9 Life beyond the paradox

Peace, ethnic conflict, and everyday realities of Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh¹

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In the contemporary understanding of the relationship between Jumma and Bengali people in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), two key concepts, peace and conflict, have become the dominant lens through which daily life in this region is viewed. This “peace and conflict frame” has remained in frequent use since the 1990s in Bangladesh. This invention of the peace and conflict frame has its own wider history; it has been used to identify war or war-like zones within and between nation-states. The invention of the peace and conflict frame was initiated and proliferated by the United Nations. Concurrently, many academic and strategic institutions in the global north introduced separate fields of study under various names, that is, Peace Study, and thereby a peace and conflict expert would emerge to help mitigate the conflict and establish peace. It was not surprising when Dhaka University in Bangladesh established a separate department of Peace and Conflict Studies. The participation rate of Bangladesh’s military in various UN peacekeeping missions had increased significantly, and around the same time, the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord was enacted in 1997. This particular way of looking at people’s lives through these two binarily opposed concepts not only reduces the complexities evident in real-life situations but also forces them to fit into a state of either peace or conflict.

These two concepts continue to increasingly engulf and reshape the academic, political, and development (non-governmental organization [NGO]) discourses. Even after the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord was enacted in 1997, the public perception of CHT was bifurcated into two major domains. Some of the public believe peace is prevailing in CHT that can be measured by the state, based on criteria decided by people other than the local inhabitants. The other domain believes conflict has been developed in new forms; however, generated from resistance against state and non-state oppression, the new conflicts are criminalized. This chapter reflects on how local people talk about political issues in their everyday context. The purpose is to explore the alleged paradoxes in the prevailing perceptions of being ‘more peaceful’ and ‘more conflictual’ regarding contemporary CHT.

While conversations of ethnicity and politics are common in political spheres, these discussions often significantly alter and obscure local lifestyles. This is the politics of invisibility that the peace and conflict frame renders, generating a bipolar binary by asserting only two distinct understandings of a complex situation in CHT.

The research tradition focusing on CHT often falls into the trap of a binary understanding of the events. This means the research understands different phenomenon in opposition to one another, such as Bengali versus Jumma, Army versus Shanti Bahini, Peace versus Conflict, United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) versus Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti Party (PCJSS) and so on. Related questions also emerged, such as "Who is more violent?" or "Who is more marginalized?": Army or Shanti Bahini, Bengali or Jumma. These binary oppositions are important in understanding CHT, but they are not enough.

The central argument of this chapter is that this paradoxical understanding of CHT through comparison is inherently exclusionary and neglects the everyday experience of ordinary people. It is true that binary divisions are imposed and repeatedly used as reference points, but Bengali–Jumma or UPDF–PCJSS binary entities are not homogenous. These are not ethnic identities but politically constructed identities. When conflicting issues arise, not everyone participates in the same manner, and their survival strategies differ as well. Even in the case of political parties belonging to the same group, the relationship between the varied actors in CHT marginalizes the local people. These hierarchical differences, the paradox of bipolarity, and the local people's experience are presented in this chapter.

This chapter is organized into eight sections. Following this introduction, the second section introduces the theoretical paradigm of peace discourse: how paradox is framed by classical social science literature and how it has been addressed by contemporary scholars. The third section identifies the local people of CHT. Section four examines the historical circumstances of the conflict in CHT. Then the way in which villagers have experienced the Bengali resettlement process at the grassroots level is investigated. The sixth section examines the major clauses in the CHT Peace Accord of 1997 and describes how satisfaction and dissatisfaction among different groups resulted in conflicts between various political stakeholders. Then the consequences of the peace accord at the village level are investigated. In this section, I argue that the lack of political will for implementation and the lack of applicable measures to identify root causes of conflict both contributed to conflict dynamics in the post–peace accord period before bringing the chapter to a close.

Theoretical discussions: investigating the paradox in peace discourses

Peace discourse, a widely known concept in the peace studies literature, is used to identify the root causes of conflict (Galtung 1969). In conventional peace studies, the concept of peace is mostly focused on state politics and structural factors, and primarily discusses the dialogue and negotiation between political parties. However, many recent investigations of peace and conflict have looked within particular cultures and emphasized the culturally specific nature of conflict. For instance, Galtung (1990) listed six cultural domains of conflict: religion, ideology, language, art, empirical science, and formal science. As he states,

[t]he study of cultural violence highlights the way in which the act of direct violence and the fact of structural violence are legitimized and thus rendered

acceptable in society. One way cultural violence works is by changing the moral color of an act from red/wrong to green/right or at least to yellow/acceptable; an example being ‘murder on behalf of the country as right, on behalf of oneself wrong.’

(292)

Although Galtung attempts to open a space to identify root causes of conflict in the cultural context, the academic scholarship has vigorously rearranged this space in recent decades. More specifically, the anthropological contribution to peace studies is directing research towards cultural anthropology and providing an accessible framework to the paradoxical and dispute-related study of culture and peace (Sponsel 1994; Coulter 2009; Little 2014).

