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*Photograph by Madeleine Weaver, Mawlamyine, Myanmar 2018*

## **Women's Participation in Myanmar's Peace Process: Towards a New Narrative?**

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## Abstract

The peace process in Myanmar has until now failed to integrate practices of gender equality. This is evident from the statistics of women's participation at the peace table, which remains below the fixed quota of 30%. This research aims to identify the principle factors limiting women's participation in Myanmar's peace process, and to assess how effective international and national efforts have been in the promotion of women's meaningful engagement in the future. Initially, the case studies of Colombia, Northern Ireland and Guatemala are investigated in order to ascertain the principle factors that have limited women's participation internationally. The research also considers the importance of international frameworks against the backdrop of Myanmar. The analysis is therefore placed firmly in a global and historical context, before moving on to a detailed study of the challenges faced by women in Myanmar specifically. The discussion is heavily informed by a series of eleven interviews conducted predominantly with women who are working centrally in the campaign for greater women's participation in the peace process in Myanmar. The voices and experiences of the individuals interviewed are placed at the forefront of the research to shed light on the challenges faced in improving women's participation, and to introduce new interpretations and understandings to the historical narrative. In doing so, this research argues that social, cultural, strategic and structural barriers are the principle factors contributing towards women's limited participation in Myanmar's peace process. In light of these challenges, and despite the value of international norms and frameworks, it argues that the driving force for genuine social and political transformation at the national level will need to come from within Myanmar itself: from the high level political structures and the key stakeholders in the formal peace process, but also from the grassroots, including women's organizations and civil society.

*Key Words: women's participation; Myanmar; peace process; peace negotiations; women's organizations; civil society; armed conflict; gender equality*

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Author's Note: Burma was renamed 'Myanmar' by the military junta in 1989. This research will use the term 'Myanmar,' except when quoting women who still call the country by its original name, or when mentioning the titles of women's organizations which include 'Burma' or 'Burmese.'

## Introduction: War and Peace in Myanmar

Myanmar's ethnic conflict dates back to the country's independence in 1948 following a century under British colonial rule, as well as several years of Japanese occupation.<sup>1</sup> General Aung San had led the struggle against the British, and attempted to reconcile the bitter divides between Myanmar's ethnic nationalities and its majority group, the Bamar, at the 1947 Panglong Conference.<sup>2</sup> He sought 'a constitutional way forward that would be based on equal rights for all the ethnic nationalities of Burma.'<sup>3</sup> Aung San did not see his ambitions realised, as he was assassinated in July 1947, less than a year before his country achieved independence.<sup>4</sup> Rogers describes how, in the political turmoil that followed, 'the spirit of Panglong, which promised a multi-ethnic federal democracy, was strained to breaking point.'<sup>5</sup> Until now, a peaceful and democratic federal democracy has not been achieved in Myanmar. With significant parts of the country still witnessing violent clashes in 2018, notably in Kachin and Rakhine states, it has been labelled the longest running civil war in the world.<sup>6</sup>

### *Myanmar's Peace Process: Past and Present*

After a series of failed peace talks and negotiations, and building on a number of bilateral ceasefires, Myanmar's current national peace process was heralded by the signing of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) in October 2015 by eight out of the sixteen ethnic armed organizations (EAOs).<sup>7</sup> Recently, in February 2018, the number of signatories has increased to

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<sup>1</sup> Benedict Rogers, *Burma: A Nation at the Crossroads*, London: Rider Books, 2015, Chapter 1; Min Zaw Oo, *Understanding Myanmar's Peace Process: Ceasefire Agreements, Catalyzing Reflection*, No. 2, 2014; Hunter Marston, Not even Aung San Suu Kyi can fix the world's longest running civil war, *The Washington Post*, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/democracy-post/wp/2017/04/13/not-even-aung-san-suu-kyi-can-fix-the-worlds-longest-running-civil-war/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.33c144c4641d](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/democracy-post/wp/2017/04/13/not-even-aung-san-suu-kyi-can-fix-the-worlds-longest-running-civil-war/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.33c144c4641d) [accessed 1 May 2018]

<sup>2</sup> Benedict Rogers, *Burma: A Nation at the Crossroads*, pp.1-2

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* p.2

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.* p.5

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.* p.6

<sup>6</sup> Oliver Slow, Fighting in Kachin Highlights Myanmar Civil War Worries, *VOA News*, <https://www.voanews.com/a/kachin-fighting-myanmar-civil-war/4365603.html> [accessed April 30 2018]; Hunter Marston, Not even Aung San Suu Kyi can fix the world's longest running civil war, *The Washington Post*, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/democracy-post/wp/2017/04/13/not-even-aung-san-suu-kyi-can-fix-the-worlds-longest-running-civil-war/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.33c144c4641d](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/democracy-post/wp/2017/04/13/not-even-aung-san-suu-kyi-can-fix-the-worlds-longest-running-civil-war/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.33c144c4641d) [accessed 1 May 2018]

