

## Leslie Fernanes Taylor and the 'Lost' Linguistic and Ethnographical Survey of Burma<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** As a scholarly society concerned with advancing scientific, ethnological and topographical knowledge, as well as studies of ancient texts, archaeology and monuments, the Burma Research Society<sup>2</sup> was concerned with informing and educating its readership about Burma's many indigenous groups. However, from the early 1920s, tensions emerged between the BRS, the Burma Government and Rangoon University in relation to the importance attached to the way in which Burma's many races were studied and understood. This article examines the complicated relationship between power and the production of knowledge in the colonial state, which on occasion was manipulated by members of the BRS to promote their own views and agendas. Tensions arose in connection with the production of a Linguistic and Ethnographical Survey for Burma conducted by Leslie Fernandes Taylor (1889-?), who requested the help of fellow members. His attempts conflicted with the aspirations of certain key members of the BRS, who endeavoured to bring about greater homogeneity in society by promoting a version of cultural nationalism based on a dominant Burmano-Buddhist hegemony. Although holding no political power themselves, they used their position as members of a committee appointed by Rangoon University to oversee Taylor's work, to influence the way that ethnicity was perceived in Burma. This eventually resulted in conflict between Taylor and the committee. Their actions, which are described in this paper, ensured that the Survey was never completed. Taylor was given an ultimatum to return to his position in the Indian Education Service and forbidden from using his own leisure time to continue the work. As a result, Taylor was effectively relegated to the status of an outsider, forced to leave Burma and no longer accepted within key organisations that were part of the ruling colonial establishment's inner circle.

### Introduction

Leslie Fernandes Taylor BA (Cantab) was born in York in 1889. His father was Harold Dennis Taylor, the inventor of the famous 'Cooke Triplet' photographic lens (1893), and his mother was believed to be Portuguese, hence his middle name 'Fernandes'. Whilst studying Natural Sciences at Clare College Cambridge (1909-1912), Taylor became interested in the study of anthropology and he made the

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is an excerpt from a much larger study of the Burma Research Society (1910-1935), the subject of a thesis by the author to be submitted later this year. This thesis examines the Burma Research Society as a boundary-crossing social organisation, whose mixed-race membership was drawn from both sides of the colonial divide. At a time when there were few opportunities for discursive activity concerning Burma's history and culture, the BRS provided an effective site upon which to work out new conceptual and moral bases for Burma. Following the demise of the monarchy in 1885 and the imposition of colonial rule over the whole of Burma, the country was annexed as a province of the British Indian Empire in 1886. The thesis examines the role played by key members, who used the research opportunities offered by the Society to frame a discourse of cultural nationalism based on a dominant Burmano-Buddhist identity. It also considers the ways in which other members, like Leslie Fernandes Taylor used the BRS to challenge this hegemony in an effort to enlarge the perspective and complexity of Burma's national identity.

<sup>2</sup> Hereafter: BRS.

acquaintance of noted academics connected with its development as a profession, whose patronage he enjoyed. Archibald Rose and A. C. Haddon (1855-1940)<sup>3</sup> both supported Taylor's application to join the Indian Education Service,<sup>4</sup> as his third-class degree made him ineligible for the Indian Civil Service (ICS).<sup>5</sup> Supported by leading university anthropologists of the day, an appointment in the IES in Burma was contrived for Taylor through use of the 'old boys' network' and the right contacts at the India Office in London, which would allow him the opportunity of pursuing important anthropological studies whilst in Burma.<sup>6</sup> Although Taylor's anthropological work had no official sanction or financial backing, a position in the IES would allow Taylor the opportunity to undertake studies that might benefit not only the colonial state, but also others in England. His academic sponsors saw in Taylor a way of using his talents in a semi-official capacity to benefit their own researches and extend knowledge back to Britain. Proxy researchers for professors were much sought-after and doubtless these men perceived this keen and adventurous young man to be a willing participant in their aims to extend the boundaries of imperial knowledge through fieldwork in the Empire.

The nucleus of the problem that existed between Leslie Fernandes Taylor and an inner circle of the BRS' elite concerned the potential of his Linguistic and Ethnographical Survey to disrupt their vision of cultural nationalism, which privileged a dominant Burmano-Buddhist narrative as the core ideology of the modern nation state in Burma. By making Burma's many ethnic and linguistic groups the focus of a 'national' survey which might be used to influence government policy, Taylor's work had the potential to disrupt the BRS' constructions of cultural nationalism and their stated objective of 'reinvigorating national sentiment'<sup>7</sup> through research into Burma's historical and cultural heritage. This problem is perhaps best understood by reference to the following statement made by Taylor in an address to the BRS in 1922, during which he argued that other regional and indigenous identities

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<sup>3</sup> Alfred Cort Haddon, sometime President of the Royal Anthropological Institute, was one of the pioneers of fieldwork, notably in Torres Strait, which distinguished him from an earlier generation of anthropologists who had adhered to the evolutionist principles of anthropology, from which Haddon himself also never really departed. He had a profound influence upon the development of British anthropology. See Steve Mullins, "Haddon, Alfred Cort (1855–1940)," *Australian Dictionary of Biography* 14 (1996), <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/haddon-alfred-cort-10386>.

<sup>4</sup> Hereafter: IES.

<sup>5</sup> Copy of Taylor's application form to join the IES, IOR L/PJ/6/1337, File 5003, British Library, London.

<sup>6</sup> Letter from Mr. A. Dumbell of the India Office, 22 Feb. 1912, IOR L/PJ/6/1337, File 5003, British Library, London.

<sup>7</sup> John S. Furnivall, "As It Was In the Beginning," *Journal of the Burma Research Society* 18:2 (1928): 51. Furnivall writes: 'We may claim, I think, to have contributed in some degree to the reinvigoration of national sentiment, and personally I like to look on our Society as one of the earliest and not the least unhopeful of national movements in Burma.'

had been submerged by a process of ‘Burmanisation’. Taylor called upon the Society to make an immediate and sustained effort to counteract this development, because he felt that Buddhism and Burmese culture were breaking down what was left of older social structures and religious beliefs.<sup>8</sup> He said:

The Burmese language and Buddhist religion was once extremely localised. The language and religion spread under the political domination of a capable and determined but numerically small people until it had absorbed and *Burmanised* the majority of its neighbours. This process is still very much in evidence today. Their physical descent is the only thing that is left to many of our present-day Burmans that connects them with their non-Burmese ancestry.<sup>9</sup>

Even though the Society had been founded in 1910 on the basis of being open to all regardless of race, religion or status,<sup>10</sup> Taylor’s public statement made it apparent that his views conflicted with the fundamental cultural nationalist agenda of the BRS. His remarks also drew attention to the presence of tensions and hierarchies within the Society, in which the complexities of race, class, gender and religion were implicated in the production of colonial knowledge. Although some members were able, in some contexts, to use the networks of power that existed in the BRS advantageously to further their ambitions,<sup>11</sup> in this situation, Leslie Taylor became entangled in complicated hierarchical structures which created unequal relations even between members of the same race, all of whom who were part of the colonial establishment. This case study endeavours to show how these complicated hierarchical structures resulted in Taylor becoming an outsider. It also demonstrates that Taylor’s apparent ‘insider status’ as a member of the colonial elite – holding a Government position in the IES and a seat on the Executive Committee of the BRS – could not protect him from exclusion and, ultimately, banishment from Burma.

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<sup>8</sup> Leslie F. Taylor, “Ethnological and Linguistic Research in Burma and South-Asia,” *JBR* 12:1 (1922): 13.

<sup>9</sup> Taylor, “Linguistic Research,” 10.

<sup>10</sup> U May Oung, “Inaugural Address to the Society, 29<sup>th</sup> March 1910,” *JBR* 1:1 (1911): 5. May Oung invited members ‘to devote half an hour and half an *anna* stamp to the record of the incident which has most impressed his memory during the past few months,’ so that the *Journal* ‘would form a permanent record of our notebooks and wonderings.’ His request included all members, regardless of their religious or racial background, and signified one way in which local members throughout Burma might make their voices heard at a ‘national’ level.

<sup>11</sup> For example, the Arakanese schoolmaster and amateur antiquarian San Shwe Bu used the *Journal of the Burma Research Society* to write about Arakan’s ancient history in order to promote narratives of sub-regional nationalism. He collaborated with the author Maurice Collis ICS and eventually obtained political power, gaining a seat on Burma’s Legislative Council in 1932.