However, conceptualizing culture is itself a challenging matter, not only for the study of peace but also for the wider anthropological academic practices. The discussion of a paradigm shift of conceptualizing culture (from essentialist view to post-structural paradigm) is important in this regard. According to the essentialist understanding, “culture” is a concrete social phenomenon which represents the essential character of a particular society (Hofstede 1991). The definition of culture is spatially bounded, based on inherited meanings and values which have been passed down unchanged and are shared equally by all members of the culture (Baumann 1996). In this viewpoint, the national and ethnic identities are portrayed as innate characteristics where some natural, biological and genetic traits are brought forward. As Grillo (2003) argues,

[b]y ‘cultural essentialism’ I mean a system of belief grounded in a conception of human beings as ‘cultural’ (and under certain conditions territorial and national) subjects, i.e. bearers of a culture, located within a boundaried world, which defines them and differentiates them from others. Equally worthy of explanation is that loose on the streets is not just culture, but anxiety about culture: ‘cultural anxiety.’

(158)

However, the constructivist approach argues that culture is a product of socio-political practices, where various dimensions of power in a society have been playing a significant role (Bakhtin 1984; Milne 2009). In this approach, culture should be studied as a situational atmosphere and on multiple levels.

On the other hand, the definition of culture is mostly based on the self-other dichotomy in structural anthropology. Therefore, an explicit rejection of the dichotomy is found in post-structural scholarship. According to this view, otherness is the outcome of a discursive process by which a dominant in-group (“Us,” the Self) creates one or more dominant out-groups (“Them,” the Other) by denouncing a difference, whether actual or fictional, and presenting a negation of identity and thus a motive for possible discrimination. Although it looks as if the other is sometimes valued, as with exoticism, it is done in a stereotypical, reassuring fashion that serves to comfort the Self in its feeling of superiority (Staszak 2008).

The paradigm shift of theorizing culture has significantly influenced the defining of “cultural violence” in peace literature. The transition between nonviolent and violent forms of conflict in Galtung’s structuralist paradigm is grounded in the recognition of indirect forms of conflict. Violence is often split into two distinct labels: direct and indirect. Galtung (1990) goes on to say that “symbolic violence built into a culture does not kill or maim like direct violence or the violence built into the structure. However, it is used to legitimize either or both” (292). The structural categorization of cultural violence (e.g., religion, art, language and others) is constructed as evidence of a normative hegemony of the western value system with its goal for peace, in comparison to the values of “other” society (Staszak 2008). Yet this categorization does not accurately reflect that underlying social norms regarding violence may exist on a continuum running through society. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize that grassroots people may experience different types of suffering during and after conflict. In some cases, local people may view their situations as improving, while in others as deteriorating.

In this context, the “reflectivist” scholarship created fruitful preconditions for re-examining the relationship between culture and conflict, starting with reconsidering the social role and functions of conflict itself. Rather than viewing conflict as a certain effect of power competitions (as in realism) or a deviation from the enlightened norm of social harmony (as in liberalism), conflict came to be seen as an avenue of social development, occurring through the clash and competition between different agents of social and political advancement (Miall 1999, quoted in Milne 2009).

The most significant role of cultural analysis in peace study is defining the importance of the power dimension of culture and the cultural construction of power practice of politics (Duffey 2000). In this perspective, the idea of politics is not restricted to a particular sphere (state, political parties), nor is it a novel phenomenon. It is recognized that politics is happening “everywhere” or, with respect to specific local perspectives, it acknowledges the impracticality of absolutely isolating the domain of the “political” from other societal and cultural processes (Ellis 1999).

Similarly, the recent poststructuralist approach reveals numerous important problems that can arise if transitions to a post-conflict era are not implemented with an understanding of holistic society. Adrian Little (2014) develops the idea of “enduring conflict,” referring to both the enduring nature of political conflict and the endurance of people in conflict-ridden societies by looking at countries involved in conflict transformation. He challenges the idea that the absence of conflict is the foundation and norm of a stable political environment. Little argues that political processes need to be understood within their social and cultural contexts. Also in this approach, Coulter (2010) challenges the dichotomous approach of peace vs conflict, which has been used in mainstream peace study for a long period. He raises at least three arguments. First, within the peace–conflict dichotomy, people either belong in peace or conflict; anything in between does not fit into these two roles. This is a rigid scope that defines the roles of people in society. Second, the dichotomous approach relies on an assumption that with the arrival of a politically determined end to conflict comes an improvement in the lives of those affected by the conflict. Finally, the dichotomy raises the controversial

question of whether participants' positions relative to society improve or worsen as a result of conflict. Rather than seeing conflict as a state of exception or a period of turmoil that can be contrasted with politics as usual, Coulter tries to show how the social interactions that drive conflict, including different forms of hierarchy, are deeply connected to pre-conflict and post-conflict social order. Coulter (2009) offers the initial assumption underlying her analysis: "War is not exempt from the social but creates its own social orders" (9).

By tracing out the genealogy of discourses on peace, MacKenzie (2011) shows that the experience of conflict can often appear as a list of numerical calculations: civilian casualties minus military casualties, cultural violence plus political, internal displacements compared with refugee flows. These long lists of numbers tend to define the intensity of a conflict and are used to illustrate conflict as a period of exceptionality, in which so-called normal laws, behaviours, rules, and norms are displaced by disorder. MacKenzie (2011) argues that "[w]hat is lost in this emphasis on statistics and exception are the multiple ways that war and violence affect the everyday lives of individuals. The conventional study of conflict seems to be the antithesis of the study of everyday life, or the social" (1012). Thus, MacKenzie suggests dealing with the ordinary people's accounts, existing discourses, and new possibilities that emerge.