<sup>7</sup> N. Ganesan, Ethnic Insurgency and the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement in Myanmar, *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2015) p.273

ten.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, violent conflicts have continued across the country between different ethnic groups and the military, in what has been an uncertain and unrewarding two years for the nascent peace process.<sup>9</sup> Recently, tensions have peaked with the crisis in Rakhine state, and with what the UN has called a ‘textbook example’ of ethnic cleaning of the Rohingya people.<sup>10</sup> News of these events, and the mass displacement which has followed, has reached international audiences on an unprecedented scale. Beyond these headlines lies the reality that the peace process in Myanmar is struggling to cope with renewed and ongoing tensions, despite the best efforts of many national and international organizations, political parties, groups, alliances and individuals.<sup>11</sup> Amidst this political turmoil, one major area of struggle to emerge in public and academic debate in recent years has been the creeping inequalities in Myanmar’s political sphere, made visible through the absence of women in the national peace process.

In order for genuine peace to be achieved, and for deeply embedded inequalities to be tackled, there are a number of criteria that a peace process must meet. One of the most important features determining the success of a peace process is inclusivity. Another is national ownership. While it is crucial that Myanmar’s peace process is nationally owned in order to guarantee the longevity of peace, a defining aspect of this ‘ownership’ will be its inclusivity. If a national peace process excludes certain groups from the high-level negotiations, particularly those affected (directly or indirectly) by the conflict, any agreement reached cannot be deemed representative of that society as a whole. Evidence increasingly demonstrates that ‘the quality of women’s engagement and whether or not their voices are heard’ are essential in determining the sustainability of peace.<sup>12</sup> The research of Paffenholz et al suggests that a peace agreement resulting from a negotiation

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<sup>8</sup> Myanmar News Agency, Two New Signatories Become Members of NCA, *Global New Light of Myanmar*, <http://www.globalnewlightofmyanmar.com/two-new-signatories-become-members-nca/> [accessed 2 March 2018]

<sup>9</sup> Neil Thompson, Myanmar’s Unhappy Rebels, *The Diplomat*, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/01/myanmars-unhappy-rebels/> [accessed 3 February 2018]

<sup>10</sup> For example, see: Michael Safi, Myanmar Treatment of Rohingya looks like ‘textbook ethnic cleansing,’ says UN, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/11/un-myanmars-treatment-of-rohingya-textbook-example-of-ethnic-cleansing> [accessed 9 April 2018]

<sup>11</sup> Wayne Hay, The Struggles of Myanmar’s Peace Process, *Al Jazeera*, <https://www.aljazeera.com/blogs/asia/2018/05/struggles-myanmar-peace-process-180502064233955.html> [accessed 4 May 2018]; Ei Tu Hta, Myanmar’s peace process is not living up to its billing, *The Economist*, <https://www.economist.com/asia/2018/02/17/myanmars-peace-process-is-not-living-up-to-its-billing> [accessed 20 April 2018]

<sup>12</sup> Virginia M. Bouvier, Gender and the Role of Women in Colombia’s Peace Process, UN Women Background Paper, March 2016, p.28; for example, see: Thania Paffenholz, Can inclusive peace processes work? New evidence from a multi-year research project, Inclusive Peace & Transition Initiative, Policy Brief, April 2015

process that has been inclusive of women is 20% more likely to last at least two years.<sup>13</sup> In the long term, they conclude that women's participation makes an agreement 35% more likely to last fifteen years.<sup>14</sup> In Myanmar's current peace negotiations, a large proportion of the population is being prevented from having influence over, or even a say in, the peace negotiations, which threatens the legitimacy of the peace process and the sustainability of peace when (and if) it is reached. Although there are a number of factors that have contributed towards the limited success of Myanmar's peace process, this research focuses on its lack of inclusivity stemming from the exclusion of women.

