Asian Journal of Peacebuilding Vol. 11 No. 1 (2023): 119-144
doi: 10.18588/202305.00a339 Special Issue – Research Article

Peace Studies in Myanmar: Interweaving Regional Geopolitics and Local Dynamics

Andrew Ong

This article surveys the trajectory of peace and conflict studies in Myanmar—from its early focus on civil war and insurgency, to state institutions and ethnic armed actors, and later broadening into relational and networked approaches covering formal peace processes, regional geopolitics, conflict economies, and everyday peacebuilding. It suggests that the widening of peace and conflict studies was brought about by the opening of the country from the early 2010s, which both granted scholars and researchers more access to the country and introduced new foreign specialists, discourses, and developmental actors into the political sphere. The peace agenda and directions of peace studies have been upended by the military coup of 2021; how reconciliation, justice, and federal democratic reform will look like in the future remains to be seen.

Keywords peace studies, conflict studies, civil war, Myanmar, peace processes

Introduction

The Myanmar military coup of February 2021 brought a devastating end to hopes of political and economic liberalization in the country, just as Myanmar was experiencing a decade of reform and opening. Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) party had just swept the 2020 General Elections, earning itself another term in power. It promised economic development, constitutional reform, and to lift more out of poverty through resource management, foreign investment, agriculture, and manufacturing. The coup dashed the aspirations of millions.

Yet, this seismic political shift occurred amidst a backdrop of sustained state violence and widespread disorder—most starkly the fallout of the Rohingya crisis of 2017, when Myanmar military forces were adjudged by the United Nations (UN) to have committed ethnic cleansing in northern Rakhine State, sparking the exodus of more than seven-hundred thousand refugees into neighboring

© 2023 The Institute for Peace and Unification Studies, Seoul National University
ISSN 2288-2693 Print, ISSN 2288-2707 Online

Bangladesh. It also occurred in the context of a flagging peace process, with stalled negotiations between the Myanmar government and twenty or so ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) over political dialogue and the implementation of a partial Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) signed in 2015. Armed conflict in Rakhine, Shan, Karen, and Kachin States culminated into hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Myanmar had seemingly been divided into three worlds prior to the coup. The first was the Bamar-dominated Delta and Dry Zone areas, which had seen economic and social progress since the transition toward more democratic governance beginning with President Thein Sein's reforms in 2011. Second was the ethnic minority peripheries and borderlands that remained plagued by decades of demands for autonomy, ongoing military skirmishes, and resource and environmental exploitation. The third was the world of the Rohingya people languishing in dire conditions in northern Rakhine State and across the border in Bangladesh.

In this context of intermittent armed conflict and sporadic outbreaks of mass violence throughout the country's history, peace can be understood largely in its negative sense: aspiring toward the absence of violent conflict. Peace studies in Myanmar can then be broadly thought of as work in the social sciences that explores violence, conflict, and attempts at its resolution or transformation. Only from the early 2010s, with the political transition and opening of Myanmar to foreign organizations and donor funding, has the notion of a formal and technical peace process and peace formation started to take hold in political discourse. Prior to that, peace studies existed largely as conflict studies of communist insurgency, ethnonationalist conflict, ceasefire politics, and authoritarian militarization. Since peace studies as a specific discipline is itself underdeveloped in Myanmar, with lesser scholarly emphasis on peacebuilding and conflict resolution and more focus on the histories, causes, and actors in violent conflict, this article draws on work in political science, history, anthropology, geography, and other interdisciplinary work. It adopts a broader, inclusive definition of peace studies, drawing together work that explores violence and conflict transformation from different angles.

This paper argues that where peace studies in Myanmar focused mainly on ethnic conflict and state and insurgent institutional actors prior to the early 2010s, it later broadened into more relational and networked approaches between 2011 and 2021, with heightened attention to formal peace processes, regional geopolitics, conflict economies, and everyday peacebuilding. This trajectory of peace studies was driven by two main reasons stemming from the opening and reforms of the transitional period of President Thein Sein's rule. First, the increased access for researchers and scholars to large populations and groups in the country. Second, the increased political and economic interconnectedness of Myanmar to the outside world, adding new influences and dependencies. In

addition, the social sciences began to more concertedly integrate global networks and regional relations into scholarly studies of peace and conflict. The trajectory of peace and conflict in Myanmar since 2010 has indeed been as much shaped by regional geopolitics (both US-China relations and the concomitant policy calibrations of Southeast Asian nations) as it has by local political dynamics. Yet the military coup of 2021 has now upended fundamental imaginaries of what peace might look like. Amid the chaos and upheaval of post-coup politics, Myanmar's future is one where peace in its multiple forms, across a variety of fora will need to be reworked and redefined.

This article divides the trajectory of peace studies into three periods, with two key events marking changes in the focus of scholarly work and literature. The first event was President Thein Sein's rise to power in 2011, who was seen in some circles as a reformer who loosened strict rules on censorship, allowed political activity and freer elections, and improved relations with the international community. Foreign embassies, multinational companies, private and state-owned investment, non-governmental organizations, and scholars were able to visit and live in Myanmar for extended periods of time. This opening also brought with it increased capital, cultural, and geopolitical flows, processes which created new geographies (Van Schendel 2002). The second event is the 2021 military coup, which threatens to erase any diplomatic, economic, and political gains made by the country over the preceding decade. Consequently, this article looks at three periods in Myanmar peace studies: under authoritarian rule (1990-2011), during the transition period (2011-2021), and in the post-coup era (post-2021).

To illuminate shifts in the trajectory of peace studies, this study differentiates five levels at which peace and conflict in Myanmar have been studied. The levels necessarily overlap, and classification of any given writing or report into a given level is a matter of perspective. Naturally, emphasis on the different levels also ebbs and flows in response to particular regional or local events, or scholarly discourse. These levels are: (1) *the institutional actor level*, studies which examine particular conflict actors—ethnic minority groups, EAOs, the Myanmar government, and the Myanmar military; (2) *the national level*, where a distinctive set of political conversations about peace began to involve a formalized process where talks and negotiations convened stakeholders and garnered international technical support; (3) *the geopolitical level*, which examines regional influences on the decision-making and resources of subnational actors in Myanmar; (4) *the network level*, where political and economic concerns are interwoven through conflict economy concerns, or the links between resources, politics, and conflict; and (5) *the community level* of protecting human security, and peacebuilding through civil society and grassroots organizations, developing "everyday peace" from the ground up through social initiatives.

This study suggests that peace studies broadened from an overwhelming

focus on conflict dynamics (institutional actor level) prior to 2011, to studies of peace processes and reconciliation (national level), geopolitics (regional level), conflict economy (network level), and everyday peacebuilding (community level) after 2011. One way to track these shifts is by paying attention to topics that policy think-tanks like the International Crisis Group (ICG), Transnational Institute (TNI), or the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) commission for study. For instance, in 2009, the ICG published a report on "China's Myanmar Dilemma," reflecting a growing concern with Chinese influence in Myanmar and how its support of EAOs on its border had led to shifts in the calculations of the Myanmar military, government, and leadership of the EAOs (ICG 2009). The burgeoning of studies at any particular level (for instance, that of the community and grassroots level) also reflects the opening up of new political spaces and the entry of new players, in this case that of international development actors at the ethnic minority borderlands.

Peace Studies under Authoritarian Rule (1990-2011): Focus on Institutions and Actors

Peace and conflict literature in Myanmar began with little about peacebuilding or conflict resolution, it originated with extensive compilations of painstakingly researched documentary accounts of civil war in Burma. Access to the country was nearly impossible prior to the late-2000s, and a blurb on the cover of Smith's (1999) book explains this dearth of scholarship: "A landmark in Western writing on a hitherto inaccessible country." Broadly, the history of civil war in Burma mapped conflict from the chaos of the post-independence rebellions (1948-1962) to the emergence of a counterinsurgency against the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) (1962-1989), to the conflict between the Burmese state and increasingly organized ethnic insurgencies (1989 to the present).

Shortly after independence in 1948, the country was thrown into chaos as soldiers of the People's Volunteer Organization revolted, along with the Karen, Mon, and CPB armies. The unrest spread across the country and simmered throughout the 1950s. The Tatmadaw's General Ne Win seized power in a 1962 coup, plunging the country into an isolated and nominally socialist dictatorship under the "Burmese Way to Socialism." Part of the justification for his takeover was the need to prevent the insurgencies from fracturing the country into different territories. Ne Win ruled for twenty-six years, with his Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) driving the country into poverty with political repression, heavy military expenditures, demonetisation, nationalization of assets, and rising grain and fuel prices. The Tatmadaw's brutal counter-insurgency strategy of the "four cuts"—cutting off food, funds, intelligence, and manpower to insurgents—took a heavy civilian toll. Martin Smith (2007) later framed

this history as five "cycles of conflict" from independence in 1948 until 1988 and beyond, where each stage of conflict created the structural conditions that perpetuated the following stage of insurgency. Notably, this framing mirrored the notion of the "conflict trap" popularized by World Bank reports in the early 2000s (Collier et al. 2003).