This post-structuralist paradigm influenced many anthropologists investigating the peace process of a particular society. Thus, the "Anthropology of Peace" (Sponsel 1994) proposed that the peace initiative should be adjusted in a holistic way. Such a perspective requires identifying the root causes of conflict in a broad historical, political, social, and cultural context, given that options for peace and conflict are largely the products of existing social structures. By adopting this approach, I attempt to investigate the relationship between these discursive practices and trace the ways this relationship has contributed to the existing peace discourse of CHT.

Identifying the local people: are they homogenous?

In the discussion of peace and conflict in CHT, it has been observed that the Bengali and Jumma people are the main stakeholders in the increasing conflict in CHT. While Bengalis are ethnically similar, many dissimilarities exist in economic, political, and, most importantly, resettlement contexts. Most of the Bengalis believe in Islam, and a small portion of them practise Hinduism. On the other hand, the Jumma are not homogenous in their religious and ethnic backgrounds. Most of them believe in Buddhism; the rest practise Hinduism, Christianity, and other indigenous religions, as opposed to the dominant state religion of Islam. There are also hierarchical relationships within the ethnic communities. The largest group is the Chakma, who are more politically active in establishing their rights in the region. The PCJSS was formed by activists who came from different ethnic groups of the Jumma people. The activists were unified under the umbrella of "Jumma nationalism," and the constitutional recognition of Jumma people was their main demand. The chair of PCJSS signed the CHT Peace Accord of 1997 on behalf of the Jumma people.

The recent in-group feuds between PCJSS and the United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) severely affected the livelihoods of ordinary Jumma people. UPDF claims that the peace accord fails to address the basic demands of the Jumma people. The demands are regional autonomy, constitutional recognition of the indigenous Jumma people, restoration of land rights, withdrawal of the military, and withdrawal of the settlers from the CHT. These demands have also been articulated by the PCJSS. The UPDF was born as a result of a perception that the peace accord did not address these demands. Although their narration of the same event is different, both the PCJSS and the UPDF share the same goal.

Until the 1980s, only a small portion of Bengali people had been living in CHT. However, the Bengali resettlement project dramatically changed the population's composition. The percentage of Bengalis in CHT rose from 26 per cent in 1974 to 47 per cent in 1991 (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics [BBS] 1991). While the Bengalis in CHT belong to the same nation, they have several differences in regard to socio-economic identity and occupation. The Bengali people who have lived in CHT since before the resettlement are referred to as "*adi* Bengalis," which means "old Bengalis" in the local language. Over the decades, the old Bengalis have had a good social relationship with Jumma people and have lived as neighbours with Jummas with a vibrant social life. On the other hand, as part of a Bengali resettlement project of the Bangladesh government, many more Bengalis have migrated from the plains to CHT since the late 1970s. These Bengalis are known as "settlers." They have been granted land, cash incentives, and monthly rations to maintain their lives in CHT. Although the Bengali resettlement project is sponsored by government funds, many Bengalis have settled in CHT through their own initiative or kin networks, without proper consent of resettlement authorities. These "unauthorized" settlers are not entitled to the government ration. Although the "authorized" settlers and "unauthorized" settlers did not belong to the same historical and economical background, Jumma people argued that these two bodies sometimes played the same role in different conditions.

Along with these old Bengalis and settler Bengalis, many other Bengalis started to come to CHT for work, that is, NGO workers, tourism developers, government officials, and the like. Some of them are permanently settled, and some are staying temporarily. Thus, the Jumma peoples distinguish two groups of Bengalis: the Bengalis who are settled under the government resettlement program and Bengali people who are established in the CHT in pursuit of their occupation. While the settlers are creating violence, the job-holding and *adi* Bengalis are trying to maintain a good social relationship with the Jummas.

At the beginning of my study, I intended to investigate the experiences of local people with respect to the Jumma-Bengali conflict. After spending more time in the field in Khagrachari district, I realized that the context of the conflict is far more complex than I had envisaged. The conflict in CHT is not only limited to the Bengali-Jumma dichotomy but also observed in various in-group feuds. The conflict between PCJSS and UPDF was originated by a certain group of people, but it affects the whole community in the region. I thus incorporated new arguments in my research. The context of the CHT conflict would not be clear if the realities of in-group feuds are left uninvestigated. Through this, I contend that along with

the Bengali–Jumma conflict, the real story of grassroots people is often complex, involving multiple settings.

The milieu of conflict in CHT

The root causes of conflict in CHT centre on identity formation beginning from the British Colonial period. During this time, the colonial government introduced a tribalism policy in the region. Unfortunately, the policy continued to be adopted by postcolonial regimes, even after the independence of Bangladesh. Prior to the colonial period, the region and its people were independent and functioned as a sovereign territory under customary rules and administrative systems. The indigenous people were at that time identified by the Bengalis as Joomea, or the people who were involved in Jhum or shifting cultivation (Schendel 1992; Tripura 1992; Zaman 1984). The cultivation process was managed by customary rights and considered the key to the survival of the Jumma peoples' identity. However, the politics of identity originated in the British colonial period and was adopted in the state apparatus as a policy (especially the tribalism policy) to deal with the CHT region. It is noteworthy that the notion of tribalism is not only related to the identity issue, but also to the governing policy of the colonial administrators. Colonial administrators documented several aspects of tribalism: primitive religious beliefs, animism and heathenism, ape-like physical features, and immoral and exotic nature of sexualities (Schendel 1992; Xaxa 1999). The tribalism process in the Indian subcontinent was not a homogenous project and was undertaken in different ways in different parts of the empire. But in each area, the overall purpose was to increase the dominance of colonial rule. In CHT, the Jumma people came in touch with a different kind of political economy, which, for the first time, influenced change in their own culture and society. The colonial administration started the process of land alienation by taking ownership of land rights in CHT to create reserve forests (Dewan 1990).