In his inaugural address at the foundation of the BRS in March 1910, the Rangoon lawyer and co-founder U May Oung had denied that they were ‘a select communion of superior souls’.<sup>12</sup> However, at the heart of the BRS there was an inner circle of founding members, led by J. S. Furnivall, Gordon Luce and Pe Maung Tin, who together with others, assumed the guardianship of the moral and intellectual welfare of Burma’s public culture. Their mission was dedicated towards presenting a version of cultural nationalism centred upon a dominant Burmano-Buddhist hegemony, and any initiatives which risked destabilising that concept were managed in ways that prevented its disruption.<sup>13</sup> This article hopes to show just how damaging opposition from the ‘select communion of superior souls’, who formed the Society’s central clique, could be towards members like Taylor, who attempted to assert alternative definitions of cultural nationalism. The case study will attempt to demonstrate how an influential group of BRS members exercised its power within the BRS and Rangoon University to disrupt Taylor’s survey because of the political, social and cultural outcomes that might result from its realisation.

As a member of the colonial establishment, Taylor did not face discrimination over race or class, but he came up against hierarchies that questioned his intellectual abilities and displayed animosity towards him personally and towards his project, rendering him an outsider amongst his own social and racial group. In 1923, a paper read at the Society’s Annual General Meeting by the Rangoon lawyer Maung Tha Kin dealt with continuing deep divisions and prejudices in Burma’s social organisation;<sup>14</sup> and he alleged that they were also present in the BRS, despite strenuous denials from other members. However, efforts by a small powerful clique to thwart Taylor’s ambitions to produce his Linguistic and Ethnographical Survey are an example of how real these tensions were. Taylor’s efforts ended in failure; leaving him an outcast, discredited as an academic and obliged to leave Burma in 1932 without employment, his task unaccomplished. By the end of the 1920s the clique at the centre of the BRS viewed the Survey as a risk that might bring serious consequences for a ‘plural society’ already fragmented by the deteriorating economic climate and the looming Depression

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<sup>12</sup> Oung, “Inaugural Address,” 7.

<sup>13</sup> Furnivall’s ICS experiences whilst District Commissioner at Myingyan (1907-1914), together with other ICS postings, were the geneses of the heightened politicisation of his objectives for Burma, which he hoped might be achieved through the BRS. They led Furnivall to the view that the BRS might be able to instil a degree of cultural homogeneity into society by bringing together everyone who was interested in researching into Burma’s history and cultural heritage, irrespective of social, racial or class distinctions, and unconstrained by barriers between colonised and coloniser. See “Settlement Reports” that Furnivall wrote whilst District Commissioner at Myingyan from 1907-1914. In particular, Season 1909-1913, Rangoon, 1913, W 1241, 8, 27, British Library, London.

<sup>14</sup> See Maung Tha Kin, “Depressed Classes of Burma,” *JBRS* 12:2 (1923): 140-144; “Depressed Classes of Burma - A Further Note,” *JBRS* 13:2 (1923): 139-143.

crisis. Although stories, folk legends, accounts of traditions and customs supplied by missionaries and other interested individuals had their place in the Society's repertoire, they were peripheral to the promotion of the core ideology of Burmano-Buddhism, which it was believed would ensure stability for Burma's national identity.

Taylor unsuccessfully attempted to emulate for Burma Sir George Grierson's monumental Survey for India, which the Government of India had authorised Grierson to undertake on its behalf in 1898. Assisted by many officials and friends, Grierson's Survey took thirty years to complete and extended to eighteen large folio volumes with specimens of all the languages and dialects, bibliographies, grammatical sketches and vocabularies. It was a work of enormous complexity, which allowed a grasp of the whole of the linguistic situation in India and also threw light upon its history.<sup>15</sup> However, it did not include Burma, the newest and most distant province of the Indian Empire. The Government of India had chosen not to extend the Survey to Burma because administrative control had only recently been established over the more remote regions of Burma, and there was little preliminary knowledge upon which to base the survey.<sup>16</sup>

Wendy James has suggested that the place of anthropology in the colonial situation was doubly ambivalent.<sup>17</sup> On the one hand, there was ambivalence in the attitude of colonial authority as, although anthropology was supported as a necessity for obtaining information, 'its personnel and their activities were questionable.'<sup>18</sup> But without uniformity of interpretation, proper training and skilled fieldwork, colonial anthropology was also ambivalent in its veracity towards the people it studied. Nevertheless, linguistic and ethnological information was increasingly required by colonial governments in order to control and order the frontiers of empire. Information concerning these 'debatable lands'<sup>19</sup> was needed not only to secure the frontier areas, but also to promote western

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<sup>15</sup> Frederick W. Thomas, "Sir George Grierson and the Linguistic Survey of India," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 60:3 (1928): 717.

<sup>16</sup> Charles Morgan Webb, "The Linguistic Survey of Burma: The Need for a Survey," *JBR* 4:2 (1914): 85.

<sup>17</sup> Wendy James, "The Anthropologist as Reluctant Imperialist," in *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*, ed. Talal Asad (London: Ithaca Press, 1973), 42-43.

<sup>18</sup> James, "The Anthropologist," 43.

<sup>19</sup> Although not known to be a member of the BRS, the Cambridge academic and explorer Archibald Rose, who supported Taylor, was formerly the acting British Consul in Tengyueh, Yunnan. He was someone who provided 'unofficial' intelligence reports to the government. Rose attached a "Confidential Appendix to Report," regarding what he termed 'the debatable lands' on Burma's North-East frontier with China, where he said 'the ambitions of provincial officials and the folly of their sub-ordinates will be a constant menace to the frontier peace'. See Archibald Rose, "Report on the Chinese Frontiers of India," Calcutta Govt. of India, Foreign Dept., 1911, 31, IOR/L/PS/20/D174, British Library, London.

scientific, ethnological, linguistic and topographical understanding. Information on the so-called 'primitive races' was required by the colonial government to satisfy its need to know what was going on and to gain 'a pragmatic knowledge of its subjects', so that they would continue to administer themselves without disrupting established rule in areas where the British exerted very little direct control.<sup>20</sup> However, until the establishment of more professional services during the period between the two world wars, the BRS' amateur output was the only source of anthropological knowledge of the peoples beyond the Burma heartland; that is, the core Irrawaddy Valley polity.

From the outset of colonial rule in the country, a basic distinction between the hills and the plains had been created by the Government, which became the hallmark of the British administration in late colonial Burma.<sup>21</sup> Remaining directly under the control of the Governor, the Frontier Areas were divided haphazardly and after 1922, they were reassigned once again between 'Excluded' or 'Partially Excluded' areas 'depending upon their state of advancement and upon their level of fitness to participate in the limited democratic process offered to Ministerial Burma.'<sup>22</sup> The map of Burma became an unresolved 'patchwork of oddly different administrative islands,'<sup>23</sup> as lack of funding, military resources and available skilled manpower had hindered the development of a professional surveying and mapping service. In Burma, these areas comprised vast 'unexplored' territories of well over a third of the total land area. They were set apart from the rest of Burma, largely occupied by 'hill peoples' who were left to live according to their own laws and customs under the rule of their hereditary chiefs, whose allegiance the British hoped to secure. The British administration showed little concern for their advancement or education, leaving this responsibility largely to the missionaries who colonised them with Christianity. This, in turn, brought these peoples some limited access to western education and a small range of social welfare projects often run in conjunction with the mission stations. However, as the section below on missionary praxis demonstrates, missionaries' activities were often criticised by the BRS as they were seen as embedding the roots of ethnic divisions into Burma's society, sowing the seeds for future conflict in direct opposition to the BRS' hope that the spread of 'Burmanisation' as a natural corollary of modernity would be a positive, transformative force for change.

Because of financial and other constraints, the local government at this time did not want to become too caught up in the official acquisition of anthropological knowledge, preferring to operate on an *ad hoc* basis, responding to opportunities as they arose. Leslie Taylor's appointment in the IES

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<sup>20</sup> Rose, "Report," 31.

<sup>21</sup> Martin Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity* (London: Zed Books, 1991), 41.

<sup>22</sup> Smith, *Burma*, 43.

<sup>23</sup> Smith, *Burma*, 43.

to the position of Headmaster of a Government High School in Bassein in 1915 presented just such an opening. As mentioned, he had acquired a special interest in Burma and some training in anthropology whilst at Cambridge University, having also undertaken field trips to Southeast Asia during his university vacations. Encouraged by the India Office and certain academics to pursue the advance of anthropological knowledge after he arrived in Burma, Taylor attempted to initiate and conduct a Linguistic and Ethnographical Survey under the auspices of the BRS and Rangoon University; but without having received a formal commission to do so from the Imperial government or, indeed, obtaining unanimity within the BRS. Taylor was not an entirely untrained amateur, but neither was he undertaking the work on a professional basis, as Sir George Grierson had done for India.