Following the seismic events of the 1988 people's uprising across Burma, the military dictatorship changed up its leadership once more and a new administration of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) came to power. Students and demonstrators were massacred, and thousands fled to the borderlands to take up arms against the military. The SLORC held elections in 1990, but only after any significant opposition leaders had first been arrested. When Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD swept these 1990 elections, the SLORC simply refused to hand over power and cracked down harshly on opposition groups with its repressive security and surveillance apparatus. Dissenting groups formed an alliance from the borderlands, the Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB), and its government, the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB) in 1990.

At the start of 1988, two broad groupings of insurgent forces operated against the Burmese government. The first, the CPB, enlisted thousands of ethnic minority soldiers and operated out of Panghsang on the Chinese border, from where it ran raids into Tatmadaw controlled territory. The second, the National Democratic Front (NDF), a grouping of ten ethnic minority armies formed in 1976, called for a federal Burma where their claims to autonomy were accommodated. By 1984, they had collectively renounced calls for independence in favor of self-determination within a federal union. In return, ethnic minority regions were pillaged by Tatmadaw troops through a scorched-earth policy. By the mid-1990s, the CPB had collapsed, and Myanmar was ravaged by political division, economic distress, international isolation, and ethnic discord (Steinberg 2001).

Institutional Actor Level Studies

The early conflict literature on Burma of the 1990s traced the genealogies and histories of civil war. This first set of overview texts covered the convoluted alliances and relationships of the period immediately following 1988—between the student protestors who formed the All Burma Student Democratic Front, the ethnic minority alliance of the NDF, and divided responses of the international community (Silverstein 1990; Smith 1999). Martin Smith's (1999, first published 1991) *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity* and Bertil Lintner's (1994) *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency since 1948* were two key books. Smith's (1999) expansive account details how insurgency had become a "way of life" in Burma through the 1970s and 1980s. Both books showed how the pre-independence Panglong Agreement of 1947, signed between Aung San and Shan, Chin, and Kachin leaders, had failed to adequately accommodate the aspirations

of Burma's myriad ethnic minority peoples. While Shan and Karenni leaders were promised the right of secession after ten years under the 1947 Constitution, other groups like the Karen, Mons, and Arakanese did not have their concerns addressed (see Taylor 1979).

Along with Josef Silverstein (1990) and Robert Taylor (2009, first published 1987), these writers made up a group of early Western scholars writing on the Burmese state and its rebellions. These accounts of conflict sought to track root causes, the histories of political and economic disorder, and the relationships between different groups. Because they mapped the history of conflict in Myanmar as events and transactional interactions, they often explored each conflict actor from an institutional standpoint—actions, goals, factions, and ideologies—with the limited secondary sources and interviews available at the time. These early writers of the 1990s offered fewer analytical frameworks to understand the ongoing conflict and focused instead on the gargantuan task of introducing readers to the tangled relations between the veritable alphabet soup of political parties and armed outfits. They represented the beginnings of studies that looked at institutional actors and their interrelations.

A second set of literature emerged in the 2000s, focusing on the key institutional actor of the Tatmadaw—its military administration in both the BSPP and SLORC. Because the Tatmadaw was seen as a black box whose organizational culture was integral to understanding Burma, yet difficult to decipher, studies tended to focus on institution actors. Mary Callahan's (2003) seminal work on the Tatmadaw examined its origins from both the Japanese-trained Burma Independence Army (BIA) and the British-trained ethnic minority soldiers. She argued that the Tatmadaw's philosophy of state-building was underpinned by the coercive tactics of its war fighting, making accommodation toward ethnic minorities and other opponents impossible. Its institutions were built (rather than destroyed) through domestic warfare, the use of auxiliary forces and militias to fight its enemies, and the making of key alliances via pragmatism and cronyism.

Two other key works focused less on the political role of the Tatmadaw, and more directly on its military capability. Andrew Selth's (2002) *Power Without Glory* examined the modernization of the Tatmadaw, its organization, policies, hardware, and political role. Selth suggested that although the Tatmadaw possessed doctrines for a conventional army, it was also heavily built for domestic political and counter-insurgency operations. Rather than being weakened through isolation in the 1990s, it expanded its capabilities and ideological hold on power; its leaders adept at negotiating ceasefires with key ethnic minority opponents. Still, he predicted it would face problems of leadership rivalries and hardware and manpower challenges. In 2009, Maung Aung Myoe published an overview of the Tatmadaw that focused more on detailing its capabilities—military doctrine, organizational structure, weapons acquisition, training, and military leadership. Later works on the Myanmar military include those by

Nakanishi (2013) and Egreteau (2016).

On the anti-government side, Bertil Lintner's (1994; 2011) work on the history of the CPB and its ultimate collapse was based on the author's carefully taken notes during an incredible eighteen-month traverse of CPB insurgent-held areas in the mid-1980s. His account began from the CPB's expulsion from the ruling Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League alliance in 1946, its going underground in the Pyinmana area, its shift to the highlands of Shan State, and its eventual collapse from internal mutiny in 1989 (Lintner 1990). Lintner (1994) also detailed the role of opium production and trafficking in enabling insurgency, as remnants of the defeated Kuomintang armies moved into Eastern Shan State and then Northern Thailand.

In the 2000s, a third set of institutional actor level studies emerged that examined ethnicity and nationalism among the minority groups at the peripheries of the country. These picked up on the turn toward ethnicity and nationalism across the social sciences in the 1990s (Anderson 1983), as well as the notion of "grievance" in ethnic and nationalist ideologies as a possible driver of civil war (e.g., Collier and Hoeffler 2004). They were also enabled by scholars' increasing access to Myanmar through the Thai border (and some through the Chinese border), amid networks of refugees and dissidents that had escaped political repression. Most of these works explored ethnic minority political institutions in the south and east of Myanmar, and their sense of identity and ambitions for self-determination. Several writers studied the relationship between Karen identity and nationalism: how an elite-promoted pan-Karen identity downplayed internal diversity (Harriden 2002; Kuroiwa and Verkuyten 2008), how narratives and narration fueled ethno-nationalist sentiment (Rajah 2002), and the diversity among nationalist actors—armed and non-armed (Thawnghmung 2012; Gravers 2015). Ashley South's (2003) work on the long history of Mon nationalism was prompted by interactions with Mon refugees and insurgents along the Thai border. In Kachin State, Sadan's (2016a) edited volume examined changes in Kachin society and Myanmar's political economy that underpinned the collapse of the ceasefire between the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and the Tatmadaw (Dean 2005). Chao Tzang Yawnghwe's (2010, first published in 1987) memoirs on the Shan nationalist movement were central to understanding the complex politics of Shan State and its relationship to the central government in Burma.

The complex state of ethnic politics was the subject of a fourth set of studies in the late-2000s, focusing mainly on the EAOs as actors, but gradually turning toward a relational approach by examining their ties with other groups. The Transnational Institute released a report in 2009, *Neither War nor Peace*, that mapped out the uncertain future of the ceasefires with EAOs in the lead up to the 2010 elections (Kramer 2009). Scholars began tracing the reasons for the EAOs signing bilateral ceasefires with the SLORC in three "waves" between 1989-1995

(Zaw Oo and Win Min 2007). Callahan (2007) charted the differences between the ceasefire arrangements of the EAOs, classifying them into three groups: near-devolution, military occupation, and co-existence. Meanwhile, Smith (2010) laid out the state of ethnic politics in 2009: continued skirmishes with EAOs, the Tatmadaw's calls for the armed groups to transition into Border Guard Forces (BGF), and ethnic political parties contemplating participation in the 2010 elections.

This was the early stage of peace studies in Myanmar prior to 2011. It covered the history of civil war, insurgent dynamics and ceasefires, and the institutional and organizational culture of the warring parties—the Tatmadaw, the CPB, and the various ethnic nationalist groups. While it overwhelmingly focused on institutional actors, it also began to turn toward the conflict and relations between these actors.