After partition, problems in CHT arose with the building of the Kaptai Hydroelectric Dam between 1957 and 1963, when the area was under the Pakistani government. This dam flooded at least 54,000 acres of settled, cultivable land farmed by the Jumma people (Nasreen 2002) and permanently displaced thousands of them without any compensation (Dewan 1990). While the policy of exclusion was adopted by pre-independence state government, it continued to dictate the development of the identity and livelihoods of the CHT people in the Bangladesh period.

After the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, a group of indigenous people formally placed their demands for autonomy to maintain their self-identity. But, the prime minister of Bangladesh advised them to “forget ethnic identities” and “to be Bengalis” (Al-Ahsan and Chakma 1989, 967). The denial of the constitutional recognition of the Jumma's diverse ethnic identity and regional autonomy brought social, political, and cultural chaos into CHT. A group of Jumma started a strong resistance movement by forming a political party PCJSS. This movement included an armed wing called the Shanti Bahini, meaning “Peace Bridged.” From 1976, the CHT became an area under military occupation and a training ground for counterinsurgency. Moreover, about 400,000 Bengalis moved

into the region between 1979 and 1987 under a government transmigration program. This program has had multiple sociocultural consequences on the Jumma: the destruction of the agricultural system, the change in the names of indigenous localities, the attack on indigenous religious institutions, and, above all, the forceful eviction from their lands. This resettlement project has dramatically changed the demographics of the region. The percentage of Bengalis in CHT rose from 9 per cent in 1951 to 47 per cent in 2011 (Table 9.1. Bengali resettlement project). The indigenous population is now at threat of being outnumbered by Bengali settlers, who continue to take over their land and attack their religious and cultural values. Civil administration and the military are sometimes the direct patrons and protectors of the Bengali settlers (Mohsin 1997, 2003; Adnan 2004).

Since 1980, there have been thirteen major cases of sectarian attacks on the Jumma people by the Bengali settlers (IWGIA 2012). Almost hundreds of thousands of Jumma people have been forced to cross the border to India, or have become internally displaced as a result of armed conflict (Nasreen 2002; Adnan and Dastidar 2011). About 8,000 people were killed from both communities, including security members. After a long political negotiation, the Government of Bangladesh and the PCJSS signed a peace accord in 1997, a major development in moving to settle the conflict in the region. The accord has not settled the situation; rather, several issues have arisen in the region. Before going into a detailed analysis of the Chittagong Hills Tracts Peace Accord, it is important to get an ethnographic glimpse of Bengali dominance in the village context.

Bengali resettlement: a cause of cultural violence

As described in the previous section, the resettlement project dramatically changed the demography of CHT, and the Jummas started to realize that they would soon become a minority in their own region. An ethnographic study of three villages shows many complex scenarios. The Jumma consider themselves to be a distinct group with their own identity, separate from the rest of the country. Rights and interests are regulated and administered by traditional institutions according to customary law (Roy 2000, 54). The customary systems in CHT do not refer only to land rights or land management issues. It also designates the way in which they

Table 9.1 Bengali resettlement project

Year	Jumma	Percentage	Bengali	Percentage	Total
1872	61,957	98	1,097	2	63,054
1901	116,000	93	8,762	7	124,762
1951	261,538	91	26,150	9	287,688
1981	441,776	59	304,873	41	746,649
1991	501,144	51	473,301	49	974,445
2011	845,541	53	752,690	47	1,598,231

Source: Bangladesh District Gazetteer (1975); Population Census of Bangladesh (BBS, 1974, 1981, 1991, 2001, 2011).

lead their lives – in traditional, social, political, and religious contexts. The multilayered Bengali resettlement project affects the everyday life of Jumma people enormously. It destroys existing livelihoods, affects the traditional administrative body and community organizations and networks, and threatens the cultural identity of the ethnic minorities. Often, the worst sufferers are those who must part with their agricultural land. In the following subsections, I investigate the scenario in CHT by drawing ethnographic pictures of Khagrachari district.

Changes in the names of localities

The practice of changing original locality names is found often in the Khagrachari hill district as well as in the whole CHT region. Settlers changed many names of localities which were originally in Jumma languages. In most cases, the settlers imposed a new name in Bengali as a symbol of their settlement and claim over the Jumma region. Although the changes were not initiated by any administrative body, these new names have generally been used by the local administration and Union Councils (Nasreen 2002).

The Bengali language and Muslim religious values have gained importance in the renaming of some localities. Lamuchari village was one of the biggest villages of the Mahalchari Upazilla of Khagrachari district until Bengali resettlement divided the village into several sections by renaming Boro Para (Central Lamuchari), East Lamuchari, West Lamuchari, Muslim Para, and others (see Table 9.2 Changing names of localities). Although the place of Muslim Para was previously known as *khas* (unused) lands, many Jumma people used the land for agriculture. The Bengalis converted the agricultural land into a residential area by constructing many new houses. Thus, the Muslim Para was established by Bengali Muslim settlers, and the name itself represents the domination of the Bengalis' religion in the village. Since Buddhists and Animists are the historical inhabitants, changing village names to reflect Islamic ideology severely violated the traditional religious beliefs of the Jumma people and denied the existence and religions of indigenous people.

