Indigeneity, ethnopolitics, and *taingyinthar*: Myanmar and the global Indigenous Peoples' movement

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In Myanmar, the idea of 'indigeneity' has been mobilised in two radically different ways. Ethnonationalist groups such as the Chin National Front and the Karen National Union have utilised the concept to lobby for increased autonomy in international forums such as the United Nations, while the Burmese state has used the idea of indigeneity (or native-ness, typically translated as taingyinthar *in Burmese) to exclude certain minorities — most prominently the Rohingya — by explicitly striking them from the official list of Myanmar's 'national races'. To clarify how this definitional tension has developed, this article will situate the competing Burmese appeals to indigeneity within the history of international indigeneity politics, and compare the Burmese 'Indigenous situation' to other Asian countries that have addressed the question of who counts and does not count as Indigenous.*

Since at least the 1980s, the concept of 'indigeneity' or 'indigenousness' has been employed by a variety of social movements around the world in order to secure legal rights or accomplish political goals.[1] The term 'Indigenous Peoples' has gained significant traction with the United Nations, which has provided multiple forums for the consideration of Indigenous rights and in 2007 adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which was signed by every Southeast Asian UN member state, and all but two Asian members (Bangladesh and Bhutan, which abstained from voting).[2] However, UNDRIP signatories — especially in Asia — have been slow to actually embrace the international concept of indigeneity in their own internal laws, due to many considering the concept of Indigenous Peoples to be relevant in other parts of the world where widespread European colonisation occurred, but not in their own countries. This view has become known as the 'salt-water theory'.[3] At the time of writing, Cambodia,

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1 Michael Hathaway, 'The emergence of indigeneity: Public intellectuals and an Indigenous space in southwest China', *Cultural Anthropology* 25, 2 (2010): 301–33.
2 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), 'Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples', 2007; http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/IPeoples/Pages/Declaration.aspx (accessed 3 May 2015). For a discussion of this issue in relation to Bangladesh, see Nasir Uddin, 'The local translation of global indigeneity: A case of the Chittagong Hill Tracts', this vol.
3 Micah F. Morton and Ian G. Baird, 'From Hill tribes to Indigenous Peoples: The localisation of a

Japan, the Philippines, Nepal and Taiwan (Republic of China) are the only Asian states that have included explicit and specific rights for 'Indigenous' communities in their legal code.[4]

This article seeks to understand the 'Indigenous situation' in Myanmar.[5] The mobilisation of indigeneity politics in Myanmar, as in various other countries in Asia, could potentially have very important consequences: apart from the Burmese state military, many of the groups involved in Myanmar's long-running internal armed conflicts are ethnonationalist armies; some of these groups are fighting for varying degrees of autonomy and self-rule.[6] It is possible that Myanmar's ethnopolitical organisations could employ the strategies of the global Indigenous Peoples' movement in order to peacefully pursue their goals: some groups from Myanmar, such as the Karen National Union (KNU) and Chin National Front (CNF), have attempted to join the international Indigenous Peoples' movement by making their presence known at the United Nations, but those groups have had relatively limited success in leveraging their Indigenous status. To understand the Indigenous situation in Myanmar, this article will analyse the tension between the international conception of indigeneity and the range of ways that indigeneity (and its Burmese language interpretations) has been used in that country.

This analysis will begin with a review of how Indigenous Peoples' issues have been considered at the international level. From there, I will discuss the particular problems related to the recognition of Indigenous Peoples in Asia by building on Micah Morton and Ian Baird's work on Thailand.[7] Then I will examine in detail how several ethnonationalist organisations have employed the 'international' concept of indigeneity in prominent international forums; particular attention will be given to the delegations sent to the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Peoples by the KNU, CNF, and Naga Peoples' Movement for Human Rights (NPMHR), the first three Myanmar-based groups to attend an international forum on Indigenous Peoples' issues. This discussion will draw heavily on the history of ethnopolitics in Myanmar, especially the consequences of the inter-ethnic Panglong Conference of 1947. The article will conclude by examining how the Burmese concept of *tain-gyinthar* — usually translated as 'indigenous' or as 'national race', which Nick

global movement in Thailand', this vol.; see also Ian G. Baird, 'The construction of "Indigenous Peoples" in Cambodia', in *Alterities in Asia: Reflections on identity and regionalism*, ed. Leong Yew (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 156.

4   Christian Erni, ed., *The concept of Indigenous Peoples in Asia: A resource book*, IWGIA document No. 123 (Copenhagen: International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs; Chiang Mai: Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact, 2008). See also Ian G. Baird, 'Introduction. Indigeneity in Asia: An emerging but contested concept', in 'Indigeneity in Southeast Asia', ed. I.G. Baird, special issue, *Asian Ethnicity* 17, 4 (2016): 501–5.

5   In 1989, the Burmese government — then known as the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) — changed the name of their country from the Union of Burma to the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. There has since been considerable controversy over whether to call the country 'Myanmar' or 'Burma', although the current civilian government continues to use the term 'Myanmar'. I will use the term Myanmar to refer to the country, except where Burma is historically necessary (e.g., when referring to British Burma); but 'Burmese' as an adjective. The ethnic majority of Myanmar will be referred to as the Bamar, and their language as Burmese.

6   Martin Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the politics of ethnicity* (Dhaka: University Press, 1999), p. 28.

7   Morton and Baird, 'From Hill tribes to Indigenous Peoples', this vol.

Cheesman refers to as a 'pre-eminent political idea in Myanmar'[8] — continues to come into friction with the international legal concept of indigeneity.

It should be noted before proceeding that it is not within the purview of this article to decide who is Indigenous or how to determine indigeneity, as the concept is complex and is variously understood by individuals and groups, both inside and outside of Myanmar. However, in view of providing some clarity for readers, it is worth mentioning a definition of indigeneity articulated by Ian Baird, drawing on the theories of Tania Li and Stuart Hall: indigeneity is 'a particular type of positioning that variously draws on history, landscapes and repertoires of meaning … that emerges through different varieties of struggles and engagement'.[9] In the United Nations, indigeneity is founded on the concept of 'self-determination'. Despite this, however, for many 'indigeneity' is a term of identification which carries problematic 'connotations of prior occupancy',[10] which have led to disputes, particularly in Asia. According to Morton and Baird, the work of the United Nations and other organisations that work with Indigenous Peoples has come to promote a concept of indigeneity that 'sees Indigenous Peoples not only as first peoples, but as colonised or oppressed peoples'.[11] As noted by Michaela Pelican, the concept is extremely complex and 'subject to local and national particularities',[12] which can cause indigeneity to be articulated in dramatically different ways over space and time, not only in Asia but also in other parts of the world, including Africa.

