garissa town the safest city in East and Central Africa.

**“ Relations between the centre and borderland populations started on a contentious footing, and Kenya's bureaucratic state and military remained decidedly suspicious of ethnic Somalis.”**

Seeing how effective the Committee was, the national government supported the expansion of the model to neighbouring administrative districts. This 'hybrid governance' involved the state ceding some of its core functions, such as maintaining peace and security, to various local non-state and informal stakeholders including clan elders, businesspeople, women, youth, and locally based state and security officials. Many donors supported the government's efforts, echoing global peacebuilding trends in the early 2000s that emphasised the role of non-state actors, particularly community groups and civil society. Ibrahim and the other women who started the WPDC became celebrated peacebuilding advocates, travelling the world to share their stories.

### **Shifts in political economy since the early 2000s**

The early 2000s saw changes in the political economy of the region that significantly shifted the nature of conflicts. The end of emergency rule in 1991 allowed Kenyan Somali traders – using their clan, business and religious connections in Somalia and Gulf Arab states – to move goods into and through Kenyan markets, and on to markets in Uganda and the Great Lakes region. Border regions and northern Kenya more widely were viewed as rich with resources and new markets to help secure

the country's economic growth. No longer dismissed as an inconsequential borderland, national business and political elites now sought to establish links in the borderland region for investment, trade and political power. This was a marked reversal from the region's marginalised past and its exclusion from wider development planning and investment.

Economic change also hastened pastoralist 'sedentarisation'. For example, the drilling of boreholes in the 1980s and 1990s encouraged both settlement and competition. By wresting control of water points, clans created new permanent settlements and asserted territorial claims and pressure for political recognition. Small and medium-sized towns throughout the region experienced exceptional growth, especially after 1991 once the state of emergency was lifted and refugees arrived from Somalia.

From 2003, the Kenya state began to support new social infrastructure like schools and clinics as well as administrative offices through Constituency Development Funds (CDFs), contributing further to town growth. In recent years, Garissa has become the country's fastest-growing city, while Dadaab, home to the world's largest refugee camp, now ranks as Kenya's third largest city. As sedentarisation accelerated and towns expanded, demands for the supply of goods heightened. The volume of transport services increased as goods and people moved between growing centres in the region like Wajir, Mandera, Garissa and Isiolo, as well as between these towns and larger cities like Nairobi and Mombasa. This increasing connectivity between the centre and borderlands, and within the borderlands, signified north-eastern Kenya's growing encapsulation into wider Kenyan political and economic life.

**“ In recent years, Garissa has become the country's fastest-growing city, while Dadaab, home to the world's largest refugee camp, now ranks as Kenya's third largest city.”**

Livestock marketing and trade, the backbone of local livelihoods and economic life, continued to flourish despite recurring drought and the Somali war, increasing demand for transport links. Much of this trade was cross-border into Somalia, with elites such as wealthy businesspeople, large livestock owners and clan leaders making use of differentiated conditions on either side of the border. Insecurity and lack of poor governance in Somalia meant an absence of enforced taxation rules and unregulated access to ports. The proximity of centres in the north-eastern borderlands between Nairobi and Kenya's central highlands, and Kismayo port in Somalia, made them a ready market for transiting goods. A key example is the growth of the Garissa livestock market in the region since the 1990s, now one of the largest such markets in the Horn of Africa.

The borderlands economy has changed with the growth of towns, multiplying transport connections, accessible and unregulated sea ports in southern Somalia, and expanding transnational flows of goods. The improving position of Kenyan Somali business elites, and refugee elites that control trade routes from Somalia to Dadaab refugee camp, has also generated increasing flows of investment into Kenya's northern borderlands, in areas such as property, agriculture, haulage and financial services, as well as illicit trade in goods such as charcoal and sugar. Nonetheless, human development indicators remain largely very poor. According to the World Bank, the average poverty rate in north and north-eastern Kenya is 68 per cent (compared to 38 per cent nationally), primary school attendance is 55 per cent (82 per cent nationally), women's literacy is 41 per cent (89 per cent nationally), and access to safe water 57 per cent (72 per cent nationally).

### **The impact of devolution**

Political developments have also been a key factor in changing dynamics: Kenya's 2010 constitution paved the way for devolution and the creation of new county governments that receive the equivalent of 15 per cent of national revenue. While many in north-eastern Kenya celebrate devolution as a form of 'home rule' signifying the region's greater autonomy from the centre, in practice it is one of the most ambitious efforts to expand state power into the borderlands.

Devolution has also brought new forms of conflict, including shifts in inter-clan rivalries. The greater integration of the borderlands with political and economic processes in Kenya and transnationally has led local elites to seek to control both territory and political-administrative positions in order to assert and consolidate power. The creation of Wajir, Garissa and Mandera counties in 2013 sharpened the trend of rising clan-based competition to control sub-national political offices. Positions in county governments carry with them the power to decide the distribution of public resources for development but also the ability to wield influence over institutions that allocate contracts and tenders, jobs and scholarships.

As a result, fragmentation at sub-national level along clan and sub-clan fault-lines, already evident since the early 1990s, has increased. Clan identities have increasingly become crucial markers in conflict dynamics as a way to stake and contest claims to resources, including rangelands, water points, irrigable land and political positions. Local clan leaders and elders, and the use of *Xeer*, have become less prominent in resolving localised conflicts, which more easily spread into higher-level conflict dynamics.

Al Shabaab's influence has also increased. The Somalia-based militant group has waged an intensifying campaign of attacks in Kenya since 2008. By 2015, Lind (2018) reports, it was implicated in nearly 40 per cent of all conflict events in northern Kenya, concentrated in Mandera, Wajir and Garissa counties. Al Shabaab propaganda refers to Somali-inhabited areas of Kenya as 'colonised territories', drawing on long-standing local grievances against the Kenyan state and the sense of marginalisation among borderlands populations that fuelled the earlier *Shifita* conflict. State security responses included extrajudicial killings, a crackdown on refugees,



Woman herding goats at a water point near Wajir, north-east Kenya.  
© CGIAR/Flickr Creative Commons

amendments to security laws and police swoops on certain communities. As in earlier times, these were felt as a form of collective punishment, reconstituting the wedge between Kenyan Somalis and the state while doing little to curb the threat of Al Shabaab attacks.

**“ Along the Kenya–Somalia border, cross-border peace committees – adapted from the original Kenyan WPDC committee model – developed in the 2000s with membership drawn from both sides of the border.”**

### **Peacebuilding today**

Changes in clan conflict dynamics and the impact of Al Shabaab operations emphasised the need for effective peacebuilding work. However, the influence of peace committee structures that evolved in the late 1990s began to decline in the 2000s. In essence, the local peace committees became victims of their own success. The formalisation of peace as part of a national peace accord following post-election violence in 2007–08 introduced regular allowances,

elected positions, and links to formal governance and security structures. These incentives opened up the peace committees to capture and manipulation by political elites.

Instead, other structures and processes began to address peace needs in the region, including religious leaders but increasingly also politicians and local business elites. The previous peacebuilding achievements of the WPDC stemmed from its diverse membership that transcended narrow clan interests and its ability to cultivate relations between local communities and the Kenyan state. The loss of pioneer local peacebuilders such as Dekha Ibrahim through death and old age undermined local peacebuilders' capacity and institutional relations at a time when new and innovative approaches and skills were needed. In Garissa and Mandera, religious leaders, seen as impartial and above parochial clan interests, formed mediation councils and have played an important role in resolving some clan conflicts where clan elders and peace committees could not succeed. Yet the ability of religious leaders to mediate Al Shabaab-related conflicts appears to be minimal in the borderlands, and clan identity has remained influential in mediating cross-border Al Shabaab-related violence.

Along the Kenya–Somalia border, cross-border peace committees – adapted from the original Kenyan WPDC committee model – developed in the 2000s with membership drawn from both sides of the border. They grew organically, responding to the need to address cross-border conflict and criminality. Connecting through clan networks with civil

society, women's groups and clan elders, they have been effective in negotiating with non-state armed actors in Somalia to secure the return of carjacked vehicles and hostages, and ensure the safety of children crossing the border to go to school. However, the Kenyan military intervention into Somalia in 2011 and the return of key border towns to Somali federal and Jubaland regional government forces in 2012 has diminished their role. Collaborative operations between national authorities, while contributing comparatively little to mediating cross-border tensions, in particular with non-state armed actors with which they lack credibility, have secured funding and formal recognition, casting a shadow over the committees' efforts.

An added challenge for peace committees is that their composition, skill sets and approaches are best suited for dealing with localised conflicts. They are not well equipped to deal with high-stake political conflicts involving county governments or parliamentary politics, which characterise conflicts in the region from 2010 onwards. Correspondingly, peacebuilding has shifted away from bottom-up efforts to negotiations between elites and power-sharing arrangements. This included a new category of clan 'elders', often retired civil servants, teachers, businesspeople and members of the diaspora, who had strong links to local political elites and an astute understanding of state structures, political bargaining and deal-making.

The Garre Council of Elders (GCoE) in Mandera is the most well-known example of these emerging structures. Formed in 2010 after the Garre clan lost the Mandera Central parliamentary seat to the rival Degodia clan, it managed to unite the many disparate Garre sub-clans behind an agreed slate of candidates in the build-up to the 2013 elections. These candidates went on to sweep all the contested seats. As well as uniting the Garre sub-clans, the GCoE was effective in horse-trading political seats with other clans and negotiating with Kenyan national elites for cabinet posts and nominated MPs. The GCoE also put in place mechanisms for wider consultation with local community members, including receiving public petitions and submissions from local communities and diaspora clan members on the intra-Garre power-sharing arrangements. However, the success of the GCoE was short-lived, as political infighting and disagreement between the GCoE and incumbent politicians led to its fragmentation and loss of influence in 2017 elections.

Other clans and sub-clans are adopting the GCoE model with equally successful electoral results. But the peacebuilding impact of these new structures is mixed. For example, while the GCoE's power-sharing arrangement put a stop to conflict between Garre and Murule clans in central Mandera, it has fanned conflict between Garre and Degodia clans in Mandera North by excluding Degodia from the resulting power-sharing arrangement. The aims of these new structures are based on narrow clan and political interests. They are also exclusive of women or minority clans, unlike the peace committees which gave voice to a range of different social groups including youth, women and elders. The GCoE has also drawn resentment from marginalised clans: for example, members of the Degodia clan accuse it of pursuing an expansionist and exclusionist political agenda in its power-sharing arrangement by denying them and other clans political representation in Mandera.

## Conclusion

Conflict and peace in Kenya's north-eastern borderlands have changed alongside the wider politics and political economy of the region. Conflict now often involves competition for political and administrative positions that provide access to public resources and decisions around how these should be allocated, as well as opportunities for contracts, tenders and other economic benefits. Violence is also characterised by non-state actors and transnational influences.

**“ Less than ten years since devolution was introduced in Kenya, hopes that it would encourage more responsive and accountable governance at the sub-national level have yet to be fulfilled.”**

Less than ten years since devolution was introduced in Kenya, hopes that it would encourage more responsive and accountable governance at the sub-national level have yet to be fulfilled. The so-called 'local' turn in peacebuilding that saw the formalisation and subsequent co-option of peace committees needs to be rethought. The move away from peacebuilding processes led by community-based leaders and structures to elite negotiations has in some places addressed the threat of immediate violence by temporarily securing certain political and economic elite interests. But in general it has failed to fundamentally alter the existing drivers of conflict over the longer term, and the wealth and influence of elites have not trickled down to many poor Kenyan Somalis. Rather, the immediate impact has been to open up a whole new field of jostling for political supremacy.

Durable peace in northern Kenya requires multiple, sustained and complementary efforts at the national, regional and local levels. This requires alignment of existing national and county-level peace infrastructure, institutional frameworks and initiatives. There is also a need for better and effective coordination between the national and county peace architectures and existing regional peacebuilding initiatives such as the IGAD's Conflict and Early Warning and Response Network (CEWARN). In addition, increasing state-to-state relations and collaboration on cross-border threats such as Al Shabaab should be complemented by support to cross-border community peacebuilding initiatives and structures rooted in the shared clan, business and family links in the Kenya-Somalia border. Concrete steps are urgently required to operationalise the agreement by the Presidents of Kenya and Somalia in 2017 to re-open the Kenya-Somalia border to facilitate legitimate cross-border activities such as family visits, trade and livestock grazing. This will strengthen inter-state and inter-community relations, increase revenues from legitimate trade – currently undermined by illegal trade and smuggling – to spur local economic development, and more importantly foster a sense of ownership and inclusion among local communities – a key factor for sustainable peace and security in the borderlands of northern Kenya.

Political conflicts related to devolution are not unique to Kenya; they are also a problem in Ethiopia and Somalia. A regional approach to dealing with political conflicts and especially those related to devolution is long overdue. At the local level, government responses need to go beyond the security-centric policies of the past. They should work with the local clans and peace structures to come up with durable solutions to underlying causes of the conflict, including providing political, technical and institutional support. Local communities and local leaders in north-eastern Kenya have an important role to play in maximising the opportunities offered by devolution to address poverty and persistent conflicts in the region. This requires more inclusive county governance structures that reflect the diversity of the population. Community and civil society capacity to hold county leaders accountable for their decisions needs to be strengthened by the national government and development partners. This could go a long way towards fostering alternative, multi-clan and non-violent avenues for advancing peace and security.

# Myanmar

## Peacebuilding amidst war in northern Myanmar

Patrick Meehan

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He is a Co-Investigator on a major new research project funded by the Global Challenges Research Fund, entitled 'Drugs and (dis)order: Building sustainable peacetime economies in the aftermath of war', which focuses on Afghanistan, Colombia and Myanmar.

After decades of military rule, Myanmar's 2010 General Election appeared to be a watershed moment. The emergence of a democratic political system, the launching of a formal peace process in 2011 and Aung San Suu Kyi's 2015 election victory inspired hopes that Myanmar was embarking upon what the World Bank dubbed as a 'triple transition': from authoritarian military rule to democratic governance, from a centrally directed economy to a market-oriented economy, and from 60 years of conflict to sustainable peace in the country's border areas.

Yet, alongside these positive changes a number of the country's border areas have experienced some of the worst fighting for more than 25 years. There have been very significant escalations in violence since 2010, especially in Rakhine State (against the Rohingya population), and in Kachin State and northern Shan State in the north-east of the country close to the border with China. In these two northern border areas – which are the focus of this article – previous ceasefires have broken down (notably the 17-year ceasefire with the Kachin Independence Army or KIA) and new insurgencies have emerged. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) now number in the hundreds of thousands and there are continued reports of human rights violations.

The country's high-profile democratic transition encouraged a rush from the international community to engage in Myanmar. Nationally, space opened up for peacebuilding activities, but on the ground in conflict-affected borderland areas this space remains extremely constrained. Peacebuilding efforts face the challenge of how to engage in a peace process where formal dialogue, peace conferences and government-led efforts to strengthen a nationwide ceasefire agreement operate in tandem with ongoing military offensives, worsening violence, increasing restraints on local, national and international development agencies, and sustained attacks on press freedom.

This article explores why the peace process in Myanmar has faced major difficulties in reaching an initial nationwide

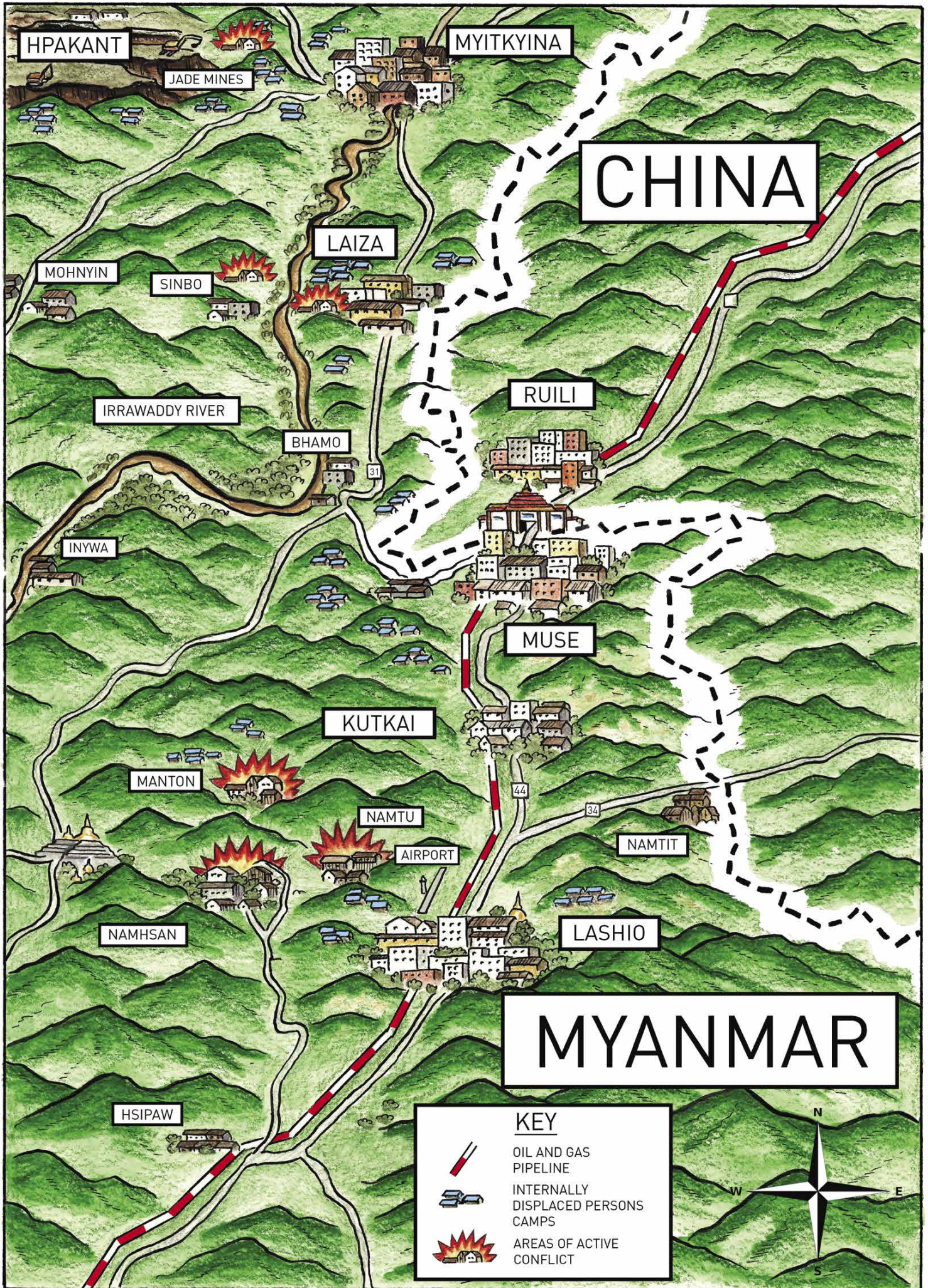
ceasefire, and how peacebuilding, humanitarian and community development initiatives in Kachin State and northern Shan State continue to face huge challenges despite the country's democratic transition and formal peace process.

“**There have been very significant escalations in violence since 2010, especially in Rakhine State, and in Kachin State and northern Shan State in the north-east of the country close to the border with China.**”

The first part analyses one of the central puzzles in Myanmar's peace process: why renewed violence broke out throughout Kachin State and northern Shan State at the same time as a national peace process was launched. It demonstrates how the late 2000s marked a culmination of political, social and economic processes that simultaneously provided the foundations for a military-orchestrated political transition at the centre *and* triggered renewed armed conflict in Kachin State and northern Shan State. It situates the current peace process within a deeper understanding of the contested and unresolved processes of statebuilding and centre-borderland relations – showing how the country's war-to-peace 'transition', its experiences of ceasefire arrangements, and the prospects for peace look very different when viewed from the margins rather than from the capital, Yangon, or abroad. The second part explores the profound challenges that have faced peacebuilding initiatives led by local organisations in the northern Myanmar-China borderlands. In doing so, the article critically reflects upon the overly optimistic framing

**Illustration (opposite): Key features, including spots of active conflict in Kachin and Shan States in northeast Myanmar.**

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HPAKANT

JADE MINES

MYITKYINA

CHINA

MOHNYIN

SINBO

LAIZA

RUILI

IRRAWADDY RIVER

BHAMO

INYWA

MUSE

KUTKAI

MANTON

NAMTU

AIRPORT

NAMTIT




NAMHSAN

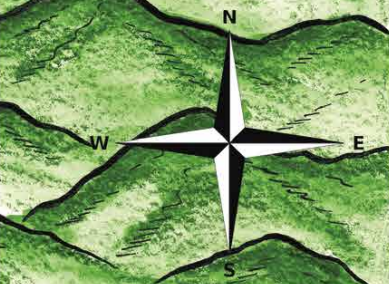
LASHIO

MYANMAR

HSIPAW

**KEY**

-  OIL AND GAS PIPELINE
-  INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS CAMPS
-  AREAS OF ACTIVE CONFLICT



Map 1: Kachin and Shan States, Myanmar bordering China.