The rise of Bengali dominated economy: the relationship between culture and economy

The local economic system was significantly altered. Massive-scale Bengali resettlement dramatically increased the demands of consumer goods that Bengalis

Table 9.2 Changing names of localities

Original Name	New Name
Lamuchari	East Lamuchari, West Lamuchari, Boro Para, Muslim Para and others.
Kedachara Bon Chilla Pro Chowdhury Tilla	Palashpur Shalbon

Source: Fieldwork, 2011–2014.

habitually used. The migration of Bengali businesspersons has increased drastically since the resettlement period, and they continue to migrate to the area for their commercial interests. These businesspersons fully dominate the business sector of CHT. For instance, although the Mahajan Para village area is not a major commercial area, there are different kinds of shops, a transport business, and hotel businesses. The Jumma owns only nine shops out of thirty-four. Because the Bengali-owned shops sell products that suit their own tastes and habits, the majority of their consumers are also Bengali, including settlers, government and NGO officials, and security officers residing in Khagrachari.

Unlike Mahajan Para, Khagrachari is one of the leading tourist spots in Bangladesh, and people travel there from many parts of the country to enjoy their vacation. Indigenous products are in high demand by tourists. However, indigenous items such as clothes or food are sold in Bengali shops. Bengali-owned hotels and resorts now operate in Khagrachari town because tourism makes the hotel and transport businesses very profitable. Bengali businesspersons have established about a dozen hotels, in addition to the government-owned tourist resorts.

However, it is notable that the Bengali people of CHT are not homogenous, especially in terms of status and economic conditions. The Bengalis have a long history of business activities in the CHT region dating back to the British colonial period. While the social relationship between settlers and Jummas are hostile, good neighbourly relationships exist between the *adi* Bengalis and the Jumma. But compared to the resettlement period, the *adi* Bengalis' commercial activities in the region were diminutive. The new businesspersons also have a separate identity, living in cluster villages. This new group has a good social relationship with the settlers, but not with the Jumma. They have the capital to expand the Bengali economic dominance in the CHT region and invited many tourism companies and corporate chain shops to the region. Thus, the dominant Bengali establishment, dramatically changing the political economy of CHT, has marginalized the local economy of the Jumma people.

The huge population growth has also raised the demand for different kinds of transportation in the region. Although there are many kinds of highway buses operating, it is difficult to find a Jumma owner. Most of the well-known bus companies in Bangladesh started their transport services in the CHT region. There were new bus routes established after the Bengali resettlement. For instance, most of the Bengali settlers of the Shalbon and Lamuchari villages migrated from Noakhali, Comilla, and other south-eastern parts of Bangladesh. Settlers often use the new route to travel to their place of origin and meet relatives. Here, too, Bengali dominance is eminent. For local transportation, rickshaws, both auto and electric, are very popular. These also developed after Bengali resettlement in the region, and only a few local transport businesses are owned by Jumma people. Therefore, I argue that the Jummas are marginal to the economic expansion. The Bengali dominance in the economic sector also helps to establish the dominant identity as Bengali.

Colonial legacy towards (re-)establishing the cultural rights

On December 2, 1997, the government of Bangladesh and the PCJSS signed a peace accord. Several issues have arisen in the accord. Although the accord

recognizes the revival of cultural rights, it identifies Jummas as “tribal” people in several clauses. General Section A.1 states, “Both the sides have recognized the need for protecting the characteristics and attaining overall development of the region considering Chittagong Hill Tracts as a tribal inhabited region” (Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord 1997, cited in Partha 2016b). However, the question that arises is: how does the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord recognize the cultural rights of Jumma people? Has the accord clearly located the root causes of conflict?

As we have seen, the history of conflict in CHT is rooted in the self-recognition process of Jumma people. In 1992, when the International Year of the Indigenous Peoples was acknowledged by the United Nations, the Jumma people of CHT began to identify themselves as indigenous people, or *adivasi*, not as “tribal.” In addition, a number of other international laws helped to increase organization and mobilization among the Jumma. The ILO Convention 169 added, “Self-identification as indigenous or tribal shall be regarded as a fundamental criterion for determining the groups to which the provisions of this Convention apply” (ILO convention 1989, cited in Sumon, 2014). However, this Convention was not endorsed by the constitution or Chittagong Hills Tracts Peace Accord or 1997. By using such terminology such as “tribal region” and “tribal rights,” tribalism was once more reproduced in the peace accord. There have been seriously problematic situations arising regarding the conceptualization of “tribal.”