Peace Studies in the "Transition" Period (2011-2021): Attention to Relations and Networks

As Myanmar opened to increasing numbers of foreign visitors and expatriates under President Thein Sein's 2011 political reforms, the spaces for Burmese media and civil society activism widened. Access also increased for researchers and scholars, aid workers, development and humanitarian organizations, specialists and consultants, and foreign media. Public discourse more openly gravitated toward issues of development and democratization, and to the ongoing armed conflict in the country. From 2011, research that could be classified as peace studies broadened from a focus on institutional actors to more networked and relational approaches. This included an expansion to include national peace processes, regional geopolitics, the conflict economy, and community and grassroots peacebuilding.

At the institutional actor level, research and media reportage covered specific EAOs with increasing depth—their structure and organization, histories, leadership, ideologies, interests, factionalism, and internal dynamics. More easily able to interview EAO leaders and observe territories under their control, scholars and journalists had increasing reach to civil society groups, officials, and ordinary people who lived and worked under EAO governance. The term "ethnic armed organizations" entered mainstream political parlance after 2009, when the Tatmadaw called for all EAOs to transform themselves into BGFs under Tatmadaw command. None of the significant EAO players complied, and tensions rose. In August 2009, the Tatmadaw attacked the Myanmar Democratic National Alliance Army (MNDAA) in Kokang region, forcing it out of the region and displacing tens of thousands of refugees into China. Coverage of the EAOs consequently broadened, as the future of the country's bilateral ceasefires was at stake.

Comparative work made it increasingly clear that the armed groups on the Chinese and Thai borders had very different political cultures and calculations. On the borders with China, David Brenner's (2015) work with the KIA showed how economic concessions between KIA and Tatmadaw leaders that were meant to create a stable ceasefire contradictorily led to fragmentation within the KIA, loss of legitimacy of some leaders, and the breakdown of the Kachin ceasefire in 2011. Jenny Hedström (2017; 2020) looked at gender in the Kachin revolutionary household and how the reproduction of a militarized society depends disproportionately on women's labour. Other EAOs on the Chinese border were the splinter groups from the CPB—the UWSA, The National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA or Monglar group), and the MNDAA (or Kokang group). In an earlier work, Tom Kramer (2007) described the United Wa State Army's governance structures, its relationship with China, and its involvement in the narcotics trade. This was followed shortly after by texts that examined the governance of political culture of the UWSA, Myanmar's largest EAO, from Chin (2009), Renard (2013), and Ong (2018). On the Kokang, Hu and Konrad (2018) examined how conflict in 2015 between the Tatmadaw and the MNDAA altered the border practices and imaginaries of the Chinese state and the Kokang refugees and produced new understandings of territory and belonging in the region. Meehan (2016) tracked the history of the lesser-known Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) as an armed group that repeatedly broke away from its parent group and alliances to keep fighting, despite Tatmadaw efforts to pacify the Ta'ang.

Toward the Thai border, Harrisson and Kyed (2019) looked at the state-making practices of the Karen National Union (KNU) and the New Mon State Party (NMSP) as they developed justice and governance systems to rival the political legitimacy of the central government. Brenner (2018) studied how decisions of the KNU to negotiate rapprochement with the Tatmadaw stemmed from internal political dynamics and struggles between factions. Brenner (2019) also conducted comparative work between the KIA and the KNU that examined struggles for legitimacy and authority within the EAOs and proposed a relational study of EAOs in the context of their social environment and grassroot sentiment. Authority built through the provision of social services and governance of their people was central to the strength and stability of the EAOs.

The National Level: Democracy, Reconciliation, and Peace Processes

At the same time, development, democracy, and conflict specialists (mainly Western ones) were entering the country in increasing numbers from 2011, bringing with them their comparative lenses from other developing countries and conflict zones around the world. Thein Sein's reforms allowed room for concerted efforts to promulgate the discourse of democracy. Foreign observers who had only years before watched the harsh suppression of the 2007 "Saffron Revolution," iconic for its striking visuals of the orange robes of the Buddhist monkhood,

were now able to support local communities and political groups in their quests for a democratic transition. This work initially involved watching Tatmadaw internal dynamics and spotting opportunities for reconciliation between key generals and pro-democracy actors including Aung San Suu Kyi (Win Min 2008). Holliday (2008) argued for the democratization process to be gradual, within the military junta's planned framework for the 2010 elections, in order to prevent the military doubling down and ethnic fragmentation leading to heightened conflict. Aung-Thwin (2001) dismissed American "democracy jihad" as parochial and counterproductive in creating the conditions for reform and reconciliation. Other studies later emerged that examined more direct links between democracy and peace in the country, finding that democratization would offer an incomplete solution to the country's conflicts, needing to be complemented by an inclusive political process and constitutional reform (Ganesan 2017; Nilsen 2013; Sadan 2016b). The prospects for peace were first framed through the promise of democracy: representation, accountability, good governance, and security sector reform would, it was believed, pave the way for reconciliation and stability.

Alongside the democracy discourse were more direct calls for supporting peacebuilding and the formal peace process. Here, peace studies took on its most overt forms. Myanmar's most recent formal national-level peace process began in the early 2010s under President Thein Sein's government. Thein Sein created the Myanmar Peace Center (MPC) in 2012 to negotiate peace deals with the various EAOs across the country, even incorporating several exiles from the anti-junta "88 Generation" group (Ganesan 2014). At the time of its establishment, conflict was ongoing between the KIA and the Tatmadaw, but the KNU had recently agreed to a bilateral ceasefire. A majority of other EAOs had bilateral ceasefires that dated back to the 1990s (see South 2003, xxi), and had more recently (around 2011) renewed their commitments to these ceasefires. Thein Sein's government's objective was now to formalize a national ceasefire under a single document. During this period, reports were commissioned by international organizations to map out the "stakeholder network" (O'Hara and Selling 2012). Longtime observer Paul Keenan (2013) published a comprehensive guide dividing up the ethnic armed groups by state, charting the EAO landscape at the turn of the 2010s. John Buchanan (2016) produced an impressive overview of militias across the country—detailing the areas of operations of the lesser-known People's Militia Forces and BGFs.

In 2015, the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) was signed between Thein Sein's government and eight EAOs. However, the larger EAOs refused to sign, saying that the agreement lacked any substantive provisions for dealing with breaches and clear agendas for political dialogue that would address their calls for increased autonomy. The "peace industrial complex," a network of consultants and advisors, swung into action. It produced bodies of knowledge on conflict actors, political calculus, peacebuilding techniques, and negotiation

strategies. It organized conferences, study tours to other countries, wrote reports, and briefed the Myanmar government and foreign embassies on how to support conflict actors. Think-tanks mapped out the terrain of stakeholders in the peace arena, tabulated their interests and demands, becoming key producers of up-to-date peace monitoring information (e.g., Institute for Security and Development 2015; ICG 2016, 2017, 2019a, 2020b; TNI 2017). For this, the network gathered some criticism for an "anti-politics" stance, for converting wide-ranging political problems into narrower technical ones, and failing to appreciate the role of local civil society actors (Bächtold 2015).

When the NLD government took power in 2016, it disbanded the MPC and replaced it with its own National Reconciliation and Peace Center. New negotiators were appointed who had no previous relationships with the EAOs. The NLD held a new "21st Century Panglong Conference" to bring the EAOs into regular dialogue. Thawnghmung (2017) criticized the NLD government's management of the peace process, noting that ethnic minority leaders were disappointed with her silence on ongoing conflict and her patronizing attitude in meetings. Her appointment of NLD loyalists resulted in a top-down peace process that damaged relations of trust with the EAOs. With Saw Eh Htoo, Thawnghmung (2022) later noted that the "two-headed" division of power between the Tatmadaw and the NLD government undermined progress for national reconciliation.

As the peace process was unfolding, EAOs continued to engage in skirmishes with the Tatmadaw. Armed conflict worsened in Shan State in 2015 and Rakhine State in 2019, now possible for think-tanks and other researchers to closely monitor (ICG 2019a; Mathieson 2017; TNI 2019). Observers offered technical suggestions to manage conflict. Sai Wansai (2018) argued for a "conditional clause" approach that would create agreements and mutual compromise by binding parties to a set of conditions, that if breached, would free the other side from its obligations. Tønnesson, Min Zaw Oo, and Ne Lynn Aung (2021) demonstrated in detail how the lack of inclusivity in the NCA made peace unsustainable. With the increasing political dominance of EAOs of the Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee, led by the UWSA (which had closer ties to China), Chinese support for the peace process under the NLD government became crucial (ICG 2017). This shifted influence away from Western mediators, leading to skepticism of China's intentions and its distinct modus operandi (Adhikari 2021; Ganesan 2017; Joy 2018).