*'Why we need women: ' An Overview of Women in the Peace Process*

There is a significant body of literature addressing women's involvement in peace negotiations, and specifically the importance of women's inclusion in order to secure both inclusive and lasting peace.<sup>15</sup> From an in depth reading of the topic, it is apparent that the distinction between 'peace' and 'conflict,' while simplistically determined by the majority of men according to the presence or absence of armed conflict, is not so clear-cut for women. For this reason, Hunt and Posa observe, 'allowing men who plan wars to plan peace is a bad habit.'<sup>16</sup> While male (negotiators') experiences are predominantly of the battlefield, Hunt and Posa argue that 'women generally come from family care and civil activism,' with a 'huge stake in community stability.'<sup>17</sup> This argument lacks recognition of women's experiences on the frontline, as victim of rape and other manifestations of

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<sup>13</sup> Laurel Stone, Quantitative Analysis of Women's Participation in Peace Processes, cited in Thania Paffenholz, Marie O'Reilly, Andrea O'Suilleabhain, Reimagining Peacemaking: Women's Roles in Peace Processes, International Peace Institute, June 2015, p.34

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Elisabeth Porter, Women, Political Decision-Making, and Peace-Building, *Global Change, Peace and Security*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (August, 2010); Sanam Naraghi Anderlini, Women at the Peace Table: Making a Difference, UNIFEM, 2000; Azza Karam, Women in war and peace-building: The Roads Traversed, The Challenges Ahead, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (December, 2010); Virginia M. Bouvier, Gender and the Role of Women in Colombia's Peace Process; Rosemary Sales, *Women Divided: Gender, Religion and Politics in Northern Ireland*, New York: Routledge, 2003; Margaret Ward, Gender, Citizenship, and the Future of the Northern Ireland Peace Process, *Eire Ireland*, Vol. 41, No. 1-2 (Summer, 2006); Patty Chang et al, Women Leading Peace, A close examination of women's political participation in peace processes in Northern Ireland, Guatemala, Kenya, and the Philippines, Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, 2015; Sumie Nakaya, Women and Gender Equality in Peace Processes: From Women at the Negotiating Table to Postwar Structural Reform in Guatemala and Somalia, *Global Governance*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (Oct-Dec 2003)

<sup>16</sup> Swanee Hunt and Christina Posa, Women Waging Peace, *Foreign Policy Magazine*, No. 124, May-June 2001, p.38; Elisabeth Porter, Women, Political Decision-Making, and Peace-Building, p.250

<sup>17</sup> Swanee Hunt and Christina Posa, Women Waging Peace, p.38; Elisabeth Porter, Women, Political Decision-Making, and Peace-Building, p.250

violence and displacement during warfare. Equally, it generalises the male experience. Nonetheless, it has some value in revealing that, in the vast majority of cases, it is men who wield the guns, and the same men who are automatically granted a seat at the table. Challenging this, in light of the diversity of women's experiences and their backgrounds, Porter addresses the way in which women 'introduce different issues' and 'adopt different approaches to conflict resolution' than men.<sup>18</sup> As a result, it can be argued that women's inclusion in peace talks is critical. Without the input of a nation's women, there is little chance that the eventual peace agreement will correspond to the situation on the ground, at least for 50% of the population.

### *Women and Gender in Myanmar's Peace Process*

The above analysis typifies the dominant motif in literature on the topic. It can be summarised as 'why we need women' in peace negotiations. Whilst crucial and indisputable, this rhetoric is inadequate. It does little to address the underlying factors prohibiting women's political participation and perpetuating gender inequality in peace process structures. As Myanmar's peace process receives greater academic attention, it is necessary to move beyond this narrative in order to fathom why women's participation is not improving substantively and what is being done to counter this. In doing so, the framework for women's inclusion must be rewritten, informed by the voices and experiences of the women themselves.

The overarching question guiding this research therefore asks what are the key factors to have contributed to the limited participation of women in Myanmar's peace process, and how effective international and national efforts have been in the promotion of women's meaningful engagement in the future. A number of sub-questions narrow the focus of the research. The first and second chapters address Myanmar's peace process from an international perspective, asking how useful international experiences and international standards are in the Myanmar context. Chapter 1 looks at three case studies - Colombia, Northern Ireland, and Guatemala - and identifies the key factors that have contributed women's limited participation internationally. The analysis validates women's capacity for finding spaces to influence and participate in peace-making, even when the formal processes seek to exclude them. In chapter 2, postcolonial theory is employed to broaden

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<sup>18</sup> Elisabeth Porter, *Women, Political Decision-Making, and Peace-Building*, p.250

the debate when assessing the importance and compatibility of international frameworks in Myanmar's peace process. Chakrabarty's influential work on postcolonial thought will be brought into these discussions.<sup>19</sup> Chapters three and four are centred around women's voices, outlooks and experiences. The third chapter investigates how far women in Myanmar are reclaiming their history and demonstrating agency to challenge the status quo in politics and the peace process. In this chapter, discussion of the field of women's history will be informed by the works of Gerda Lerner, Joan Scott and Joan Kelly.<sup>20</sup> The final chapter engages with Cynthia Enloe's most recent work, addressing the main challenges that persist, in the eyes of a selection women from Myanmar, to limit women's participation at the peace table.<sup>21</sup> The conclusion pieces together the findings from each chapter in order to determine to what extent this research brings us towards a new narrative for women's participation in Myanmar's peace process.