Benedict Kingsbury's 'constructivist' model of Indigenous identification provides a useful tool for understanding the incredible political complexities faced by Myanmar's ethnic minorities as they identify as Indigenous Peoples on an international level. In the constructivist approach, indigeneity is

> a continuous process in which claims and practices in numerous specific cases are abstracted in the wider institutions of international society, then made specific again at the moment of application in the political, legal, and social processes of particular … societies.[13]

8 Nick Cheesman, 'How in Myanmar "national races" came to surpass citizenship and exclude Rohingya', *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 47, 3 (2017): 461.

9 Ian G. Baird, '"Indigenous Peoples" and land: Comparing communal land titling and its implications in Cambodia and Laos', *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 54, 3 (2013): 272.

10 Jacques Bertrand, '"Indigenous Peoples' rights" as a strategy of ethnic accommodation: Contrasting experiences of Cordillerans and Papuans in the Philippines and Indonesia', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 34, 5 (2011): 854; see also Tania Li, 'Ethnic cleansing, recursive knowledge, and the dilemmas of sedentarism', *International Social Science Journal* 54, 173 (2002): 361–71; and Ardeth Thawnghmung, 'The politics of indigeneity in Myanmar: Competing narratives in Rakhine State', *Asian Ethnicity* 17, 4 (May 2016): 527–47.

11 Morton and Baird, 'From Hill tribes to Indigenous Peoples', this vol. See also Andrew Gray, 'The Indigenous movement in Asia', in *Indigenous Peoples in Asia*, ed. R.H. Barnes, Andrew Gray and Benedict Kingsbury (Ann Arbor, MI: Association of Asian Studies, 1995), pp. 35–8. Gray was the first scholar to articulate this particular idea — that Indigenous Peoples are oppressed or colonised peoples — with regard to Asia.

12 Michaela Pelican, 'Complexities of indigeneity and autochthony: An African example', *American Ethnologist* 36, 1 (2009): 52.

13 Benedict Kingsbury, '"Indigenous Peoples" in international law: A constructivist approach to the Asian controversy', *American Journal of International Law* 92, 3 (1998): 415.

I do not claim that Indigenous Peoples in Myanmar have a definition like this in mind when they attend international forums such as the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Affairs; still, it is useful to consider how particular groups might undergo processes of abstraction and specification when their claims are made in international forums and then returned to their homelands. To unpack Kingsbury's 'constructivist' approach and how it might be used to understand Indigenous Peoples' movements in Myanmar, I will use the example of the KNU. As will be discussed in greater detail below, the KNU was among the first groups to claim indigeneity at the United Nations; in doing so, they 'abstracted' themselves by aligning their status vis-à-vis the Burmese state with numerous groups from across the world and their respective states. Then, the specific demands of the KNU, made under the auspices of the abstracted United Nations' acknowledgement of their indigeneity, would emerge in the localised context of Karen dealings with the Burmese state. The KNU's political manoeuvrings at the local level are further complicated by their claim to represent a 'pan-Karen' identity: 'Karen' is a controversial term coined during the British administration of Burma that lumped together a wide range of previously unrelated groups.[14]

Here, I argue that the international legal concept of indigeneity is sharply different from the localised Burmese conception of indigeneity — what might be called the Indigenous sense of indigeneity. The international legal concept of indigeneity privileges colonised, underrepresented, or otherwise oppressed groups; the Burmese concept of indigeneity, which is usually translated as *taingyinthar* (တိုင်းရင်းသား),[15] provides the government of Myanmar with a powerful tool to categorise the population they govern — and, subsequently, to decide who should be included in or excluded from participation in Myanmar civil society. *Taingyinthar* is a complicated and problematic term, and one that comes into considerable friction with the aforementioned international definitions of indigeneity that consider Indigenous Peoples to be colonised or oppressed peoples. It tends to be mobilised in order to determine who is and is not a legitimate citizen of Myanmar, generally for the purpose of excluding certain groups from political participation and state recognition as residents of Myanmar.[16] Burmese minority groups who employ the international concept of indigeneity tend to claim Indigenous status to gain 'cultural rights' and make arguments for state recognition of traditional forms of governance, land tenure, and citizenship — ultimately, a different set of political goals than are accomplished by *taingyinthar*.

The concept of indigeneity in academia and international law

In order to understand the ways in which indigeneity has been used in Myanmar, it is necessary to consider how indigeneity came to be a useful concept in the context

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14   Ardeth Thawnghmung, *The 'Other' Karen in Myanmar: Ethnic minorities and the struggle without arms* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), p. 19. For example, the two largest groups usually categorised as 'Karen' — who speak mutually unintelligible languages — tend to self-identify with the terms 'Sgaw' or 'Pwa Kan Yaw' and 'Pwo' or 'Ploan'. The complexities of ethnic classification and contestation of terms such as 'Karen' to refer to Myanmar's vast array of ethnic groups will be discussed in further detail below.
15   Cheesman, 'How in Myanmar "national races" came to surpass citizenship', p. 461.
16   Thawnghmung, 'The politics of indigeneity in Myanmar', p. 528; see also Cheesman, 'How in Myanmar "national races" came to surpass citizenship', p. 462.

of international law; in particular, it is worth paying attention to how indigeneity came to be linked to land tenure. From the 1970s to the 1990s, the concept of indigeneity underwent a major shift in public discourse. As of the 1970s, the phrase 'Indigenous Peoples' was a 'prosaic description without much significance'; however, by the late 1990s, indigeneity had become 'a concept with considerable power as a basis for group mobilization'.[17] This shift began in the academy and gradually radiated outward into the legal and political spheres through the concept of 'Indigenous rights'. According to Michael Dove, the concept of 'Indigenous rights' developed in the 1980s and 1990s as a consequence of anthropological scholarship: discussions that would have referred to 'tribesmen' or 'peasants' began to refer to 'Indigenous Peoples', giving the term academic credibility.[18] According to Dove, this term was picked up in international politics as a salient way to approach questions of minority rights in spaces where minorities had long histories of coexisting with a majority population. The formation of the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations in 1982, which has now become the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, could be seen as a culmination of this discourse[19] — a political reification of the academic concept of Indigenous Peoples, and the first time that Indigenous Peoples from within Myanmar claimed Indigenous status in an international forum. As will be discussed in detail later, the CNF, KNU, and NPMHR all appeared at the Working Group. While all of those organisations are (correctly or incorrectly) associated with armed ethnopolitical groups, it is important to note that they also function as civil society organisations. Although the term 'Indigenous' was made academically credible by anthropologists and politically relevant through international organisations such as the United Nations, grassroots civil society organisations and NGOs were the first to use the term in Asia.[20]