In order to contextualise the circumstances surrounding the failure of Taylor's Survey, the next section presents an overview of the professional development of anthropology and the BRS' responses to it. It also discusses the tensions which already existed within the BRS before Taylor began his Survey work; tensions between amateurs and others such as missionaries, who considered themselves 'professionals' because of their work in the field, sometimes undertaken over the course of many years. Their greater linguistic and ethnological knowledge of their subjects allowed them to assume a superior position and criticise fellow members, thereby underlining the different competencies between the missionaries and others who had spent less time in the field. Outsiders from the BRS lacked first-hand knowledge, such as that acquired by members who lived in contact with Burma's minorities or those who had undertaken detailed studies of Burma's ancient history, languages and culture. As the *Journal of the Burma Research Society*<sup>24</sup> illustrates, the BRS afforded its diverse membership many opportunities to exhibit intellectual and other forms of assumed superiority not only towards outsiders, but also on occasion towards fellow members. This was usually manifested in criticisms made in debates at the Society's monthly meetings and in articles and reviews published three times a year in the *Journal*. The next section also discusses the BRS' role in shaping knowledge about Burma's races before the establishment of more professional anthropological services, which, although eagerly sought by the colonial government, carried within it the unwanted possibility of disrupting the BRS' core mission.

### **The BRS' Contribution to the Advancement of Ethnology in Burma**

The institutionalisation of anthropology as an academic 'discipline' or profession evolved during the nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century from early findings by scholarly societies,

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<sup>24</sup> Hereafter: *JBRS*.

independent academics, explorers and other travellers, whose acquisition of linguistic and ethnological material was reported in scholarly journals, reports and memoranda.<sup>25</sup> From the beginning of the twentieth century, as the requirement for specialised knowledge increased, it was matched by a response from the universities in providing training for anthropologists and a corresponding need for museums to collect and document objects<sup>26</sup> in their collections.<sup>27</sup> The provision of formal training in anthropology offered by the universities in Britain converged with the requirement in Burma for specialised ethnological knowledge in order to administer the hill peoples of Burma. However, until the founding of Rangoon University in 1920, the BRS was the only scholarly institution available for output and debate about material related to Burma's many complex languages and ethnologies. Nevertheless, the variations in competencies and lack of coordination of objectives meant that there was no coherent policy with regard to the way that ethnography was presented in the *JBRS*, unlike the French at the *École Française d'Extrême-Orient* in Hanoi,<sup>28</sup> whose academic thought makes a clear distinction between 'professional' and 'amateur' scholars. As a consequence, the BRS' members, as amateur scholars, created their own hierarchies based on more local perceptions of what constituted superior linguistic and ethnological knowledge.

The period between the two world wars, however, was a time when ethnographic and linguistic studies had increasing relevance and application beyond the academic sphere, spilling over into the political arena. It coincided with the period when functionalist and social anthropology under the leadership of Bronisław Malinowski and Alfred Radcliffe-Brown really came into being as a profession, as it began to produce the knowledge necessary to colonial governments. These more complex interactions inevitably heralded the possibility of bringing greater conflict and complexity to debates about how Burma's identity as a nation should be defined, as more detailed engagement with the varied social constructions of the nation came to be described. Functionalist and social anthropology investigated how social groups behaved by analysing customs, social organisation,

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<sup>25</sup> See note 22 on Archibald Rose.

<sup>32</sup> See Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Christopher A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). See also histories of Charles 'Hindoo' Stuart of the East India Company, one of the first collectors of Hindu statuary, which now forms the core of the British Museum collection, known today as the Bridge Collection after a subsequent purchaser.

<sup>27</sup> The Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford remains one of the foremost examples of the many anthropological collections founded in Britain from the eighteenth century onwards.

<sup>28</sup> Hereafter: *ÉFEO*.

laws and traditions with a view to supporting more complex interactions with native peoples, and to improving their education 'on modern lines' in a situation of contact with colonial rule.<sup>29</sup>

In contrast to these later developments, during the BRS' early decades, amateur accounts of ethnographic description in the *JBRS* – ranging from folkloric, through to linguistic and historical representations – made little attempt to analyse their functional relationship to the whole of Burma, or indeed their relevance to the project of cultural nationalism. It was left up to individual members to put forward their own interpretations on the basis of the often disparate and uncoordinated knowledge sources available to them, without guidance from any overarching frameworks of knowledge or methodologies of interpretation other than examples of fellow members' scholarship. Between 1911 and 1914, the *JBRS* published a total of eighteen articles by its members on linguistics and thirteen articles on ethnology out of a total of 124, including one in the very first edition of the *Journal* by Colonel G. E. R. Grant Brown ICS, a colonial official in the Upper Chindwin. Grant Brown's article "Human Sacrifices near the Upper Chindwin"<sup>30</sup> contained graphic eye-witness accounts of human sacrifice in the villages of Lasa and Lanu in the Shan state of Khamti Long, close to the borders of Assam and Tibet. In its insistence that the barbaric and gruesome rituals of human sacrifice took place beyond colonial borders, Grant Brown's article in the *JBRS* draws attention to the ambiguity which existed at that time regarding Burma's Frontier Areas. Inaccurate mapping and lack of professional surveying meant that territorial and political integrity were never truly established after the final Annexation of Burma.

As mentioned above, missionaries were amongst those in the BRS who assumed superiority, because as 'insiders' who lived and worked in Burma, who knew the country and spoke the language, they considered themselves the 'knowing people,' who understood the 'real' Burma. Their knowledge was enshrined in the articles that they contributed to the *JBRS*. There was, therefore, an important distinction between missionaries and accounts from BRS members like Grant Brown, whose shorter visits to the frontier areas had occurred during annual tours in the cold weather. Because of their field-based observations, linguistic skills and their knowledge of local dialects, the missionaries were able to present more authoritative linguistic and ethnological accounts in the *JBRS* of Burma's complex racial groups. Their criticisms in reviews<sup>31</sup> in the *JBRS* emphasised differences

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<sup>29</sup> Stephan Feuchtwang, "The Colonial Formation of British Social Anthropology," in *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*, 83.

<sup>30</sup> George E. R. Grant Brown, "Human Sacrifices near the Upper Chindwin," *JBRS* 1:1 (1911): 35.

<sup>31</sup> See American Baptist missionary, Rev. W. W. Cochrane's scathing review of Major F. Bigg-Wither's *Guide to the Study of Shan*. W. W. Cochrane, "A Guide to the Study of Shan, by Major F. Bigg-Wither," *JBRS* 2:1 (1912): 107-112.

between them and amateur informants, who were 'less able to report on language, custom, diet and disease as a series of topics in any one culture [...] and to make social order as such intelligible'.<sup>32</sup> The missionary Rev. W. W. Cochrane was critical of amateur linguists in the BRS who attempted to write language guides without full and accurate knowledge of the subject, just because the colonial government offered them financial incentives to do so. Cochrane disparagingly described these men as 'Globe-trotters [...] who write of the character and customs of the people through whose country they quietly pass with a Kodak'.<sup>33</sup>

Another missionary, Rev. Dr O. Hanson, became well known as an expert on the Kachin Hills. Hanson's book *The Kachins: Their Customs and Traditions*<sup>34</sup> was considered in 1913 to be the standard work on the culture of the Kachin Hills. Largely a work of descriptive ethnography, it followed his article published a year earlier in 1912 in the *JBR*.<sup>35</sup> Hanson also used the *JBR* to criticise the work of fellow BRS members who ventured into his field of expertise, in particular Major C. M. Enriquez' book *A Burmese Arcady*.<sup>36</sup> A footnote in Hanson's review of Enriquez' book pointed out with some asperity that most of the information in the first chapter of *A Burmese Arcady* had been plagiarised from his own standard work on the Kachins without the necessary attribution. As a missionary, Hanson had very different objectives in mind when interacting with the Kachin people than Enriquez, who worked for the government as a recruiter for the Indian Army. According to Hanson, this meant that Enriquez' had written his book from a narrow military perspective, and it was not a 'historic or ethnologic study in explaining the peculiarities of a backward race'.<sup>37</sup> Although without professional training as an anthropologist, which would have enabled him to make more meaningful interpretations, Hanson's work as a missionary had allowed him to know Kachin social practices, customs and traditions at first hand. It was an important step in the professionalisation of anthropology and prefigured later changes by Malinowski and others, who advocated fieldwork as an essential part of the formal training for anthropology. However, the missionaries' work with people whose beliefs and customs differed from mainstream Burma also held the inherent danger of undermining the BRS' core Burmano-Buddhist values.