First, while the government of Bangladesh has adopted several institutional policies, these are inadequate to revive or uphold the cultural rights of the Jumma people. The establishment of Tribal Cultural Institutes and Khudra Nri-Gosthi Sangskritik Pratisthan Aine (Small Ethnic Group Cultural Institute Act 23 of 2010) are most debatable in this regard. There have been three Tribal Cultural Institutes established in the CHT region. However, most of the initiatives of these cultural institutes are focused on promoting tourism in the Hill region. As the institutions are located mostly at the district level, the connection with rural villages is very weak. Similarly, the activities of the tribal museum remain confined to entertaining tourists with the colourful dresses and ornaments of the mysterious “tribals.” Local cultures are presented as exotic, showcased by the state during the celebration of national events like Independence Day or Victory Day (Guhathakurta 2003). Yet the communities are portrayed passively, never as thinking, creative agents seeking transformation of their lives and the marginalizing system. After a long period of criticism of the tribal notion by the civil society organizations, the government of Bangladesh approved the Khudra Nri-Gosthi Sangskritik Pratisthan Aine, 2010 (Act 23 of 2010), on 5 April 2010. Pursuant to the act, the “Tribal Cultural Institute, Bandarban” was relabelled as “Khudra Nri-Gosthir Sangskritik Institute, Bandarban.” Changing the name of the institution was considered significant, but only the title changed; the functions remained unchanged.

Second, the tribal notion in the revival of the Jumma people’s identity rights is problematic in the context of the complex historical background, and this idea is present in the root causes of conflict in the CHT region. The idea that indigenous people are tribal reflects the larger history of Orientalism. Based on this

concept, the colonial and new postcolonial interests are controlling the people (Said 1978). In colonial times, it was a sign of colonial difference, producing an ever-widening chasm between the subjects and objects of colonial knowledge (Dirks 1999). Ironically, five decades after the end of British colonialism, this tribalism was reproduced in the peace accord.

Third, in the post-accord period, the issue of the cultural identity of the Jumma people has led to much debate and controversy. On occasion, this debate has brought Jumma leaders and state officials into sharp disagreement. Many student forums in Khagrachari district organize rallies, meetings, and processions demanding recognition of indigenous people in the national constitution. During my fieldwork, I observed a program in Khagrachari on World Indigenous Day on August 7, 2011. However, this program was attacked by the police. Some of the Jumma activists were injured, and many of them were arrested.

Fourth, the accord recognized customary laws as it reiterated the administrative roles of the chiefs and the headmen. However, it failed to clarify the ways to overcome the problem of land occupied by the Bengali settlers. As stated by the headman of Lamuchari Dinendra Chakma (field notes, 62):

I have been serving as a headman of Lamuchari village since 1990. By tradition, I am the designated person to maintain law and order of this village, but the Bengalis do not obey me. Moreover, the Bengalis tried to attack me several times. I am the most targeted person [by] the Bengalis. Most of the issues related to conflict resolving of this village are now managed by the army or police. Sometimes they invite me to the conflict resolving meetings but my voice [is] never heard. I am acting like a puppet during the meeting. The army and police make their own decisions, most of which are made in favour of the Bengalis.²

As reported by the *Karbari* of Lamuchari village, at least six Bengali cluster villages have already been established in the Lamuchari area. Most of the land occupied by these clusters was previously agricultural land of the Jumma people. The Bengalis have forcibly occupied the land. However, without legal documents, the Jumma victims cannot claim ownership rights for their lost land with the legal authorities. In the competition for the land and resources in the CHT region, the state has taken the side of the Bengalis against the rights of the Jumma people. The accord did not specifically mention the land-based violence and made no provision for punishing the guilty. However, the Jumma people have been suffering the loss of their traditional culture with regard to their customary land rights.

One key problem at the village level relates to the customs and traditions regarding land ownership. As previously noted when discussing the setting of the CHT Peace Accord, not only did the customary system provide the Jumma people with their economic rights, but it was also a cultural value which had been nourished through the generations. Although the establishment of the Jummas' land and cultural rights was recognized by the accord, no direct measures were undertaken to protect their customary rights in the CHT region. The inadequate protection of the customary land rights has caused complex difficulties in CHT.

While the Jumma people have been managing the land by customary common property rights, the Bengalis have frequently placed claims on the land by defining it as *khas*, or unused land. New settlers, with the help of Bengali officials and the earlier Bengali settlers, have continuously occupied the Jumma land in the post-accord period.

Fifth, the peace accord tries to uphold the cultural rights of the Jumma people. But the conflict between religious groups is yet to be identified. In the post-accord context, more than a dozen major conflicts have risen between the two communities in Khagrachari district. In Mahalchari subdistrict of Khagrachari district, at least five temples in Jumma communities were destroyed between 1997 and 2010. For instance, in the massive attacks of August 26, 2003, in Mahalchari sub-district of Khagrachari, one of the Buddhist temples in Lamuchari and three of the temples in other villages were completely burned. Moreover, according to the villagers of Lamuchari, the religious freedom of the Jumma people is not only obstructed by the settlers but also disturbed by administrative orders. For instance, on September 12, 2007, the Khagrachari district authorities banned the construction of new religious institutions in Mahalchari subdivision in Khagrachari without prior permission of government authorities in the area (IWGIA 2012). Such orders indicate that the CHT Peace Accord exists only on paper, not in practice.

While the need to uphold cultural rights was recognized in the peace accord, the Jumma people still demand identity recognition. The agreement was contracted between government and PCJSS (Chowdhury 2012; Rahman 2011). However, many other local political parties like the Hill People Federation, the Hill Student Federation and the Hill Women Federation rejected the treaty. They protested that the CHT Peace Accord failed to endorse many important demands, including the self-recognition issue of Jumma people.