In the words of Arif Dirlik, identifying oneself as 'Indigenous' comes with 'an almost absolute attachment to place';[21] in other words, one must be Indigenous *to somewhere* in particular. The particularity of land tenure claims among Indigenous Peoples is especially pertinent when considering those who employ collective land use as a 'built in feature of [their] production systems',[22] such as those embedded within hunting and gathering cultures. Tania Li is, however, sceptical that claims of attachment to particular places could be made for agricultural communities, as a farmer's use of land is more generalised than a hunter-gatherer's.[23] Nevertheless, Cambodia's 2001 Land Law presents an opposite understanding of how communal land titling should function for Indigenous communities. Indeed, communal land titles for Indigenous groups in Cambodia have thus far been limited to agricultural

17 Cheesman, 'How in Myanmar "national races" came to surpass citizenship', p. 414.
18 Michael Dove, 'Indigenous People and environmental politics', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 35 (2006): 196.
19 Jeff J. Corntassel and Tomas Hopkins Primeau, 'The paradox of indigenous identity: A levels-of-analysis approach', *Global Governance* 4, 2 (1998): 141.
20 Morton and Baird, 'From Hill tribes to Indigenous Peoples', this vol.
21 Arif Dirlik, 'Globalization, indigenism, and the politics of place', *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 34, 1 (2003): 16.
22 Tania Murray Li, 'Indigeneity, capitalism, and the management of dispossession', *Current Anthropology* 51, 3 (2010): 385.
23 Ibid.

lands, especially those used by swidden cultivators, while forests used for gathering have been 'reified as state owned'[24] rather than belonging to Indigenous groups.

Within Myanmar, no specific legislation at the national level has been passed to provide minority groups (including groups who identify as Indigenous) with separate land tenure rights; at present, there is not a unified land tenure policy in Myanmar's legislation.[25] According to the 2008 Constitution of Myanmar, the legislative bodies of Myanmar's various 'states, divisions, and regions' are given a great deal of freedom to determine how land tenure is legislated, and how that legislation is enforced in their respective constituencies.[26] This lack of top-down legal specificity would seem to provide space for self-identifying Indigenous groups to use their lands according to local custom; indeed, in Karen State, some KNU-linked groups have been issuing their own communal land titles.[27] However, land acquired through foreign and local investment *is* given legal protection under Myanmar's Farmland Law and the Vacant, Fallow, and Virgin Lands Law. Rural landholders have no legal recourse if their land is usurped for commercial purposes. Predictably, this has led to widespread land disputes in areas where customarily farmed or foraged lands have been acquired by businesses.[28]

It should come as no surprise that the relationship between Indigenous rights and land tenure has been one of the primary causes of criticism towards the topic. The most famous critique of the indigeneity movement is likely that of anthropologist Adam Kuper, who considered that the concept of indigeneity is analytically useless and politically dangerous.[29] He takes issue with the Indigenous rights movement's assumption that claims of 'firstness' and 'priorness' in human populations should come with exclusive rights; furthermore, in Kuper's reasoning, 'Indigenous' is little more than a tidy synonym for 'primitive', a concept that anthropologists have been trying to dismantle for years. Kuper argues that the first assumption makes a conceptual link between indigeneity and right-wing irredentist groups in Europe, while the second point somewhat paradoxically demonstrates that 'Indigenous' is inextricably linked to the essentialising force of colonial rhetoric; furthermore, Kuper asserts that the association between land tenure and indigenous rights is highly problematic, not only because indigenous rights could 'undermine individual rights'[30] to land tenure, but also because it might be impossible to legislate spaces for nomadic groups. Kuper's critique was met, however, with a massive backlash, which Dove argues is evidence of the enduring 'political capital'[31] of the concept.

Several scholars have attempted to reconcile Kuper's problematisation of Indigenous rights with what they see as the possible benefits of legislating rights

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24   Baird, '"Indigenous Peoples" and land', p. 277.
25   Food Security Working Group, 'Legal review of recently enacted Farmland Law and Vacant, Fallow and Virgin Lands Management Law: Improving the legal and policy frameworks relating to land management in Myanmar' (Washington, DC: Forest Trends, 2012), p. 3.
26   Ibid., p. 16.
27   Ian Baird, pers. comm., 18 Sept. 2017.
28   Karen Human Rights Group, 'Losing ground: Land conflicts and collective action in eastern Myanmar', 13 Mar. 2013; http://www.khrg.org/2013/03/losing-ground-land-conflicts-and-collective-action-eastern-myanmar (accessed 3 Sept. 2015).
29   Adam Kuper, 'The return of the native', *Current Anthropology* 44, 3 (2003): 389–402.
30   Ibid., p. 390.
31   Dove, 'Indigenous People and environmental politics', p. 193.

for Indigenous groups. Pelican's response to Kuper is one that articulates well with my personal conception of indigeneity: while she echoes Kuper's scepticism by claiming that indigeneity is not a useful term for anthropological analysis, she acknowledges that 'it nonetheless has reality and meaning for those who identify themselves as indigenous'.[32] James Sidaway et al. present a slightly different approach from Pelican's, in which they see indigeneity as a product of colonial racial imagining 'about indigenous people',[33] an identification which those same groups can now use as a tactic for working towards their political goals. In line with Ian Baird, the present study is primarily concerned with the political implications of the 'international proliferation of the concept of indigeneity'[34] for Myanmar, rather than the metaphysical truth or falsehood of the indigeneity concept.

Ethnonationalism and international indigeneity

As previously noted, 'Indigenous rights' is best understood as a form of minority rights: a means to the acknowledgement and allowance of difference in a given polity. In Thailand, the primary 'movers and shakers' in the Indigenous Peoples' movement have been from so-called 'Hill tribes', a diverse group of ethnic minorities;[35] likewise, the key actors in Myanmar's Indigenous Peoples' movement are ethnic minorities who have historically occupied regions along Myanmar's frontiers. Indeed, for all of the groups that will be discussed in this article — the KNU, the CNF, and the NPMHR — ethnicity has been the primary axis along which this difference has been established.