Map 2: Regional location of the border between Myanmar and China.



of Myanmar's so-called triple transition and argues that international donors and non-governmental organisation (NGOs) need to centre the experiences of local peacebuilding initiatives when re-assessing how to engage in the country's faltering peace process. This article draws upon extensive interviews conducted by the author with civil society organisations and local and international NGOs in Lashio, Myitkyina and Yangon between 2015 and 2018.

## **De-centring understandings of Myanmar's transition**

Since independence, much of the country's borderlands with China have remained beyond government control. The KIA administered much of Kachin State while the powerful Communist Party of Burma (CPB) controlled large amounts of territory along the China border and supported an array of other ethnic armed groups. Securing control of the northern Shan and Kachin borderland region has been central to the statebuilding agenda of successive post-colonial governments in light of its geopolitical importance close to China, its strategic location on the main Myanmar–China trade routes, and its abundant natural resources. However, the region's topography of remote hills and dense forests, and the back channels of cross-border support that ethnic armed groups have received, limited the effectiveness of the Myanmar army's counter-insurgency campaigns. The government's use of military force to achieve this has fuelled longstanding grievances and protracted armed conflict in the ethnically diverse borderlands, where the power and legitimacy of the central state has historically been weak and contested.

**“ Securing control of the northern Shan and Kachin borderland region has been central to the statebuilding agenda of successive post-colonial governments.”**

### **The false promise of ceasefires and transition**

A series of ceasefire deals in the late 1980s and early 1990s – initially with the four main splinter groups of the CPB (which had collapsed in 1989) and culminating with the 1994 KIA ceasefire – gradually transformed the political economy of Kachin State and northern Shan State. By using ceasefire deals to stabilise one of the most contested regions, Myanmar's military government was able to concentrate on restoring control in the rest of the country after nationwide pro-democracy protests of 1988 and continued insurgency elsewhere – including the launch of devastating counter-insurgency offensives in the Thailand–Myanmar borderlands of southern Shan State and Karen State throughout the mid-late 1990s and early 2000s.

Given the precariousness of the government's finances, the ceasefires were also used to establish the stability required to accelerate resource extraction, especially of jade and timber, and expand formal cross-border trade with China. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the military government

legalised cross-border trade through government-controlled trade gates – the most important of which was the Muse–Ruili crossing in northern Shan State which links China to Mandalay – and devised new foreign investment and land laws, allowing the government to allocate large-scale land and resource concessions.

For the KIA and other armed groups in northern Shan State, a ceasefire was more logical than continuing to fight in light of declining support from China and increasing threats from the Myanmar army; it also allowed them to capitalise on emerging economic opportunities. However, although the ceasefires in Kachin State and northern Shan State largely held until 2010, little progress was made in addressing longstanding political grievances, creating a 'no-war-no-peace' environment in this region.

The ceasefire period came to be defined by three dynamics: a prolonged process of militarisation in borderland areas which saw the number of Myanmar army units and military-backed militia groups proliferate in Kachin and northern Shan State; the opening up of borderland areas for economic 'development'; and a stalled peace process in which government promises of political dialogue never materialised.

Over the next two decades, this region became central to the country's crony-controlled economy as a result of the vast revenues generated from logging, jade mining (an industry estimated by Global Witness to have generated more than \$30 billion in 2014, equivalent to 48% of Myanmar's annual GDP), the region's illicit drug economy (heroin and methamphetamines), hydropower dams, large-scale agribusiness concessions, expanding cross-border trade with China, and the construction of pipelines that transect former conflict zones to deliver offshore oil and gas to China. The region's economic transformation has been underpinned by establishing and enforcing, often through violence, highly unequal control over land and resources which serve the interests of a powerful nexus of military and private sector actors, comprising military elites, local militias, Myanmar business elites, cross-border and international investors, and in some cases ethnic armed groups. The ceasefire period also saw the reinvigoration of nationalist tropes within the military, which have long acclaimed the army's role as a safeguard against internal fragmentation and external subjugation by the country's powerful neighbours.

Thus the very ceasefire agreements that served to reduce levels of outright violent conflict exposed borderland populations to an array of violent and destructive forces of militarisation, continued counter-insurgency, exclusionary nationalism, dispossession and destructive development that served to reinvigorate long-held resentment against the central government.

Distrust in the ceasefire process in Kachin and Shan States was also heightened by a number of events since the mid-2000s. In 2005, the military forced the surrender of smaller ceasefire groups and arrested a number of high-profile Shan political and military leaders. In 2008, the country's new Constitution locked-in the military's control over the political system by enshrining the military's right 'to participate in the National political

leadership role of the State' and providing it with effective veto power over any constitutional reform. This was followed in 2009 by a government declaration that all ceasefire armed groups were to be absorbed into the Myanmar army as Border Guard Forces (BGF). The government also declared that after September 2010 all ceasefires would be 'null and void' and groups which had not converted into BGFs would be deemed insurgents. Throughout the 1990–2008 period the military government consistently informed ceasefire groups that, as a transitional government, it had no mandate to enter into political dialogue until a new constitution had been enacted. The BGF proposal, therefore, marked a clear turnaround in which ceasefire groups were now told to surrender autonomy prior to any form of political dialogue. The government's position also offered no acknowledgement of the systems of governance administered by ethnic armed groups that provided health, education and justice systems to large populations.

By the late 2000s, the military government's increasing control over the country's borderlands, the country's improved financial position and the promulgation of the 2008 constitution encouraged military elites to instigate a transition to civilian rule and capitalise on the international support such a process would bring. The government's decision to initiate a formal peace process in 2011 was underpinned by a belief among military elites that they were in a strong enough position to manage this process on their own terms.

However, for those living in Kachin State and northern Shan State there was deep distrust of government promises of ceasefires, peace and development. These terms have become dirty words, weighed down by experiences of continued violence, expropriation and insecurity. Myanmar's 'transition'

in 2010–11 therefore came at a time of crisis – from the perspective of many armed groups and borderland populations – in the ceasefire system of the previous two decades. This included a *legitimacy* crisis, in which the leadership of various armed groups, especially the KIA, became tarnished by claims that they were profiting from the exploitation of the people and environments they claimed to be protecting; a crisis of *strategy*, as the hope that ceasefire agreements would pave the way for more meaningful political dialogue faded away; and a *military* crisis, as ethnic armed groups faced increasing pressure from the Myanmar army.

### The China effect

Centre-periphery tensions in northern Myanmar, and their impact on the peace process, have been further complicated by diverse cross-border influences from neighbouring China. China's decision in the 1980s to decrease its support for ethnic armed groups and strengthen government-to-government relations was instrumental in shaping the military government's ceasefire strategy. Weapons sales, protection in UN Security Council debates, and increased investment and border trade from China were all important in strengthening Myanmar's military government throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Stabilising Myanmar government control over the country's borderlands has also been viewed by some within China as a way to address security threats, especially the cross-border flow of drugs, and to provide a more secure environment for Chinese trade and investment. For business and political elites in Yunnan especially, cross-border trade and investment was viewed as an essential component of the province's development strategy.

Rural settlements in northern Shan state, Myanmar. © Jeffrey Donenfeld, [www.JeffreyDonenfeld.com](http://www.JeffreyDonenfeld.com)



Yet, the Chinese government remains wary of Western influence in Myanmar's borderlands, and continues to see the benefits of maintaining a buffer zone that limits Myanmar military presence along its border. The influx of refugees has also increased concerns in China about ongoing counter-insurgency offensives along its borders. Furthermore, the reliance of border-based armed groups on maintaining support from China arguably makes them more pliant to Chinese interests than Myanmar military elites, which remain wary of China's influence in Myanmar. Chinese security forces and business elites have enduring formal and informal relationships with various ethnic armed groups and elites in northern Myanmar that remain important in enabling them to secure access to resources, intelligence and protection. And some border areas are much more closely integrated with China, reflected by their use of Chinese currency, language, time and SIM cards. Closer government-to-government relations therefore co-exist alongside a set of interests that have simultaneously empowered non-state armed groups and networks of power, communication and resources beyond state control.

The peace process in Kachin State and northern Shan State stands at the apex of three competing pressures: (1) the interests of Myanmar's ruling elites who view the peace process as a mechanism through which to make ethnic armed groups compliant, rather than a reason to enter into genuine political dialogue with them; (2) powerful scepticism among ethnic armed groups and borderland populations towards the rhetoric of ceasefires, political dialogue, and inclusive development that surrounds the peace process; and (3) diverse – and at times conflicting – cross-border political, security and business interests.

## Peacebuilding amidst conflict

### National-level processes

At a national level, the peace process that emerged after 2011 sought to formalise existing ceasefires, establish new ones with groups the government previously hadn't dealt with, and renew ceasefires that had broken down, notably with the KIA. These agreements were to provide the foundation for a nationwide ceasefire agreement (NCA), which Aung San Suu Kyi's government claimed would provide the starting point for more substantial political dialogue – including on issues of federalism, revenue-sharing and the future status of ethnic armed groups – through a series of Union Peace Conferences. The Myanmar government has retained strong control over the peace process and rejected the need for formal external mediation.

However, the NCA process has faced huge challenges, especially in northern Myanmar. Although a 'nationwide' ceasefire agreement was finalised in October 2015, many of the country's most powerful ethnic armed groups refused to sign. The rejection of ceasefire offers and a return to fighting rejuvenated the legitimacy of the KIA, while fresh insurgencies have broken out in northern Shan State. A number of the country's most powerful armed groups established the so-called Northern Alliance in 2016 to oppose the government-led peace process, demanding a genuine federal union in which

the rights of self-determination, regional autonomy and equality were guaranteed. In response, the Myanmar army has launched renewed counter-insurgency offensives and has backed a large number of local militia groups. Violent conflicts have also emerged in northern Shan State between ceasefire and non-ceasefire armed groups. The years following the launching of Myanmar's formal peace process in 2011 have witnessed some of the heaviest fighting in Kachin and northern Shan State for more than three decades.

“ Although a 'nationwide' ceasefire agreement was finalised in October 2015, many of the country's most powerful ethnic armed groups refused to sign.”

### Sub-national peacebuilding efforts

At the sub-national level, there have been various initiatives within conflict-affected areas aimed at building trust, support and engagement with the peace process. This article focuses on the experiences of activities conducted by local organisations. A number of civil society organisations (CSOs) emerged in the 1990s and 2000s to address the challenges facing communities in Kachin State and Shan State. While some were able to operate within the country – often through religious networks – others were located beyond the country's borders, mostly in northern Thailand. These organisations undertook a wide range of activities, including conducting research in conflict-affected areas, drawing attention to on-going human rights abuses, supporting IDPs and refugee populations, and supporting a range of low-profile health, education and development activities. Following the launch of the government's peace process in 2011, existing and new organisations gained formal permission to operate within the country, while the decision by many donors to prioritise support for in-country activities, and cuts in funding to organisations based outside the country – provided added incentives and pressures to establish projects in Myanmar.

The priority for many organisations was to address the damage inflicted on populations by decades of conflict. Initiatives have focused on trying to make the government, ethnic armed groups and international donors and NGOs more responsive to the needs of populations in conflict-affected areas. This has included attempts to strengthen the voice of marginalised populations (including a specific focus on women and youth) in the peace process. Programmes have also sought to identify and address major social and economic issues facing impoverished communities, including improving health and education services, promoting small-scale community-led development initiatives, addressing the environmental damage created by decades of unchecked resource extraction and addressing both historic and contemporary cases of land-grabbing. This has also involved efforts to ensure that new international development initiatives are sensitive to the challenges of operating in conflict-affected areas. These initiatives have sought to begin to address underlying grievances and lay the foundations for a more sustainable

and equitable peace. However, as violent conflict escalated, priorities often shifted to emergency humanitarian work.

### Challenges for local organisations

The most fundamental of challenge facing these peacebuilding initiatives is the fact that the Myanmar army – the de facto authority in the region – views the peace process as secondary to its priorities of consolidating state authority. Under the 2008 constitution, the military enshrined its control over the key ministries of Defence, Home Affairs and Border Affairs. Myanmar’s civil service – the General Administration Department (GAD) – is housed under the Ministry of Affairs and is largely staffed by military and ex-military personnel. Local organisations remain under heavy surveillance, to the extent that military intelligence officials join their meetings. High levels of scrutiny also discourages communities from engaging with organisations, as they remain fearful of repercussions from military, police and army-backed militias. In many areas, ethnic armed groups continue to provide services to marginalised populations, but opportunities to work through these systems remain extremely constrained – especially in northern Myanmar where the main armed groups have not signed ceasefires with the government.

**“ Organisations are required to constantly assess where power lies in the country’s bureaucratic structures and who best to approach, creating a system of perpetual uncertainty.”**

Local authorities’ continued distrust of CSOs also presents huge challenges to gaining access and permission to work in many borderland areas. Personalities and personal ties continue to be more important than formal structures and systems. Organisations are required to constantly assess where power lies in the country’s bureaucratic structures and who best to approach, creating a system of perpetual uncertainty where the reasons for gaining or being denied permission remain opaque and are not easily replicated. Organisations are required to navigate multiple levels of authority, including the Union (national) level (through the Ministry of Home Affairs), the state level, and through local township authorities (part of the GAD). Since the NLD government came to power, it has become even less clear where power lies, as parallel civilian and military structures operate alongside each other.

In this system, organisations’ requests for access to undertake activities are passed back and forth between different levels of government decision-making. Organisations are regularly told at local level that their requests require higher permission, only then to be told by central ministries that decisions have to be made by local authorities based on the situation on the ground. This provides a subtle way to restrict programmes without being seen as directly confrontational. The ongoing sensitivity and ambiguity surrounding the peace process continues to

make officials reluctant to approve of any activity that could run the risk of upsetting the fragile balance of power that exists in conflict-zones between the army, ethnic armed groups, and militias. The fear of making the wrong decision has long encouraged both senior figures and lower-ranking cadres to stall rather than approve work in areas under their jurisdiction.

A second fundamental challenge is that ethnic minority populations continue to be treated with suspicion and hostility by the Myanmar army. The military often does not distinguish between armed groups, CSOs and local populations from the same ethnic group. The upsurge in violent conflict in Kachin and northern Shan State since 2010 has created both a huge local need for peacebuilding and humanitarian support and renewed distrust from the military towards local populations, which the military often views as supporting insurgency. Organisations trying to support IDPs throughout northern Shan State and Kachin State face difficulties not only in moving through conflict zones but also in navigating the military’s response to the IDP crisis. Large shipments of emergency food aid – including from international organisations – have regularly been denied to ensure food does not reach ethnic armed groups, placing huge pressure on small-scale, often clandestine networks. At times emergency supplies have been able to move back and forth across the border with China in order to reach IDP camps. However, these cross-border networks remain unofficial and subject to sudden change, reflecting the multiple interests that CSOs have to navigate.

Military distrust of peacebuilding and community development initiatives is also rooted in the fact that attempts to address issues facing borderland populations threaten to undermine and destabilise the political deals and hybrid governance structures that emerged during the ceasefire period and which underpin the military’s control over contested territories. This is epitomised very clearly in the dynamics of Myanmar’s illicit drug economy. The country is a major producer of opium and methamphetamines, with production concentrated in Shan and Kachin states. Increasing drug use throughout the ceasefire period has caused huge damage among borderland communities, and the peace process has created very little opportunity to address these problems. This is largely attributable to the fact that drugs are deeply embedded in localised governance structures: in many areas, army-backed militias deployed to act as local counter-insurgency forces and to protect development projects are given the opportunity to run legal and illegal businesses – primarily drugs. This is a way for the army to strengthen their loyalty and enable them to be self-financing. Despite the huge social damage wrought by drugs in Myanmar’s borderlands and the aspiration to use the peace process as an opportunity to start to address this, there is strong reluctance among authorities to risk destabilising the delicate local power structures that have sedimented around the drug economy.

### Conclusion

The worsening violent conflict in Kachin State and Shan State has led many donors and organisations to critically reflect on Myanmar’s transition and reconsider how they engage in peacebuilding in the country’s borderlands. This article suggests some ways in which these efforts can be recalibrated.

First, it emphasises the need to better understand the country's current transition from the vantage point of those at the margins of the Myanmar state. Much external engagement with Myanmar's peace process has been based upon the assumption that opening up political space at the centre – through supporting the country's democratic transition, Aung San Suu Kyi and the national-level peace process – would provide the foundations for peacebuilding throughout the country's borderlands. However, this approach fails to account for how political transition at the centre and renewed violence in the margins are intimately connected. The experiences of local peacebuilding initiatives demonstrate that the same dynamics that facilitated the launching of the peace process at the national level – especially the Myanmar military's belief that they were in a strong enough position to manage this process on their own terms – have constrained opportunities to address the drivers of conflict in Kachin and northern Shan State.

Second, the experiences of local peacebuilding initiatives demonstrate that the prospects for working in these regions are shaped by the interplay of: *local dynamics* – in Myanmar's case how to operate in highly fragmented sub-national systems of governance; *centre-borderland relations*, especially ongoing efforts by the Myanmar military to control the peace process and to consolidate state authority through securitising borderland regions; and *cross-border dynamics*, notably the influence of diverse and at times contradictory Chinese interests. To engage effectively in Kachin State and northern Shan State, organisations will need to ensure that they develop

partnerships and channels of communication that enable them to better understand and operate across these different scales.

Third, this article emphasises the need for more rigorous political economy analysis of Myanmar's peace process that centres borderland experiences of ceasefires and 'development'. The difficulties confronting local CSOs are rooted in the fact that the challenges communities face in Kachin State and northern Shan State – violence, drugs, poverty and rising inequality – are embedded in the systems of borderland governance that the Myanmar army used to expand its authority during the previous ceasefire period. Strong government control over the peace process, and the subsequent limitations placed on international organisations, has meant that much support is directed towards technical aspects of peacebuilding. This approach has offered limited scope to situate the peace process within a deeper understanding of processes of statebuilding in the country's borderlands, and the local politics and power relations surrounding these processes. Local organisations often have the clearest understanding of systems of borderland governance, their likely impact on peacebuilding programmes, and how to navigate these systems, but they are also in a highly vulnerable and exposed position. Learning from the experiences and knowledge of local organisations, integrating this knowledge into programme planning and design, and developing ways to support local organisations' efforts to navigate the complex and often violent structures of authority in Myanmar's borderlands, are important starting points for international organisations rethinking how to work for peace in Myanmar's fragile and violent borderland regions.

# Syria

## Administering a borderland at war: Bab al-Hawa in Syria

Abdulkader Kurabi and Jerome Drevon

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Borders and borderlands can be pivotal to the resilience of armed insurgencies – as supply routes, as safe zones for refugees, and as hubs for local war economies. They can be used to sustain the war effort and provide vital resources for armed groups and civilians alike. Armed conflicts transform borderlands from peripheral regions into focal points for war efforts, particularly for local groups vying to secure power and resources. Soon after the start of Syrian war, armed opposition groups allied with local residents in the north-west of the country began to 'liberate' large and predominantly rural areas from the regime of President Bashar al-Assad. The liberation in 2012 of Bab al-Hawa, a key international border-crossing between Syria and Turkey, marked a turning point for the war in the region.