Peace paradox: everyday life experiences of local people

Many recent studies have indicated deep concerns about conflicts between the Bengalis and the Jumma people in the post-accord context. However, too many concentrated only on the conflict between the Bengalis and the Jumma people. They have done little to investigate the recent “in-group feuds” in the Jumma community. By locating multiple conflict scenarios at the village level, I argue that the CHT Peace Accord has not only contributed to reducing conflict but, in particular cases, has also helped increase conflict. On one hand, the peace accord has reduced the armed conflict between the army and Shanti Bahini; on the other hand, many in-group feuds have begun around the dissatisfaction among many Jumma political stakeholders. Although it is important to note that the recent conflict scenarios in CHT line up with the Bengali–Jumma dichotomy, the Jumma people have experienced many difficulties in recent in-group confrontations between the UPDF and the PCJSS. In this section, I investigate how ordinary people have negotiated the multiple realities of conflict at the grassroots level.

Following the peace accord, the dissatisfaction of different stakeholders increased, and conflict spread in multiple layers. Conflict between the UPDF and the PCJSS has seriously affected the livelihood of ordinary Jumma people.

The UPDF believes that the accord has failed to address the basic demands of the Jumma people. These demands, which have also been articulated by the PCJSS, include regional autonomy, constitutional recognition of the indigenous Jumma people, restoration of land rights, withdrawal of the military, and withdrawal of the Bengali settlers from CHT. Moreover, the accord contains no reference to accountability for past human rights abuses, which have bordered on genocide. The UPDF has argued that, without the fulfilment of these basic demands and accountability for human rights abuses, a genuine and permanent peace cannot be established in CHT. The UPDF was born as a result of this perception.

In recent decades, both groups have become desperate to control the Hill area using strong-arm tactics. According to the Mahajan Para and Lamuchari, some of the activists and leaders of the UPDF and PCJSS are extorting money as “protection money” from them to maintain their parties. This scenario is eminent in the whole CHT region. When a village is dominated by UPDF, the activists from UPDF are forcefully squeezing money from the inhabitants. Similar practices prevail in the PCJSS-dominated areas. Moreover, refusal to pay the extortion money results in torture or abduction by party activists. While in the field, I learned that when a person is working in Dhaka city or another plain-land area, family members are forced to pay extra money as their economic condition is comparatively better than other Jummas. As stated by a villager from Lamuchari,

[i]n the CHT, it is hard to find a village where the people are not dominated by either UPDF members or PCJSS members. However, there appears to be no overlap between the two areas of control. If a village is captured by the PCJSS, the UPDF workers are unable to collect extortion money from the PCJSS-controlled area. Moreover, opposition workers have no justification for going into the village for any ordinary purpose³.

The dominant activists are constantly on patrol searching for opposition workers in the respective villages. Ordinary people who do not belong to either side cannot go to the other villages at night due to these patrols. In the realm of UPDF and PCJSS politics, the strong bipolar system (Islam 2013) of the politics is extremely confrontational in nature. Since 1997, the near-equal strength of the two major local political parties has contributed to the emergence of a duopoly over the regional political system of CHT. The ordinary people who were not actively involved in regional politics felt deprived and betrayed due to their poor representation on the Regional Council. Similarly, the stakes of the competition between the PCJSS and the UPDF have helped to institutionalize political violence as an instrument of power. In this political culture, the ordinary people are forced to side with the more powerful party if they wish to participate in and receive benefits from the system. As reported by villagers,

[t]he PCJSS and the UPDF have accused each other of attacks, killings, abductions, death threats, and other such activities. The situation in the CHT has become tense as the UPDF and the PCJSS are locked in a long-standing

clash and have turned the total Hill region into a “valley of death.” Nobody comes forward to file any police cases after these murders or illegal tolls.

The painful experiences of local people during the period of militarization and Shanti Bahini’s insurgencies, everyday conflict due to the Bengali resettlement, forceful evictions to establish security camps, and the unexpected roles of the UPDF and the PCJSS have clearly shown that they have been living in a panicked environment for a long time. Furthermore, this environment is continuing, due to the imposition of different power structures. In particular, in-group feuds between the UPDF and the PCJSS have brought more fear to the local Jumma people. Thus, the villagers have urged that the killing and abductions must stop and that they must become united for the betterment of the ethnic people living in the CHT.

On the other hand, the Bengali settlers also believe that the CHT Peace Accord only concerned the Jumma people. The accord has failed to address the issue of Bengali settlers who have resettled voluntarily or without legal consent. They do not have any legal document of the possession of the land, and they are demanding the legal rights to their occupied lands. Because of this, an organization named Sama Adhikar Andolan (Equal Rights Movement) was established to ensure the rights of Bengali settlers. As of today, the number of Bengali settlers’ organizations has increased to six.

In recent years, it has been observed that the Bengali organizations frequently hamper the democratic and peaceful programs of Jumma organizations. If a Jumma organization announces a meeting, the Bengali organizations will declare another program at the same place. In most cases, this compels the authorities to impose legal action, such as Section 144⁴ of the Criminal Procedure Code, which bans all programs by both parties.⁵ According to the informants of Mahajan Para village, “the administration is not active enough to tackle the groups from both sides. Moreover, the Bengali organizations have gained strength, spread their members and branches all over the CHT region, and led the settlers to violence.”