While these accounts remained essentially localised, disconnected from the wider national narrative and restricted by presumptions about the 'primitive Other', they posed no significant

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<sup>32</sup> Feuchtwang, "The Colonial Formation," 97.

<sup>33</sup> Cochrane, "A Guide," 108. Kodak was the brand name of an early camera popular with tourists.

<sup>34</sup> Ola Hanson, *The Kachin: Their Customs and Traditions* (Rangoon: A. B. M. Press, 1913).

<sup>35</sup> Ola Hanson, "The Origin of the Kachins," *JBR* 2:2 (1912): 204-213.

<sup>36</sup> Colin M. Enriquez, *A Burmese Arcady* (London,: Seeley Service & Co., 1923).

<sup>37</sup> Ola Hanson, "A Burmese Arcady, by Major C. M. Enriquez," *JBR* 12:3 (1922): 156-160.

threat to the cultural nationalist project at the heart of the BRS' ideological agenda as defined by its founding and key members. However, they were not unaware of the potential for disturbing this vision; indeed, J. S. Furnivall viewed attempts by missionaries to politicise the Karen peoples as detrimental to the cause of national unity and cultural cohesion, and consequently, unsympathetic to the BRS' mission. Furnivall's unpublished writings on these issues offer insights into some of the fundamental political motives of the BRS, which, even though not expressed publicly in the *JBRS*, connect him and other members of the Society with political events during the 1920s,<sup>38</sup> as discussed below.

Proselytising Christian Baptist missionaries introduced a global tradition of missionary praxis that equated progress and the civilising mission with that of Western Christianity, thereby laying the foundations for different racial groups to develop in isolation from mainstream Burma, which J. S. Furnivall and others in the BRS opposed.<sup>39</sup> In the 1920s, this was expressed politically in demands made by some groups – notably the Shan, but also by various Kachin elites – that they should be permitted to have autonomous political structures supported financially by the colonial state. It is in this context that the consolidation of the Scheduled and Excluded Areas<sup>40</sup> and the creation of the Federal Shan States occurred. Clearly, this kind of political fissure was antithetical to the desires of the leading cultural nationalists in the BRS, among them J. S. Furnivall. He considered that missionaries had exacerbated the problems associated with introducing social cohesion to Burma's population, one of his main aims for the BRS. In his writings on the Karen, he believed that missionary practices fostered a spirit of communitarianism amongst the Karen communities and he criticised the Baptist missionaries, who he said:

Taught their converts much more than was included in text books and the pupils got more out of them than diplomas. While Western education was breaking down the Burmese social order, it was building up a new Karen society. Unfortunately the missionaries imbued this new Karen society with a spirit of hostility towards the people among whom they had to live.<sup>41</sup>

Furnivall considered that the problems of divisions between the Karens and the Burmese dated from the Montagu announcement in the House of Commons, when on 21 August 1917, the British Government announced their intention to adopt 'the progressive realisation of responsible

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<sup>38</sup> John S. Furnivall, "The Karens," notes from an unpublished chapter on the Karens (undated), PPMS 23, Box 11, File 44, 54-55, SOAS Archives, London.

<sup>39</sup> See page 13 below.

<sup>40</sup> Excluded Areas, also known as Ministerial Burma, mentioned earlier.

<sup>41</sup> Furnivall, "The Karens," 54-55.

government within the Empire as the goal of British policy in India.<sup>42</sup> He was critical of colonial policies that eroded the Buddhist social order and he saw the economic and educational opportunities offered by Baptist missionaries as providing ‘pathways for Karen advancement outside of the Burmese Buddhist tradition [...] creating space for an alternative Karen national consciousness’.<sup>43</sup> In his view, by fostering Karen literate networks the Christian missions embedded the roots of ‘ethnicism’, thereby giving rise to a plural society.<sup>44</sup> When the Whyte Committee was debating the problems of constitutional reform in 1921,<sup>45</sup> encouraged by the missionaries, the Karens presented their demands for separate representation on the Legislative Council, even though many of them were Buddhists.<sup>46</sup> At this time, communal representation for the Karens was strongly opposed by the Burmese and Arakanese, among them leading members of the BRS like U May Oung and U Shwe Zan Aung,<sup>47</sup> who in company with Furnivall, Pe Maung Tin and Gordon Luce were focused on promoting Burmano-Buddhist hegemony as the basis for Burma’s national cultural identity.

We can see therefore how Furnivall in particular made no secret of his belief that ‘erroneous’ privileging of the distinctiveness of Burma’s non-Bamar and non-Buddhist communities presented a threat to the BRS’ vision of unified cultural nationalism. However, this posed a problem, as not only did the BRS claim to represent all forms of knowledge about Burma but, as the Burma Administration extended its authority throughout the country, the demands of modern governmentality required increasingly accurate linguistic and ethnological information, which in the absence of other sources they looked to the BRS to supply. It is under these circumstances that Leslie Taylor became involved in fulfilling this requirement, by conducting a Linguistic and Ethnographical Survey. The attitude of the core BRS elite to this endeavour reveals much about the ways internal boundaries in knowledge production functioned in the Society; as the political stakes grew exponentially, internal boundaries presented barriers that increasingly could not be breached.

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<sup>42</sup> Furnivall, “The Karens,” 39.

<sup>43</sup> John S. Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice: A Comparative Study of Burma and Netherlands India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948), 104, 392, 398-99, in William B. Womack, “Literate Networks and the Production of Sgaw and Pwo Karen Writing in Burma, c. 1830-1930” (PhD diss., SOAS, 2005), 29-30.

<sup>44</sup> Womack, “Literate Networks,” 29, 40. See also Mikael Gravers, “The Karen: Making of a Nation,” in *Asian Forms of the Nation*, eds. Hans Antlöv and Stein Tønnesson (Richmond: Curzon, 1999), 327-264.

<sup>45</sup> Committee set in 1921 under Sir Frederick Whyte in connection with the Burma Reform Scheme, initiated by the “Montagu-Chelmsford Report” prepared in 1918. See also San C. Po, *Burma and the Karens* (London: Elliot Stock, 1928).

<sup>46</sup> Furnivall, “The Karens,” 41.

<sup>47</sup> Po, *Burma*, 9.

Such a situation reveals the innate power of the inner core of the BRS and its increasing involvement with the research and academic agenda developing within Rangoon University. Its fundamental Burmano-Buddhist ideological assumptions created hierarchies of knowledge production within a scholarly society, which in other respects was a vital and unique boundary-crossing space for intellectual engagement between colonised and coloniser.

### **The Ethnographic and Linguistic Survey of Burma: An Unfulfilled Opportunity**

In his survey of the history of anthropology in Burma, U Chit Hlaing has raised:

The puzzling question why there was no extension from the Ethnological Survey of India – a colonial government establishment, arguably the first ever professional institutionalisation of anthropology as such – into Burma as part of the Indian Empire.<sup>48</sup>

Apart from accounts appended to the Census of India in 1911, 1921 and 1931, U Chit Hlaing has also wondered why ‘the provincial governments of Burma, until 1936 a part of the Indian Empire, did not continue the work of those in India, where officers were seconded to study and write monographs upon the peoples in their jurisdiction’.<sup>49</sup> U Chit Hlaing considered that some of the answers may be found in Burma’s marginal status within the Indian empire, as a sort of ‘amorphous appendage.’<sup>50</sup> Although this may be a partial answer to the question, lack of other expertise as well as funding for survey projects in Burma – including the Archaeological Survey – meant that the Burma government turned to the BRS to support its requirements for knowledge of this kind. When Sir Charles Morgan Webb ICS, in his capacity as Secretary to the Government of Burma, wrote to the Secretary of the Government of India’s Department of Education in September 1914, with a request for further funds to extend subsequent operations of the Survey of India to Burma, he cited the importance since 1911 of ‘the valuable linguistic and philological studies made by members of the Burma Research Society and published in the Society’s Journal.’<sup>51</sup> In his request, Morgan Webb listed the relevant publications in the *JBRS*, which he stated:

Indicate that the need for a Linguistic Survey of the province is so great that important steps to this end are being taken by enthusiastic members of a *quasi*-public society. They certainly

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<sup>48</sup> U Chit Hlaing, “Anthropological Communities of Interpretation for Burma: An Overview,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 39:2 (2008): 241.

<sup>49</sup> Hlaing, “Anthropological Communities,” 241.

<sup>50</sup> Hlaing, “Anthropological Communities,” 241.