Bab al-Hawa is strategically significant. The surrounding borderlands have long epitomised hostile relations between Syria and Turkey: from disputes over demarcation following decolonisation, to opposing Cold War alliances – Turkey with NATO and the West, and Syria with the Soviet Union – to disagreement over water access or the status of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, an armed opposition group. A rapprochement between the two countries in the 2000s, which resulted in a free trade agreement and a free visa policy, broke down after the 2011 Syrian uprising. Turkey cut ties with the Syrian regime and lent support to the armed opposition.

The liberation of Bab al-Hawa removed the official administration on the Syrian side of the border, replacing it with loosely organised armed opposition forces. Based on interviews conducted by the authors in Turkey and Syria, this article looks at how the renewed institutionalisation of border control came about. Establishing a controlled, secure space in the absence of formal state institutions required the formalisation of the trans-border flow of people and goods, the unification of armed groups, and the re-establishment of an internationally recognised border. This has been contingent to a large extent on the evolution of the Syrian armed insurgency. Early efforts

struggled to accommodate the divergent interests of the multiple Syrian armed opposition groups active in the area. Change came when larger and more powerful armed groups gained military ascendancy, facilitating the establishment of a functioning border administration. The borderland's institutionalisation has paralleled its increased strategic importance, but at some long-term cost to local civilian populations as the influence of local civil society has waned while the link between military and political power has endured.

“Based on interviews conducted by the authors in Turkey and Syria, this article looks at how the renewed institutionalisation of border control came about.”

### An unsettling liberation

The liberation of the border crossing and surrounding areas unsettled the borderland, empowering an array of non-state armed groups. The Syrian military were forced to withdraw from Bab al-Hawa in July 2012 under military pressure from local Syrian armed opposition groups led by *Liwa Dir'a al-Thawra* (the Brigade of the Protection of the Revolution), *Kata'ib al-Faruq* (the Faruq Brigades), and *Majliss Shura al-Mujahideen* (the Advisory Council of the Mujahideen). The first two groups were mainstream opposition armed groups that were particularly strong at the beginning of the uprising. They later divided and joined other movements. The third group was a more radical Salafist jihadist group created by the prominent Absi family, which later joined Islamic State.

Illustration (opposite): Bab Al-Hawa border crossing between Syria and Turkey.  
© Jon Sack

TURKEY

OĞULPINAR

CILVEGÖZÜ

DEMILITARISED ZONE

BAB AL-HAWA

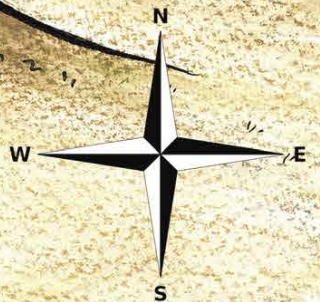
ADMINISTRATIVE BUILDINGS WHERE ARMED GROUPS INITIALLY SET UP THEIR HEADQUARTERS

LOCATION OF SUICIDE BOMBINGS IN 2013 AND 2014

HOSPITAL

LOCATIONS WHERE REFUGEE CAMPS WERE INITIALLY SET UP BEFORE BEING MOVED OUT

SYRIA



Map 1: Idlib and Aleppo Governorates, Syria bordering Turkey.



Map 2: Regional location of the border between Syria and Turkey.



There was no sign of organised management of the border for the next two years. Movement of goods and people continued but was unsupervised, which was destabilising for the local economy and civil society. The security vacuum was filled by loosely structured armed factions. While *Majliss Shura al-Mujahideen* remained for three months, others such as *Ahrar al-Sham* (the Free Men of the Levant: AS), and *Jaysh al-Islam* (the Army of Islam) established longer-term military bases. Groups also exploited new economic opportunities arising from the chaos in these early days: larger armed opposition groups set up checkpoints to administer the cross-border flows of people and goods, collecting illicit duties on an arbitrary basis; while smaller groups (including families and gangs) engaged in other activities such as smuggling people and goods (from medicine to weapons).

The state of the border was also dependent on Turkey's reactions to evolving events: after initially closing the border for a few weeks, the Turkish authorities decided to allow the export of basic goods to Syria without customs regulations and the entry of Syrian private citizens in order to provide relief to the local population. Over time, they reduced the flow of incoming refugees as security deteriorated.

The liberation of the border crossing altered the local political economy of the borderland in different ways. Two refugee camps were set up as internal refugees started to converge on the area. A hospital was also established in Bab al-Hawa in 2013 under the auspices of the Union of Medical Care and Relief Organizations (UOSSM – an international coalition of humanitarian, non-governmental and medical organisations). Recognising its importance to the area, armed factions largely respected and protected the hospital. The hospital was eventually isolated from the border crossing's buildings and an independent road was created to provide a direct access. Local communities also benefited from growing job opportunities in existing and new institutions; for example, the expertise of former border control employees was required for the development and implementation of new customs regulations.

**“ Some local communities sought greater returns in recognition of their proximity to the border and their contribution to its liberation.”**

Some local communities in the surrounding areas of Sarmada, al-Dana and Atmeh sought greater returns in recognition of their proximity to the border and their contribution to its liberation. These included higher financial returns, increased representation in the local administration, better job opportunities and additional support for local councils. Dissatisfaction with armed groups from outside the region was particularly prominent. Members of the al-Shanabira tribe from Hama, for example, set up a roadblock controlling traffic at the local refugee camp. Smugglers also traded goods looted from factories in the Syrian borderlands and trafficked people across the border.

## **The creation of a civilian administration**

Bab al-Hawa border crossing is the main commercial point of entry for northern Syria, and any unpredictable closure has ramifications for the region. The eventual creation of a civilian administration at Bab al-Hawa was an important step in mitigating the impact of competing armed groups in the region, and facilitating trans-border traffic and humanitarian access. It was primarily driven by the needs of Syrian civilians affected by the war, as well as to secure Turkish interests.

A representative of AS claimed in a personal interview that the group initiated a process to establish a functioning border administration, though acknowledged that it had lacked the strategic vision, material means or experience to fully oversee an international border crossing. It made attempts in mid-2013 to recruit regime defectors with relevant technical capacity in immigration, passport control and customs services.

Early efforts to regularise the border administration ultimately failed. The presence of multiple armed opposition groups with competing interests and diverging political goals undermined consensus and blocked progress. Many armed groups benefited from the prevailing disorder, exploiting it to extract illicit taxes. Others feared that increased revenues from better border regulation could in fact increase competition and violence among them and so harm the unity of the Syrian opposition as a whole, and some were concerned it would set a precedent for armed actors in other liberated areas to legitimise the imposition of local taxes from the population. Other groups simply saw more military and economic advantage in focusing their efforts on liberating areas still under regime control.

The evolution of the armed opposition to the Syrian regime ultimately changed the situation in the borderlands. In November 2013, prominent Islamist factions positioned at the border – AS, *Suqur al-Sham*, *Jaysh al-Islam* and *Liwa al-Haq* – joined with others to form the Islamic Front. Their unity was decisive in facilitating broader cooperation with other new alliances, notably the *Hazm* Movement and the Syrian Revolutionaries Front (alliances that formed around the same time, partially grew out of the Faruq Brigades, and consisted of groups fighting loosely under the banner of the Free Syrian Army) and in June 2014 an agreement was signed to form a civil administration.

An executive board was established to manage the civil administration headed by Nashat al-Bardisi (Abu Haitham), a consensual figure whom all the groups could accept, alongside representatives from other significant armed groups. Its responsibilities covered most pre-2011 portfolios, including legal affairs, health, human resources, public relations, financial governance and technical affairs. Defectors from the Syrian regime who had formerly worked in customs, immigration, passport control, police and border management were recruited to set up the new administration. The Turkish government – recognising the need to reduce security tensions while maintaining economic gains – was also a key driver in the process, pressuring armed opposition groups to establish a civilian administration with technical expertise to organise the flow of goods and people.

After two months' preparation, the new administration began its work in August 2014 in coordination with local councils and the chamber of commerce. Its main objectives were to facilitate communication with local officials, ease trade, provide humanitarian relief, regulate cross-border transit and preserve security. Infrastructure damaged during the liberation of Bab al-Hawa was restored, stolen computers and data were retrieved, and new software established to read security codes and scan passports. New laws and regulations were introduced for immigration, transit authorisation and customs, police and technical support, with reforms overseen by regime defectors and technocrats. The administration launched a website to deliver services to Syrian citizens, including demands for medical treatment in Turkey or transit travel requests through Turkey. Staff needed to have both the right professional qualifications and the approval of armed groups.

Institutionalisation of Bab al-Hawa had an immediate effect on security: the unification of large armed groups in north-west Syria meant smaller factions could be expelled. Armed groups not directly associated with the administration were ordered to remove their military bases. Refugee camps were similarly transferred outside the border-crossing area and disarmed. This stabilised security and directly benefited local communities, who no longer had to pay bribes or negotiate with multiple armed groups. Revenue was allocated for refurbishing looted infrastructure and for the salaries of local and factional employees. Some of the budget was also spent on the law court in the nearby town of Binnish and on providing basic services in neighbouring regions. The remainder was divided between the armed groups that remained in charge of the border.

“ **Some, including AS, quickly saw opportunities for economic and political gains for their own group from securing control of administering customs.**”

### **Military versus civilian priorities**

Armed opposition groups continued to disagree on how the border crossing would operate and who was in charge. Some, including AS, quickly saw opportunities for economic and political gains for their own group from securing control of administering customs. Relinquishing control over the area would indeed have been costly. Interviews with customs officials suggested that financial returns increased from approximately \$205,000 before the formation of the civil administration to a value of between \$600,000 and \$1.5 million. Others aspired to create an autonomous civilian administration that would ultimately be independent from armed groups and linked to the development of opposition civilian governance nationally, such as by supporting the local councils that had spread throughout the areas liberated after the 2011 uprising. These groups also believed that revenue from the border crossing could contribute to the reconstruction of those areas most deeply affected by the war.

Although the local population directly benefited from institutionalisation of the border crossing, the new environment also constrained the role of civil society over time. While locals initially had some success in independently promoting their interests, the presence of increasingly unified and powerful insurgent groups combined with Turkey's renewed importance saw their influence curtailed. These two factors ultimately shaped the evolution of the borderland.

Major armed opposition groups ensured their influence in the civil administration through the nomination of civilian technocrats affiliated to them to sensitive positions. The administration strived to assert its independence and separate civil and military issues but failed to successfully resist the pressure exerted by the groups. Despite armed groups' declared support for the independence of the Bab al-Hawa administration, security and military commanders obstructed its work. The administration sought to hire qualified defectors from the regime but many armed groups insisted that only individuals accountable to them could be hired. Lack of transparency, absence of trust between the groups stationed at the border, and their attempts to exploit internal divisions to their advantage impeded the work of the local administration of Bab al-Hawa.

Meanwhile, the evolution of the military landscape continued to dictate political outcomes in the region. In late 2014, *Jabhat al-Nusra*, a Salafist jihadist group that emerged from the Islamic State in Iraq before declaring allegiance to *al-Qaeda*, clashed with the Syrian Revolutionaries Front and the *Hazm* Movement in the north of the country, forcing these alliances to dissolve in early 2015. Then, in March 2015, *Suqur al-Sham* merged into AS (the Islamic Front alliance being by this time more or less defunct). Together these developments effectively allowed AS to control the administration of the border, providing it with a substantial source of income.

Under AS control, some of the border administration's budget was still used to deliver basic services to local areas. AS leaders claim that the remainder was spent on military operations and ammunition, but there was little oversight in place. In an interview, Kinan Nahhas (Abu Azzam al-Ansari), a senior civilian manager of the border crossing and head of AS's political bureau, reflected on his experience in Bab al-Hawa. He had sought a professional civilian institution working for the Syrian revolution, with financial returns serving the revolution and the areas affected by the war. But he lamented the heavy handedness of security checkpoints in the border crossing, managed by military men from his own group. He criticised their misunderstanding of the concept of statehood and their obsession with the short-term interests of their group, which explained their handling of security issues and excessive micro-management of border flows.

Exclusive control over the border became a major strategic objective for armed groups in competition with AS. As the front lines of the war stabilised and the armed opposition found it harder to liberate new geographic areas, the priorities of the insurgency were altered. The political and economic importance of Bab al-Hawa was reinforced as resources for the armed opposition in liberated areas receded, the spoils from liberating new areas dried up, and foreign support diminished.



Men stand outside a taxi on the Syrian side of the Bab al-Hawa border crossing between Turkey and Syria in January 2013. © Joël Carillet/iStock

The region subsequently became a prominent political asset to be used in regional and international negotiations.

AS's monopoly lasted until July 2017, when the region was taken by *Hayat Tahrir al-Sham* (the Levant Liberation Committee: HTS), a grouping formed in January that year and led by *Jabhat Fatah al-Sham*, the former *Jabhat al-Nusra*. Under pressure from Turkey, HTS did not make substantial changes to the border crossing and its administration. Given international reticence about dealing with a group once affiliated to *al-Qaeda*, HTS leaders have preferred to reap the political and financial benefits stemming from control without imposing unnecessary change.

### Conclusion: stabilisation for whom?

The transformation of the borderland between north-west Syria and Turkey has paralleled the evolution of the armed conflict in Syria. Regardless of the consensus around the need to stabilise the border, the presence of numerous armed groups has impeded substantial reforms. The establishment of the administration was significantly facilitated by the unification of large armed groups in north-west Syria into more powerful coalitions that were subsequently able to subsume or expel smaller factions and so dominate the battlefield. Military pre-eminence dictated the evolution of the border administration as well as governance in the borderland region more broadly.

The establishment of a functioning administration at Bab al-Hawa was a significant achievement that helped bring stability to the border and the surrounding borderlands. Local communities directly benefited from improved security, the development of new institutions providing services to local populations and refugees, and more abundant economic resources.

The unification of the armed insurgency in the borderland facilitated the institutionalisation of Bab al-Hawa. Armed groups' initiatives to unite or the willingness of some factions to eliminate their competitors gradually reduced the number of armed groups in the area. The successive monopolies of AS and HTS transformed the area by imposing a single authority on the Syrian side of the border. Yet, opposition armed groups had no real strategic vision and continued to oppose the development of an independent border crossing not directly under their authority. Civilian gains decreased over time as the civil administration was not able to resist pressure by increasingly powerful armed groups. The control of a strategic asset by a small number of actors has limited the empowerment of local communities as they gradually lost channels to secure their interests.

“ Bab al-Hawa has gradually transformed into a political as much as an economic resource to be exploited and leveraged regionally and internationally.”

Bab al-Hawa has gradually transformed into a political as much as an economic resource to be exploited and leveraged regionally and internationally. But the monopoly control by only one group (first AS and then HTS) has also reduced the role of local civil society, which can no longer exploit internal divisions to further their interests. Internal and international insurrectionary dynamics have ultimately prevailed over local developments. Control over the border has been used by prominent armed groups to broker favourable outcomes in negotiations over the future of the region.

# Nepal

## Madhesi borderland brokers and Nepal's post-war transition

Jonathan Goodhand, Oliver Walton, Sujeet Karn and Kalpana Jha

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Nepal's post-war transition has involved protracted negotiations over the relationship between the capital Kathmandu and the peripheries of the state. For nearly a year after the signing of the 2006 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, Madhesi and Tharu groups in the Tarai region – a 500-mile strip of land bordering India – violently protested against government proposals for a new constitution.

“**Borderland groups have historically been excluded from powerful positions in Nepali politics, the judiciary, military and bureaucracy.**”

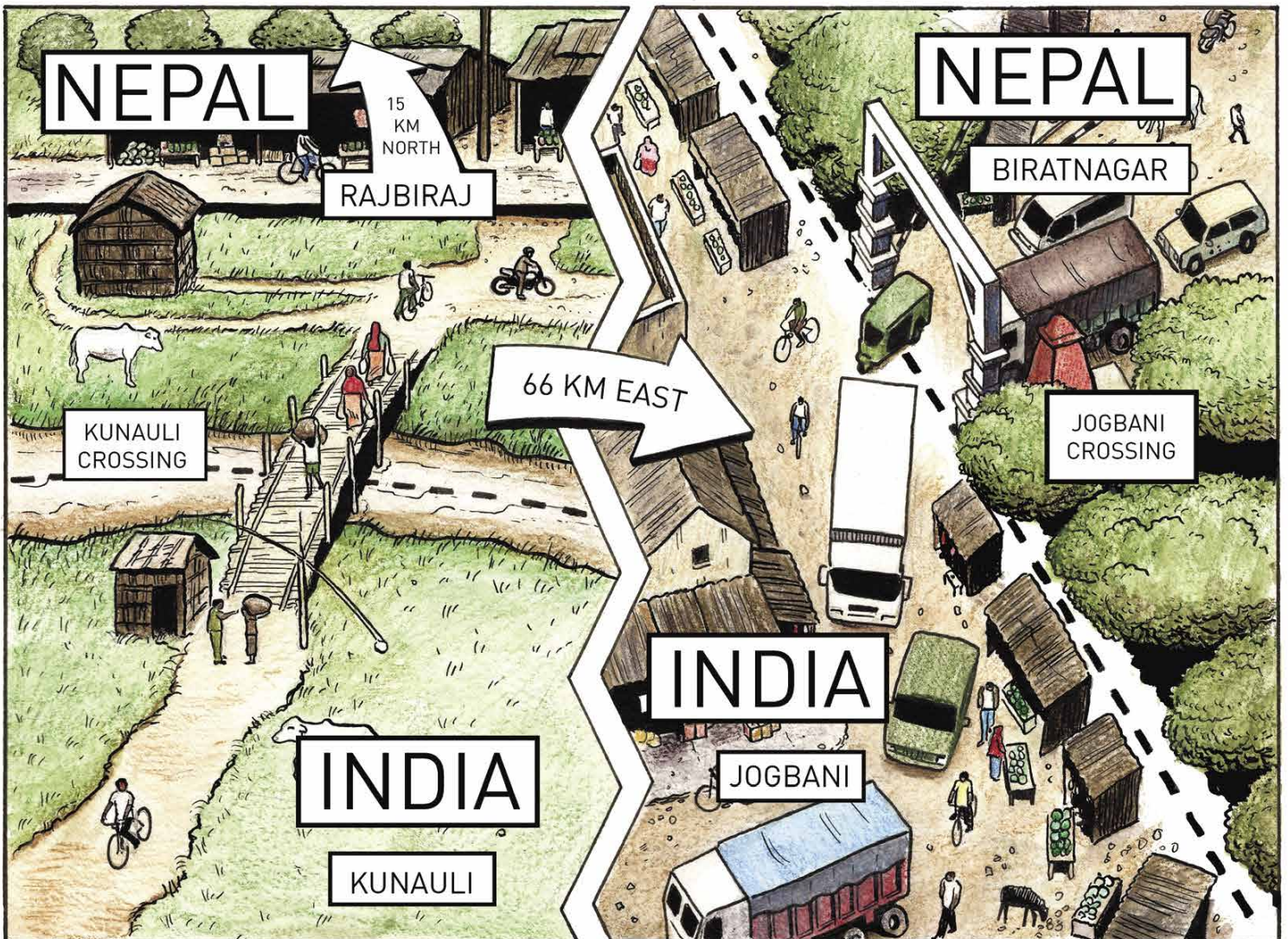
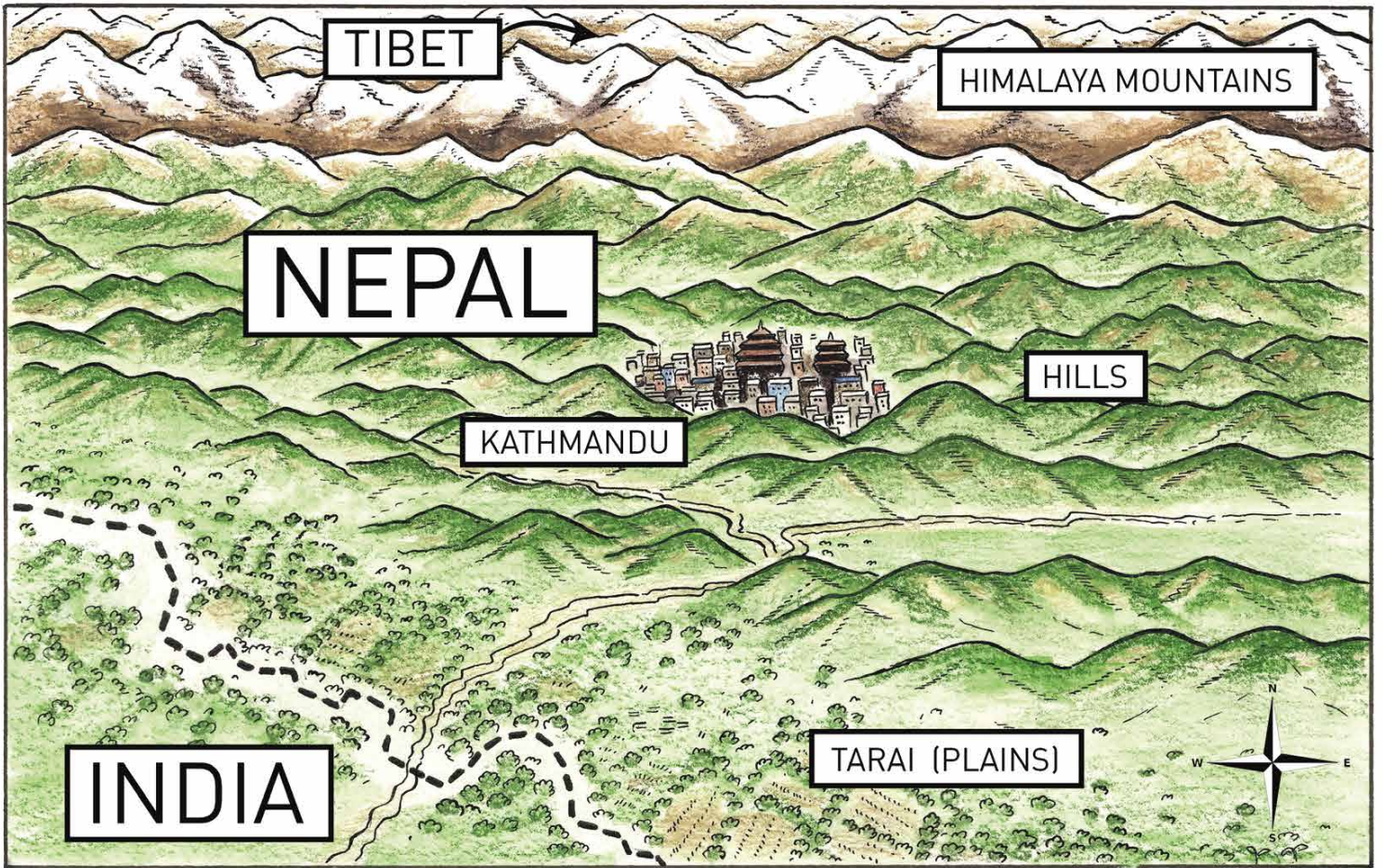
Borderland groups have historically been excluded from powerful positions in Nepali politics, the judiciary, military and bureaucracy. These institutions have been dominated by Bahuns and Chhetris, Nepal's hill 'upper caste' groups. In the post-war period, social and political leaders from the Tarai have been at the forefront of efforts to open up Nepal's political settlement by demanding constitutional reforms based on a federal model.