Similar to the UPDF, some Bengali organizations have not been in favour of the accord. Although their narration of the same event is different, their position shares the same goal. In this regard, it is important to remind ourselves how identity politics plays its role in a real-life setting. In this regard, the indigenous rights discourse also negotiates with the different agencies of bipolar Bengali nationalism. Moreover, a low level of trust has become a common feature of Jumma society. In general, the people of CHT possess a low and declining degree of trust in their political institutions and political leaders. Generally, people in these communities do not believe that their fellow members are engaged in politics for the mutual benefit of society. The people are disappointed and bewildered by the performance of the members of the UPDF and the PCJSS, both in their activities and oversight of the dualistic operations.

Conclusion

This chapter has critically examined the role of the peace process when dealing with the challenges of reducing conflict and has demonstrated that the nature

of conflict in CHT was deeply embedded both in the nature of the state itself and in the political institutions that link the state and society. The consequences of the peace accord have been investigated. Special reference was made to the dynamics of the negotiation process among the local people through their everyday life experiences and realization. Ethnographic evidence has suggested that different stakeholders were not playing the same role at the grassroots level. The process of surveillance and the power apparatus have been mostly executed by military operations; at the same time, it was interesting to observe the negotiation between different stakeholders at different levels. On one hand, the peace accord has reduced the extent of the armed conflict between the army and Shanti Bahini (Peace Force), but, on the other hand, many in-group feuds have been ignited through the dissatisfaction between various Jumma political stakeholders. The ordinary Jumma people have believed that the government was seeking to provoke or support these various Jumma political organizations in an attempt to divide and rule.

Many clauses of the CHT Peace Accord can be seen as problematic because they fail to identify the causes of conflict. Instead, some of the clauses create further conflict in the region. As we have observed, the PCJSS, the representative of Jumma people in the signing process of the peace accord, accepted and reproduced categories of tribal identity that derived from colonial knowledge and its postcolonial reproduction. The reproduction of colonial categories re-established tribal identity in CHT and made it the basis of political, social, and economic life. Thus, the identity formation issue still pervades the region.

In this regard, it is important to remind ourselves how the self-identity issue plays a role in a real-life setting. Structural bipolarity, as I have argued, is not as bipolar in the field as it is described by many academics. Surveillance does not create fear for only a certain group of people, it affects the whole community in that particular region. Along with the political economy, cultural resistance is also very conspicuous. In brief, the relationships and negotiations with different stakeholders are sometimes explicit and sometimes implicit in practice. The peace accord did not clarify the way to overcome the problem of lands occupied by the Bengali settlers. On the other hand, the future of unregistered Bengali settlers is also elusive. In this chapter, I emphasized the variation and diversity present in the reality of the dynamics of different groups. Adopting the social interaction approach of peace discourse, I have investigated the dynamics of the ever-changing characteristics and many layers of real-life conflict. Through this, I revealed the loopholes of highly manifested bipolarity, and connected the power relationships on the ground and experience of ordinary people for a better understanding of the field and the contemporary trend of peace discourse.

In addition, the implementation process of the CHT Peace Accord is also questionable. Withdrawal of the military camps was the central agenda of the peace accord; however, in practice, it was only partially implemented. A lack of political will on the part of successive governments has led to delays in the demilitarization process, and the army still holds the highest power in the region. The different stakeholders of the conflict are not necessarily playing a homogenous role, especially as popularly predicted. In short, these stakeholders can be narrowed down

to different interest groups. The local political scenario may seem in accordance with the gross narration from the centre, but it is actually not so. The process of surveilling, threatening, and searching is part of the power apparatus implemented by military settlement. At the same time, it is also interesting to observe the negotiation among different stakeholders and different beneficiary groups. Safety is an important issue, not only for the Jumma people but also among Bengali settlers. Bengalis have a relatively good and privileged relationship with the army, but they also have to negotiate under the shadows of historical legacy and current reality. Like the UPDF, some Bengali organizations are not in favour of the CHT Peace Accord. But the conflict between the PCJSS and the UPDF is very different in nature than the other violence perpetrated by settlers and Bengali organizations.

There seems to be a consensus that the administration has failed miserably to protect the rights of the Jumma people, and there is a sense of bitter frustration. Recognizing identity, protecting customary rights, and ensuring legal practices are important and imperative to stop such kinds of conflict in the region. In conclusion, I argue that this overall dichotomous understanding of conflict is in itself inefficient. It falls into the trap of a dominant peace discourse, which fails to locate the ever-changing characteristics of conflict.

Notes

- 1 The content of this chapter was part of the PhD thesis of the author at Hiroshima University, Japan, PhD session in 2015. The findings of this article from a functional to a discourse analysis approach were driven by my several periods of fieldwork in between 2011 and 2014. The research methods were largely qualitative, involving interviews and in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and, participant observation.
- 2 The interview was taken at August 21, 2011.
- 3 The narrative of this person was collected from the fieldwork of March 2014
- 4 Section 144 is a section of the Indian/Pakistani and Bangladeshi Codes of Criminal Procedure which prohibits the assembly of five or more persons, holding of public meetings, and carrying of firearms and can be invoked for up to two months. It also gives the magistracy the power to immediately issue an order absolute in urgent cases of nuisance or apprehended danger.
- 5 For instance, when the Jumma people of Dighinala Upazilla scheduled a rally on July 3, 2014, to protest the establishment of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) camps in the Jumma villages, the Bengali Student Council organized another meeting at the same time and at the same venue. The local administration in Dighinala clamped down on the meeting section using 144.

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