<sup>51</sup> C. Morgan Webb Sec. to Govt. of Burma to Sec. to Govt. of India Dept. of Education: The Need for a Survey, Rangoon, 21<sup>st</sup> Sept. 1914, MSS Eur. E 223/221, Letter 795-W-4, 3, British Library, London.

demonstrate that the survey can no longer be postponed merely for lack of initial knowledge.<sup>52</sup>

As his request for further funds was denied,<sup>53</sup> Morgan Webb turned to the BRS for help in supplying the necessary expertise and man power in order to carry out a survey in Burma, and he addressed the BRS with the object of examining whether, based on the Burma Census Report for 1911, conditions in the Province had changed.<sup>54</sup> More importantly, he wished to discuss the feasibility of extending the Survey to Burma with the Society's cooperation. He concluded that not only had conditions changed as further areas of Burma had come under government supervision and administration, but also that the successful accomplishment of the first two stages of a linguistic survey for Burma would now be greatly enhanced by the existence of the BRS. By stating that 'the Society is already, on its own initiative, undertaking tasks very much on the lines the survey would progress', Morgan Webb conflated the BRS' previous *ad hoc* efforts of producing articles on ethnography with the ability to become involved in producing a Survey. However, he did concede that the Society 'has not the resources to carry out unaided the gigantic task which is herein suggested.'<sup>55</sup> He continued:

Speaking from a purely personal point of view, as member of the Society, I think that it would be pleased to place its resources at the disposal of Government and take an active share in a task which would involve so high a degree of research [...] The co-operation of the Society would ensure that the investigations would not degenerate into a formal routine, reluctantly performed by an official in addition to his own duties, selected because he happened to be the only officer available on the spot.<sup>56</sup>

Although claiming to speak from a purely personal point of view as member of the BRS, Morgan Webb's use of his public office as Secretary to the Government of Burma emphasises once again the complexity of the networks and the potential for conflict that existed between the BRS and the inner circle of the ruling colonial elite in the Burma Administration. As a *quasi*-public society the BRS was seen as a repository of various sources of knowledge from which diverse groups might expect to derive benefit. It was under these circumstances, after the Government of India's refusal to supply the necessary funds and manpower to extend the linguistic and ethnographic survey to Burma, that one of the BRS' own members took up the challenge by aspiring to emulate Grierson's *magnum opus*

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<sup>52</sup> Morgan Webb, "The Linguistic Survey of Burma," 86.

<sup>53</sup> Secretary to the Govt. of Burma to the Secretary to the Govt. of India Dept. of Education, Rangoon, 24<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1920, quoting letter of 3<sup>rd</sup> Dec. 1914, MSS. Eur. E 223/221, Letter 728-V.-11, 3, British Library, London.

<sup>54</sup> Burma was annexed on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1886 as a Province of the Britain's Indian Empire after the 3<sup>rd</sup> Burma War in 1885. It remained a Province until separation from India as a Crown Colony in 1937.

<sup>55</sup> Morgan Webb, "The Linguistic Survey of Burma," 90-91.

<sup>56</sup> Morgan Webb, "The Linguistic Survey of Burma," 90-91.

for India. Because Burma was without its own official linguistic or ethnographic survey,<sup>57</sup> this omission was considered to have made a noticeable impact upon the conduct of the Census Operations for Burma in 1911, and it was therefore resolved to undertake one before the next Census in 1921.<sup>58</sup> Having given such bold assurances about the BRS to his superiors in Calcutta, Morgan Webb was no doubt anxious to maintain his own professional credibility and get a survey under way, even though it had no official funding or approval. He found in Leslie Taylor a willing ally for the task.

Just as Morgan Webb had assumed, it might well have been anticipated that because of its stated mission to represent knowledge about the whole of Burma, the BRS would have been just the right kind of organisation to carry out a survey. Leslie Fernandes Taylor IES devoted his life's work to producing a Linguistic and Ethnographic Survey for Burma at no small personal and financial cost to himself, as he battled the Burma Government and Rangoon University for recognition and assistance with his work. In the early 1920s, Taylor turned to the Burma Research Society and its members not only to publicise his work through the *Journal*, but also to recruit the Society's members to assist him in collecting materials. However, as the following account of Taylor's trials and tribulations reveals, vested interests and networks operated behind the scenes to militate against a successful outcome. As mentioned, three prominent members of the BRS, namely J. S. Furnivall, Gordon Luce and Pe Maung Tin, who also held positions at Rangoon University, were able to use their influence to ensure that Taylor's survey was not accomplished. This demonstrates the extent of the personal influence that these key members were able to wield in order to prevent the possible advancement of alternative pathways of national consciousness that Taylor's survey might open. It demonstrates that the BRS was part of a network concerned with the production of knowledge that was far more complex than one which simply divided colonised and coloniser. This leads to the question that if the Burma Research Society was genuinely dedicated to advancing and authenticating knowledge about Burma, why did the Society as a whole not do more to support Taylor? Why was Taylor dismissed from Government service and why did Rangoon University dispense with Taylor's services working on the Linguistic Survey, which he had offered to continue on a greatly reduced salary after six years' employment as a researcher?<sup>59</sup> Many of these questions will have to remain unanswered because of the lack of sources. As late as 1956, Taylor's anger and frustration at his treatment by the colonial

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<sup>57</sup> The Linguistic Survey of India was conducted between 1894 and 1928 by Sir George Grierson as a comprehensive survey of the languages of British India, describing some 364 languages and dialects.

<sup>58</sup> Morgan Webb to Sec. to Govt. of India Dept., 3.

<sup>59</sup> L. F. Taylor to B. Heald, Vice Chancellor, Rangoon University, 18<sup>th</sup> March 1932, MSS Eur E 223/221, Letter L.S.B/1846, British Library, London.

Government and Rangoon University, who had withdrawn their support for his project in the early 1930s, was demonstrated in an article in the *JBRS*, which stated:

As a result of this rather fascist decree forbidding me to use my leisure time in my own way upon scientific and useful work and having regard to the importance of the Survey I decided reluctantly to retire on a proportionate pension to save and continue the work, hoping to secure financial assistance from elsewhere.<sup>60</sup>

As noted previously, there is a scarcity of sources about the outcomes of Taylor's Survey, and certainly no reference is made in the *JBRS* to the personal problems that occurred, particularly by Furnivall and his BRS colleagues. Information has been gleaned from secondary sources, notably from the correspondence between Taylor and Sir George Grierson<sup>61</sup>.

Taylor had originally made Sir George Grierson's acquaintance through undertaking to provide him with transcriptions of gramophone recordings of thirty languages of Burma, collected from native speakers during the 1920s in Rangoon. Grierson, it seems, became something of an unofficial 'go-between' in the many twists and turns of the fortunes of Burma's Linguistic and Ethnographic Survey, corresponding with the various parties involved, but all the while maintaining loyalty to Taylor and praising the quality of his work. Beginning in 1921, Taylor conducted a lengthy correspondence with Grierson lasting more than two decades, in which he discussed the many trials and setbacks that he had encountered in Burma whilst attempting to complete his survey. As Grierson pointed out to Taylor in 1932, when he asked him to support his refusal to publish his material before it was ready, 'Yours is a one-man job you are apparently doing all the collecting of material yourself. On the other hand mine was a thousand man job in which my material was collected for me by officials scattered all over India.'<sup>62</sup> Grierson's comparison of the work involved in accomplishing the Survey of India with Taylor's attempt in Burma summarises attitudes prevalent at that time, and supports U Chit Hlaing's observations on Burma's marginal status within the Indian empire as a sort of 'amorphous appendage.'<sup>63</sup> It also reiterates the failure of the BRS' elite to effectively support Taylor's efforts.

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<sup>60</sup> Leslie F. Taylor, "Account of the Ethnographical and Linguistic Survey of Burma," *JBRS* 39:2 (1956): 5.

<sup>61</sup> See Sir George Grierson's Papers, containing his correspondence with Taylor from 1921- 1938, IOR MSS Eur E223/327 and MSS Eur E223/328, British Library, London.

<sup>62</sup> Report No. 1834-S from Kalaw for the Information and Kind Consideration of H.E The Governor of Burma, 17<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1931, IOR MSS Eur E223/327, British Library, London.

<sup>63</sup> Hlaing, "Anthropological Communities," 241.