Peace studies in Myanmar thus widened its trajectory from the study of ethnic nationalisms and EAOs, to the complex relations of ethnic politics, and into the more technical enterprise of supporting the peace process and steering political dialogue. Yet by 2020, the peace process was widely accepted by observers to have "stalled" (ICG 2020b) and the Panglong Conferences became less frequent, more symbolic than effective.

The Regional Level: Geopolitical Influences on Domestic Politics

Another impact of Myanmar's opening to regional and global influences was the increasingly direct influence that geopolitics had on domestic politics. Peace and conflict studies literature in Myanmar reflects the extent to which peace is a geopolitical, and not simply a national, issue. Myanmar's history of sanctions, isolation, international recognition (and lack thereof), displacement of refugees, narcotics flows, and political or military support from its neighbours, shows how geopolitical rivalries of the Cold War, ASEAN internal dynamics, and that between US and China today, have had direct consequences for peace in Myanmar.

Following the 1988 demonstrations, scholars reviewed the effects of Myanmar's international isolation. US sanctions and disengagement (Steinberg 2010) placed on Myanmar had driven it closer to Chinese support. Josef Silverstein (1992) detailed the efforts taken by the international community in the wake of the 1988 SLORC takeover to pressure the Myanmar government into recognizing the results of the 1990 elections. This included the failures of arm embargoes and ASEAN's "constructive engagement," and the inability to agree on the halting of aid, even as human rights violations were repeatedly brought before the UN Human Rights Commission. By 2008, Selth's (2008) examination of the durability of the military regime—comparing the hardline approach of the US and United Kingdom with ASEAN's "soft line" accommodation and China and Russia's support for the regime—concluded that international pressure would have limited effect on change within Burma. Others agreed that the failure of international unity and its theatrical censures had severely curtailed the effectiveness of international pressure (Steinberg 2007b).

But the key factor in the marked influence of geopolitics was China's increasingly active role in Myanmar. An implicit sense of geopolitical competition between China and the West over Myanmar marked the discourses and studies of external influences on peace. Western media and think-tanks picked up on Chinese moves to assert its influence. The ICG (2009) flagged this shift with an early report, *China's Myanmar Dilemma*. It examined the marriage of convenience and co-dependencies between China and its smaller neighbor, highlighting strategic issues that were to become key talking points in the 2010s. Chinese concerns over border security, a corridor for China to the Indian Ocean, economic investment and resource extraction, and weapons sales would turn into large geostrategic issues with lives of their own. By the late-2010s, think-tank reports (ICG 2010, 2020b; TNI 2016, 2017; Sun 2017) had developed a bucket list of hot-button issues: "Malacca Dilemma," Belt and Road Initiative, New Silk Road, oil and gas pipeline, "String of Pearls," China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC), the Myitsone Dam, and infamous extractive sites like the Letpadaung copper mine and Hpakant jade mines. These became common parlance as Xi Jinping's strategy for Southeast Asia became increasingly evident.

Myanmar had become central to Beijing's plans to create an alternative route

to the Indian Ocean, planning an oil and gas pipeline from its Southwest Yunnan Province to Kyaukphyu port in Rakhine State and the Indian Ocean in the mid-2000s. This was completed in 2013-2014. But in 2011, President Thein Sein's suspension of the Chinese Myitsone Dam project in Kachin State after domestic pressure created a setback in the relationship with China (Sun 2012). Thein Sein's modest democratic reforms also opened US engagement, welcoming Secretary of State Hilary Clinton and President Barack Obama to visit in 2011 and 2012, respectively, showing signs of a shift in alignment toward the West. In retaliation, China allegedly provided arms and financial support to the EAOs on its border (ICG 2020a) and invited opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi to Beijing in 2015 as a demonstration of its disapproval of the Thein Sein's government. Maung Aung Myoe (2015) argued that during the Thein Sein SPDC years of 2011-2015, Myanmar's interest in reintegrating itself into the international community (and rapprochement with the US) meant careful management of its relations with China to prevent overdependence.

The history of China-Myanmar relations became a key realm of scrutiny. In 2012, Steinberg and Fan published a comprehensive history of China-Myanmar ties, describing Chinese influence on five dilemmas for the Myanmar state: (1) how to integrate its ethnic minorities, (2) its openness to external social influences, (3) rational economic policies, (4) the limitations of the 2008 Constitution, and (5) controls on Chinese immigration and investment. Haacke's (2011) study of China-Myanmar relations under the SLORC and SPDC argued that the Tatmadaw leadership was able to manage its alignment with China because of its geostrategic importance and natural resources. It seemed that peace operated under the thorny constraints of international geopolitics.

Ethnic Chinese scholars provided a nuanced set of observations on China's interest in border security, moderating some of the more alarmist narratives in the media. Su (2016) argued that the interests of Yunnan province and China in social, economic, and energy security guided its strategic stance toward Myanmar, in what they called "geoeconomic repositioning." Yun Sun (2017) noted that while China approach to Myanmar's EAOs and peace process was driven by ambiguity and flexibility rather than the official non-intervention stance, its actions were also complicated by the actions of certain Chinese special interest groups. To this, Enze Han (2017) added the importance of domestic nationalist signaling in China's considerations toward Myanmar in the wake of the Kokang (2009, 2015) and Kachin (2011-2016) conflicts. Chao (2015) noted that during the 2015 Kokang crisis, China surprisingly downplayed the conflict's effects on Chinese citizens and the refugee displacement, choosing to put a dampener on Chinese nationalist fury.

When Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD took over government in 2016, she too found herself caught up navigating relations between the two superpowers. Relations improved through the acceptance of Chinese investment, and a China-Myanmar

economic corridor was planned along the path of the oil pipeline, potentially providing western China a route to the Indian ocean (TNI 2019). Aung San Suu Kyi's popularity provided her government with more leeway in managing local backlash to Chinese investment (Jones and Khin Ma Ma Myo 2021). In return, Chinese pressure was able to strongarm several EAOs into attending the NLD government's peace conference in 2016, though this coercion did not lead to any sustainable outcomes. Relations with the West deteriorated following the Rohingya crisis in 2017, pushing the NLD government closer to China through its support on the international scene, as China vetoed strong UN action at the Security Council (Joy 2018). In 2018, a USIP publication asserted that "genuine peace risks China's strategic position in the country." Regardless of perspective, by the late-2010s, the importance of global and regional geopolitics to peace in Myanmar had become firmly cemented throughout the peace studies literature.

The Network Level: The Conflict Economy

China-Myanmar relations brought the conflict economy to light in the most glaring of ways, particularly through iconic images of large Chinese investment projects. The economics of war and violence was studied in further detail, with access to shadow economies, infrastructural, plantation, mining, and telecommunication industries. In parallel, as scholarly debates on armed conflict began to elaborate on the simple dichotomy between greed and grievance as drivers of civil war, they turned toward networked analysis of the complex relations between political economy and war-fighting. These analytical lenses were brought to bear on the Myanmar context, finding its conflict economy myriad and interconnected, drawing every corner of the country into a complex web of relations.

Early studies of the conflict economy were fixated on the problem of narcotics—opium and heroin, in particular—given the US War on Drugs of the 1980s. The opium economy was examined largely in work around Shan State (Chin 2009; Jelsma, Kramer, and Vervest 2005), detailing the link between conflict over control of the narcotics trade and the use of profits to fund insurgent armies (Jonsson and Brennan 2013). Patrick Meehan's (2011; 2015) key work showed how the drugs economy was used by the Myanmar state to co-opt insurgent groups through concessions as a form of state-building, yet paradoxically also undermined its ability to control them. His later work with Seng Lawn Dan examined how the Myanmar military's brokerage networks with smaller militias in Northern Shan State contributed to pervasive violence and instability (Meehan and Dan 2022). TNI (Kramer and Woods 2012) examined the corrupt use of China's Opium Substitution Fund in Northern Myanmar by profiteering private Chinese entrepreneurs, with little assistance reaching exploited farmers. Lim and Kim (2020) looked at "embedded governance" in Shan State—how opium growing provided income for farmers, yet enmeshed them in the wider problems

of drug addiction, land dispossession, and exploitative taxation. ICG (2019b) highlighted the later shift toward the methamphetamine trade, describing the networks of precursor drugs from China and the role of EAOs and smaller insurgent militias in its production and trafficking. The drugs economy was central to the proliferation of violence in insidious ways that ran parallel to the more formal peace process that engaged mainly the established EAOs.