Borderland 'brokers' have played important roles in Nepal's peripheries, acting as intermediaries who mediate across spatial, social, political or economic boundaries, and between communities and institutions. These brokers have been significant in facilitating post-war change in Nepal, including through efforts to renegotiate the relationship between the central Nepali state in Kathmandu and populations in the Tarai.

In the post-war period, the push and pull between groups in the periphery and Kathmandu opened up a 'deal space', which brokers have sought to monopolise in order to 'trade' in power, resources, information or ideas. The 'deal space' in the Tarai borderland has been one of the most politically contested regions in post-war Nepal. This article takes a closer look at post-war politics in the Tarai, focusing on the life histories of two brokers from the Saptari district in the east. Their experiences illustrate how different brokers emerge in post-war politics to connect borderland regions to the centre, and how their motivations and networks affect processes of post-war transition.

**Illustration (opposite): Life around the Kunauli and Jogbani border crossings between Nepal and India.**

© Jon Sack



Map 1: Saptari and Sunsari Districts, Nepal bordering India.



Map 2: Regional location of the border between Nepal and India.



## Political settlement in the Tarai

The southern Tarai plains cover 17 per cent of Nepal's territory but are home to approximately 51 per cent of its population. According to the 2011 census, 36 per cent of the Tarai's population are of hill origin, 63 per cent are from the plains and may be categorised as Madhesi – although some, such as Muslims and Tharus, might not consider themselves Madhesi. A further one per cent are identified as 'Others'. The term Madhesi is generally used to refer to non-*pahadi* (hill origin) people living in the Tarai of Indian Hindu origin.

Many Tarai communities have long felt sidelined in Nepal and the region includes pockets of extreme poverty and high rates of economic inequality. The Saptari district in the Eastern Tarai has been economically marginalised since the 1950s due to declining connectivity. This resulted from a range of factors including the building of an east-west highway which bypassed the district centre, Rajbiraj; limited state investment; as well as the growth of more vibrant and better-located borderland centres such as Biratnagar in neighbouring Morang district. But the Tarai has also long been an intellectual and political hub, and a key focal point for successive political and armed movements and ongoing Madhesi activism.

The Tarai region as a whole also has strong ethnic and linguistic ties with communities across the border in the Indian states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. It is an open and integrated borderland, produced through close political, social and religious connections and flows and interactions of people, commodities and ideas back and forth across the border. Historical and contemporary political movements in the Tarai have relied heavily on cross-border connections and political patronage from India, and the region became strategically important for the Maoist movement as a place of sanctuary during the 'People's War'.

**“ The Tarai region is an open and integrated borderland, produced through close political, social and religious connections and flows and interactions of people, commodities and ideas back and forth across the border.”**

With the opening up of political space in Nepal after the end of the war in 2006, a number of Madhesi political parties and factions emerged alongside several newly formed armed groups. The Madhesi Movement [*Madhesi Andolan*] demanded that provisions for federalism be included in the 2007 Interim Constitution in protests that escalated over three weeks. Despite some initial success in the 2008 parliamentary elections, however, Madhesi political parties were routed in the elections of 2013. When new federal boundaries were finally agreed in Nepal's long-awaited constitution in 2015, these prompted further protests in the Tarai over concerns that they reinforced existing political marginalisation. This provoked some Madhesi, with the tacit support of the Indian government, to impose an economic blockade of the border with India in the Tarai.

## BOX 6

### Defining brokers and brokerage

Brokers are individuals or institutions that mediate power, resources or ideas across social, political or economic boundaries – they are networking specialists. Brokers can perform different roles. They can act as go-betweens between different political groups, as representatives of marginalised or vulnerable groups, or intermediaries in trading networks. Their roles are typically ambiguous – they often help to break down barriers but may also have an interest in maintaining or even hardening boundaries and 'gatekeeping' connections between centre and periphery in order to protect or enhance their mediation role. As a result, they can have varied impacts on the lives of the constituencies they represent or serve.

In much of the academic literature and in popular discourse, brokers are often depicted as self-interested, or utility-maximising agents. The research that underpins this case study takes a less normative approach by understanding brokers in their structural context. It focuses attention on how their roles are shaped by ideologies and social norms, and by the opportunities presented by wider political or social changes.

Brokers challenge or transgress boundaries. Those based in or with strong links to borderland regions may have a particularly critical role in these regions because state authority is often more limited and contested. Economic and political actors at the centre may therefore rely on intermediaries to mobilise political support or capital. Borderland brokers can be crucial in mediating between the centre and periphery or across an international border.

Political brokers of the kind analysed in this Nepal case study, who seek to influence political processes at the centre and represent borderland constituencies, may be problematic conduits for peacebuilding support. They often operate under the radar, may condone or deploy violence, and their influence on political processes may be brief. But a better understanding of how brokers operate in borderland regions could help peacebuilders develop a clearer picture of how legitimacy and authority are generated in these regions.

For further information: see *Borderlands, Brokers and Peacebuilding* [www.borderlandsasia.org](http://www.borderlandsasia.org)

Since then, there has been significant progress in establishing a new federal structure in Nepal, including devolving power to the provinces and holding local, provincial and national elections. However, attempts at progressive constitutional changes in the post-war era have seen strong push-back from established elites – particularly the dominant Bahun-Chhetri groups, the army and the mainstream parties, but latterly also from the Maoists. Madhesi have continued to feel socially and politically excluded, facing discrimination and being viewed with suspicion due to their links with communities across the border with India.



Busy border crossing in Biratnagar, near Saptari, east Tarai. © Oliver Walton

## Borderland brokers

The stories of the two borderland brokers presented here are very different but share a long history of personal engagement in Madhesi politics. They illustrate a range of brokerage roles: from interacting directly with Kathmandu politicians, to gathering information or conducting research about conditions in the Tarai, to mobilising support for Madhesi interests via mainstream political parties – or even in the case of one of them, precipitating violent mobilisation against the central state. In different ways, they have been involved in efforts to renegotiate the relationship between the central state and populations in the Tarai through advocating stronger political representation, more equitable distribution of resources, or greater autonomy. One broker toyed with ideas of self-determination and separatism. As their life histories show, brokers vary considerably in terms of their origins, their constituencies, their strategies, where they derive their power from and their career paths.

## Tula Narayan Shah

Tula Narayan Shah (commonly known as Tula) is a prominent intellectual, activist and journalist who researches and advocates on Madhesi issues in Kathmandu and the Tarai. He is in his mid-40s and was born in Goithi, Saptari district in the eastern Tarai. His mother tongue is Maithili and he struggled at school because he was unfamiliar with Nepali, the official language in education institutions.

Tula's career in student politics began in Janakpur, a large town on the border with India that became a focal point for the 1990 People's Movement for Democracy (*Jana Andolan*). He

## BOX 7

### Collecting life histories

The life histories of borderland brokers in the Tarai were collected as part of a two-year research project, *Borderlands, Brokers and Peacebuilding*, which examined the role played by borderland regions in shaping post-war transitions in Nepal and Sri Lanka – particularly how local leaders from the margins ('borderland brokers') shape wider processes of post-war development, state reform and transitional justice. The life histories were generated through several semi-structured interviews conducted with these brokers in Kathmandu and Saptari between 2015 and 2017. These narratives were triangulated with data drawn from interviews with other key informants in Kathmandu and Saptari district during the same period, and from secondary sources. In addition, detailed district studies and national mapping provided further contextualisation for the brokers' life histories.

became actively involved in the Nepal Students' Union (NSU), affiliated to the Nepali Congress political party. He eventually drifted away from the NSU, frustrated at the discrimination that blocked him from progressing to a prominent position. After school he moved to Kathmandu to study engineering. Like other borderlanders, he carried the border with him and became very conscious of discrimination against Madhesis at many different levels, from struggling to find a job to facing day-to-day harassment on the streets of Kathmandu.

A key incident for him that underscored this injustice and discrimination was when his father was insulted in Kathmandu by someone pulling down his *dhoti* (a traditional lower-body item of Madhesi clothing) – Tula cites this as spurring on his subsequent work as an activist.

During the war, Tula was largely detached from party politics and worked as a water engineer in Kathmandu. He was re-politicised by the 2007 *Madhesi Andolan*. In 1990 at the time of the People's Movement he had believed passionately in state reform through democratic politics. But disillusionment with mainstream parties led him to identity politics and safeguarding of minority rights and in 2007 he established the Nepal Madhes Foundation (NEMAF), a research and advocacy NGO focusing on Madhesi issues, that produced reports and held workshops and dialogues. Tula became a prominent media voice but maintained a distance from party politics and, despite strong networks among Kathmandu and Madhesi political elites, has often been critical of the Madhesi political leadership.

Tula's brokerage is primarily concerned with representing and shaping the Madhesi cause to political audiences in the capital. His role as a broker is primarily one of 'translation': he mediates ideas and information between political actors, civil society and donors. His legitimacy comes from his ability to mediate between these three constituencies while maintaining a critical distance from them, influencing the 'deal space' that opened up in the Tarai following the *Madhesi Andolan* by generating information and ideas that shape the public and political discourse. This in turn affects the political platforms and bargaining positions of central and Madhesi elites.

Tula was acutely aware of the dangers of being either co-opted by political parties or trapped in the 'NGO net' by following donor priorities rather than his own. He also had to fend off criticism that he was surreptitiously trying to establish a political organisation. Straddling these different worlds has been difficult. In 2017 he mused: 'I realise I've become very bureaucratic – it's very difficult to be an activist and be an NGO person.' He began to question whether he was making a difference politically and if his energies might better be spent on engaging directly in party politics: 'I was compelled to ask myself if I had actually created the critical mass that I had intended to.' Tula has struggled to find a balance between supporting the grassroots Madhesi cause and engaging with political actors at the centre. As the environment towards NGOs has grown more hostile in Nepal in recent years, he also faced criticism that he was an NGO *dalal* ('tout' or 'pimp'), exploiting the Madhesi cause to further his own personal position.

Tula's life epitomises the complex personal struggles involved in advocating for the rights of peripheral groups at the centre. He lives in Kathmandu, believing that the main barriers to Madhesi rights and representation lie in the capital. And while his understanding of how power works in Nepal and how to bring about change has helped raise awareness about the Madhesi cause, he has also grown frustrated at his inability to overcome the 'rampant co-optation' of Madhesis in Kathmandu. There is a constant pull to be more strongly embedded in the struggles of the marginalised communities

of the Tarai by mobilising grassroots support. Like all brokers, his political agency is circumscribed because his role and legitimacy depends on being able to respond to, and keep in tension, the demands of different constituencies.

**“ Following the creation of Province 2, the only Madhesi-majority province, Tula has decided to 'throw his hat in the ring' and join a Madhesi party.”**

At the time of writing in 2018, Tula's life has taken a new turn. Following the creation of Province 2, the only Madhesi-majority province, he has decided to 'throw his hat in the ring' and join a Madhesi party. A new political space has opened up in the borderlands – a space that Tula's brokerage has helped create – and this inevitably will change the dynamics of brokerage. Tula's new political persona is still unclear, but his role is likely to shift from being a 'translator' to a power-broker. This means directly occupying a new 'deal space', which will involve new challenges as he grapples with party structures, patronage and demands from the Madhesi population for tangible benefits from the new provincial structures.

His story highlights the contingency, vulnerability and frustrations of brokerage in a context of unequal power relations and during a period of rapid political change. As Jha (2014) notes, 'his choices were not a result of abstract theoretical principles, but sprang from what life had thrown at him'. Tula's life shows that the 'post-war transition' is not the only transition that has defined people's lives in Nepal. He has experienced a range of dramatic political changes since 1990, including the People's Movement, the Maoist insurgency, the signing of the peace agreement, the end of the monarchy, and two Madhesi uprisings. The Tarai has also been transformed by economic change, which has seen a fracturing of some of the older hierarchies and an elevation in the position of marginalised groups such as the Dalits.

## **RD Azad**

RD Azad was also born in Saptari district. He is in his 60s and has a very different political and social outlook from Tula. Although both have made Madhesi politics their life's work, Azad still lives in the village of his birth in a remote rural setting near the border. And while Tula is a pragmatist, Azad is fiercely ideological and has been an uncompromising advocate of Madhesi rights – for him, 'abstract theoretical principles' matter a great deal.

At the same time, his career embodies the labyrinthine and conflictual politics of Madhesi groups, involving multiple organisations and frequent alliances and splits. At times he has engaged in formal politics and stood for elections, while at others he has gone underground and supported violent revolutionary politics. In this sense his role and focus as a broker is fluid. When engaged in formal politics he mediates links within the fragmented Madhesi periphery, as well as between the periphery and the centre, but when

he goes underground he drops out of these brokerage networks entirely.

Like Tula, Azad comes from a middle-class, land-owning family. He was educated in the Tarai and then worked for 17 years as a government secondary school teacher, during which time he joined the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN)-Masal (a now defunct faction) and studied communist literature. It was while working in the hills that he became politicised, voraciously reading about Marxism and Leninism with other teachers who were to become foot soldiers and leaders in the Maoist movement. He subsequently returned to his father's occupation of farming in his home village of Kochabhakhari with the goal of 'preparing himself for the *Madhes Andolan*'.

By this time, he believed that armed revolution was the only way to achieve liberation for the Madhesi people. The precise form that this liberation would take and the means to achieve it were not always consistently articulated, but two demands remained constant: first the right to self-determination of the 24 districts of the Madhes, and second the recognition of Hindi as the official language of the Tarai. While working as a farmer, he travelled widely across the Tarai, cycling from village to village. In the aftermath of the 1990 *Jana Andolan*, he published a book about the Madhesi cause, *Tarai jal Rahi Hai* (Tarai is burning). The book was heavily influenced by revolutionary Marxist-Leninist thinking and was written in Hindi, which is spoken widely across the Tarai.

As political parties representing Madhesis emerged in the 1990s, Azad again travelled widely across the Tarai and into India, promoting his book's message and developing his political networks including through occasional interactions with the Indian intelligence services. Mirroring Tula's political trajectory, he became increasingly drawn to identity politics, albeit a much more radical variant. Drawing inspiration from another borderland group, Sri Lanka's LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam), he established an underground revolutionary organisation in 1994 – the *Madhes Mukti Sangathan* (Madhes Liberation Organisation). The group began to prepare for an armed revolution in the Tarai but soon folded because, according to Azad, it lacked a motivated cadre.

In the wake of this failure, Azad re-evaluated his strategy and switched to mainstream party politics. He formed the *Madhes Mukti Morcha* in 1997, which two years later merged with *Madhesi Janadhikar Forum* (MJF) and campaigned for a federal system and a more autonomous Madhes. In 2006, however, he returned to the path of armed revolution, spending time across the border in India and setting up the *Madhes Mukti Tigers* (Madhes Liberation Tigers) in Sunsari district. Although it was one of the most active underground armed groups in Madhes during that period, it only lasted for a short time.

Azad's retreat back into radical, separatist politics can be seen as a rejection of the very notion of a 'deal space'. According to this position, the problem was one of 'internal colonialism' and the imperative was to expose contradictions rather than make deals: 'we are a very dangerous people to the government –

they are watching us carefully...by legal and constitutional means the Madhesi can get nothing.' The Mukti Tigers were formed 'in great haste', but Azad left after he became disillusioned with the growing influence of criminal elements and the indiscipline of his cadres. He contested and lost parliamentary elections in 2008 for the MJF, and subsequently left the party, concerned about the Maoist influence in the organisation. After the failure of Mukti Tigers, Azad joined a political campaign led by the Madhesi politician JP Gupta – *Tarai Madhes Rastriya Abhiyaan* (TaMaRa). Azad continues to work with the TaMaRa Campaign and has abandoned armed revolution in support of a more peaceful strategy.

**“ Attempts to enter formal Madhesi politics and to play a brokering role, usually involving mediating between Madhesi leaders and their support base in the Tarai, lead to disillusionment and a return to more radical politics.”**

There appears to be a recurring pattern to Azad's political career. Attempts to enter formal Madhesi politics and to play a brokering role, usually involving mediating between Madhesi leaders and their support base in the Tarai, lead to disillusionment and a return to more radical politics. In many respects Azad is too much of a purist and an ideologue to play the role of broker for any length of time. While he believes an armed revolution may emerge in the future, he feels that people in the Tarai are not yet ready for such a movement. But he remains committed to this option: 'If all other doors are closed then you may have to resort to violence. It all depends on the thoughts and actions of the state ruling class.'

However, this position is not widely supported within the Madhesi political movement and Azad remains a marginal figure. His radical position and lack of networks in Kathmandu mean he has limited direct influence on the 'deal space' that opened up after 2007. At the same time, Madhesi politicians can use the threat that radicals like Azad represent to extract concessions from the centre. Azad's life highlights the complex linkages between leftist, Maoist and Madhesi political mobilisation, the intense jockeying for position that characterised the emergent Madhesi movement, and the interplay between armed revolutionaries and mainstream multi-party politics.

## Conclusion

The two brokers explored here primarily derive their power and influence from their position as representatives of borderland communities. They share a broad commitment to greater political inclusion for the Madhesi population. While Azad has sought in the past to harden boundaries between centre

and periphery by engaging in separatist politics and armed insurgency, Tula mediates across spatial and socio-political boundaries, working through the media and civil society to shape discourse and political debates in Kathmandu. Azad is more deeply rooted in the Tarai while Tula positions himself at the centre in Kathmandu.