However, things started more promisingly. Soon after he arrived in Burma in 1915, Taylor joined the BRS, quickly rising to a position as an executive officer on the committee. He lost no time in making use of the networking opportunities that it provided. He turned to the Society not only to publicise his work through articles in the *Journal*, but also to recruit the Society's members to assist him in collecting material for his Ethnographic and Linguistic Survey of Burma. In his appeal to BRS members, Taylor particularly sought the help and participation of 'those who live in the jungles or on the mountains and who occasionally find time hanging heavily over them.'<sup>64</sup> He explained that their help in filling in questionnaires would enable him to classify the remote peoples according to their racial descent. He asked for the BRS members' help in sending in abstracts of books and other information through correspondence, and he intimated that questionnaires could be sent out to members in all parts of the country and the answers compared, edited and united in order to gather an ever-growing body of information.<sup>65</sup> Here we may recall that in his inaugural address in 1910, U May Oung had requested that all members throughout Burma submit memorable incidents and record anything of significance.<sup>66</sup> However, this held the possibility of unleashing apparently trivial but highly problematic and heterogeneous histories. Taylor's request carried even greater potential for disruption, because he asked specifically for information on race.

Despite obtaining help from some two hundred members, some of the Society's most influential members, as well as Rangoon University were not in accord with Taylor's ambitions, even though the quality of his scholarship was never in question. In fact Otto Blagden,<sup>67</sup> who had inspected Taylor's work in London, reported that 'It is possible indeed that Mr Taylor has done more original investigation and recorded more materials than any other worker before him has done within such a limited time.'<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, the depth of feeling against Taylor by the BRS' inner circle was recorded in a letter from Gordon Luce to Blagden,<sup>69</sup> written after Taylor had returned to Europe in 1932. Luce referred to Taylor as 'a very ugly customer,'<sup>70</sup> and maintained that although the University had been subject to financial restraint, they had wanted to see the Survey through, but they distrusted Taylor and his motives:

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<sup>64</sup> Leslie F. Taylor, *The Ethnological and Linguistic Survey of Burma: An Account of its Institution and Progress Together with Proposals for its Completion* (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons Ltd, 1948), 11.

<sup>65</sup> Taylor, *The Survey*, 11.

<sup>66</sup> Oung, "Inaugural Address," 5.

<sup>67</sup> Otto Blagden was Reader in Malay at the School of Oriental Studies, founded in London at Finsbury Circus in 1917, and was a corresponding member of the BRS.

<sup>68</sup> Taylor, *The Survey*, 16.

<sup>69</sup> Gordon Luce to Otto Blagden, University College Rangoon, 25<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1932, Papers of Otto Blagden, MS 360895/3, SOAS Archive, London.

<sup>70</sup> Luce to Blagden, 1932.

At the back of the minds of many of us, I fear, is a grave distrust and suspicion of Taylor and all his works. We know him now to be unscrupulous and unprincipled - in fact scholarship apart, a thoroughly bad lot; and if we found him so when he was working in our midst in Burma, how little can we trust him at a distance of 8,000 miles?<sup>71</sup>

This unusually strong expression of personal dislike<sup>72</sup> for Taylor emphasises his outsider status, excluded from and distrusted by those in the inner circle of the BRS, among them his fellow countrymen, despite its claims to be a boundary-crossing organisation open to all. Luce<sup>73</sup> and his close colleagues were suspicious of Taylor's motives in conducting potentially disruptive enquiries into Burma's many races and their languages. There are at present no other known sources available that could otherwise explain this strong personal dislike of Taylor. Nevertheless, in 1918 the local Government of Burma appointed Taylor to be Deputy Superintendent of Census Operations in Burma for the proposed Census of 1921 and also to conduct the second stage of the Linguistic Survey for Burma. According to Taylor, a first stage of the Linguistic Survey had been completed earlier by the Local Government and in 1918 he put forward a proposal to the Local Government making a powerful case for a full Linguistic Survey for Burma, in conjunction with an Ethnological Survey. Taylor urged that 'Many of the languages and dialects of Burma are on the verge of extinction. They will pass away with the lives of the few old men who can still remember them.'<sup>74</sup>

As mentioned, earlier in 1922, Taylor delivered an important address to the BRS, in which he publicly outlined his objectives for the survey that opposed the BRS' core ideology; namely, he wished to redress the imbalance occasioned by privileging a Burmano-Buddhist ethnic and linguistic identity. Taylor's Survey introduced the potential for further rupture within society in Burma later described by Furnivall as:

already splintered among the Burmese, Europeans, Indians, and Chinese. Only Burmese nationalism was capable of rebuilding human bonds among people, of enabling them to

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<sup>71</sup> Luce to Blagden, 1932.

<sup>72</sup> Despite the intemperate language used by Luce to voice his and BRS colleagues' opinion of Taylor, there is at present no clear reason why Taylor should have been called 'unscrupulous and unprincipled.' It is hoped that future research will uncover further motives to explain this animosity.

<sup>73</sup> G. H. Luce, *History of Service*, IOR V/12/408, 590-591, British Library, London. Gordon Luce himself had no love for the Burma Government, having been passed over in 1919 for the Chair in English at the newly formed Rangoon University because of his 'Burmanisation' (i.e. his marriage to a Burmese woman). In 1921 he sent a "Memorial" in protest to the Governor General in Calcutta. After study leave in Europe from July 1921-May 1922, he returned to Rangoon when his friend D. G. E. Hall recommended to the Senate that he be awarded a Professorship of Far Eastern History.

<sup>74</sup> Leslie F. Taylor, *Note on the proposed Linguistic Survey of Burma, 1919*, IOR/V/27/920/24, 2, British Library, London.

once again create a common social will, paving the way for Burma to enter the modern world on its own terms.<sup>75</sup>

Following an opening review of the greater progress made by other countries in Southeast Asia in this field, leaving Burma in danger of being left behind, Taylor's address urged upon the Society's members the necessity of studying the language, culture and physical appearance of indigenous people in Burma before attempting classification.<sup>76</sup> Taylor called for a better knowledge of ethnology which would benefit statesmen; he believed that the scientist of the twenty-first century would be grateful for all that had been saved and recorded, which he feared was dying out as a result of the increasing influence of a Burmese-Buddhist influence.<sup>77</sup> Of crucial importance on this occasion was the way that Taylor described his perception of how historically the Burmans had achieved overall political domination of the other minorities and his belief that regional and indigenous identities had been submerged by a process of 'Burmanisation'.<sup>78</sup>

Because there was still a continuing problem with obtaining funding for the Linguistic and Ethnological Survey, in January 1923 Taylor welcomed the opportunity of an initial two-year appointment as a Research Lecturer in Indo-Chinese Ethnology and Linguistics at Rangoon University as the only means of getting his Survey started.<sup>79</sup> Although Taylor finally managed to get his Linguistic Survey off the ground at the end of 1924, the years from 1925 to 1930 represented a roller coaster of triumphs and disasters for Taylor as he struggled to convince the Government and the University authorities not only that they should grant further extensions for his work, but also of its value and his own competence to undertake it. He gained reprieves for his Survey due to the intervention of Grierson in a private capacity through correspondence, as well as letters of recommendation to the Burma Government from the Council of the Royal Anthropological Institute and the Cambridge Board of Anthropological Studies. Whilst it would appear that Taylor's difficulties in obtaining continued support for his Survey had little directly to do with the BRS, in the end Taylor's downfall was authored by three of the Society's most powerful and prominent members, Messrs Furnivall, Pe Maung Tin and Luce, acting in their capacity as members of a Committee appointed by Rangoon University to control and supervise Taylor's work.

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<sup>75</sup> John S. Furnivall, in Julie Pham, "J. S. Furnivall and Fabianism: Reinterpreting the 'Plural Society' in Burma," *Modern Asian Studies* 39:2 (2005): 322.

<sup>76</sup> Taylor, "Linguistic Research," 1-13.

<sup>77</sup> Taylor, "Linguistic Research," 10.

<sup>78</sup> See Taylor's quotation at the beginning of this paper.

<sup>79</sup> Taylor to Grierson, 31<sup>st</sup> July 1922, Papers of Sir George Grierson, IOR MSS Eur. E223/327, Letter L.S 300, British Library, London.

The nucleus of Taylor's troubles lay in his inability to get on with this Committee, one of whom had described him as 'a very ugly customer';<sup>80</sup> although, as previously stated, there is no clear explanation at present for this strong, highly personalised dislike of Taylor. However, it should be remembered that two hundred other BRS members did help Taylor and contributed to the Survey by completing his questionnaires. Therefore, this emphasises once again the clear divisions between a small clique at the heart of the Society and the wider membership. Nowhere else was this more evident than the actions taken by them as members of the University Committee. Although composed of five members, two were not active and never attended meetings - the University Principal, Mr Sloss, who had never examined Taylor's work and Mr Charles Duroiselle, who lived in Mandalay and rarely attended meetings, perhaps because he could not afford the train fare.<sup>81</sup> That left the three active members of the committee, Furnivall, Luce and Pe Maung Tin, who did turn up to the meetings and who were the driving force behind the Government's ultimatum to Taylor.