This conflict economy was best encapsulated through Kevin Woods' (2011) notion of "ceasefire capitalism," demonstrating how the Myanmar military bartered resource concessions for logging and rubber plantations with insurgent groups for their agreeing to de facto bilateral ceasefires. This form of "military territorialization" extended the reach of the state, pulling in private businessmen and insurgent leaderships into networks of capitalist governance in an "entrepreneurial turn" (MacLean 2008). The peri-conflict peace created by such illiberal peacebuilding bore the ever-present threat of violence (McCarthy and Farrelly 2020). Other resources that potentially provoked conflict through competition over exploitation concessions and land rights were nickel (Einzenberger 2018), copper (Tang-Lee 2016), rubber (Woods 2019), rubies (Global Witness 2021), and timber (Dong and He 2018). Resource exploitation resulted in poverty, labour exploitation, and land dispossession, all of which worsened human insecurity while providing revenue to military units. Jade, however, was the ultimate resource. The scale of environmental damage, drug addiction and precarious conditions surrounding the jade mines in Hpakant and Kachin States were the subject of a 2015 Global Witness report that detailed Tatmadaw, KIA, and UWSA involvement in the jade trade (Global Witness 2015).

Chinese-backed Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects often triggered anti-Chinese sentiment across the country with perceptions of it being heavy-handed, profit-driven, and insensitive to local sensibilities. It drove a wedge within communities who felt that their leaders were selling their interests out. Laur Kiik (2016) examined the fallout from the suspension of the Myitsone Dam project and how its failure was caused by what he calls a Chinese "anti-(ethno)-political" approach that ran up against Kachin nationalist sentiment and Burmese environmental activism. The incident compelled a more careful Chinese engagement with societal actors (Chan 2017). Elsewhere, Suhardiman, Rutherford, and Wright (2017) detail how Chinese-driven hydropower projects on the Salween River marginalize local Karen communities and lead to their forced displacement by BGFs. Mark and Zhang (2017) note however, that Chinese state-owned enterprises have become savvier, conducting public relations campaigns and stakeholder engagements to placate local opposition to their projects. Chinese investment projects triggering public backlash against Myanmar's political leaders, whether EAO, NLD, or Myanmar military, will continue to form part of the intricate political calculations that these armed actors navigate. Peace in the conflict economy is networked both domestically and regionally.

The Community Level: Human Security, Civil Society, and Gender

By the late-2010s, an increasing disillusionment with the national peace process drove scholars and policymakers to examine what imaginaries and relations of peace looked like at the everyday community level. There was also funding and projects from civil society organizations that targeted such interventions. Yet, focus on the community-level was not entirely new. Prior research examined the role of civil society and grassroots organizations in peacebuilding and reconciliation in Myanmar (Steinberg 2007a). Noting how ethnic minority politics in Myanmar had quickly come to be dominated by armed resistance groups and war-fighters, scholars shifted attention to the non-armed actors among the ethnic minorities (Thawnghmung 2012). An early example of such studies can be found in Ganesan and Kyaw's (2007) edited volume, with pieces that examined the involvement of Karen church leaders in shuttle mediation between the KNU and the military junta (Alan Saw U 2007), and the Kachin Shalom Foundation's pyramidal networking approach for actors in peacebuilding (Ja Nan Lahtaw 2007).

Others argued for the building of civil society capacity to create hybrid public spaces (Middleton and Win Min 2021), foster shifts in political culture among EAOs (Jagger 2018), with language education as a decentralized avenue for convergence and peacebuilding (South and Lall 2016; Bertrand 2022). Stokke (2019) examined a lesser explored space outside the EAOs—the Ethnic Political Parties (EPPs) and their failure to formally represent ethnic minority interests in the national arena. Studies of non-armed political actors searched for ways in which their authority and legitimacy could be buttressed through programs and initiatives.

The search for alternative forms of civil society peacebuilding at the community level increased from 2017 onwards, as progress in the formal peace process came to a near standstill. A key emphasis was gender—any given photograph of peace conference participants reflected the stark absence of women from formal negotiations. Simultaneously, entry of more non-governmental organizations into EAO spheres of influence created new avenues for women's participation in politics (Israelsen 2019). Scholars explored sexual and gender-based violence in Myanmar—its heavy under-reporting (Davies and True 2017), the inadequacies of legal protection, and the omission of gender from needs assessments and peace processes—"genuine peacebuilding is much larger than ceasefire negotiation" (Faxon, Furlong, and Sabe Phyu 2015, 475). They turned to grassroots women's organizations to document the ability of women's activism to introduce notions of diversity and intersectionality (Pepper 2018) and develop women-to-women peacebuilding (Cárdenas and Olivius 2021; Blomqvist, Olivius, and Hedström 2021).

The Rohingya crisis of 2017 where at least 6,700 were killed and more than seven hundred thousand displaced, was a cataclysmic event that shattered any

pontifications about peace and conflict. It seemed to be regarded as an issue completely separate from the ongoing peace process because of the sheer scale of suffering, and perhaps because the hapless Rohingya had no sizeable armed group to speak of. Much was written about the origins of communal violence (Cheesman 2017; McCarthy and Menager 2017), the social and cultural contestations over Rohingya identity (Van Klinken and Su Mon Thazin Aung 2017; Prasse-Freeman 2023), and the military tactics of the Tatmadaw in its "practices of erasure" (MacLean 2018). What could be said to be left of peace, reconciliation, or justice when nearly a million refugees lived in poor conditions in Bangladesh? Denied citizenship and belonging, they were no longer rights-bearing subjects and were excluded from the political process. In this dire context, conversations about peace were instead carried out through the humanitarian language of assistance and resettlement prospects.

Other recent fields of peace-related research involve investigations of Myanmar's online space and how it fosters violence rhetoric and hate speech, particularly around the Rohingya crisis (Prasse-Freeman 2021; Sablosky 2021). Brooten and Verburuggen (2017) examined how media reporting perpetuated victim-perpetrator narratives that oversimplify conflict. However, other scholars suggested that the increased usage of mobile phones might serve as a "pacifying force" among certain ethnic groups (Bergren and Bailard 2017). The online digital space will be a key realm for future peace studies in Myanmar, requiring new methodologies and forms of writing. In particular, after the coup of 2021, both foreign-owned telecommunication companies Telenor and Oredoo exited Myanmar, paving the way for a telecommunication landscape that is dominated by the military.

Peace Studies After the Coup?

This article has mapped the trajectory of peace studies from the initial focus on overviews of civil war and an institutional actor level approach, to a broadening of focus from 2011 toward the networked approaches of the studies of the national peace process, regional geopolitics, conflict economy, and everyday peacebuilding. It shows how the opening of Myanmar in 2011 invited new discourses, knowledge producers, and geopolitical relations, and reshaped the focus of peace studies in the process. It has, as its limitation, a focus on English-language publications.

The question now remains: What is left of peace studies in Myanmar following the military coup of February 2021? More than 2,000 have been killed at the time of writing this article, with more than one million displaced from their homes. Insurgency has broken out across the country, with People's Defence Forces (PDFs) launching attacks on embattled Myanmar military troops across six "warscapes" (Loong 2022). The balance between the military junta (State

Administration Council [SAC]) and the opposition National Unity Government (NUG) appears to hold, while the entry of the larger EAOs, the AA and UWSA, in support of either side, could decisively tilt the momentum (Ye Myo Hein 2022). The SAC is said to have lost control of more than half the country. Nonetheless, the toll on Myanmar's people has been immense, with its economy faltering and 14.4 million people, or a quarter of the population of Myanmar, requiring humanitarian assistance (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2021). The Rohingya people languishing in camps on the Bangladesh border no longer feature heavily in public or international discourse. An entire generation has seen their aspirations put on hold indefinitely.

Media reports since 2021 turn to studies of the widespread resistance that has taken hold across the country. They assess the effectiveness of the PDFs and battle casualties of the Myanmar military, offering a variety of prognostications on the conflict trajectory, most of which cannot be independently verified. They also report on the failing economy and growing humanitarian crisis. Public discourse in the Burmese language is proliferating on social media, calling for a federal democracy, and sometimes laced with censorship or social punishment. The challenge now seems to be to present insights and understandings that compel international support for the stabilization of the country.