Yet it is striking that both have led lives of frequent movement – between the Tarai and Kathmandu, within the Tarai borderland region, and across the border. In both cases, the border is a strategic resource and reference point. Its existence enabled Tula and Azad to mobilise political connections, take sanctuary or generate economic benefits to increase their leverage vis-à-vis the centre – for example during the blockade. The two brokers differ in how they balance mobilising constituencies in the periphery and engaging with political actors at the centre. An emphasis on one comes at a cost to the other. The flipside of Tula's engagement with the political centre has been weak relationships with the periphery, while Azad's focus on grassroots mobilisation has made him increasingly irrelevant in the political mainstream.

**“ While it is tempting to view them as individuals who pursue clear strategies to promote the interests of their constituents, an examination of their lives reveals the messiness and unpredictability of post-war transitions.”**

The cases highlight three key points about the approaches used by borderland brokers in post-war transitions. First, they demonstrate how these figures may operate through a variety of channels or pathways – including violent and non-violent action. As highlighted by Azad in particular, brokers may be involved in both mainstream and violent revolutionary politics, and these are often closely intertwined. Second, how they engage is liable to shift over time. Windows of opportunity to empower their constituencies or further their own political interests are often quite fleeting and need to be seized quickly. Brokers risk irrelevance if they are unable to adapt to new political currents or trends. Third, the changeable character of post-war politics necessitates flexibility and triggers considerable doubt and frustration for brokers themselves. While it is tempting to view them as individuals who pursue clear strategies to promote the interests of their constituents, an examination of their lives reveals the messiness and unpredictability of post-war transitions. Individuals react to events as much as shape them. Muddling through, their political agency waxes and wanes according to shifting centre-

periphery relations, the resilience of their networks, their organisational base, and their ability to mobilise and connect constituencies and coalitions. Both Azad and Tula have been adept at reacting to the moments of rupture that characterise post-war transitions, but both allow their political objectives very long-term time horizons.

This focus on individual brokers goes beyond analysis of group interests, thinking more about how different actors negotiate and develop relationships within and across different spaces, at different moments and with varied impact and influence. This draws attention to how these figures mobilise and maintain support, whether through violence, coercion and fear, through the delivery of information, resources or services, or through shared norms and legitimacy. In contrast to conventional political settlement analysis, which tends to focus on material interests and power relations, an exploration of the lived experience of borderland brokers illustrates the importance of ideas and beliefs – not only for driving personal pathways, but also for understanding the dynamics of elite bargaining processes and the stability, or otherwise, of post-war political settlements.

# Tunisia

## Peacebuilding in Tunisian border regions: a missing piece of the transition process

Mariam Abdel Bakry

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Previously, Mariam was based in Cairo working on socio-economic projects in the south of Egypt. She holds an MSc in International Relations Theory from the London School of Economics and Political Science.

Tunisia is commonly regarded as the only 'Arab Spring' country that has transitioned into a viable democracy, a view reiterated by Tunisian officials and international actors alike. In contrast to Libya, Syria and Egypt, which are struggling with multiple challenges including armed conflict and terrorism, Tunisia is seen as having made significant strides towards stability. A democratic constitution was adopted, and the country's social blocs managed to safeguard a consensus-led reform process between Islamist and secular forces. Foreign donors' interest in the Tunisian process translated into an influx of foreign aid. The European Union (EU), Tunisia's largest donor since 2011, has more than doubled its financial contribution, making the country the principal beneficiary of its Southern Neighbourhood Policy – supporting cooperation between the EU and 10 countries in the Middle East North Africa region.

Yet events in the south of the country and the capital reveal a more volatile reality unfolding – including the return of old regime elites in the 2014 presidential elections, a number of terrorist attacks since 2015, the repeated postponing of municipal elections, and the recurrence of social protests. An exploration of Tunisia's borderlands also reveals a different story – one of continued political marginalisation, securitisation and economic underdevelopment – highlighting the uneven effect of the country's democratic transition on its interior and border regions, and how models of governance have contributed to the persistence of this reality.

This article traces the historical marginalisation of Tunisian populations in the regions along the Libyan–Tunisian border from the perspective of communities that live there. It further analyses the impact of changes in border governance – particularly in light of a developing national anti-terrorism discourse – on the livelihoods of borderland populations, youth aspirations and regional disparities between Tunisia's coastline and its interior. The article is based on surveys and a range of peacebuilding interventions conducted by International Alert, an international peacebuilding non-governmental organisation,

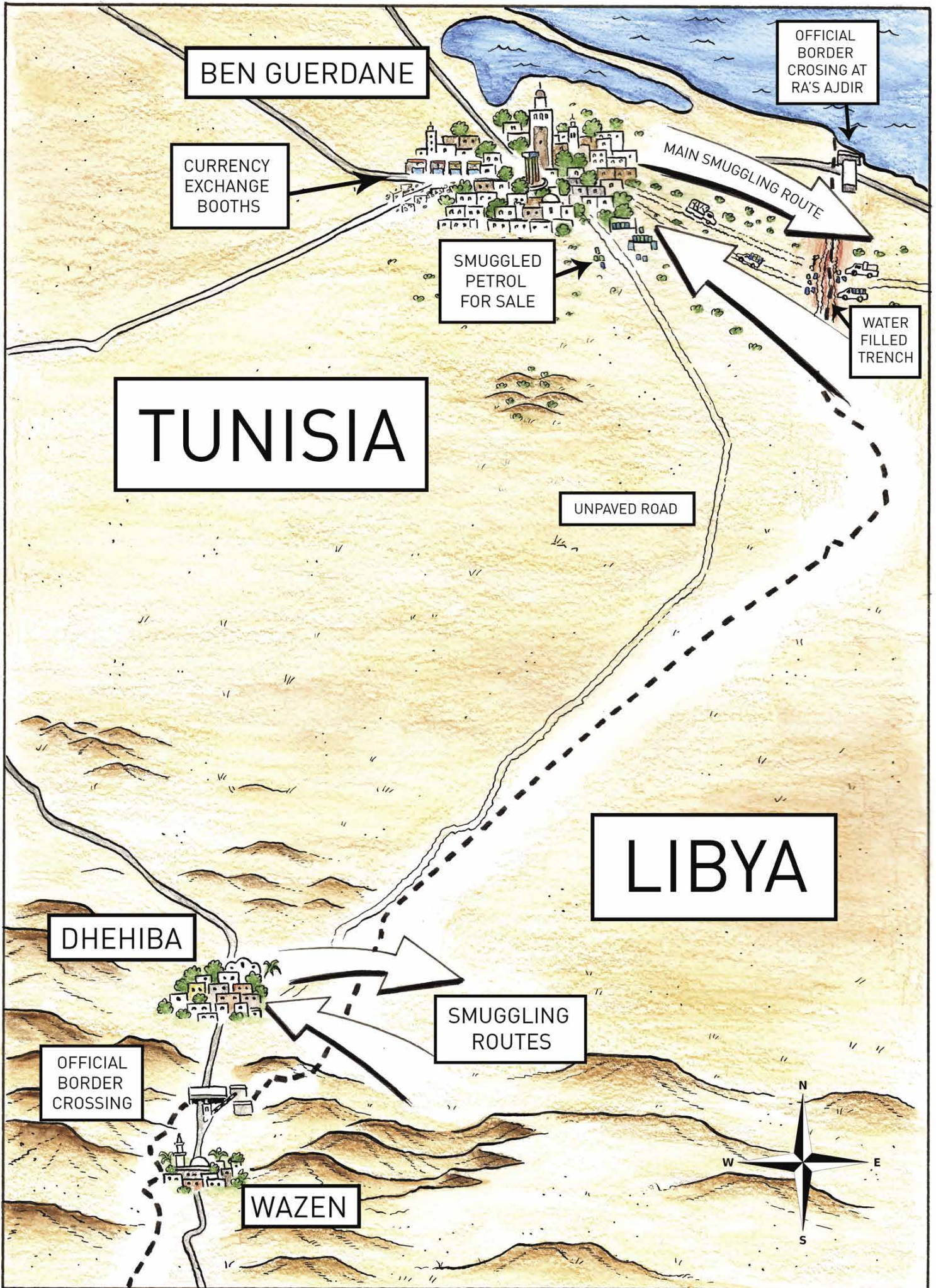
in Tunisia's peripheries, and includes a discussion of the challenges and limitations these interventions face.

“ **An exploration of Tunisia's borderlands reveals a story of continued political marginalisation, securitisation and economic underdevelopment – highlighting the uneven effect of the country's democratic transition on its interior and border regions.**”

Tunisia's impoverished hinterland is marked by exclusion. Longstanding issues of unemployment, absence of state welfare, corruption, high poverty rates, development challenges and insecurity continue seven years after the events of 2011. Though smaller than Tunisia's almost 1000km border with Algeria, the 459km Tunisia–Libya border carries distinct importance in discussions around border security. On the Tunisian side, the border is primarily shared by the Medenine and Tataouine governorates. Characterised by vast deserts and arid land, Tataouine is the largest Tunisian governorate and is also known for its mountainous landscape and water scarcity. Medenine, on the other hand, enjoys the south-east coastal strip and hosts tourist centres. Two official border crossings operate in this region.

**Illustration (opposite): Key features in the border regions of Medenine and Tataouine Governorates, Tunisia.**

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BEN GUERDANE

CURRENCY EXCHANGE BOOTHS

OFFICIAL BORDER CROSSING AT RA'S AJDIR

MAIN SMUGGLING ROUTE

SMUGGLED PETROL FOR SALE

WATER FILLED TRENCH

TUNISIA

UNPAVED ROAD

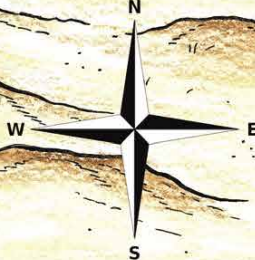
LIBYA

DHEHIBA

SMUGGLING ROUTES

OFFICIAL BORDER CROSSING

WAZEN



Map 1: Medenine and Tataouine Governorates, Tunisia bordering Libya.



Map 2: Regional location of the border between Tunisia and Libya.



International Alert has been working in two border sub-regions: Ben Guerdane in Medenine, and Dehiba in Tataouine. This article is anchored in the views and perspectives of those living in marginalised areas, informed by surveys with more than 700 respondents in late 2015 to spring 2016. It points to the fact that the state's main involvement in these regions has been to control informal unregulated border trade and maintain security. This approach has further widened the citizen-state rift as, according to respondents, policies such as the closure of the border crossing negatively impact the livelihoods of communities involved in informal border trade.

## Marginalisation – past and present

A key feature of Tunisia's post-colonial state has been the acute disparity between the developed coastal regions (such as Tunis and Sfax) and the less-developed interior and peripheral border regions (such as Kasserine and Tataouine). It was therefore of little surprise that the 2011 revolution emerged from the interior of the country, spreading quickly to other regions. The periphery's predicament dates back to the time of independence from France in 1956, when a struggle erupted between Habib Bourguiba, the head of the Neo Destour party, and Saleh Ben Youssef, the party's secretary general. From this struggle grew the 'Youssefi' movement, which remained committed to armed struggle and opposed any settlement with the colonial power. This led to a split in the party, with the Youssefi movement gaining support in the south of the country. Fearful that the Algerian revolution would extend into Tunisia, France pushed the balance of power in Bourguiba's favour. He became President of a new independent state with France's ongoing support to crush the Youssefi movement and its supporters.

Bourguiba's Tunisia had a pro-Western outlook and a repressive security apparatus which persecuted political opponents such as the Youssefis and the Islamists. A centralised economy and large bureaucracy expedited the rise of cronyism and corruption. Rampant unemployment, particularly in the interior regions, became the norm. Investment was concentrated in the northern coastal areas, marginalising regions loyal to Saleh Ben Youssef. This analysis is reinforced by many of Bourguiba's public statements in the late 1950s in which he cultivated an image of a separate south, one that was economically underdeveloped, politically 'immature' and even dangerous.

The rule of Bourguiba's successor, Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali (1987–2011), only worsened the marginalisation of these regions. Two-thirds of public investment during his rule was allocated to the northern coast. Southern border communities were largely impoverished, working predominantly in farming and construction. When asked their views on the region, 97.7 per cent of survey respondents from Dehiba and 88.5 per cent of those from Ben Guerdane mentioned 'marginalisation'. They interpret this as 'a social destiny' inflicted by the central government on the south of Tunisia as a 'form of punishment'. This perception of exclusion transcends generations and gender, although it is more acute among the young unemployed.

## Border governance and its discontents

As during French colonial rule, communities are 'managed' through authoritarian governance. The state's presence and modes of operation have continued to centre on security, and primarily on deterring threats from the Libyan side, with minimal concern for public welfare. Those living in the south strongly identify in terms of their ties to their Libyan neighbours and as descendants of prestigious tribes separated only by borders drawn by the Italian colonialists. This shared identity contributes to a problematic relationship with the state. Local acceptance of the border is low, with one out of three respondents describing it as an artificial barrier. This is no surprise, given that the border – as a physical barrier between states – is a relatively recent phenomenon, with the first border post only set up in 1957. Yet, the significance of the border to communities' livelihoods should not be underestimated, especially when the state narrative presents it mainly as a source of insecurity. The border is regarded as an economic resource by the vast majority of inhabitants (90.2 per cent in Ben Guerdane and 86.9 per cent in Dehiba). In the absence of state development, peripheral communities adopted their own survival strategies, with the border representing a key financial opportunity. Even today, for many young people the border is their main source of income and employment.

The significance of the border and the economy around it is linked to the opportunities available to communities in the borderlands. Economic issues are regarded as key to people's marginalisation: 93 per cent of respondents in Dehiba and 80.9 per cent in Ben Guerdane viewed their economic situation as either 'bad' or 'very bad'. To break this down, the research looked at three indicators: modes of employment, education and the informal sector.

**“ Economic issues are regarded as key to people's marginalisation: 93 per cent of respondents in Dehiba and 80.9 per cent in Ben Guerdane viewed their economic situation as either 'bad' or 'very bad'.”**

Job creation was identified as the main priority for most respondents and the labour market was a key aspect in the research. In both cities, unemployment exceeds the national average, with female unemployment reaching over three times the national rate. One in five respondents in Dheiba reported unstable working conditions. The erosion of waged labour is apparent in both cities, particularly for the current generation and in the traditional agricultural sector. Formal employment opportunities offered by local government and the army have long been the sole route to social advancement. This has resulted in patron-client relations between inhabitants and local authorities.

While illiteracy has more than halved in the two cities compared to the previous generation, school enrolment for

young men aged between 19 and 24 years is half the national rate. The lack of interest in education is the main cause of school drop-outs in Ben Guerdane (61.8 per cent), while in Dheiba, financial difficulties were seen as the main cause (51.3 per cent). A recurring view was that schooling, and education in general, are neither engines for social mobility nor a means for securing a stable job, and cross-border trade is often the route to a livelihood after school.

The local economy, according to respondents, is more dependent on trade with Libya than on the economic policies of the Tunisian state, and informal trade is key to this picture. Yet, trade has a complicated relationship with border governance. During the Ben Ali era, informal cross-border trade was implicitly tolerated as a driver of national economic growth; in fact, the border economy was a channel for Tunisian integration into the global economy via its periphery. The profitability of the border economy also made it of interest to elites. The rampant corruption of the period inevitably reached the border economy of Ben Guerdane, and from the mid-1990s the influence of the Trabelsi family (the family of Ben Ali's wife) grew stronger. However, more established local players, with their comparative advantages (historical precedence, geographical proximity with Libya and well-established cross-border family and tribal networks), were still able to secure their share of the income generated at the border.

In allowing the relatively free flow of trade across the border, the state also sought to assert control over these border regions. The Ben Ali regime believed that border trade would ease mounting societal pressure in the absence of economic development. While these arrangements were informal, the rules for local smugglers were clear: the government tolerated trade but forbade arms and drugs trafficking and expected assistance from the smugglers in countering these.

**“ The communities distinguish between two kinds of smuggler: the so-called ‘barons’, the wealthy chiefs who run the smuggling networks with little local endorsement; and the ‘good smugglers’, whose work benefits their communities by making goods affordable.”**

Yet, engagement in informal cross-border trade carries profound stigma for many ordinary people. The communities distinguish between two kinds of smuggler: the so-called ‘barons’, the wealthy chiefs who run the smuggling networks with little local endorsement; and the ‘good smugglers’, whose work benefits their communities by making goods affordable – selling textiles, clothing, electronics and basic food commodities – and who were involved in protecting Ben

Guerdane from the jihadist threat in 2016, when, according to some inhabitants, smugglers helped to drive out the militants.

## **Descent into dissent**

This approach to the border economy allowed the state to expand into lucrative activities, control dynamics beyond its governance abilities, absorb unemployment at a lower cost and, at the same time, ward off social conflicts. But by spreading uncertainty and tolerating pillaging, this ‘model’ in fact ended up generating anger and dissent. In hindsight, indications of deteriorating stability in the region should have been evident. For example, in the summer of 2007, mounting discontent with the lack of development in Dheiba resulted in a three-day city-wide strike. Protesting inhabitants left the city and marched towards the border to show their readiness to leave a country that was unable to provide them with a decent living. In 2010, the border crossing of Ras Jedir was closed by authorities. With the explicit reason still unknown, there is speculation that the Trabelsi network pressured Ben Ali to close the border to harm its competitors. Protests continued throughout the month of Ramadan, eventually forcing the central government to reopen the borders.

Since the 2011 revolution, there have been two distinct phases in the state's border management policy. From 2011 to 2013, in response to weakened security forces and the withdrawal of the National Guard and police after the revolution, a *laissez-faire* approach was adopted. Official data documented an increase in the number of Tunisians crossing the border into Libya. This period witnessed a widening of border activities, including by actors previously excluded from smuggling, such as young people – some of whom became involved in cross-border drug trafficking and terrorism. They made use of disorder within the security apparatus, unprecedented threats from the Libyan side and often conflicting state policies.

This quickly shifted in 2013 with renewed securitisation of the border. At a national level, 2013 was a crucial year in which the democratic transition was under threat after two political assassinations took place, deepening tensions between Islamist and secular blocs. At the border, the army established and secured a buffer zone, reinstating state control. This militarisation did not, however, disrupt smuggling – it simply made it more expensive. According to survey respondents, the ability to cross the border became increasingly conditioned by corruption. Border officials, who often lack adequate training, are frequently complicit in smuggling networks. For those living in the border region, the state's new security approach has further exemplified state disregard for their concerns and welfare.

## **The state approach: hard security**

The Tunisian state's principal interest in border security is in controlling the border militarily. The state went from establishing buffer zones to ‘hardening’ the border with physical barriers following multiple attacks by non-state armed actors, and the security forces' budgets have increased significantly since 2013. Events in Libya have also had an impact, with the collapse of the state and the takeover of the border by infighting militias significantly increasing concern about border insecurity.



According to border communities, the hard security approach has done little to produce 'stability'. The security situation in Libya impacts on economic options and livelihoods: the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia estimated that between 10,000 and 15,000 families ceased to receive income due to the Libyan conflict. In Medenine, for example, 20 per cent of the working population is part of the informal sector, of which the vast majority reside in Ben Guerdane. Corruption among border officials increases the communities' frustration.

The deteriorating economic situation has led to despair among youths. In 2017, 12 young people from Medenine and 14 from Tataouine died trying to reach Europe after their boats capsized. With every such death, an enraged community becomes more conscious of the absence of the state. Frustrations are exacerbated by the conflation of smuggling and terrorism by the national media and some politicians – particularly as this encourages calls to restrict border trade in those regions. The media, both national and international, have run sensationalist coverage of crises at the border – notably the 2016 Ben Guerdane battle, in which groups affiliated with Islamic State (IS) fought Tunisian forces for over 36 hours, resulting in the death of 13 security personnel, seven local residents and around 45 armed assailants. In Ben Guerdane, 82.2 per cent of survey respondents criticised media coverage of the security situation, which they said served to deepen the perception of an unruly south characterised by smuggling and terrorism. This stigmatisation overshadows the perceptions citizens have of themselves, of their communities, of their history and of the 2011 revolution and the transition that followed.