Each of the aforementioned organisations are actually composed of multiple ethnicities who have only gradually and unevenly come to see themselves as belonging to a larger 'Karen', 'Chin', or 'Naga' community.[36] All three of these terms have been contested and are the subject of considerable controversy; it would be false to claim that 'the Karen' and 'the Chin' are singular, easily-identifiable ethnic groups. The word 'Naga' is a centuries-old exonym, popularised during the British colonisation of northeast India to refer to a range of linguistically unrelated communities;[37] within Myanmar, the Naga are formally classified as a subgroup within the Chin 'national race'.[38] Although I will occasionally make reference to ethnic groups using umbrella terms like 'the Karen' or 'the Chin', it is important to note that these words have evolved over time, are still evolving, and are not necessarily used by all of the Indigenous Peoples to whom they refer.

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32 Pelican, 'Complexities of indigeneity and autochthony', p. 54.
33 James D. Sidaway, Chih Yuan Woon and Jane M. Jacobs, 'Planetary postcolonialism', *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 35, 1 (2014): 8.
34 Ian G. Baird, 'Translocal assemblages and the circulation of the concept of "Indigenous Peoples" in Laos', *Political Geography* 46 (2015): 55.
35 Morton and Baird, 'From Hill tribes to Indigenous Peoples', this vol.
36 Peter Swift, 'Understanding Chin political participation in Myanmar' (MSc. thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2018), p. 37; see also Thawnghmung, *The 'Other' Karen in Myanmar*, p. 19.
37 S.R. Tohring, *Violence and identity in north-east India: Naga–Kuki conflict* (New Delhi: Mittal, 2010), p. 7.
38 Soe Zeya Tun, 'The Naga tribes of Myanmar', *Boston Globe*, 16 Jan. 2015.

As noted by Jane Ferguson, many of Myanmar's ethnic minorities straddle the borders of Myanmar and its neighbours.[39] This is certainly true of the Indigenous Peoples represented by the three ethnonationalist groups examined here: self-identifying Naga live throughout the hilly areas that are now bifurcated by the India–Myanmar border, with significant populations in Nagaland on the Indian side and Chin State and Sagaing Division on the Burmese side; Naga nationalist groups such as the NPMHR conceive of 'Naga' as a multi-ethnic nation, indigenous to an area currently occupied by both the Indian and Myanmar states.[40] Similarly, there are large Karen-identifying populations on both sides of the Myanmar–Thai border; the groups referred to as 'Chin' by the Burmese government and by Chin nationalist organisations populate parts of Myanmar, India, and the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh. Therefore, this article will include the work of individuals and organisations based both inside and outside of Myanmar, as long as the ethnic groups and Indigenous Peoples they represent (or claim to represent) have significant populations within Myanmar.[41]

Inter-ethnic conflict has a long history in Myanmar; it is one of the pre-eminent factors driving Myanmar's civil wars, some of which have been running for several decades. In order to understand the factors that eventually pushed the KNU, the CNF, and the NPMHR to lobby for recognition as Indigenous Peoples at the United Nations, it is important to give a brief precis of the history of Myanmar's eth-nopolitics. Although ethnic conflict on the frontiers of the Burmese state almost certainly predates the historical record, the British colonisation of Burma did much to exacerbate already existing inter-ethnic tensions. One of the key factors leading to the efflorescence of ethnonationalist movements in contemporary Myanmar was the British tendency to group tenuously-related (and even unrelated) ethnic minorities together under broad ethnic umbrella categories, and then give specific privileges to groups and individuals in those umbrella categories. As noted by Ardeth Thawnghmung, ethnic minorities — particularly those classified by the British as the Chin, Kachin, and Karen — 'benefitted disproportionately from Western mission-ary efforts and British recruitment policies for the army, police, and bureaucracy'.[42] These privileges were starkest in the British-administered Burmese army, which, in 1925, would only accept recruits if they could be classified as Chin, Kachin, or Karen;[43] this policy led many in the Bamar majority to see the army as 'an instrument to facilitate their oppression at the hands of ethnic minorities'.[44]

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39   Jane Ferguson, 'Ethnicity, belonging, and the national census in Burma/Myanmar', *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 171, 1 (2015): 10.
40   Nandita Haksar and Luingam Luithui, *Nagaland file: A question of human rights* (New Delhi: Lancer International, 1984), p. 15.
41   See also Uddin, 'The local translation of global indigeneity', this vol.: like Uddin's study, this article can and should be understood as a challenge to the regional boundaries between South Asia and Southeast Asia. Although Myanmar is certainly included in most definitions of Southeast Asia, a thorough examination of the Indigenous Peoples situation in Myanmar requires widening the scope to include other geopolitical regions.
42   Ardeth Thawnghmung, *Beyond armed resistance: Ethnonational politics in Burma (Myanmar)*, EWC Policy Studies No. 62 (Honolulu: East-West Center, 2011), p. 3.
43   Matthew J. Walton, 'Ethnicity, conflict, and history in Burma: The myths of Panglong', *Asian Survey* 48, 6 (2008): 894.
44   Ibid.

On 12 February 1947, the Burmese government — represented by nationalist hero Aung San — met with Shan, Kachin, and Chin leaders to draft and sign the Panglong Agreement,[45] itself the result of a larger meeting known as the Panglong Conference, held in Panglong (also spelled Pinlon), Shan State, Burma. The ostensible purpose of the Panglong Conference was to formalise the participation of ethnic minorities in the postcolonial Burmese government along the lines of 'nations within a nation';[46] indeed, the Panglong Conference and its resulting Agreement have been employed by the Myanmar state as something of a metaphor for state engagement with ethnic minorities. The best example of this usage can be found in the name of the biannual peace talks held by the National League for Democracy (NLD) government since August 2016: the '21st Century Panglong Union Peace Conference',[47] given this name in spite of being held in the junta-designed capital Nay Pyi Taw.