The committee exerted pressure on Taylor to publish the results of his work, leading to a crisis when he refused to comply and pointed out to them that 'the publication of unrevised scientific work was a crime.'<sup>82</sup> Taylor considered these three to be ignorant of the nature of his work, and claimed that they were pushing him to commit the 'unpardonable mistake' of publishing scientific work before it was ready.<sup>83</sup> However, Taylor's assertion that they were ignorant of the nature of his work simply does not hold true. Furnivall had spent over twenty years as an ICS officer concerned with land surveys, and had risen to the senior position of Commissioner. Luce had spent a lifetime deciphering old inscriptions and was extremely knowledgeable in the old languages of Burma. Pe Maung Tin was reported by Taylor to have told him to publish his work 'even if it was of a poor quality and could not be made to see the falsity of his opinion.'<sup>84</sup> Although the Committee's demand to Taylor to publish his work appears contradictory to their objectives of ensuring that his Survey did not destabilise the dominant Burmano-Buddhist hegemony, it was in fact a hollow ultimatum designed to ensure the termination of his work. We may recall here the words of Sir George Grierson, who told Taylor 'Yours is a one-man job [...] on the other hand mine was a

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<sup>80</sup> Luce to Blagden, 1932.

<sup>81</sup> Maurice Collis, *Into Hidden Burma* (London: Faber, 1953), 53. A fellow BRS member, the author Maurice Collis, had remarked on Duroiselle's wretched government salary, meaning that doubtless he could not afford to attend Committee meetings.

<sup>82</sup> Letter No.1797 Orgl. Taylor to Grierson, Kalaw, 20<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1929, Papers of Sir George Grierson, MSS Eur. E223/327, British Library, London.

<sup>83</sup> Taylor to Grierson, 1929.

<sup>84</sup> Report No. 1834-S.

thousand-man job.’<sup>85</sup> By exerting pressure on Taylor to publish his work, the Committee was safe in the knowledge that it was beyond the physical and mental capacity of one man alone to bring the Survey to fruition. Furthermore, as we shall see below, Grierson had unwittingly provided them with the necessary ‘ammunition’ for his dismissal by telling one of their ICS colleagues that Taylor had been tardy in completing work for him.

Eventually, in 1930, on the recommendation of the Committee, Taylor was given an ultimatum by the Burma Government to return to his work as an Inspector of Schools, in which case he was forbidden to use his leisure time on the Survey or to resign from the IES and continue it privately at his own expense. After this dispute, Furnivall, Luce and Pe Maung Tin resigned from the Committee and therefore were not present at a final meeting, so that Taylor could not challenge their recommendation to dismiss him; furthermore, their resignations were not recorded in the minutes. Taylor later described the Burma Government’s ultimatum and by inference Committee members Furnivall, Luce and Pe Maung Tin as ‘fascist’.<sup>86</sup>

By the end of 1930, Taylor had left Rangoon and was resident in the Shan States at Kalaw. In despair, on 12<sup>th</sup> November 1930, Taylor sent a sad and impassioned telegram from Kalaw to Grierson imploring his help.<sup>87</sup> In February 1931, Taylor submitted a long report concerning his difficulties to the Governor of Burma, Sir Charles Innes, in which he revealed that the University had initially wanted to take over his Survey. Taylor’s refusal on the grounds that he had invested so much of his own time and money into it is an indication of his reluctance to hand over research that he believed had been initiated for government purposes. ‘I now see,’ wrote Taylor to the Governor, ‘that the whole matter may have been used against me without my knowledge and without giving

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<sup>85</sup> Report No. 1834-S.

<sup>86</sup> Taylor, “Account,” 5

<sup>87</sup> Telegram No. 0513 from L. F. Taylor to Sir George Grierson sent by Imperial International Communications Limited on 12<sup>th</sup> November 1930 from Kalaw in the Shan States, Papers of Sir George Grierson, IOR MSS EUR 223/327, British Library, London: ‘Requested by the Government to choose between returning to duty as Inspector of Schools and closing down the Survey or resigning Government service and continuing Survey privately have accepted latter alternative to save Survey Stop Committee appointed two years ago with members ignorant of Survey work to control me led to disputes and trouble especially on premature publication Stop Government’s offer based on doubt of value of my work without even inspecting it Stop Have cabled Sir Charles Innes Governor of Burma now in London to consult you about my work Stop Please emphasise that sanction for Survey for two years at time only prevents complete and consistent scheme Stop If Survey started by Government it should be sanctioned for fifteen years Stop Please help me Stop I guarantee that later work is better than earlier work which you inspected Stop Taylor Kalaw Burma.’

me the opportunity of presenting my own side of the question.’<sup>88</sup> Taylor also petitioned the Governor for the right to make a public appeal for funds as a private citizen.<sup>89</sup>

In a letter dated 17<sup>th</sup> January 1931, the Secretary to the Government of Burma in the Educational Department informed Grierson that: ‘Mr Taylor had been allowed to retire from the service of the Government and that the Local Government would therefore have no more concern with his work, and is unable to undertake the publication of any transcriptions that may be prepared in future.’<sup>90</sup> Despite waiting fruitlessly for the gramophone transcriptions for many years, Grierson refused to use his influence to put pressure on Taylor to comply with subsequent requests from Rangoon University to make over his materials to them, together with any transcriptions that he had made of the gramophone recordings. In his reply, Grierson informed the Vice Chancellor that ‘It is true that with inexhaustible kindness he has given me great help on several occasions in regard to the languages of Burma, but for several years my chief requests to him have been for one thing only - the speedy preparation of these gramophone transcriptions - and you know the result.’<sup>91</sup> Some ten years later, in June 1938, when Taylor was living in Gibraltar, Grierson was still receiving Taylor’s excuses about the delays in completing them.<sup>92</sup> Soon afterwards, Taylor was called up for active service in the Navy during the Second World War. The Survey was never completed and Rangoon University never succeeded in acquiring Taylor’s materials. After his enforced retirement, Taylor had left Burma in 1932, taking his allegedly vast archive of material<sup>93</sup> with him. It is now apparently lost; last heard of, according to Taylor, locked in storage in Gibraltar.<sup>94</sup>

Questions at the beginning of this section asked why Rangoon University dispensed with Taylor’s services - doubtless because he refused to make over his materials to them - and also why Taylor was dismissed from Government service. Whilst not directly dismissed, Taylor’s position in the IES was made intolerable as he was forbidden from using his leisure time to pursue the Survey and, because the privilege of staying free-of-charge in *dak* bungalows was withdrawn, he was no longer able to afford to make the field trips vital to carrying out his survey work. The modern term

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<sup>88</sup> Report No. 1834-S.

<sup>89</sup> Report No. 1834-S.

<sup>90</sup> Sir George Grierson to The Hon. Sir Benjamin Heald, Vice Chancellor of the University of Rangoon, 26<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1932, MSS Eur. E223/221, British Library, London.

<sup>91</sup> Grierson to Heald.

<sup>92</sup> Letter 2039/G.S., 1<sup>st</sup> June 1938, Gibraltar, MSS Eur. E223/221, British Library, London.

<sup>93</sup> Taylor alleged that he had collected specimens amounting to 1,200 words of vocabulary and 500 phrases of some 60 languages, and in addition, a great deal of more fragmentary material collected for him by others as well as an enormous amount of ethnographical material. See Taylor to Heald, 1932.

<sup>94</sup> Taylor, *Survey*.

for such measures is known as ‘constructive dismissal’. It was achieved through the influence of Furnivall, Luce and Pe Maung Tin, who, as insiders in Burma’s colonial establishment, used their connections with C. W. Dunn, an ICS colleague and a close friend of Furnivall’s,<sup>95</sup> to gain the necessary information to use against Taylor and to ensure his dismissal.