While local inhabitants were concerned about spill-over from Libya, they saw restrictions on border trade and lack of development, rather than terrorism, as the main cause of insecurity. For the inhabitants in Dheiba and Ben Guerdane, insecurity results primarily from a fear of unemployment, followed by the fear of border trade being restricted, and thirdly food insecurity and the lack of economic development. Any interruption of the income generated by the border therefore results in significant social upheaval that can be hard to contain.

**“ Any interruption of the income generated by the border results in significant social upheaval that can be hard to contain.”**

The state's hard security approach also needs to be seen in light of broader human rights violations on a national level. Amnesty International's 2017 report on abuses in the name of security criticised the flawed 'counter-terrorism' legislation passed in 2015 for increasing the power of the state's security apparatus, for extending the death penalty for certain offences, and for its broad definition of terrorism. Cases of arrests of suspected persons along with their family members are documented in the report along with other human rights violations. These practices are reminiscent of the former regime and sit uncomfortably with the state's rhetoric of democratic transition. The report lists Ben Guerdane as one of the areas particularly targeted for security operations,

especially after the 2016 IS attack on the city. Official investigations concluded that many perpetrators of the attack were inhabitants of Ben Guerdane, supplied with arms from the Libyan IS.

At a national level, issues of 'violent extremism' are of concern. In a 2015 report, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights estimated that over 3,000 Tunisians had left the country to fight for IS and other groups. Approximately double this number were prevented from leaving by Tunisian authorities. With the demise of IS in Syria and Iraq, the state regards the return of these fighters as a serious security threat. So far, the state has not publicised a coherent strategy for reintegrating returnees. In fact, dozens of returnees have been arrested and imprisoned. With the overall economic situation of the country further deteriorating and no end in sight to the political and social marginalisation of its peripheral zones and communities, current approaches to security and transition are unlikely to provide long-term stability.

**“ With the overall economic situation of the country further deteriorating and no end in sight to the political and social marginalisation of its peripheral zones and communities, current approaches to security and transition are unlikely to provide long-term stability.”**

The hard security approach is compounded by communities' mistrust of the political transition process and the ability of political elites to deliver change – respondents felt that the revolution has done little to change the behaviour of parliamentarians. The centralised nature of the Tunisian state presents a further challenge to credible local governance. The repeated delay of municipal elections scheduled for October 2016 – the first since the 2011 uprising – led to an absence of legitimate local institutions with which communities could engage. The elections finally took place in May 2018, but it is too soon for any serious assessment of how this might change local political dynamics.

### **Towards a comprehensive peacebuilding approach**

Confronted by the reality of regional disparities and marginalisation, International Alert has focused its interventions in Tunisia since 2012 primarily in populous neighbourhoods of Tunis and border governorates, with the conviction that any transitional process in Tunisia cannot be successful without the inclusion of marginalised groups that were long sidelined by the state. A broad approach is taken towards security, which is understood in terms of

a comprehensive response to community priorities including social, economic and security dimensions, and which focuses on two main areas of intervention.

The first is concerned with the production of quantitative and qualitative research to better understand the root causes of marginalisation and exclusion. This work uses a participatory approach that gives priority to the viewpoints of citizens and the measures they recommend. Research has proven to be a strong tool for advocacy: whether it is qualitative research on water governance or quantitative research on youth perceptions of (in)security, it offers a well-informed means to counter narratives at the national level.

The second area of work involves programmes based on the participation of marginalised groups, particularly young people, and local authorities to strengthen mechanisms of local governance. In the absence of municipal elections, interim local councils were put in place by the government, comprising independent and party-affiliated politicians and civil society members to govern municipal affairs until the elections.

Bottom-up approaches to strengthen local governance are bolstered by attempts to institutionalise mechanisms of local governance and tools of citizen diagnostics of public services. To this end, International Alert launched projects in marginalised areas using OpenStreetMap – a collaborative mapping tool that allows citizens to add detail to maps of their districts and to pinpoint areas that need local authorities' intervention. Based on these, International Alert works with local authorities and community-based organisations to implement mechanisms for community involvement, such as participatory budgeting. The objective is that these mechanisms will allow citizens to determine their own priorities for public projects (for example, street paving, street lighting, creation of spaces for youth), oversee their implementation and hold authorities accountable. These projects allow citizens of marginalised areas to actively engage in their local communities and offer them ownership of spaces that were previously concentrated solely in the hands of the state. Other pilot projects have also focused on developing models of community assessment of public services, such as health and education, offering communities a platform to make their voices heard on socio-economic issues.

Engagement between citizens and local authorities serves to create a link in contexts where citizens have historically been excluded from the public sphere, and in the long term has proven to shift the dynamics of state-citizen relations. These tools and mechanisms can be replicated with other communities in Tunisia, reshaping local dynamics towards greater inclusion and participation. However, a number of external challenges remain: the situation on the other side of the border, in Libya, remains volatile and renewed violence will certainly have adverse effects on the Tunisian side. Additionally, closures of the border crossings can temporarily disrupt peacebuilding efforts. Finally, the overall economic pressure, especially on young people, makes their commitment to such projects uncertain.

## Conclusion

The Tunisian transition process has been difficult and at times violent, even more so in the periphery, where almost simultaneous disruptions in the Tunisian and Libyan systems of border governance have each created a set of uncertainties.

Border regions have complex dynamics during transition processes. In the cases of Medenine and Tataouine these are partially due to their long history of state neglect, which saw these borderlands marginalised and securitised during historic statebuilding processes. Yet, the democratic transition process has also brought about previously denied freedoms, such as freedom of speech and assembly, which have opened new avenues for research and advocacy in the border regions. Decades of underdevelopment will not disappear quickly and the persistence of a centralised state, maintained by longstanding elites, presents a challenge to structural reform. However, comprehensive peacebuilding efforts as well as the prospect of greater transparency and democratic governance since municipal elections took place in May 2018, provides a positive opening for change.

# Ukraine

## Ukraine's Donbas region: how borderlands became battlefields and boundaries became frontiers

Natalia Mirimanova

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Analysis and Resolution, George Mason University. Natalia has served as a consultant for the UN, OSCE, EU, Internews, Aga Khan Foundation, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue and other international, national and local governmental and non-governmental organisations.

In 2014, parts of the eastern parts of the Donbas – the Donets (river) Basin, encompassing the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine bordering Russia – broke away from Ukrainian control and with Russian military and financial assistance established two self-governing 'republics'. An agreement reached by Russia and Ukraine under the auspices of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in 2015 plotted a path for these territories to reintegrate into Ukraine, but little progress has been made towards making this a reality. This article explores the complex identities of the Donbas region and how it came to be divided by war. It looks at why progress in the official peace process has been so slow and what international actors and local NGOs have done to build peace at the grassroots level.

### Borderland communities in the Donbas: redefining the periphery

Ukraine shares borders with seven countries: Russia, Belarus, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Moldova. In each of its borderlands lives territorially concentrated minorities with ethnic kin communities across the border. However, the identity structure of the heavily industrial Donbas is unique. Its history has yielded a mixed identity defined more by its economic role than by national loyalty or ethnic kinship. Russian, Ukrainian, Jewish, Belgian, Croat, Serbian, British and German investors, workers, managers and adventurers, as well as historical communities of Greeks living along the Sea of Azov, have shaped its outlook. People of diverse skills and backgrounds migrated here, blending once distinct social identities to produce a hyper-localised identity centred on the industrial occupations of its population.

Russian has dominated as a *lingua franca* rather than a marker of ethnicity. While most of the populace speak Russian as their mother tongue, this has not necessarily deepened their connection to Russian communities across the border. Yet the Ukrainian national identity has not been traditionally strong

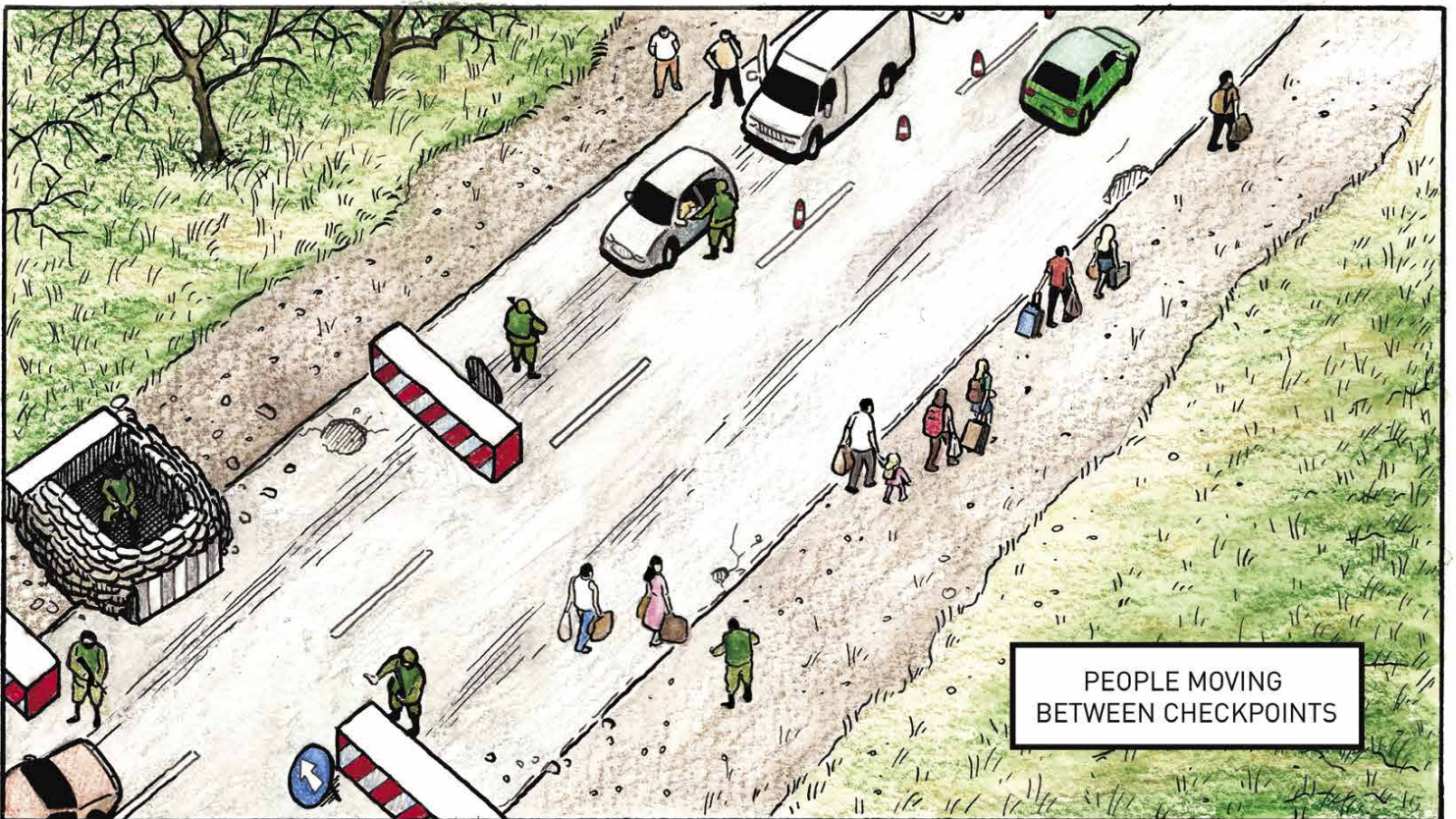
here either. Local identity has overshadowed other ethnic or national attachments.

“**The identity structure of the heavily industrial Donbas is unique. Its history has yielded a mixed identity defined more by its economic role than by national loyalty or ethnic kinship.**”

This reality is more complex than the imaginary line that is often drawn between western and central Ukraine and the Donbas. Some Ukrainians regard the eastern region as one of political apathy and clientelism, lacking in civic activism, independent agency or entrepreneurial spirit; this is contrasted with western Ukraine, where the people are seen to be more entrepreneurial and mobile. The long-standing animosity between eastern and western Ukraine can be partly attributed to historical memory and in particular the framing of the Second World War: the Western Ukrainian nationalists' resistance to the Soviet army allegedly included siding with the Nazis and complicity in mass atrocities against Jews, Roma and others. Stereotypes had sometimes turned nasty and, for example, inter-mingling between the Russian-speaking Luhansk and the Ukrainian-speaking Lviv was always discouraged. However, such animosities rarely led to violence and the perceived divide had been decreasing, with new generations growing up in Donbas after Ukraine's independence in 1991 embracing Ukraine as their home

**Illustration (opposite): Key features including checkpoints in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts (Donbas) in eastern Ukraine.**

© Jon Sack



Map 1: Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, eastern Ukraine.



Map 2: Regional location of the border between Ukraine and Russia.



and speaking Ukrainian as fluently as Russian. As a result, no one had to choose between different identities.

Cross-border ties remained very important, however, with Russia providing a market for nearly 20 per cent of the coal, steel and machinery produced in the Donbas. In the two decades following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the nearly 2,300-kilometre-long border between Ukraine and Russia was one of the 'softest' in the post-Soviet space. People crossed into Russia for seasonal jobs, yet locals were not as dependent on their proximity to over-the-border labour markets compared to other borderland communities (for example, those in the Sumy region, or those closer to Polish and Hungarian labour markets to the west).

Economically and politically, the Donbas was far from peripheral. According to official Ukrainian statistics, the region accounted for 14 per cent of Ukraine's gross domestic product in 2013, a quarter of the country's exports, and a significant share of its tax revenue. The population had higher levels of income and to some extent higher living standards (industrial health hazards aside), when compared to other border regions. In addition to heavy industries, it was home to urban academic and engineering hubs. The region was not thriving, either – the global financial crisis, the outdated equipment of the state-owned enterprises, and dependence on volatile commodity markets prevented the region from achieving better results. But political representation of the easternmost border regions at the national level was also always ensured, with the Donbas the stronghold of one of the most significant political groups in Ukraine, the Party of Regions. In this regard, the Donbas clearly does not fit the stereotype of a borderland as being a remote, economically and politically peripheral place.

**“ Since independence, Ukraine's leaders have consistently tried to break free from Russian dominance without necessarily cutting all ties.”**

### **Borderlands became battlefields**

Since independence, Ukraine's leaders have consistently tried to break free from Russian dominance without necessarily cutting all ties. Europe was regarded by many as a natural alternative, a space to which Ukraine belonged. After a decade of hard negotiations with the European Commission, an Association Agreement with the European Union was ready to be signed in November 2013. Russia viewed this as a threat to its Eurasian Economic Union, and moreover feared that economic integration would eventually bring Ukraine closer to NATO – a 'red line' for Moscow. Victor Yanukovich, leader of the Party of Regions and Ukraine's President at the time, yielded to Russian pressure and did not sign the agreement. Pro-European citizens and political elites launched peaceful protests in the Maidan square of Kyiv, which met with a brutal response from the riot police. The protests escalated and, after violent clashes left dozens of protesters and police officers dead, the President fled the country in February 2014 and new leaders took power. Russia called it a coup d'état.

Rallies in Donetsk and Luhansk in support of the Maidan Protests attracted only a few thousand people. The majority chose to wait and see. Support for the corrupt rule of Yanukovich was low, but few in the region felt any affinity with the Maidan revolution, especially after the Maidan nationalist leader proposed banning the Russian language. Moreover, the prospect of European integration was also an economic challenge for the Donbas, whose economy would require rapid modernisation and substantial investment. Resentment and fear of losing access to Russia's markets contributed to growing anti-Maidan sentiments in Donbas, further fuelled by longer-standing working class grievances associated with industrial decline. Threatening messages from Ukrainian nationalist forces and anti-Ukrainian propaganda invigorated by Russian state television stirred existential fears and motivated locals to join anti-Kyiv riots in the east and south of Ukraine in the winter of 2014.

Before long, criminal gangs and Russian 'curators' took control of the riots, and further rallies were orchestrated from and supported by the Kremlin, including by supplying 'protesters' from Russia. The demands at the heart of the riots were quickly over-shadowed by Russian and Soviet symbolism. Eventually, in April 2014, a military contingent with no insignia marched into Donbas. Some communities, led by the local administration, welcomed the Russian 'saviours'. Those who tried to resist were killed or detained. Extortion, kidnapping, torture and murder of businesspeople and Ukrainian activists – anyone suspected of loyalty to Kyiv – marked the blooming of the 'Russian Spring'.

The official Ukrainian line, widely shared across Ukrainian society, is that this represented a Russian invasion and occupation of the border region. Russia's military presence and direct command over the de facto leadership of the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics is not contested, even by Russia. Russia, however, emphasises the voluntary and paramilitary nature of the operation, and insists its presence in the breakaway entities was dictated by 'humanitarian concerns'.

The same month, Ukrainian forces initiated a military operation to re-take the Russian-captured territories. Fierce fighting broke out with heavy artillery and tanks in densely populated cities and villages. Suddenly, peaceful borderlands had become battlefields.

### **Boundaries became frontiers**

The Ukrainian military operation brought tragic clarity to the residents of Donbas: they were a new 'other', a sentiment carefully nurtured by both the Russian and Ukrainian media. The military operation was carried out by special security forces and volunteer conscripts – which helped shape national and international perceptions of the operation as a grassroots mobilisation of 'the nation' against 'the invasion'. The people in the Donbas felt increasingly isolated and those remaining in rebel-held territories were particularly alienated from notions of Ukrainian nationalism and sovereignty.

A ceasefire orchestrated by the Trilateral Contact Group (Ukraine, the Russian Federation and the OSCE) in February 2015 established a 'line of contact' that – with checkpoints, barbed-wire fences, anti-tank ditches and flags – split the



The city of Bakhmut located in the government-controlled areas of Donbas in winter 2016/17. © Galina Bozhenko

Donetsk and Luhansk regions into government-controlled areas (GCAs) and non-government-controlled areas (NGCAs).

**“As political and geopolitical preferences became conflated with territory, ethnicity and linguistic divides, the ‘other’ was increasingly dehumanised in ordinary conversations, the media and political campaigns.”**

The war did not just mark the division of geographic space. The violence triggered a wave of displacement to other regions of Ukraine or to Russia. The numbers are estimated at slightly less than 1.5 million, about 800,000 of whom chose to settle in the adjacent Ukrainian-controlled territories. The outflow of hundreds of thousands of people from the breakaway territories into the rest of Ukraine signified a rupture of human ties and a widening of social disparities, not only between pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian populations, but also reflected in the social composition of the two parts of the borderlands. The majority of people who left were those who could: the wealthy, educated and young. Those who remained were predominantly pensioners and impoverished groups, as well as micro-business owners and industrial workers.

While people continued to move back and forth through checkpoints, even during open conflict, long waits, fears of shelling and mistreatment, coupled with sharply deteriorating road conditions and increasingly unaffordable transport fees, became inherent obstacles to movement. Human interactions across the line of contact weakened and perceptions of ‘the enemy’ were inflated. As political and geopolitical preferences became conflated with territory, ethnicity and linguistic divides, the ‘other’ was increasingly dehumanised in ordinary conversations, the media and political campaigns. The political divide was transformed into a ‘blood line’ (to use Vamik Volkan’s term) between incompatible identities, and new borderland communities and dynamics emerged on either side as a result.

### **Contested representation and legitimacy: pitfalls for genuine dialogue**

In the self-proclaimed ‘republics’, the new leaders and their armed supporters evicted local authorities who refused to cooperate. Individual mayors and administrators did continue to deliver services to the population, including carrying cash for pension payments across the line of contact, as most of the banks in the rebel-captured areas had stopped operating, but eventually some of them decided to leave. For example, the Luhansk regional administration relocated to Severodonetsk, a city in western Luhansk recaptured from the rebels by Ukrainian forces in July 2014. Similarly, Kramatorsk became the new regional centre for the Donetsk region. Some public officials relocated to other parts of Ukraine, where they were often met with suspicion, while those who did not support the post-Maidan leadership or feared persecution moved to Russia. This left local authorities without a mandate to operate.