In reality, the Panglong Agreement might work better as a symbol for the intractable nature of Myanmar's inter-ethnic conflicts than it does as a symbol for inter-ethnic cooperation. The original Panglong Agreement was only signed by representatives from the Shan, Kachin, and Chin ethnic groups. The representatives of those groups did not necessarily reflect the political wills of each community at the time: the Shan and Kachin delegations were composed entirely of hereditary elites, despite the growing presence of more nationally-oriented youth-led democracy movements such as the Shan State Freedom League and Kachin Youth League. The Chin delegation had to participate without the aid of a translator, which severely hindered their ability to make their own demands or understand the policies that were being debated.[48] Several Karen representatives attended, but apparently only had observer status. The reasons for this are somewhat confusing: several Karen elites were frustrated by the Burmese government's choice of Shan representatives, and refused to negotiate as long as 'certain *saophas*'[49] were in attendance; however, long-standing tensions between the Karen and Bamar may have encouraged the fledgling government of Burma to intentionally exclude them.[50]

In the wake of the Panglong Conference, measures were placed in the Union of Burma's 1947 Constitution that vaguely reflected the articles of the Panglong Agreement by making specific concessions to a range of ethnic groups. The Shan and Karenni (also referred to as Kayah) were given precisely-demarcated states with the right to secede after ten years; Chin representatives to the Union waived secession rights in favour of increased economic inclusion in the Union.[51] No Karen state was demarcated at this time, and a constitutional provision was added that forbade secession should a Karen state be created.[52] This legislative snub angered the KNU, a group formed in 1947 by elites from the Sgaw and Pwo subgroups as an

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45 Ibid., p. 889.
46 Thawnghmung, *The 'Other' Karen in Myanmar*, p. 40.
47 The Republic of the Union of Myanmar President Office, 'Accreditation for 21st Century Panglong Peace Conference', http://www.president-office.gov.mm/en/?q=issues/peace/id-6521 (accessed 27 July 2017).
48 Walton, 'Ethnicity, conflict, and history in Burma', p. 902.
49 Ibid., pp. 899–900; *saopha* refers to members of the Shan hereditary nobility.
50 Ibid.
51 Thawnghmung, *The 'Other' Karen in Myanmar*, p. 40.
52 Ibid.

umbrella organisation to promote Karen unity.[53] Not long afterwards, on Christmas Eve of 1948, long-simmering anti-Karen sentiment led the Tatmadaw (the Bamar-dominated postcolonial Burmese military) to massacre 80 Karen civilians at a church service; anti-Karen violence rapidly spread to other regions.[54] This sparked a violent reaction from the Karen National Defense Organisation (the armed wing of the KNU at that time). The Karen revolt sparked the beginning of the Burmese civil wars; at least ten separate ethnonationalist groups have gone to war with the governments of Burma/Myanmar since 1949. Although the KNU and other armed ethnonationalist organisations have signed ceasefires at various times since the mid-twentieth century, tensions remain high in parts of the country.

The KNU is an ethnonationalist organisation with a powerful armed wing. According to one website apparently run by the KNU, their foundational values remain militaristic in nature: 'Surrender is out of the question; The recognition of the Karen State must be completed; We shall retain our arms; We shall decide our own political destiny.'[55] A different website that also appears to be run by the KNU, or an allied group, paints a marginally less militaristic picture of the organisation.[56] Although the manifesto on this second website does invoke the aforementioned four principles, it places them within the historical context of the Karen revolt of 1949, and ends by invoking the United Nations charter and United Nations Declarations on Human Rights.[57] If one takes this website at face value, it would appear that the United Nations plays a significant role in official KNU ideology; therefore, it would make sense that the KNU would view the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Peoples as the ideal forum to advance their objectives of self-determination.

Indeed, in August 1987, the KNU made a statement to the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations. According to Saw Mae Plet Htoo — representing the KNU — the Karen seek 'autonomy, not separation'.[58] Interestingly, Saw Mae Plet Htoo contextualises this claim by invoking the Panglong Agreement and the 1947 constitution, neither of which made concessions to the Karen; instead, Saw Mae Plet Htoo seems to be invoking these documents in a gesture towards pan-Indigenous solidarity, claiming that the promises made in those documents (which most directly benefitted the Shan and Karenni) had been 'betrayed'[59] by the Burmese government. The KNU does not appear to have made a claim for full autonomy or the exclusive right to land tenure within Karen State, but instead leveraged their identification as Indigenous Peoples as a means to increased international visibility and the recognition of their oppression at the hands of the Burmese state.

53 Ibid.
54 Ashley South, *Ethnic politics in Burma: States of conflict* (New York: Routledge 2008), p. 30.
55 Karen National Union, 'Objectives', http://karennationalunion.net/index.php/burma/about-the-knu/objectives (accessed 12 Sept. 2015).
56 Karen National Union, 'The Karens, a nation, their nature and history', http://www.knuhq.org/about/the-karens-a-nation-their-nature-and-history/ (accessed 1 Aug. 2017).
57 Ibid.
58 Saw Mae Plet Htoo, 'Commentary on the Burmese delegate's reply', Karen National Union (KNU) Bulletin No. 14, Dec. 1987, pp. 6–12.
59 Ibid., p. 10.

As far as I am aware, Saw Mae Plet Htoo's appeal to the United Nations is the first time one of Myanmar's non-Bamar 'ethnic nationalities' employed the concept of 'indigeneity' or 'indigenousness' in an attempt to secure greater rights or autonomy in an international sphere. Saw Mae Plet Htoo himself[60] seems to have dropped out of public vision: his name is only mentioned on documents related to his 1987 appeal to the United Nations, and never on the KNU's websites; Karen activists I spoke with in Yangon told me that they recognised his name, but were not sure who he was. However, Saw Mae Plet Htoo's appeal to the United Nations is important in that it marks the beginning not only of Myanmar-based groups' involvement with the Indigenous People's movement, but perhaps the beginning of the Indigenous Peoples' movement itself. Chris Hathaway notes that the 1980s marked the well-documented beginning of 'Indigenous social movements'[61] — fighting for the rights of Indigenous Peoples — as powerful forces for shaping the political lives and legal rights of minority groups across the globe, including in Asia.[62] The KNU, making their statements to the United Nations in 1987, would appear to have been forerunners in mobilising the concept of indigeneity for the purpose of gaining visibility or leveraging power.