Whilst on leave, Dunn visited Sir George Grierson at his home in Camberley on 17<sup>th</sup> March 1928, when Grierson somewhat naively revealed details of Taylor’s tardiness in producing the aforementioned gramophone transcriptions. Evidence of Dunn’s visit was found in a number of handwritten confidential letters exchanged between Dunn and Grierson, to whom Dunn introduced himself as ‘having been appointed a member of a Committee to advise the Government of Burma concerning the work of Mr E. (sic) L. Taylor of the Indian Educational Service, who holds a temporary appointment for studying the languages of Burma and making an “ethnographical survey.”’<sup>96</sup> There is no reference in any of the sources to Dunn being a member of this Committee. Conveniently amalgamating his ICS and BRS roles, Dunn told Grierson that he was ‘extremely ignorant of the aims of Mr Taylor’s work’ and that he would like his advice.<sup>97</sup> He continued:

The government of Burma is, I think, not clear what object, which can be regarded as a benefit to Burma (and particularly to *Burmese nationalism*<sup>98</sup>) and expenditure on which can be defended against criticism in the Legislative Council is likely to be achieved by Mr Taylor’s employment.<sup>99</sup>

Although in subsequent correspondence Dunn agreed to cancel any reference to the gramophone recordings, Grierson had unwittingly provided Dunn with information that the Committee could use in order to have Taylor dismissed because of his failure to publish his work in a timely manner.<sup>100</sup> Even though Dunn’s enquiries purported to have been made on behalf of the Burma Government, it seems clear that they were made primarily on behalf of his friends in the BRS, who were seeking information that they might use to discredit Taylor. The correspondence between

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<sup>95</sup> See Furnivall’s Archive PP23 at SOAS, the first three folders of which contain many letters written to Dunn after Furnivall returned to Burma post-Independence. Dunn had by that time retired to England and was engaged at SOAS working on the Burmese-English dictionary with J. A. Stewart ICS, another ICS Officer and member of the Fabian Society.

<sup>96</sup> C. W. Dunn to Sir G. G. Milton, Cambridge, 13<sup>th</sup> March 1928, MSS Eur. E 223/221, Letter 158, British Library, London.

<sup>97</sup> Dunn to Milton, 158.

<sup>98</sup> Author’s italics.

<sup>99</sup> Dunn to Milton, 158.

<sup>100</sup> C. W. Dunn to Sir G. G. Milton, 29<sup>th</sup> March 1928, MSS Eur. E 223/221, Letter 162, British Library, London.

Dunn and Grierson ended with a letter from Grierson insisting that he had a very high regard for Taylor's work and his competence to carry it out and assuring Dunn that:

I would hardly put it that I was unable to assure you that Mr Taylor was a man who would finish his work. That would be putting it rather too strongly. My own doubt was based on what has occurred in regard to the transcriptions of gramophone records. In regard to these, in the face of larger inducements of the linguistic survey of Burma of which he had just been put in charge he cooled off.<sup>101</sup>

After it was all over, Taylor wrote to Grierson saying that 'someday the University of Rangoon and the local Government will be thoroughly ashamed of the parts they have played. I shall make the Survey a complete success and then I shall be in a very strong position to humble both of them.'<sup>102</sup> Even though ostracised by the colonial establishment, after he left Burma, Taylor kept up his correspondence with Sir George Grierson, who, whilst never actively or officially intervening on Taylor's behalf, always provided a sympathetic response to Taylor's letters. Grierson frequently obliged with the necessary references and recommendations to various institutions from whom Taylor sought funding in order to continue his Survey.<sup>103</sup> In 1948, Taylor published a small pamphlet, printed in England by the Cambridge firm of printers W. Heffer, in which he outlined his struggles over the decades to obtain the funding which he required. He also claimed in his pamphlet to have the largest private collection of books on Burma ever assembled, a collection that contained an immense quantity of information about Burma's ethnology and linguistics, and in manuscript all the materials related to his Survey.<sup>104</sup> Having been repudiated by the colonial government and never taken up by Rangoon University, nothing further was ever heard of Taylor's Survey, with the result that all his allegedly vast archive of work has apparently now been lost forever. If this archive ever existed and were it ever to come to light, it would not only posthumously vindicate Taylor, but would also provide an important picture of the linguistic and ethnological composition of late colonial Burma as it stood in the years preceding Independence. However, it would be prudent to exercise a certain caution over its alleged size and content. The fact remains that although Taylor's

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<sup>101</sup> Sir G. G. Milton to C. W. Dunn, 21<sup>st</sup> March 1928, MSS Eur. E 223/221, Letter 160, British Library, London.

<sup>102</sup> Taylor at Kalaw, 6<sup>th</sup> June 1931, MSS Eur. E 223/221, Letter 1840/G, British Library, London.

<sup>103</sup> In 1939 Taylor was awarded a Leverhulme Scholarship with sufficient funds to continue his Survey for two years. However, with the outbreak of World War II Taylor joined the Navy, and although he survived the war, there is no evidence that he took it up. After the war all trace of him disappears, except for a pamphlet, mentioned above, published in 1948 and his 1956 article in the *JBRS*. The date of his death is unknown and he may have died abroad. His last recorded residence (1948) was Charlestown, Nevis, British Virgin Islands.

<sup>104</sup> Taylor, *Survey*.

intentions were sincere, the project, for a variety of reasons outlined above, was never brought to fruition.

This case study has endeavoured to show that the BRS played a significant role in the development of anthropology at a time when perceptions about it were changing. Insofar as it concerned the BRS - a core group of influential members were intent on manipulating outcomes in order to maintain a distinct Burmano-Buddhist ideology. In pursuit of this aim, they demonstrated a willingness to exclude anyone who did not conform to this agenda, even though the information and research produced may have contributed to an appreciation of the way that indigenous minorities were understood in late colonial Burma. Although missionaries had greater authority in the *Journal*, due to their linguistic skills and knowledge gained from living close to their subjects for long periods, their missions were also viewed as fostering the roots of ethnicity and, therefore, inimical to the promotion of the values of a core Irrawaddy Valley polity. Furnivall and his BRS colleagues viewed missionaries' support for Karen communal representation under the Burma Reform Scheme ( at a time of increasing nationalist agitation) as likely to foster an alternative Karen national consciousness outside of the Burmese Buddhist tradition.<sup>105</sup> All of this presented challenges to the BRS' sense of political and cultural purpose in adhering to a Burmano-Buddhist hegemony. If these and other sub-national histories had the capacity to challenge this legacy, how much more challenging might Leslie Fernandes Taylor's excursions into Burma's 'untamed' borderlands have been?

The controversies over Taylor's aims, made explicit in his address to the BRS in 1922, reveal the complexities of hierarchies that reached beyond the BRS. Taylor viewed his survey as a means of redressing the inequality of the Buddhist-Burmano dominance and stemming the tide of 'Burmanisation'. His aims conflicted with those of others concerned with the production of colonial knowledge, particularly the upper echelons of the Society, represented by Furnivall and his colleagues, as well as with Rangoon University. By this time the University was the focus of increasing political agitation and recent student boycott. Furnivall and his colleagues viewed Burma's many ethnic and linguistic groups as presenting a political challenge to the fragile concept of Burma's national identity and a further risk to an already disintegrating 'plural society', which it had

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<sup>105</sup> Notwithstanding, there were also Karen Buddhists who set out to rediscover a Karen literature that was on a par with that of the Burmese and which fostered an image of Karen identity that was separate from foreign agency brought about by colonial policy and Christian missionaries. See Womack, "Literate Networks," 27, 44.

been Furnivall's purpose to inhibit when he co-founded the BRS in 1910.<sup>106</sup> In their view, this was of considerably greater importance than one man's attempt to conduct a linguistic and ethnographical survey.

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<sup>106</sup> John S. Furnivall, Report on the first regular settlement operation in the Myingyan District: Season 1909-1913, W 1241, 8, British Library, London.

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The first is the close meaning and the second is remote. Usually, the speaker or the writer aims at the remote meaning. Similarly, Al-Muraghi (2000:338) focuses on what he calls the "near" and "far" meanings of one single word used for pun. Scholars like Leech (1969:209), Newmark (1988) and Delabastida (1997) emphasize the homonymous and polysemous nature of words used in pun or word play. They mention the homonymous (different words having identical forms) nature of a word like bank, as in the bank of the river and the bank for money storing, and the polysemic (one word has many meanings) nature of a word like bank. With the introduction of Anglo-Norman French, Middle English words developed, exhibiting many characteristics of Modern English. One of the major distinguishing attributes of Middle English and Modern English is the Great Vowel Shift. This vowel shift focuses on a change in the pronunciation of the English long vowels (Turville-Petre, 29). For example the / e: / used in Canterbury Tales, mostly closely resembles the modern / e: /, the / i: / as in modern / i: /, and the / u: / as in modern / u: /, does present striking differences between Modern and Middle English.

## 2 Linguistic relativism until Whorf

### 2.1 The notion of language and thought in the Enlightenment

### 2.2 Hamann and Herder, the Romantic period

### 2.3 Humboldt's conception of linguistic relativism

### 2.4 Humboldt's influence on Boas, Sapir, and Whorf

### 2.5 Whorf's conception of linguistic relativism

#### 2.5.1 Introduction

#### 2.5.2 Ascribing the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis to

Â In the tradition of cognitive science, on the other hand, it is often assumed that certain universal categories underlie all human thought and researchers in this tradition thus seek to negate the principle of linguistic relativism, which would, when true, imply the existence of cross-cultural differences in thought.