Efforts to make peace have been pursued through two diplomatic groupings. One high-level contact group, the Normandy format, was established in June 2014, through which Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany talk mainly at the foreign ministerial level. Around the same time, the Trilateral Contact Group embarked on the 'Minsk process', holding direct negotiations between representatives of Ukraine and Russia under the aegis of the OSCE. Three working groups have been developed to deal with political, humanitarian and economic issues, in which individuals – de facto officials and experts as well as Russian and Ukrainian officials and experts – participate. This process yielded agreements in September 2014 and February 2015, but progress has been slow. Participants do not have the power to make any significant decisions on their own, and even technical matters, such as the exchange of prisoners of war or the restoration of energy and water supplies, take time due to the need for consultations with superiors. Implementation then depends on personal commitments made by Minsk participants or informal interventions from the governments or individuals, such as Viktor Medvedchuk, a Ukrainian oligarch and Russian President Putin's close personal friend.

Representation at the Minsk process negotiation table has been contentious owing to the disputed legitimacy of actors. The post-Maidan national leadership refuses to recognise any authority in the NGCAs other than official local authorities loyal to Ukraine. The legitimacy of the leaders of the self-proclaimed republics is not fully accepted within their own territories either, with clashes between different groups over access to power and public finances common. Similarly, rebel leaders reject the legitimacy of the post-Maidan leadership in Kyiv. There is therefore no explicit representation of the non-government-controlled Donbas nor of the government-controlled Donbas. Yet in practice, leaders of the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics have at times participated in an informal capacity or via Viktor Medvedchuk, who has been mandated by the Ukrainian President to play this role.

The Ukrainian authorities sought to shore up their legitimacy in the run-up to the first post-Maidan presidential elections in May 2014, when, with support from the Swiss-chaired OSCE, a national dialogue process was established. This was to include representation from the borderland regions in the east and in the south. One of the three rounds of dialogue had even been scheduled to take place in Donetsk, but was cancelled for security reasons. The Donbas was represented by official authorities from the region from the previous President's party – but, with nearly zero legitimacy at the time, they had a weak public mandate. The short-lived process served a tactical goal of preparing the way for elections to take place, thus countering Russian's claims that the Ukrainian interlocutors were illegitimate.

From the beginning of the political crisis, spontaneous attempts were made by local and regional administrations to pacify protesters and establish a dialogue between different groups. This was a risky business since banditry and gun rule increasingly replaced law and order. For example, a member of Horlyvka city council was murdered after he attempted to enter the captured local administration building and engage in talks with rebels. All similar attempts have failed. The emerging

leaders of the protest movement perceive the Ukrainian side as manipulative and untrustworthy. At the same time, these ad hoc representatives have a very limited mandate to negotiate with Kyiv representatives owing to the tight control exercised by the Russian security services.

Thus borderland communities in the Donbas lost their voice in Ukrainian politics. Some felt they were marginalised, while others explicitly rejected post-Maidan Ukraine as a political space. Internally displaced people (IDPs) who relocated from NGCAs to GCAs were deprived of the right to vote in local Ukrainian elections. Those who stayed had to re-register in GCAs in order to vote in national elections, entailing a risky crossing of the line of contact.

**“ From the beginning of the political crisis, spontaneous attempts were made by local and regional administrations to pacify protesters and establish a dialogue between different groups.”**

### **How the centre defined the conflict borderland: unwanted reintegration**

NGCAs were defined by the Ukrainian government as 'temporarily occupied territories' and legislation was enacted to regulate them. The movement of people has been channelled exclusively through checkpoints along the line of contact – five of which are operational in the Donetsk region and one in the Luhansk region. While international humanitarian cargo is allowed into NGCAs, all commercial cargo has been banned. Residents can only obtain their pensions and social payments after registering in GCAs and once their actual whereabouts in the GCAs has been confirmed by the authorities. Since many people commute and live in two places, such 'pension trips' are risky and costly, and impossible for the elderly or disabled. International human rights organisations have consistently highlighted this as a human rights violation. Ukraine argues that it is impossible to carry out bank transactions in NGCAs or access records now in the hands of de facto authorities. Russia has instead assumed responsibility for providing some social payments there.

The central government has also developed a series of initiatives to curb separatist sentiments. This includes a range of campaigns promoting Ukrainian national symbols, flags, holidays, traditional dress and culture, as well as infrastructure repair and housing. IDPs have also been offered education opportunities in the Ukrainian language and scholarships and grants to study in other parts of Ukraine.

The September 2014 agreement generated by the Minsk process envisioned a phased reintegration of the NGCAs into Ukraine. For Ukraine, this would take place after border control is restored and Russian troops leave. For Russia and the self-proclaimed republics, elections and special status for the territories should pave the way to restoring Ukraine's

jurisdiction, including over the state border. However, none of the parties seem seriously invested in making this work.

For example, while a Ministry of Temporarily Occupied Territories and Internally Displaced Persons was established in Kyiv in April 2016, it is chronically under-financed and unable to service the conflict-affected population adequately. Most parliamentarians have resisted any efforts directed at integrating IDPs or developing inclusive processes that might ease borderland communities back into Ukrainian society. Furthermore, although the Minsk agreement prescribes granting special status to NGCAs within the Ukrainian state, a draft law on special status has not yet been ratified. An overwhelming majority of deputies in the Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian parliament) and their constituents oppose any special status for the Donbas region. Instead, the people of Donbas are often labelled a 'fifth column' in political and media discourse. Some commentators question Ukraine's wish to take the NGCA's back at all, suggesting, as a *Foreign Policy* article did, that Ukraine benefits from avoiding the immense cost of not having to sustain a depressed 'rust belt'.

Yet, subsidising Donbas in the long term is a burden Russia does not want either. It needs less hostile and more cooperative relations with Ukraine and may use the territories of the Donbas currently within its control as a bargaining chip. However, until Kyiv and Moscow address the issue seriously, the Donbas NGCAs will remain in political limbo.

### **Peacebuilding: a local affair**

International organisations, especially the OSCE and the UN, have made significant contributions to projects on confidence building, entrepreneurship and infrastructure, as well as providing humanitarian assistance and advocating better functioning checkpoints between the controlled and uncontrolled territories.

The OSCE Project Coordinator in Ukraine launched a reformed national dialogue in 2015, shifting the focal point and location of the dialogue to the easternmost conflict-affected areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions where officials from Kyiv do not frequently travel. These 'Reconstruction through Dialogue' forums in the Donbas GCAs became an important way for stigmatised Donbas communities – IDPs and locals alike – to participate in national and local policy making. The forums provide a space to discuss reforms and other strategies charted from the capital, often with little understanding of realities on the ground. This has helped cultivate a platform for communication between the centre and the borderlands, with positive material outcomes. The OSCE Project Coordinator in collaboration with local NGOs and experts holds dialogue and problem-solving meetings on issues relating to decentralisation reforms that have significant humanitarian, social and political implications, and require trust, cooperation and empathy on behalf of the designers, implementers and beneficiaries of the reform.

The UNDP has played a crucial role in providing support to both IDPs and host communities. This includes carrying out comprehensive assessments to understand the needs of the population of conflict-affected areas as well as levels of social cohesion (the UN SCORE for Eastern Ukraine – USE). The

UNDP also supported exchanges between the western borderlands and the Donbas GCAs, helping students, entrepreneurs and local officials travel across the country – many for the first time – to meet people and break hostile stereotypes.

**“ Officially sanctioned dialogues between stakeholders across the divide is rare. Grassroots initiatives by borderland communities have begun to fill the void.”**

The majority of dialogue and mediation projects and programmes focus on capacity building for facilitators to help communities overcome internal disagreements, creating dialogues between police and civil society organisations in Kharkiv, or designing decentralisation roadmaps in some locales. Officially sanctioned dialogues between stakeholders across the divide is rare. Grassroots initiatives by borderland communities have begun to fill the void. One example of this is 'Donbas Dialogue', an online crowdsourcing platform initiated by IDPs that helps individuals from across the line of contact engage in dialogue anonymously and confidentially. Quiet, confidential dialogue initiatives that involve representatives from across the line of contact have been carried out by Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue. Dialogue platforms that involve residents and IDPs in NGCAs, on the one hand, and refugees who fled to Russia and Russians, on the other, are another unique format. They take place in neutral locations and are not widely publicised due to the personal risks for the participants. Sadly, residents of the breakaway republics are often reluctant to participate in direct dialogue with their counterparts owing to restrictions imposed by Russian security services.

### **Conclusion**

The recent history of the Donbas shows how border regions, despite visible integration into national political and economic processes, can be vulnerable to rupture from geopolitical pressures. The future of the borderland communities of Donbas is a matter of secondary interest for both Ukraine and Russia. For Ukraine and to some extent for the West, the new division line in Europe – a challenge to the European security architecture – is the primary security concern. The war, though low in intensity at the moment, is far from over. It is draining Ukraine's scarce resources. For Russia, keeping control over a patch of Donbas is a step towards the re-establishment of its hegemony in what it considers its historic sphere of influence.

The reintegration of Donbas into Ukraine has come to look like an empty promise. The human and political distance between the NGCAs of eastern Donbas and the rest of Ukraine has grown dramatically, and popular interest in stitching the human fabric back together again is weak. The programme of decentralisation in the GCAs has no links with the governance model in the NGCAs, with these two halves of Donbas living parallel realities. Not quite independent, and under the supervision of Kyiv, the GCAs struggle to leave the trauma

of war behind and create a new positive agenda for the local population and IDPs. The NGCAs for their part are turning into weakly founded state-like entities, but find it hard to generate any kind of 'national loyalty' to the new governing authorities. Instead, more and more people in these areas, impoverished and weary of the immense barriers for business, education and travel, feel pulled towards Russia itself, despite there being no prospect of their integration across the border.

Against this background – and in the absence of political talks between the different conflict parties – localised dialogue, affirmative action and the empowerment of communities to achieve small but tangible changes in their livelihoods have become meaningful activities.

# Northern Ireland

## Brexit borderlands: the vulnerabilities of the Irish peace process

Katy Hayward

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EU on the Irish border and peace process, most recently authoring the report 'Bordering on Brexit: views from local communities in the central border region of Ireland/Northern Ireland'. She has presented widely to various audiences on the topic of Brexit and Northern Ireland/Ireland, especially with a view to the Irish border and the peace process. She has also given written and oral evidence before several parliamentary committees in both the UK and the Republic of Ireland.

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'For a border community, the border impacts on every aspect of everyday life. When you get up in the morning, which road do you go out on? ...the border affects everything you think about and everything you do.'  
*County Monaghan resident*

The Irish border runs for just under 500 kilometres across the northern part of the island of Ireland. It divides the independent state of the Republic of Ireland from Northern Ireland, which is a region of the United Kingdom (UK). It was the Government of Ireland Act (1920) that first divided the island into two separate jurisdictions, each with its own government and parliament. This act of partition was envisaged as a temporary answer to the island's contested sovereignty. It was intended to create straightforward majorities on either side of the border that reflect broadly different national identities: predominantly British and Protestant on the northern side of the border and predominantly Irish and Catholic in the south.

**“ The border was drawn with little consideration for local concerns: it divided villages, church parishes, farms and families. The Irish borderlands are typical of many such borderlands.”**

The border was drawn with little consideration for local concerns: it divided villages, church parishes, farms and families. The Irish borderlands are typical of many such borderlands. The region has long suffered the consequences of being peripheral to the centres of political and economic

power in Dublin and Belfast. Partition further exacerbated the effects of underdevelopment, rurality and population decline. There are substantially sized towns and cities all the way along the border, but partition cut them off from their natural hinterlands. This effect became stronger over time as the border grew in significance first as a state boundary, then a customs barrier and then a security barrier. It forced people's decisions about where to work, trade and shop to be made on grounds other than convenience.

So, it was for practical reasons as well as ideological ones that the border was resented from the start by Irish nationalists, many of whom saw it as a crude manifestation of British colonialism. Those with a British identity who wished to see continued rule from London viewed the Irish border in very different terms: as a welcome line of defence and distinction from the Republic of Ireland. Inconvenience was a small price to pay, in their minds, for remaining in a close union with Great Britain.

These two broad views about the Irish border came into open conflict during the period of violence (known as 'the Troubles') that began in the late 1960s and lasted 30 years. The 1998 Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement that brought the violence towards a conclusion did not seek to weaken the identities or political ambitions of any community. Instead, it framed the border as a point of cooperation rather than division. The British and Irish governments agreed to work closely together in the interests of Northern Ireland, and cooperation across the border became formally institutionalised in several areas

**Illustration (opposite): Key features in the border areas of County Armagh, Northern Ireland, and Counties Monaghan and Louth in the Republic of Ireland.**

© Jon Sack

THE ONLY INDICATION OF CROSSING A BORDER IS THE CHANGE IN ROAD SPEED LIMIT SIGNS FROM KM PER HOUR (IN IRELAND) TO MILES PER HOUR (IN NORTHERN IRELAND)

# NORTHERN IRELAND

FORKHILL BASE DECOMMISSIONED IN 2005



MONAGHAN

NEWRY

# IRELAND

CROSSMAGLEN

FORKHILL

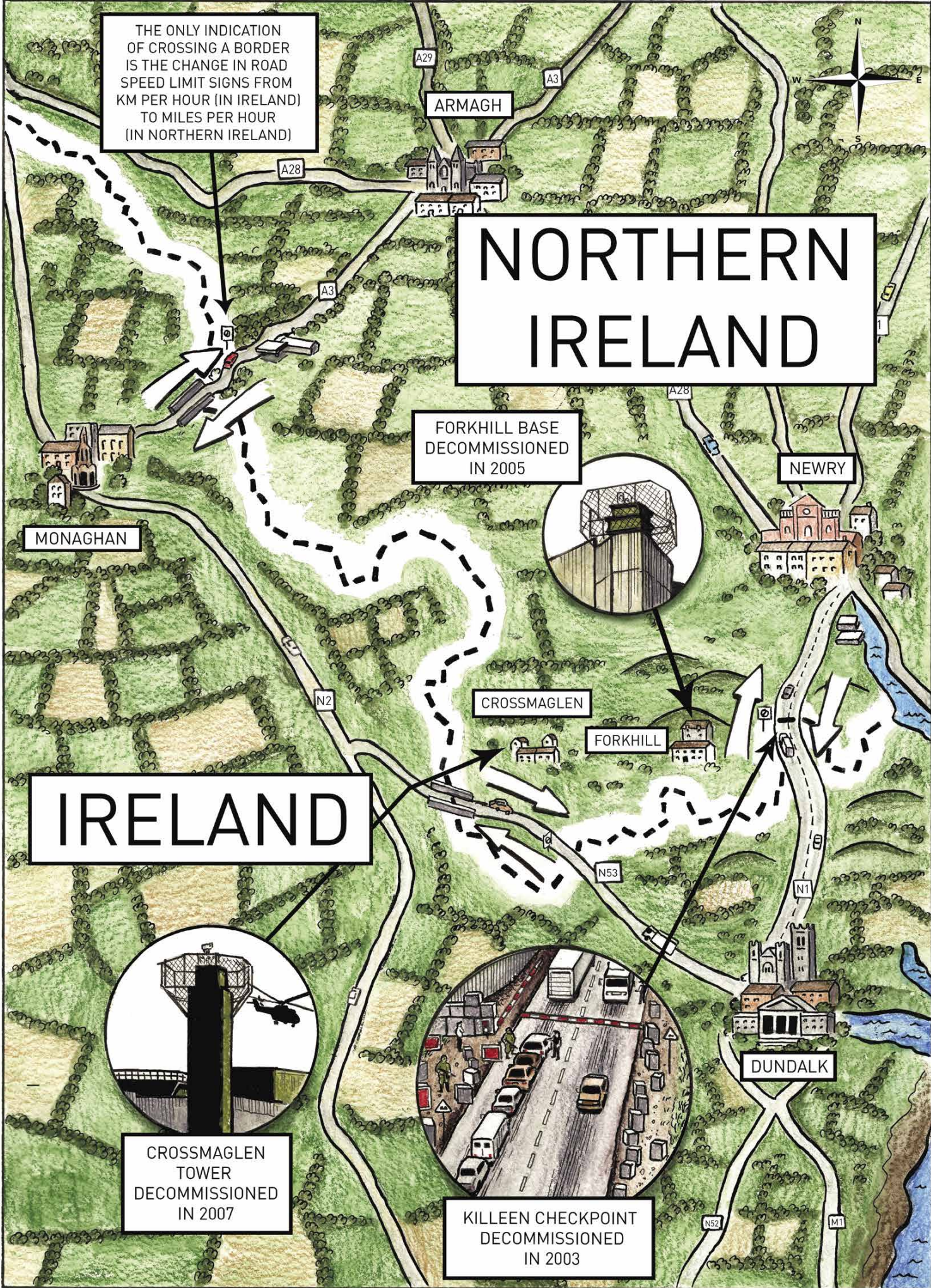


CROSSMAGLEN TOWER DECOMMISSIONED IN 2007



KILLEEN CHECKPOINT DECOMMISSIONED IN 2003

DUNDALK



Map 1: Fermanagh, Tyrone, Armagh and Down Counties, Northern Ireland bordering the Republic of Ireland.



Map 2: Regional location of the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.



of mutual interest, including trade, access to emergency health facilities and transport.

As a result, the border as a divide in economic, social and policy terms became decreasingly significant. This soft integration was mutually beneficial but did not have constitutional significance. People of various identities could therefore support cross-border cooperation, with detachment from political ideology becoming absolutely essential to the success of the peace process.

This contribution to the Accord Insight seeks to explain the significance of European Union (EU) membership to ameliorating contention around the Irish border as part of the peace process. It is based on a study conducted by the author on behalf of the Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN) in 2017 – a year after the UK voted in a referendum to leave the EU (now called 'Brexit'). The purpose of the study was primarily to record the views of local communities in the central Irish borderland region who are 'bordering on Brexit' in a very literal way. Based on qualitative research, including interviews and focus groups, it explores local fears around the potential impact of Brexit on a still-fragile peace process.

## BOX 8

### Living in conflicted borderlands

The closure of most border roads during the Troubles had a dramatic impact on the everyday lives of people living near the border. Journeys to work, church, school, shops, or to visit family or friends were affected; farmers whose farms straddled the border constructed makeshift crossing points to get to their cattle. Patterns of collective support among communities of small farmers, Protestant and Catholic – helping at harvest, sharing machinery, helping in times of need – were destroyed.

Life along the border was also shaped by the presence of the army and paramilitary violence. Areas along the border experienced the greatest number of bombings, deaths and injuries outside of parts of Belfast. The attempt to seal the border depended on a very heavy military presence along the border in Northern Ireland: roadblocks, army patrols, watchtowers and checkpoints both responded to and provoked paramilitary violence. Civilians suffered repeated intimidation and harassment by security forces, and sectarian killings were common.

Adapted from *The Irish Borderlands* project,  
[www.irishborderlands.com/living/index.html](http://www.irishborderlands.com/living/index.html)

## Brexit and the Irish border

The UK and Ireland's membership of the EU made the cross-border approach to peace possible – in its simplest terms, EU membership entails forging integration and cooperation across national borders. Much of the momentum behind Brexit arises from opposition to this trend. While a slim majority in the UK as a whole voted to leave the EU in the June 2016 referendum, a majority in Northern Ireland voted to remain; strongly so in the constituencies that run alongside the Irish

border. Immediately after the result was announced, the Irish government raised concerns about the protection of the 1998 Agreement and the future status of the border.

When the UK leaves, the Irish border will in effect become an external boundary of the European Union. What this means in practice is subject to both the terms of British withdrawal from the EU and the nature of the future UK-EU relationship. A so-called 'hard Brexit' would mean the Irish border would be a frontier to the free movement of people, goods, services and capital that is a feature and condition of EU membership. In addition to economic costs, there would be growing divergence in experience on either side of the Irish border. This will have material, political and psychological consequences in the Irish border region – a region devastated by conflict and where 20 years of cross-border cooperation have slowly brought much-needed change.

## EU membership from the perspective of the Irish borderlands

In economic terms, UK and Irish membership of the EU Single Market has removed customs tariffs, harmonised regulation and indirect taxation, and created a more level playing field for trade across the border. Cross-border trade is of growing importance to the Northern Ireland economy and has become a particularly important stepping stone for the development of its domestic private sector. Economic growth has been aided by EU financial contributions to major cross-border infrastructural projects (such as the Belfast-Dublin rail and road corridor).