In 1992, a delegation of ethnic Naga led by Luingam Luithui attended the UN Working Group on Indigenous Peoples as a representative of the NPMHR. Several other Naga-focused groups attended the UN Working Group, most notably the National Socialist Council of Nagaland,[63] a paramilitary organisation that India considers one of its foremost threats to national security. Luingam Luithui, who founded NPMHR, has been a key figure in the international Indigenous Peoples' movement, especially in Asia; Morton and Baird credit him as one of the central figures responsible for bringing the international concept of indigeneity to Thailand, where he founded the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP).[64] Moreover, his nephew, Gam Shimray, is the director of AIPP, and based in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Although Luithui himself is from northeast India, it is important to consider Luithui's work in relation to the situation of indigeneity in Myanmar, particularly given the transborder homeland occupied by the groups who identify as Naga and his long history of involvement with Indigenous Peoples' movements in Asia. There are approximately 120,000 Naga living in Myanmar in an autonomous zone within Sagaing Division.[65] The Naga are considered *taingyinthar* in Myanmar, but are currently officially classed as a subgroup of the Chin ethnicity;[66] in Luithui's own words, Naga nationalists generally consider themselves as Indigenous Peoples

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60 'Saw' is an honorific title used by Karen men.
61 Hathaway, 'The emergence of indigeneity', p. 310.
62 See Morton and Baird, 'From Hill tribes to Indigenous Peoples', this vol.
63 It is worth noting that the National Socialist Council of Nagaland actually refers to two groups, who use the same title but frequently come into conflict with one another as well as with the Indian state. For a more detailed analysis of NSCN factionalism and their relationship to Naga civil society organisations, see Samir Kumar Das, *Conflict and peace in India's northeast: The role of civil society*, EWC Policy Studies No. 42 (Washington, DC: East-West Center, 2007).
64 Morton and Baird, 'From Hill tribes to Indigenous Peoples', this vol.
65 Soe Zeya Tun, 'The Naga tribes of Myanmar'.
66 Than Tun Win, 'Composition of the different ethnic groups under the 8 major national ethnic races in Myanmar', http://www.embassyofmyanmar.be/ABOUT/ethnicgroups.htm (accessed 22 May 2015).

inhabiting a transborder zone encompassing parts of both India and Myanmar, as do the Chin.[67]

The Naga have a long history of marginalisation by both the Burmese and Indian states, and even by other border-straddling ethnic minorities: the Naga were denied the right to participate in any of the Panglong proceedings in Burma in the 1940s, and were met with disdain not only from the Burmese government but from other ethnic minorities as well.[68] According to Luithui, the first step towards solving a minority rights crisis is for people within a minority group to locate and engage with 'people who are willing to hear [them]'.[69] The Burmese government was obviously not willing to hear the Naga case for recognition and inclusion during the Panglong Conference. Likewise, the Indian government has certainly not been willing to negotiate with Luithui, despite the fact that he has worked primarily with civil society organisations: he was repeatedly harassed by the Indian government while conducting activities with the AIPP.[70] As neither the Burmese nor Indian states were willing to hear the Naga case, Luingam was likely driven to visit the United Nations to add legitimacy and momentum to the Naga Indigenous Peoples' movement and, more generally, the Indigenous Peoples' movement in Asia.

In 1994, two years after Luingam Luithui, No Than Kap went to the UN Working Group on Indigenous Peoples to represent the CNF. The CNF was formed in 1988, decades after many of Myanmar's other ethnic armed groups, and can be seen as emblematic of the transborder territoriality of the Chin: although the CNF was formed as an armed resistance movement against the Myanmar government, it was initially based across the border in Aizawl, Mizoram, India.[71] No Than Kap — chair of the Chin Progressive Party and former CNF president — is a somewhat controversial figure who is still very prominent in Myanmar politics. According to Peter Swift, rumours spread around the Chin community that the government may have granted No Than Kap a powerful appointment in exchange for diminishing the CNF's political influence.[72] Indeed, from 2010 to 2015, he served as Chin Affairs Minister for Sagaing Division, a position directly sanctioned by the government of Myanmar;[73] it is easy to understand how such a position could be seen as 'collaborating with the enemy', considering No Than Kap's former prominence within the CNF.

Cheery Zahau, founder of the Women's League for Chinland and a political activist who has worked directly with No Than Kap for almost a decade, told me that he still has tremendous support within the Chin community, especially amongst those who are disillusioned with the CNF. Nevertheless, his forceful personality and

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67 Haksar and Luithui, *Nagaland file*, p. 15.
68 Walton, 'Ethnicity, conflict, and history in Burma', p. 903.
69 Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP), 'Advancing Indigenous Peoples' solidarity and movement: A brief history of the AIPP' (video), filmed in 2012, posted 27 Apr. 2015, https://vimeo.com/126228736 (accessed 1 May 2015).
70 Morton and Baird, 'From Hill tribes to Indigenous Peoples', this vol.
71 Peter Swift, 'The Burma Democratic Front: How Eighty-Eight Generation Chin were mobilized into the Chin National Front', *Journal of Burma Studies* 21, 1 (2017): 134.
72 Ibid.
73 Riahbuk, 'Interview with the Chin Affairs Minister Pu No Than Kap', 19 Feb. 2014; http://www.riahbuk.com/2014/02/once-i-as-chief-editor-of-chinland.html (accessed 16 May 2015).

willingness to collaborate with nearly anyone in Myanmar politics do occasionally draw the ire of competing political operators, especially within the Chin community.[74] No Than Kap's trip to Geneva in 1992 provides an example of both his abilities as a political influencer and the volatile political landscape inhabited by the CNF. The trip commenced in 1992, after No Than Kap had returned from university in India and worked his way into the CNF leadership. His intense charisma and fluency in a variety of languages (including English) made him a natural choice for representing the Chin Indigenous cause at the United Nations; however, while he was attending the UN Working Group meetings, the CNF went through an internal coup that deposed No Than Kap's allies. He returned from Geneva to find himself banished from the CNF, which led him to pursue the cause of Chin self-determination through other networks.[75]

Recent research by Micah Morton points to a major resurgence of groups within Myanmar identifying as Indigenous persons and lobbying at the United Nations and other international forums. Since 2013, a new wave of Indigenous activists has begun to build a formal movement to unite Indigenous groups within Myanmar.[76] The movement was fostered by the AIPP, who facilitated a meeting of ethnic organisations in Yangon in 2014, which has led to the creation of several multi-ethnic Indigenous Peoples' organisations in Myanmar; one of these, the Coalition of Indigenous Peoples in Myanmar/Burma, has followed in its predecessors' footsteps by choosing to submit an official statement to the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.[77] Although the term 'Indigenous' has returned to some degree of political prominence in Myanmar, it has been unevenly deployed: some ethnonationalist organisations — such as the Karen Independence Organisation and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang — have specifically avoided identifying as Indigenous Peoples, as the term tends to indicate that a given group is subordinate to a governance structure other than its own.[78]

Taingyinthar, Rohingya, and Bamar nationalism

Having seen how minority groups engage with the international concept of indigeneity, it is necessary to consider how the state and majority citizens of Myanmar determine who gets to be considered Indigenous and who does not. To understand how this process happens, it is necessary to consider how the concept of 'indigeneity' has been translated between Burmese and English. Customarily, the English word 'indigenous' has been represented by the Burmese word '*taingyinthar*'; that term is also frequently translated as 'national race'. As pointed out by Jane Ferguson, indigeneity in Myanmar in the sense of *taingyinthar* has been clearly (if arbitrarily) defined since the Panglong Conference of 1948: Indigenous status was given to people

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74 Cheery Zahau, interview, 11 June 2017, Yangon.
75 Ibid.
76 Micah Morton, 'Indigenous Peoples work to raise their status in a reforming Myanmar', *Perspective* 33, 22 May 2017 (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies), p. 3.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid., p. 7.