Despite openly backing the Myanmar military to stabilize the country, China's interest in Myanmar's ongoing plight has been mainly to garner assurances to limit the disruption to its infrastructural projects. It has seemingly not offered significant political support to either side, despite its occasional statements. Western countries have more openly engaged the NUG and provided rhetoric of solidarity and support, but have delegated any national solution to ASEAN. At present, ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus of April 2021 has largely been ignored by the military junta, and the ASEAN Special Envoy has not yet been allowed to meet with Aung San Suu Kyi and given only limited access to stakeholders in the conflict. Neither the SAC or NUG are officially open to bilateral negotiations, with both sides declaring each other to be a terrorist organization. In addition, a large portion of the population of Myanmar rejects any political settlement that involves even a small role for the SAC.

Prospects for peace are extremely bleak. At such times, the very notion of research and peace studies appears superfluous or inefficacious. Yet, past knowledge accrued about Myanmar's military, its EAOs, its political economy, its civil society, and its peoples—women, youth, and ethnic minorities—and might offer insights into new coalitions built for the future (Thawnghmung 2012). How the Myanmar military, resistance forces, the NUG, and other armed EAO actors might fit into this puzzle, however, is a question that, regrettably, only the development of the conflict will make clearer.

References

Adhikari, Monalisa. 2021. "Peacebuilding with 'Chinese Characteristics'? Insights from China's Engagement in Myanmar's Peace Process." *International Studies Review* 23 (4): 1699-726.

Alan Saw U. 2007. "Reflections on Confidence-building and Cooperation among Ethnic Groups in Myanmar: A Karen Case Study." In *Myanmar: State, Society, and Ethnicity*, eds. N. Ganesan and Kyaw Yin Hlaing, 219-35. Singapore: ISEAS Publishing.

Anderson, Benedict. 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.

Aung-Thwin, Michael. 2001. "Parochial Universalism, Democracy Jihad and the Orientalist Image of Burma: The New Evangelism." *Pacific Affairs* 74 (4): 483-505.

Bächtold, Stefan. 2015. "The Rise of an Anti-Politics Machinery: Peace, Civil Society and the Focus on Results in Myanmar." *Third World Quarterly* 36 (10): 1968-83.

Bergren, Anne, and Catie Snow Bailard. 2017. "Information and Communication Technology and Ethnic Conflict in Myanmar: Organizing for Violence or Peace?" *Social Science Quarterly* 98 (3): 894-913.

Bertrand, Jacques. 2022. "Education, Language, and Conflict in Myanmar's Ethnic Minority States." *Asian Politics & Policy* 14 (1): 25-42.

Blomqvist, Linnéa, Elisabeth Olivius, and Jenny Hedström. 2021. "Care and Silence in Women's Everyday Peacebuilding in Myanmar." *Conflict, Security & Development* 21 (3): 1-21.

Brenner, David. 2015. "Ashes of Co-optation: From Armed Group Fragmentation to the Rebuilding of Popular Insurgency in Myanmar." *Conflict, Security & Development* 15 (4): 337-58.

Brenner, David. 2018. "Inside the Karen Insurgency: Explaining Conflict and Conciliation in Myanmar's Changing Borderlands." *Asian Security* 14 (2): 83-99.

Brenner, David. 2019. *Rebel Politics: A Political Sociology of Armed Struggle in Myanmar's Borderlands*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Brooten, Lisa, and Yola Verbruggen. 2017. "Producing the News: Reporting on Myanmar's Rohingya Crisis." *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 47 (3): 440-60.

Buchanan, John. 2016. "Militias in Myanmar." The Asia Foundation, July. https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Militias-in-Myanmar.pdf (accessed March 5, 2023).

Callahan, Mary. 2003. *Making Enemies: War and State Building in Burma*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Callahan, Mary. 2007. *Political Authority in Burma's Ethnic Minority States: Devolution, Occupation and Coexistence*. East-West Center Policy Studies 31. Washington D.C.

Cárdenas, Magda Lorena, and Elisabeth Olivius. 2021. "Building Peace in the Shadow of War: Women-to-Women Diplomacy as Alternative Peacebuilding Practice in Myanmar." *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 15 (3): 1-20.

Chan, Debby Sze Wan. 2017. "Asymmetric Bargaining between Myanmar and China in the Myitsone Dam Controversy: Social Opposition Akin to David's Stone against Goliath." *The Pacific Review* 30 (5): 674-91.

Chao, Chung-chi. 2015. "The Kokang Incident and the Contradictory Relations between

China and Burma." *Asian Ethnicity* 16 (4): 589-92.

Cheesman, Nick. 2017. "Introduction: Interpreting Communal Violence in Myanmar." *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 47 (3): 335-52.

Chin, Ko-Lin. 2009. *The Golden Triangle: Inside Southeast Asia's Drug Trade*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Collier, Paul, V. L. Elliott, Håvard Hegre, Anke Hoeffler, Marta Reynal-Quero, and Nicholas Sambanis. 2003. *Breaking the Conflict Trap*. World Bank Policy Research Report, Washington, DC: World Bank and Oxford University Press.

Collier, Paul, and Anke Hoeffler. 2004. "Greed and Grievance in Civil War." *Oxford Economic Papers* 56 (4): 563-95.

Davies, Sara E., and Jacqui True. 2017. "The Politics of Counting and Reporting Conflict-Related Sexual and Gender-Based Violence: The Case of Myanmar." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 19 (1): 4-21.

Dean, Karin. 2005. "Spaces and Territorialities on the Sino-Burmese Boundary: China, Burma and the Kachin." *Political Geography* 24 (7): 808-30.

Dong, Min, and Jun He. 2018. "Linking the Past to the Future: A Reality Check on Cross-Border Timber Trade from Myanmar (Burma) to China." *Forest Policy and Economics* 87, February: 11-19.

Egreteau, Renaud. 2016. *Caretaking Democratization: The Military and Political Change in Myanmar*. London: Hurst and Co.

Einzenberger, Rainer. 2018. "Frontier Capitalism and Politics of Dispossession in Myanmar: The Case of the Mwetaung (Gullu Mual) Nickel Mine in Chin State." *Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies* 11 (1): 13-34.

Faxon, Hilary, Roisin Furlong, and May Sabe Phyu. 2015. "Reinvigorating Resilience: Violence against Women, Land Rights, and the Women's Peace Movement in Myanmar." *Gender & Development* 23 (3): 463-79.

Ganesan, N. 2014. "The Myanmar Peace Center: Its Origins, Activities, and Aspirations." *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding* 2 (1): 127-41.

Ganesan, N. 2017. "Democratization and Its Implications for the Resolution of Ethnic Conflict in Myanmar." *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding* 5 (1): 111-29.

Ganesan, N., and Kyaw Yin Hlaing, eds. 2007. *Myanmar: State, Society and Ethnicity*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

Global Witness. 2015. "Jade: Myanmar's 'Big State Secret.'" October 23. https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/oil-gas-and-mining/myanmarjade/ (accessed March 5, 2023).

Global Witness. 2021. "Conflict Rubies: How Luxury Jewellers Risk Funding Military Abuses in Myanmar." December 15. https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/natural-resource-governance/conflict-rubies-how-luxury-jewellers-risk-funding-military-abuses-myanmar/ (accessed March 5, 2023).

Gravers, Mikael. 2015. "Disorder as Order: The Ethno-Nationalist Struggle of the Karen in Burma/Myanmar—A Discussion of the Dynamics of an Ethicized Civil War and Its Historical Roots." *Journal of Burma Studies* 19 (1): 27-78.

Haacke, Jürgen. 2011. "The Nature and Management of Myanmar's Alignment with China: The SLORC/SPDC Years." *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 30 (2): 105-40.

Han, Enze. 2017. "Geopolitics, Ethnic Conflicts along the Border, and Chinese Foreign Policy Changes toward Myanmar." *Asian Security* 13 (1): 59-73.

Harriden, Jessica. 2002. "'Making a Name for Themselves:': Karen Identity and the Politicization of Ethnicity in Burma." *Journal of Burma Studies* 7 (1): 84-144.

Harrisson, Annika Pohl, and Helene Maria Kyed. 2019. "Ceasefire State-Making and Justice Provision by Ethnic Armed Groups in Southeast Myanmar." *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 34 (2): 290-326.

Hedström, Jenny. 2017. "The Political Economy of the Kachin Revolutionary Household." *The Pacific Review* 30 (4): 581-95.

Hedström, Jenny. 2020. "Militarized Social Reproduction: Women's Labour and Parastate Armed Conflict." *Critical Military Studies* 8(1): 58-76.

Holliday, Ian. 2008. "Voting and Violence in Myanmar: Nation Building for a Transition to Democracy." *Asian Survey* 48 (6): 1038-58.