EU membership has provided benefits for citizens that have been far more extensive than those that were possible through typical bilateral UK/Ireland arrangements. Alignment of standards and regulations between EU member states do not just facilitate trade but also enable more effective environmental protection, food safety, electricity supplies and commuting across borders. If, after Brexit, UK regulations differ significantly from those of the EU and, therefore, the Republic of Ireland, the difficulties for cross-border cooperation and trade will be most keenly felt in the border region.

**“ The failure of governments on both sides to address the unintended socio-economic consequences of the 1921 drawing of the border was worsened by decades of neglect.”**

The failure of governments on both sides to address the unintended socio-economic consequences of the 1921 drawing of the border was worsened by decades of neglect – the effects of which were most acutely felt by the communities living closest to the border. Yet the socio-economic impact of the border pales in comparison to the human cost of the violent conflict. The legacy of conflict resulted in a lopsided process of borderlands integration. When combined with



Protestors attend an anti-Brexit demonstration on the Londonderry/Derry - Donegal border at Bridgend, County Donegal. © George Sweeney/Alamy Stock Photo

the centralised nature of governance and administration in Ireland and Northern Ireland, it is clear that local cross-border cooperation has continually had to work against the flow.

'This is a deprived area: socially, in terms of infrastructure, and of course because of the Troubles.'  
*Resident of County Londonderry/Derry*

It is a testament to the remarkable success of the peace process that those who live close to the Irish border no longer see it as a barrier but a gateway. Crossing the border is now a means to access wider markets, new employment, education and social opportunities. In truth, many of these benefits derived from EU membership – but they could only be properly enjoyed once the peace process was established. Prior to that, security controls on the Irish border prevented the full realisation of the benefits of the EU's more open borders.

Cross-border connections have become a means of overcoming the dual challenges of underdevelopment and geographical peripherality. Economies of scale, small-step exports, social enterprise, cross-community projects, tourism initiatives, even bargain hunting – the past 15 years has brought habits of cross-border movement that have carried evident and practical gain.

### Cross-border cooperation and peace

Residents of the border areas feel that EU membership has made cross-border connections and cooperation 'normal'. Regardless of identity, it has become possible to separate politics and ideology from the day-to-day experience of the border. This is a powerful change from the days when the border region saw some of the worst violence of the Troubles. Communities remember well what it was like to see border posts, customs officials and police officers targeted by paramilitaries, to see border roads blocked and cratered by British soldiers to reduce cross-border movement, and to experience the fear, paranoia and trauma associated with violent conflict in which neighbours became perpetrators.

The most striking finding of the ICBAN research was the deep anxiety provoked by the prospect of the border coming back to the fore as a line of division between the UK and Ireland.

'The UK leaving the EU will plunge my life into uncertainty. ...I also worry about the threat of violence [from paramilitaries] if a hard border is imposed as a result of Brexit.'  
*Resident of County Fermanagh*

Although the ease of trade and cooperation across the border is thanks largely to EU membership, it is notable that people in the border region tend to associate these benefits first and foremost with the peace process. Specifically, the Good Friday Agreement is credited with fundamentally changing people's experience of crossing the border.

'I travel more now. It's much easier to cross now than when I was growing up. The Good Friday Agreement changed all that immensely.'  
*Resident of County Armagh*

Another focus group participant elaborated on the importance of the peace process for border crossing:

'I wouldn't be living here if it wasn't for the Good Friday Agreement. I moved in 2000 to the border area. I am back and forth [across the border] every day and the idea of a border in the north is just terrifying.'  
*Resident of County Cavan*

A survey respondent concurs:

'I have lived on the border for several years. Peace in the community and easy daily access are reliant on an almost non-existent border. The introduction of a hard border would create agitation, annoyance and dissent.'  
*Resident of County Monaghan*

We see in such extracts the connections made between the 1998 Agreement and the ease of moving and working across the border now – and anxiety at potential disruption to this

calm state of affairs. A number of respondents talk about the divisive communal 'them versus us' attitude that contributed to the conflict and which would be exacerbated by the existence of a hard border. One focus group participant goes further:

'The "them and us" complex could be very quickly re-established if there is difficulty and restrictions on movement. That movement starts with the social and extends into business. ... cross-border forums have broken down barriers and personal relationships have established as a result of this.'

*Resident of County Tyrone*

## The psychological effects of a renewed divide

Reflecting the legacy of a violent past, a number of respondents connected the expectation of restrictions on cross-border movement with resonances of conflict. One resident of County Leitrim described the impact of Brexit on her personally as being a 'sense of fear and intimidation'. For residents in the borderlands, the very concept of a 'hard border' is one that conjures up memories and fears of a militarised, securitised border. One respondent explained this vividly:

'I grew up a stone's throw from the border. I remember 22-mile detours to go four miles up the road. I remember the militarisation of border crossings and the closure of roads. I remember how few services we had and how difficult it was for people to survive. We were completely terrorised by the British military. I never ever want to see that again and we should never go back to that.'

*Resident of County Fermanagh*

Any renewed physical or material manifestations of border controls are undesirable on several levels. First, they would disrupt the 'normal' activity of cross-border movement, trade and integration that has been so closely connected to the peace process. Second, such border controls could become targets for paramilitary activity (as they were at the start of the Troubles). Moreover, their very existence would serve as grist to the mill for mobilising resentment and distrust among local residents towards the UK government – something which only those opposed to the peace process would welcome. Finally, they would stand as a stark reminder of painful, traumatic experiences and as a symbol of regression in cross-border relations and, more broadly, in relations between the UK and Ireland. One resident of Monaghan, in the Republic of Ireland, described the effect of Brexit as follows:

'It places barriers between our county and the rest of the six counties. It raises old wounds and attitudes that were prevalent during the Troubles. It is not good for the peace process.'

Despite UK Prime Minister Theresa May's reassurances that 'no one wants to see a return to the border of the past', participant responses on both sides of the border repeatedly expressed the fear that a hard border would propel the borderlands back to a situation similar to that experienced during the Troubles:

'Mentally, [the border conflict] has had a huge bearing on the identity of the people. Cavan, Louth, Donegal –

500 yards to your right could be danger, but to your left, you're ok. That constant warfare mentality wears you down.'

*Resident of County Cavan*

'There was a fear when you got to the checkpoint – you didn't know if you were going to get hauled out of the car. When people think of the border, that's often where they go in their minds.'

*Resident of County Armagh*

Such psychological aspects are understandable in a post-conflict context and they need to be handled with sensitivity. It is for these reasons that Brexit may have ramifications for the peace process itself; the peaceful, unremarkable border crossing has been a hugely important part of conflict transformation. One focus group participant explains this well:

'Particularly [after] 10 years working together, people [in the borderlands] have seen what life is like for normal people and they don't want to lose that. People are annoyed, concerned, confused and getting angry.'

*Resident of County Monaghan*

This quote reiterates the point that cross-border contact has a rare quality in the Irish border region – something quite different to contact across the English Channel. Contact is part of a process of 'normalisation' – one that has been facilitated by EU membership. This is not to say that this cannot be continued after Brexit, but the importance for the peace process of those social, personal contacts, the ones that don't have an economic value or material presence, is clear.

**“ Contact is part of a process of 'normalisation' – one that has been facilitated by EU membership.”**

## Conclusion

There seems to be a paradox in the contemporary Irish border: crossing the border is both unremarkable and extraordinary. In some ways it is non-existent, completely irrelevant; in other ways it is ever-present and at the centre of politics, economics and peace. This makes it difficult to explain and anticipate the effects of Brexit on a border that is currently so open. EU membership has been a vital context for this openness, although most respondents associate the open border first and foremost with the success of the 1998 Agreement.

Accordingly, any 'hardening' of the border is seen as a negative sign for peace and stability in the borderland region. Most specifically, the legacy of violent conflict is apparent in the fears that people have about the impact of Brexit on the border. For many respondents, the very term 'border control' is one that conjures images of a securitised border and recalls deeply negative experiences and community tensions. Our respondents referred to the 'emotional' and 'psychological' aspects of the border being reawakened as a result of the Brexit referendum. As one participant described it: 'We're still on the path to reconciliation and [Brexit] is like opening a wound.'

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*All weblinks have been checked as correct at September 2018*

# The Accord series

www.c-r.org/accord

## Insight



### INSIGHT ISSUE 3 (2016)

#### Reconciliation and peace processes

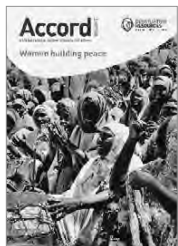
Accord Insight 3 examines practical approaches and challenges to reconciliation in peace processes. Case studies from the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, Colombia, Mindanao (Philippines) and Northern Ireland offer insights from initiatives to transform relationships horizontally, among communities, and vertically, between society and the state, in societies with different histories of violence and at very different stages on the conflict spectrum.



### INSIGHT ISSUE 2 (2015)

#### Local engagement with armed groups

This second Accord Insight publication looks at the interactions between armed groups and local populations. Case studies from Colombia, northern Uganda, Syria and Northern Ireland document the experiences of communities who have organised to influence the behaviour of armed groups – often in advance of more formal negotiations and in situations of intense violence and embedded conflict.



### INSIGHT ISSUE 1 (2013)

#### Women building peace

Most peace agreements do not address the specific concerns of women, and women are still excluded from political processes. The first Accord Insight presents nine articles and new analysis drawn from the Accord series from 1998 to 2010, which examine the roles women have played in addressing violence and building peace – from Bougainville and Sierra Leone to Aceh and Northern Ireland.

## Accord



### ISSUE 27 (2018)

#### Incremental peace in Afghanistan

Accord issue 27 outlines a radical new approach to move beyond the peace rhetoric in Afghanistan through an incremental process that pursues two objectives: 1) short-term – to achieve a reduction in violence; and 2) long-term – to achieve a more broadly inclusive social contract representative of all Afghans.



### ISSUE 26 (2017)

#### Two steps forward, one step back: The Nepal peace process

Accord 26 includes over 30 articles and interviews from Nepali and international experts focusing on the progress of inclusion and the function of power, and how peace and political negotiations in various forms and forums have facilitated transition from negative to positive peace.



### ISSUE 25 (2014)

#### Legitimacy and peace processes: from coercion to consent

Accord 25 focuses on the practical ways that legitimacy can contribute to building more sustainable peace: national dialogue; constitutional reform; local governance; and transforming coercive actors. It looks at 15 country case studies, including the Philippines, Syria, Afghanistan, the Basque Country, Somaliland, Yemen and Burma.



### ISSUE 24 (2012)

#### Reconciliation, reform and resilience: positive peace for Lebanon

Accord 24 includes more than 30 articles and interviews on peacebuilding in Lebanon: from diverse perspectives and from inside and outside the country. Together they show that the Lebanese are not passive victims of a violent fate determined beyond their country's borders. Many are actively pursuing opportunities for change.



**ISSUE 23 (2012)**

**Consolidating peace: Liberia and Sierra Leone**

A decade after the official end of wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone, Accord 23 draws on respective societies' experiences and insights to ask what headway has been made to consolidate peace, what challenges lie ahead and what lessons can be learnt. It argues that policy needs to focus on people, on repairing relationships and promoting inclusion, and that traditional mechanisms can play a crucial role.



**ISSUE 22 (2011)**

**Paix sans frontières: building peace across borders**

War does not respect political or territorial boundaries. This twenty-second Accord publication, looks at how peacebuilding strategies and capacity can 'think outside the state': *beyond* it, through regional engagement, and *below* it, through cross-border community or trade networks.



**ISSUE 21 (2010)**

**Whose peace is it anyway? Connecting Somali and international peacemaking**

Accord 21 contains over 30 articles including interviews with Somali elders and senior diplomats with the African Union, the UN and IGAD, and contributions from Somali and international peacemaking practitioners, academics, involved parties, civil society and women's organisations.



**ISSUE 20 (2008)**

**Reconfiguring politics: the Indonesia-Aceh peace process**

In 2005, the Indonesian government and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) agreed a settlement ending 30 years of armed conflict. Accord 20 explores how that agreement was reached and subsequent challenges to its implementation.



**ISSUE 19 (2008)**

**Powers of persuasion: incentives, sanctions and conditionality in peacemaking**

International policymakers frequently use incentives, sanctions and conditionality as tools to influence intra-state conflicts. Using a range of case studies, Accord 19 asks whether and how these tools can constructively influence conflict parties' engagement in peacemaking initiatives.



**ISSUE 18 (2006)**

**Peace by piece: addressing Sudan's conflicts**

This Accord publication reviews the peace process that led to the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Sudan. It also explores questions that remain to be tackled, arguing that future Sudanese initiatives must be more inclusive and better coordinated.



**ISSUE 17 (2005)**

**The limits of leadership elites and societies in the Nagorny Karabakh peace process**

Since the 1994 ceasefire, the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorny Karabakh has remained deadlocked. Accord 17 explores the dynamics of polarisation, the obstacles to a sustainable agreement and the challenge of overcoming resistance to compromise.



**ISSUE 16 (2005)**

**Choosing to engage: armed groups and peace processes**

Non-state armed groups, key actors in many internal armed conflicts, have participated in peace processes across the world. Accord 16 draws on these experiences to explore the case for engaging with armed groups, and the different options, roles and challenges for such engagement.



**ISSUE 15 (2004)**

**From military peace to social justice? The Angolan peace process**

The Luena Memorandum of 2002 brought an end to Angola's 27-year civil war. Accord 15 reviews the history of peacemaking efforts in Angola, and analyses challenges that remain if the absence of violence is to develop into a sustainable and just peace.



**ISSUE 14 (2004)**

**Alternatives to war: Colombia's peace processes**

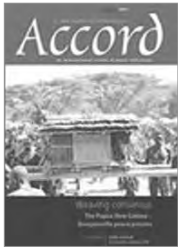
This Accord publication provides an overview of more than 25 years of peace initiatives with Colombia's guerrilla and paramilitary groups. It includes analysis of civil society efforts at local, regional and national levels and identifies the necessary elements of a new model of conflict resolution.



**ISSUE 13 (2002)**

**Owning the process: public participation in peacemaking**

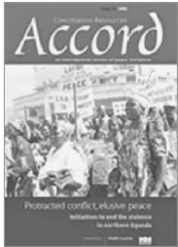
This first thematic Accord publication documents mechanisms for public participation in peacemaking. It features extended studies looking at how people were empowered to participate in political processes in Guatemala, Mali and South Africa. It also contains shorter pieces from Colombia, Northern Ireland and the Philippines.



**ISSUE 12 (2002)**

**Weaving consensus: the Papua New Guinea – Bougainville peace process**

This Accord publication documents efforts leading to the Bougainville Peace Agreement of 2001. It describes an indigenous process that drew on the strengths of Melanesian traditions, as well as innovative roles played by international third parties.



**ISSUE 11 (2002)**

**Protracted conflict, elusive peace: initiatives to end the violence in northern Uganda**

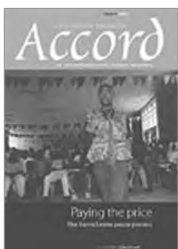
While a meaningful peace process in northern Uganda remains elusive, Accord 11 documents significant peacemaking initiatives undertaken by internal and external actors and analyses their impact on the dynamics of the conflict.



**ISSUE 10 (2001)**

**Politics of compromise: the Tajikistan peace process**

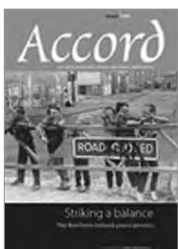
This publication describes the aspirations of the parties to the conflict in Tajikistan. It documents the negotiation process leading to the General Agreement of June 1997, looking at the role of the international community, led by the UN, and of local civil society.



**ISSUE 9 (2000)**

**Paying the price: the Sierra Leone peace process**

The Lomé Peace Agreement of July 1999 sought to bring an end to armed conflict in Sierra Leone: one of the most brutal civil wars of recent times. Accord 9 explores the Lomé process and earlier attempts to resolve the conflict, and draws lessons for Sierra Leone's transition.



**ISSUE 8 (1999)**

**Striking a balance: the Northern Ireland peace process**

This publication examines the factors that led to the negotiations resulting in the 1998 *Belfast Agreement*. It describes the complex underlying forces and the development of an environment for peace. (2003: Supplement Issue – see online index)



**ISSUE 7 (1999)**

**A question of sovereignty: the Georgia-Abkhazia peace process**

This publication explores the background and issues at the heart of the Georgia-Abkhazia conflict, providing a unique insight into a political stalemate and pointing towards possible avenues out of deadlock.



**ISSUE 6 (1999)**

**Compromising on autonomy: Mindanao in transition**

The GRP-MNLF 1996 Peace Agreement was a milestone, as all previous peacemaking attempts over 24 years had failed. Accord 6 analyses elements of peacemaking in Mindanao and examines the challenges of implementation. (2003: Supplement Issue – see online index)



**ISSUE 5 (1998)**

**Safeguarding peace: Cambodia's constitutional challenge**

This publication documents issues around the signing of the 1991 Paris agreements that officially ended Cambodia's long war, and the subsequent violent collapse of the country's governing coalition in July 1997.



**ISSUE 4 (1998)**

**Demanding sacrifice: war and negotiation in Sri Lanka**

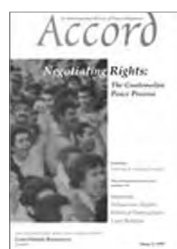
This publication documents the cycles of ethnic/national conflict that have blighted Sri Lanka since 1983. It analyses negotiations and other peace initiatives, and outlines fundamental concerns that need to be confronted in future peacemaking efforts



**ISSUE 3 (1998)**

**The Mozambican peace process in perspective**

This publication documents the diverse initiatives that drove the parties to a negotiated settlement of the conflict in Mozambique. It further illustrates the impact on the country of changing regional and international political dynamics.



**ISSUE 2 (1997)**

**Negotiating rights: the Guatemalan peace process**

The signing of the peace agreement in 1996 brought an end to 36 years of civil war in Guatemala. Accord 2 analyses issues of impunity, indigenous rights, political participation and land reform.



**ISSUE 1 (1996)**

**The Liberian peace process 1990-1996**

This first Accord publication documents the lengthy and fractious Liberian peace process and provides insight into why thirteen individual peace accords collapsed in half as many years.

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Conciliation Resources is an independent organisation working with people in conflict to prevent violence and build peace. We're there for as long as we're needed to provide advice, support and practical resources. In addition, we take what we learn to government decision-makers and others working to end conflict, to improve peacebuilding policies and practice worldwide.

We work mainly in the Caucasus, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Fiji, Guinea, India, Liberia, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sierra Leone, South Sudan and Uganda, in partnership with local and international civil society organisations and governments. We also publish *Accord: an international review of peace initiatives*. Our funding is through grants from governments, independent trusts and foundations.

**We aim to:**

- » **Promote** understanding of peaceful ways to resolve conflicts
- » **Create** opportunities for dialogue between divided communities
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This fourth Accord Insight publication looks at peacebuilding in borderland regions and how peace and transition processes address the interests of borderland communities.

A 'borderlands lens' challenges key assumptions in current peacebuilding policy and practice: that power and order radiate outwards from the centre; that border zones are resistant to being incorporated into national peacebuilding and statebuilding projects because of a lack of security, development or governance infrastructure; and that more development and greater state presence are, therefore, logical solutions to borderlands conflict.

The publication looks at seven case studies of peacebuilding in borderlands: Bab al-Hawa, Idlib on the Syria-Turkey border; north-eastern Kenya, bordering Somalia and Ethiopia; the Medenine and Tataouine governorates of Tunisia; Northern Ireland; the Donbas region of Ukraine which borders Russia; the Tarai region of Nepal on the border with India; and Shan and Kachin states in Myanmar, bordering China. These show how transition processes look very different when viewed from the margins of states and provide important lessons for peacebuilding policy and practice.

**Conciliation Resources** is an independent international organisation working with people in conflict to prevent violence, resolve conflicts and promote peaceful societies. Conciliation Resources' Accord publication series informs and strengthens peace processes by documenting and analysing practical lessons and innovations of peacebuilding.

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ISBN 978-1-905805-27-3



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