'in the territory demarcated as the Union of Burma before the first Anglo-Burmese War'[79] — that is, people living in a territory defined by the British after a completely arbitrary cut-off year. Moreover, ethnic Bamar have a special status within the state's view of the Myanmar's ethnic spectrum: Bamar are considered to be the only 'major group whose total population resides within the territorial bounds of the state [of Myanmar]'.[80] This is obviously fallacious, as there are significant populations of ethnic Bamar living throughout Southeast Asia and the rest of the world, but it is a line of logic that has led the Burmese state to consider Bamar as 'exclusively indigenous' compared to other groups perceived to have significant transborder populations, who may or may not also be considered indigenous according to the *taingyinthar* rubric.

It is worth pointing out that the term *taingyinthar* has come under criticism as a translation of the English word 'Indigenous', particularly from groups who are familiar with the international political concept of indigeneity. According to Morton, Indigenous Peoples' networks within Myanmar have instead chosen to use the term '*htanay taingyinthar*' (ထနေတိုင်းရင်းသား) in order to differentiate Indigenous Peoples' status from that of Myanmar's 'national races', which include the Bamar majority and groups who do not self-identify as Indigenous Peoples.[81] This was confirmed by Cheery Zahau, who added that the current government of Myanmar is particularly reluctant to differentiate between the two terms as it could be seen as a tacit admission of the 'special' status of Indigenous persons in Myanmar.[82] While Nick Cheesman acknowledges that *taingyinthar* has conventionally been understood 'as a synonym for race, ethnicity, or indigeneity',[83] he warns that simplistic translations of the word may obscure some of the political subtleties of the 'national races' concept (his preferred translation) that are important for understanding the word in its local context. Although this essay will employ *taingyinthar* as a Burmese synonym for 'indigenous', I acknowledge that the term is complex and contested.

Perhaps the most prominent recent contestation involving the concept of *taingyinthar* in Myanmar has been the ongoing oppression of the Rohingya ethnic minority at the hands of the Burmese government. Ardeth Thawnghmung argues that this particular contestation of indigeneity establishes a relatively unstudied sphere of the 'indigenous question' in Asia: while there is much literature on the Indigenous status of 'hill tribes' and long-established 'minority populations' in Asia, very little academic attention has been given to whether or not the descendants of 'immigrants' with long histories in a given place should be considered indigenous.[84] There is no doubt that the current government of Myanmar does *not* consider the Rohingya to be indigenous to the country. As the heading of a press release issued by the President Office of Myanmar on 31 August 2014 states, 'We have never had ethnic nationals called

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79   Ferguson, 'Ethnicity, belonging, and the national census in Burma/Myanmar', p. 9.
80   Ibid., p. 10.
81   Morton, 'Indigenous Peoples work to raise their status', p. 7.
82   Cheery Zahau, interview, 11 June 2017, Yangon.
83   Cheesman, 'How in Myanmar "national races" came to surpass citizenship', p. 462; this article provides an excellent extended investigation of the genesis of the term *taingyinthar* and its role in Myanmar's ethnopolitics up to the present.
84   Thawnghmung, 'The politics of indigeneity in Myanmar', p. 527.

'Rohingya' according to [the] official list of indigenous ethnic groups of Myanmar as well as our historical records'.[85] The press release, which details a meeting between U Thant Kyaw, Deputy Foreign Minister of Myanmar, and the Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh, contains two bizarre details regarding the indigenous status of the Rohingya. First, U Thant Kyaw acknowledges that the Bangladeshi side of the meeting did not 'express the term Rohingya'[86] when referring to migrant populations on the Myanmar–Bangladesh border. Furthermore, U Thant Kyaw reasserts that the Rohingya are under no circumstances to be considered indigenous to Myanmar.[87] It would seem that no state is willing to include this group — certainly not Myanmar, which refers to the Rohingya as Bengalis in its official statements and publications — and not Bangladesh, who have historically been unwilling to acknowledge the existence of Rohingyas.[88]

There have been Muslims in the area now occupied by the state of Myanmar since at least the ninth century CE,[89] and Muslims of Bengali descent since at least the fifteenth century CE.[90] Thus, some groups of Muslims within Myanmar — including those Rohingya descended from Bengali Muslims who arrived in the area now defined as Myanmar before 1823 — would necessarily be defined as 'indigenous' under the 1948 definition as described above by Ferguson. However, the Burma Citizenship Law of 1982 excludes the Rohingya: the Rakhine people, a largely Buddhist ethnicity and the ethnic majority of Rakhine State, are explicitly mentioned as a 'national ethnic group';[91] the Rohingya, who have coexisted with the Rakhine for centuries, are not. This historical precedent for state exclusion of the Rohingya turned into public anti-Rohingya violence in June 2012 after a group of purportedly Rohingya men raped a Rakhine Buddhist woman. Over the next two years, anti-Rohingya sentiment helped fuel anti-Muslim violence in dozens of cities of Myanmar.[92] It is, however, important to note that not all Muslims in Myanmar are Rohingya, and not all Burmese Muslims are denied indigenous status. Muslims in Myanmar are an extraordinarily diverse group of people who claim a wide range of

85 Office of the President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 'We have never had ethnic nationals called "Rohingya" according to official list of indigenous ethnic groups of Myanmar as well as our historical records', 31 Aug. 2014, http://www.president-office.gov.mm/en/?q=issues/rakhine-state-peace-and-stability/id-4125 (accessed 17 Sept. 2015).
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
88 This view appears to be changing in the wake of the catastrophic violence that broke out between the Tatmadaw and the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) in northern Rakhine State, Myanmar, on 25 Aug. 2017. Bangladesh state media reported hundreds of thousands of Rohingya pouring into their country; in an address to the UN General Assembly on 21 Sept. 2017, Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh's prime minister, acknowledged that over 800,000 Rohingya were living in camps in southeastern Bangladesh, possibly signalling a change in both Bangladesh's chosen terminology and perhaps also in their position vis-à-vis the political status of the Rohingya. It should be noted that this is an evolving situation.
89 Moshe Yegar, *The Muslims of Burma: A study of a minority group* (Heidelberg: Schriftenreihe Des Südasien-Instituts Der Universität Heidelberg, 1972), p. 2.
90 Thawnghmung, 'The politics of indigeneity in Myanmar', p. 539.
91 Pyitthu Hluttaw, Burma Citizenship Law of 1982 (unofficial trans.). http://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain?docid=3ae6b4f71b (accessed 20 Sept. 2015).
92 Thawnghmung, 'The politics of indigeneity in Myanmar', p. 535.