Hu, Zhiding, and Victor Konrad. 2018. "In the Space between Exception and Integration: The Kokang Borderlands on the Periphery of China and Myanmar." *Geopolitics* 23 (1): 147-79.

Institute for Security and Development Policy. 2015. "Myanmar's Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement." October. https://isdp.eu/content/uploads/publications/2015-isdp-backgrounder-myanmar-nca.pdf (accessed March 5, 2023).

International Crisis Group. 2009. "China's Myanmar Dilemma." Asia Report 177, September 14. Brussels.

International Crisis Group. 2010. "Chinas Myanmar Strategy: Elections, Ethnic Politics and Economics." Asia Briefing 112, September 21. Brussels.

International Crisis Group. 2016. "Myanmar's Peace Process: Getting to a Political Dialogue." Asia Briefing 149, October 19. Brussels.

International Crisis Group. 2017. "Building Critical Mass for Peace in Myanmar." Asia Report 287, June 29. Brussels.

International Crisis Group. 2019a. "A New Dimension of Violence in Myanmar's Rakhine State." Asia Briefing 154, January 24. Brussels.

International Crisis Group. 2019b. "Fire and Ice: Conflict and Drugs in Myanmar's Shan State." Asia Report 299, January 8. Brussels.

International Crisis Group. 2020a. "Commerce and Conflict: Navigating Myanmar's China Relationship." Asia Report 305, March 30. Brussels.

International Crisis Group. 2020b. "Rebooting Myanmar's Stalled Peace Process." Asia Report 308, June 19. Brussels.

Israelsen, Shelli. 2019. "Women in War and Peace: Karen Women's Political Participation during and after the Karen-Burma Ceasefire Accords." *The Round Table* 108 (2): 175-88.

Ja Nan Lahtaw. 2007. "Peace Initiatives among Ethnic Nationalities: The Kachin Case." In *Myanmar: State, Society, and Ethnicity*, eds. N. Ganesan and Kyaw Yin Hlaing, 236-255. Singapore: ISEAS Publishing.

Jagger, Stan. 2018. "Developing Civil Society in the Non-State Sphere: Welfare and Rights-Based Organisations Associated with Ethnic Armed Groups in Myanmar." *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 29 (2): 316-43.

Jelsma, Martin, Tom Kramer, and Pietje Vervest. 2005. *Trouble in the Triangle: Opium and Conflict in Burma*. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.

Jones, Lee, and Khin Ma Ma Myo. 2021. "Explaining Myanmar's Response to China's Belt and Road Initiative: From Disengagement to Embrace." *Asian Perspective* 45 (2): 301-24.

Jonsson, Michael, and Elliot Brennan. 2013. "Drugs, Guns and Rebellion: A Comparative Analysis of the Arms Procurement of Insurgent Groups in Colombia and Myanmar." *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research* 20 (3): 307-21.

Joy, Adrienne. 2018. "Understanding China's Response to the Rakhine Crisis." Special Report 419. United States Institute of Peace.

Keenan, Paul. 2013. *By Force of Arms: Armed Ethnic Groups in Burma*. Vij Books India.

Kiik, Laur. 2016. "Nationalism and Anti-Ethno-Politics: Why 'Chinese Development' Failed at Myanmar's Myitsone Dam." *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 57 (3): 374-402.

Kramer, Tom. 2007. *The United Wa State Party: Narco-Army or Ethnic Nationalist Party?* Washington: East-West Center Washington.

Kramer, Tom. 2009. *Neither War nor Peace: The Future of the Ceasefire Agreements in Burma*. Amsterdam: Transnational Institute. https://www.tni.org/files/download/ceasefire.pdf (accessed March 5, 2023).

Kramer, Tom, and Kevin Woods. 2012. *Financing Dispossession: China's Opium Substitution Programme in Northern Burma*. Transnational Institute.

Kuroiwa, Yoko, and Maykel Verkuyten. 2008. "Narratives and the Constitution of a Common Identity: The Karen in Burma." *Identities* 15 (4): 391-412.

Lim, Jinhee, and Taekyoon Kim. 2020. "Bringing Drugs into Light: Embedded Governance and Opium Production in Myanmar's Shan State." *Oxford Development Studies* 49 (2): 1-14.

Lintner, Bertil. 1990. *The Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Burma*. Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program Publications.

Lintner, Bertil. 1994. *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency since 1948*. Boulder: Westview Press.

Lintner, Bertil. 2011. *Land of Jade: A Journey from India through Northern Burma to China*. 3rd ed. Ithaca: Orchid Press.

Loong, Shona. 2022. "Post-Coup Myanmar in Six Warscapes." International Institute for Strategic Studies. https://myanmar.iiss.org/analysis

MacLean, Ken. 2008. "Sovereignty in Burma After the Entrepreneurial Turn: Mosaics of Control, Commodified Spaces, and Regulated Violence in Contemporary Burma." In *Taking Southeast Asia to Market: Commodities, Nature, and People in the Neoliberal Age*, eds. Joseph Nevins and Nancy Lee Peluso, 140-57. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

MacLean, Ken. 2018. "The Rohingya Crisis and the Practices of Erasure." *Journal of Genocide Research* 21 (1): 83-95.

Mark, SiuSue, and Youyi Zhang. 2017. "From Impediment to Adaptation: Chinese Investments in Myanmar's New Regulatory Environment." *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 36 (2): 71-100.

Mathieson, David Scott. 2017. "Burma's Northern Shan State and Prospects for Peace." Peace Brief 234, September. United States Institute of Peace.

Maung Aung Myoe. 2009. *Building the Tatmadaw*. Singapore: ISEAS Publishing.

Maung Aung Myoe. 2015. "Myanmar's China Policy since 2011: Determinants and Directions." *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 34 (2): 21-54.

McCarthy, Gerard, and Jacqueline Menager. 2017. "Gendered Rumours and the Muslim Scapegoat in Myanmar's Transition." *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 47 (3): 396-412.

McCarthy, Gerard, and Nicholas Farrelly. 2020. "Peri-Conflict Peace: Brokerage, Development and Illiberal Ceasefires in Myanmar's Borderlands." *Conflict, Security & Development* 20 (1): 141-63.

Meehan, Patrick. 2011. "Drugs, Insurgency and State-Building in Burma: Why the Drugs Trade Is Central to Burma's Changing Political Order." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 42 (03): 376-404.

Meehan, Patrick. 2015. "Fortifying or Fragmenting the State? The Political Economy of the Opium/Heroin Trade in Shan State, Myanmar, 1988-2013." *Critical Asian Studies* 47 (2): 253-82.

Meehan, Patrick. 2016. "The Continuation of War by Other Means: An Anatomy of the Palaung Ceasefire in Northern Shan State." In *War and Peace in the Borderlands of Myanmar: The Kachin Ceasefire, 1994-2011*, ed. Mandy Sadan, 361-87. Copenhagen: NIAS Press.

Meehan, Patrick, and Seng Lawn Dan. 2022. "Brokered Rule: Militias, Drugs, and Borderland Governance in the Myanmar-China Borderlands." *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 1-23.

Middleton, Carl, and Tay Zar Myo Win. 2021. "The Emergence of a Hybrid Public Sphere in Myanmar: Implications for Democratisation." *TRaNS: Trans -Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia* 9 (1): 45-64.

Nakanishi, Yoshihiro. 2013. *Strong Soldiers, Failed Revolution: The State and Military in Burma, 1962-1988*. Singapore: NUS Press.

Nilsen, Marte. 2013. "Will Democracy Bring Peace to Myanmar?" *International Area Studies Review* 16 (2): 115-41.

O'Hara, Christopher, and Niels Selling. 2012. *Myanmar's Ethnic Insurgents: UWSA, KNU, and KIO*. Institute for Security and Development Policy.

Ong, Andrew. 2018. "Producing Intransigence: (Mis) Understanding the United Wa State Army in Myanmar." *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 40 (3): 449-74.

Pepper, Mollie. 2018. "Ethnic Minority Women, Diversity, and Informal Participation in Peacebuilding in Myanmar." *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 13 (2): 61-75.

Prasse-Freeman, Elliott. 2021. "Hate Bait, Micro-publics, and National(ist) Conversations on Burmese Facebook." *Independent Journal of Burmese Scholarship*. (1): 144-204.

Prasse-Freeman, Elliott. 2023. "Refusing Rohingya: Reformulating Ethnicity amidst Blunt Biopolitics." *Current Anthropology* 64 (2).