ethnic heritages;[93] there are several groups of Muslims — even some in Rakhine State, such as the Kaman or Kamein — who are officially considered *taingyinthar*. However, it is impossible to separate Myanmar's recent spate of anti-Muslim violence from the xenophobic attitude that the Burmese state has displayed towards the Rohingya.

Myanmar's recent anti-Muslim violence stems directly from Bamar nationalism and its self-conception as the only group 'exclusively indigenous' to Myanmar. The conceptualisation of Myanmar's Muslim minorities as 'foreign' has an extensive twentieth-century history stemming from anti-Indian violence during British Burma, but the present 'foreign-isation' of Burmese Muslims has come to a head with the rapid expansion of the '969 movement', which has now been folded into the Ma Ba Tha movement.[94] As explained by Mu-Lung Hsu,[95] the number '969' was chosen as the movement's symbol in order to provide a cosmological counter to the number 786, a culturally significant number for South Asian Muslims, which was visible on many halal restaurants and Muslim-owned shops in Myanmar prior to the spate of anti-Muslim outbursts in 2012 and 2013. The grass-roots ultranationalist 969 movement has sought to preserve what might be called 'indigenous indigeneity' — that is, indigeneity as conceived by and applied exclusively to the Buddhist Bamar majority of Myanmar. One can understand the paranoia and militancy with which the 969 movement pursued their cause by applying Baladas Goshal's concept of the 'minoritised majority',[96] which refers to a group that sees itself as threatened with extinction even though it constitutes the majority population in a given state.

The 'de-indigenisation' of Burmese Muslims has resulted in discriminatory legislation, such as the recently-passed Buddhist Women's Special Marriage Law.[97] Although this law does not explicitly mention Muslims, it requires Buddhist women who marry non-Buddhist men to publicly post their marriage application via the township registrar; the application will be rejected if anyone objects to the union.[98] Many have argued that the law is a blatant attempt to discriminate against Muslims.[99] The passing of the Special Marriage Law extends the point that Burmese nationalism sees the Bamar as a 'minoritised majority'; furthermore, this law highlights the Burmese state's unwillingness to consider non-Buddhist citizens as equivalent in type to Buddhists. Although the term *taingyinthar* refers to ethnicity, and not to religion, it should be clear that the concept has been used as a means to

93   Nyi Kyaw, 'Alienation, discrimination, and securitization: Legal personhood and cultural person-hood of Muslims in Myanmar', *Review of Faith and International Affairs* 13, 4 (2015): 51.
94   Ma Ba Tha (မဘသ) is an acronym which refers to the Patriotic Association of Myanmar, also frequently translated as the Association for the Protection of Race and Religion. Although Ma Ba Tha's activities are wide-ranging and not limited to anti-Muslim activism, they are understood within Myanmar as the successors to the explicitly anti-Muslim 969 movement.
95   Mu-Lung Hsu, 'Whose permanent home? Indigeneity and the Muslim "foreigners" in Burma', paper presented at Association for Asian Studies Annual Conference, Chicago, 28 Mar. 2015, p. 1.
96   Baird, '"Indigenous peoples" and land', p. 269.
97   Human Rights Watch, 'Burma: Reject discriminatory Marriage Bill'. https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/07/09/burma-reject-discriminatory-marriage-bill, 9 July 2015 (accessed 29 Sept. 2015).
98   Ibid.
99   Thawnghmung, 'The politics of indigeneity in Myanmar', p. 535.

exclusion not only in the case of the Rohingya, but also to some extent for the oppression of Muslims in general.

Conclusion: Indigeneity, ethnonationalism, and the future

For Myanmar's Indigenous Peoples, the concept of indigeneity is a means to securing the specific rights and privileges that they should be granted based on Myanmar's participation in international conventions such as the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Conversely, the term *taingyinthar* has been used by the state of Myanmar as a means to justify discrimination against and oppression of marginalised ethnic groups such as the Rohingya. There is some hope that the recent resurgence of multi-ethnic Indigenous Peoples-focused organisations, such as those discussed by Morton, can lobby for greater inclusion in Myanmar's recently democratised government; however, as demonstrated by the decades-long journeys of ethnonationalist organisations such as the KNU, CNF, and NPMHR, the path to recognition of the specific rights of Indigenous Peoples in Myanmar will certainly be an incremental process.

The NLD-led government has shown a slightly greater willingness to work in open collaboration with Myanmar's armed ethnonationalist groups than previous military-led governments, as evinced by their hosting of the 21st Century Panglong Conference. The Conference, which is intended to facilitate the negotiation of cease-fire terms between the Burmese government and non-state armed groups, is meant to be held every six months until a comprehensive peace agreement is reached. However, the 21st Century Panglong discussions have brought their own set of frustrations: in May 2017, NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi's opening comments were immediately followed by commentary from General Min Aung Hlaing, the leader of the Burmese military, leaving some observers with the impression that they had watched a 'good-cop, bad-cop routine'.[100] Furthermore, many civil society organisations felt sidelined during the negotiations;[101] although the ostensible purpose of the Conference is to reach a ceasefire agreement, ethnic-based civil society organisations could use their influence to broker deals between their affiliated armed groups and the government of Myanmar. For now, this appears to have been a missed opportunity, as civil society organisations were given far less floor time and media attention than their armed counterparts. Nevertheless, if the recent efflorescence of Indigenous Peoples-focused civil society organisations described by Morton can gain significant momentum as a grassroots movement, and translate that momentum into legitimacy with the Myanmar government, there is a chance that Indigenous Peoples and related organisations could play a role in ending Myanmar's civil wars and securing the recognition and autonomy that many seek.

100 Nyan Hlaing Lynn and Oliver Slow, 'Mixed results at latest Panglong Conference', *Frontier Myanmar*, 30 May 2017.
101 Ibid.