Rajah, Ananda. 2002. "A 'Nation of Intent' in Burma: Karen Ethno-Nationalism, Nationalism and Narrations of Nation." *The Pacific Review* 15 (4): 517-37.

Renard, Ronald D. 2013. "The Wa Authority and Good Governance, 1989-2007." *Journal of Burma Studies* 17 (1): 141-80.

Sablosky, Jeffrey. 2021. "Dangerous Organizations: Facebook's Content Moderation Decisions and Ethnic Visibility in Myanmar." *Media, Culture & Society* 43 (6): 1017-42.

Sadan, Mandy, ed. 2016a. *War and Peace in the Borderlands of Myanmar: The Kachin Ceasefire, 1994-2011*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press.

Sadan, Mandy. 2016b. "Can Democracy Cure Myanmar's Ethnic Conflicts?" *Current History* 115 (782): 214-19.

Sai Wansai. 2018. "Constitution-Making and Peace Process Stagnation in Myanmar." Transnational Institute, September 3. https://www.tni.org/en/article/constitution-

making-and-peace-process-stagnation-in-myanmar-will-a-conditional-clause-help (accessed March 5, 2023).

Selth, Andrew. 2002. *Burma's Armed Forces: Power Without Glory*. Norwalk, CA: EastBridge Press.

Selth, Andrew. 2008. "Burma's 'Saffron Revolution' and the Limits of International Influence." *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 62 (3): 281-97.

Silverstein, Josef. 1990. "Civil War and Rebellion in Burma." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 21 (01): 114-34.

Silverstein, Josef. 1992. "Burma in an International Perspective." *Asian Survey* 32 (10): 951-63.

Smith, Martin. 1999. *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnic Conflict*. 2nd ed. London: Zed Books.

Smith, Martin. 2007. *State of Strife: The Dynamics of Ethnic Conflict in Burma*. East-West Center Policy Studies 36. Washington, DC.

Smith, Martin. 2010. "Ethnic Politics in Myanmar: A Year of Tension and Anticipation." *Southeast Asian Affairs* 2010 (1): 214-34.

South, Ashley. 2003. *Mon Nationalism and Civil War in Burma: The Golden Sheldrake*. London: Routledge.

South, Ashley, and Marie Lall. 2016. "Language, Education and the Peace Process in Myanmar." *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 38 (1): 128-53.

Steinberg, David I. 2001. *Burma: The State of Myanmar*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

Steinberg, David I. 2007a. "Civil Society and Legitimacy: The Basis for National Reconciliation in Burma/Myanmar." In *Myanmar's Long Road to National Reconciliation*, ed. Trevor Wilson, 149-76. Singapore: ISEAS Publishing.

Steinberg, David I. 2007b. "The United States and Its Allies: The Problem of Burma/Myanmar Policy." *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 29 (2): 219-37.

Steinberg, David I. 2010. "The United States and Myanmar: A 'Boutique Issue'?" *International Affairs* 86 (1): 175-94.

Steinberg, David I., and Hongwei Fan. 2012. *Modern China-Myanmar Relations: Dilemmas of Mutual Dependence*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press.

Stokke, Kristian. 2019. "Political Representation by Ethnic Parties? Electoral Performance and Party-Building Processes among Ethnic Parties in Myanmar." *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 38 (3): 307-36.

Su, Xiaobo. 2016. "Repositioning Yunnan: Security and China's Geoeconomic Engagement with Myanmar." *Area Development and Policy* 1 (2): 178-94.

Suhardiman, Diana, Jeff Rutherford, and Saw John Bright. 2017. "Putting Violent Armed Conflict in the Center of the Salween Hydropower Debates." *Critical Asian Studies* 49 (3): 1-16.

Sun, Yun. 2012. "China's Strategic Misjudgment on Myanmar." *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 31 (1): 73-96.

Sun, Yun. 2017. "China and Myanmar's Peace Process." United States Institute of Peace Special Report 401, March. https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR401-China-and-Myanmar-Peace-Process.pdf (accessed March 5, 2023).

Tang-Lee, Diane. 2016. "Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Public Engagement for a Chinese State-Backed Mining Project in Myanmar - Challenges and Prospects."

Resources Policy 47 (March): 28-37.
Taylor, Robert H. 1979. "Burma's National Unity Problem and the 1974 Constitution." *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 1 (3): 232-48.
Taylor, Robert H. 2009. *The State in Myanmar*. Singapore: NUS Press.
Thawnghmung, Ardeth Maung. 2012. *The "Other" Karen in Myanmar: Ethnic Minorities and the Struggle without Arms*. Blue Ridge Summit, PA: Lexington Books.
Thawnghmung, Ardeth Maung. 2017. "Signs of Life in Myanmar's Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement? Finding a Way Forward." *Critical Asian Studies* 49 (3): 379-95.
Thawnghmung, Ardeth Maung, and Saw Eh Htoo. 2022. "The Fractured Centre: 'Two-Headed Government' and Threats to the Peace Process in Myanmar." *Modern Asian Studies* 56 (2): 504-32.
Tønnesson, Stein, Min Zaw Oo, and Ne Lynn Aung. 2021. "Non-Inclusive Ceasefires Do Not Bring Peace: Findings from Myanmar." *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 33 (3): 313-49.
Transnational Institute. 2016. "China's Engagement in Myanmar: From Malacca Dilemma to Transition Dilemma." Myanmar Policy Briefing 19, July. https://www.tni.org/files/publication-downloads/chinas_engagement_in_myanmar-final.pdf (accessed March 5, 2023).
Transnational Institute. 2017. "Beyond Panglong: Myanmar's National Peace and Reform Dilemma." Myanmar Policy Briefing 21, September. https://www.tni.org/files/publication-downloads/beyond_panglong.pdf (accessed March 5, 2023).
Transnational Institute. 2019. "Selling the Silk Road Spirit: China's Belt and Road Initiative in Myanmar." Myanmar Policy Briefing 22, November. https://www.tni.org/files/publication-downloads/bri_myanmar_web_18-11-19.pdf (accessed March 5, 2023).
United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. 2021. *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2022: Myanmar*. December 31. https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/myanmar-humanitarian-needs-overview-2022-december-2021 (accessed March 5, 2023).
United States Institute of Peace. 2018. "China's Role in Myanmar's Internal Conflicts." USIP Senior Study Group Report 1, September. https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2018-09/ssg-report-chinas-role-in-myanmars-internal-conflicts.pdf (accessed March 5, 2023).
Van Klinken, Gerry, and Su Mon Thazin Aung. 2017. "The Contentious Politics of Anti-Muslim Scapegoating in Myanmar." *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 47 (3): 353-75.
Van Schendel, Willem. 2002. "Geographies of Knowing, Geographies of Ignorance: Jumping Scale in Southeast Asia." *Environment and Planning D* 20: 647-68.
Win Min. 2008. "Internal Dynamics of the Burmese military: Before, during and after the 2007 Demonstrations." In *Dictatorship, Disorder and Decline in Myanmar*, ed. Monique Skidmore and Trevor Wilson, 29-50. Canberra: ANU Press.
Woods, Kevin. 2011. "Ceasefire Capitalism: Military-Private Partnerships, Resource Concessions and Military-State Building in the Burma-China Borderlands." *Journal of Peasant Studies* 38 (4): 747-70.
Woods, Kevin. 2019. "Rubber out of the Ashes: Locating Chinese Agribusiness Investments in 'Armed Sovereignties' in the Myanmar-China Borderlands." *Territory, Politics, Governance* 7 (1): 79-95.
Yawnghwe, Chao Tzang. 2010. *The Shan of Burma: Memoirs of a Shan Exile*. Singapore: ISEAS Publishing.

Ye Myo Hein. 2022. *One Year on: The Momentum of Myanmar's Armed Rebellion*. Washington, DC: Wilson Center.

Zaw Oo, and Win Min. 2007. *Assessing Burma's Ceasefire Accords*. Washington, DC: East-West Center Washington; Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

Dr Andrew Ong is a postdoctoral fellow at Nanyang Technological University. His research explores autonomy, armed conflict, and peace processes in Myanmar and Southeast Asia. His work has appeared in *American Ethnologist*, *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, and *Critique of Anthropology*, with commentary pieces elsewhere. His forthcoming book, *Stalemate: Autonomy and Insurgency on the China-Myanmar Border* (Cornell University Press, 2023), looks at the history and politics of the United Wa State Army in Myanmar. Email: andrewh.ong@ntu.edu.sg

Submitted: September 21, 2022; Revised: December 05, 2022; Accepted: December 08, 2022