Currently, in Myanmar's NCA mechanisms, women make up 4 out of 78 participants.<sup>22</sup> In the Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC), the mechanism created to monitor ceasefire violations, women account for only 9% of members.<sup>23</sup> The injustice of such statistics is apparent. Women constitute over half of Myanmar's population. Without representatives who can voice their concerns and their priorities directly, women remain overlooked and unaccounted for in what is a fundamentally male-centric process. At the most recent Union Peace Conference (UPC) in May 2017, there was 20% women's participation; a major improvement from the first UPC in January 2016, to which 8% of invitees were women.<sup>24</sup> What the figures do not reveal is the quality of that participation, and the influence those women were able to exercise during the negotiations. In actual fact, women in Myanmar have been unable to penetrate the higher strata of decision-making and leadership positions, and as a result have limited influence on the formal peace process and the future of their country. The obvious exception is Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the National

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<sup>19</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008

<sup>20</sup> Gerda Lerner, *The Majority Finds its Past*, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1979; Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1988; Joan Kelly-Gadol, The Social Relation of the Sexes: Methodological Implications of Women's History, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Summer, 1976) p.816

<sup>21</sup> Cynthia Enloe, *The Big Push: Exposing and Challenging the Persistence of Patriarchy*, Oxford: Myriad Editions, 2017

<sup>22</sup> Figures accurate as of 2017, see: Roslyn Warren et al, *Women's Peacebuilding Strategies Amidst Conflict: Lessons from Myanmar and Ukraine*, Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, 2017, p.20

<sup>23</sup> Roslyn Warren et al, *Women's Peacebuilding Strategies*, p.20

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*



League for Democracy (NLD) and state counsellor of Myanmar. Her position at the helm of government and her seat at the peace table has, in reality, done little for the promotion of gender equality in Myanmar (discussed further in chapter 4).

The case of Aung San Suu Kyi demonstrates that having women in a position of power is not necessarily accompanied by gender awareness.<sup>25</sup> With this in mind, it is important to understand what is meant by the term ‘gender’ in this context. Contrary to popular belief, ‘gender’ is not synonymous with ‘women.’<sup>26</sup> If this were the case, then women’s presence at the peace table alone would be sufficient in yielding ‘favourable peace outcomes’ pertaining to gender equality.<sup>27</sup> This assumption encapsulates the ‘add women and stir’ approach, which is built on the false premise that women necessarily embody what are classified as ‘feminine’ traits.<sup>28</sup> On the contrary, women’s participation does not guarantee gender-sensitivity in the content and outcomes of peace negotiations. As such, ‘women’ should not be equated with ‘gender,’ nor should ‘women’s participation’ be equated with ‘gender equality.’ Whilst it is necessary that women are present at the peace table, it is equally crucial that gender is understood and addressed. This will be an important caveat to bear in mind throughout the course of this research.

Unlike ‘women,’ which defines half of the global population, gender is a social construction.<sup>29</sup> Gender encompasses both men and women; both masculinities and femininities. Men’s (and women’s) understandings of and relationships to masculinity and femininity are shaped by gender in its socially constructed form, which has major implications for power relationships during conflict, during the peace process, and in peace time. Fundamentally, as addressed by Joan Scott, gender is a ‘social category,’ often accompanied by a number of cultural interpretations surrounding what are deemed ‘appropriate roles for men and women.’<sup>30</sup> Such cultural understandings/meanings of gender can serve to perpetuate an imbalance between the sexes, with far-reaching consequences for both men and women. The implications of this in Myanmar are

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<sup>25</sup> Christine Chinkin, Gender Inequality and International Human Rights Law, in: A. Hurrell and N. Woods (eds.), *Inequality, Globalization, and World Politics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, p.22

<sup>26</sup> Terrell Carvel, *Gender is Not a Synonym for Women*, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1996; Joan Scott, Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 91, No. 5 (December, 1986) p.1056

<sup>27</sup> Patty Chang et al, Women Leading Peace, p.20

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Terrell Carvel, Gender and International Relations, *International Studies Review*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (2003) p.298

<sup>30</sup> Joan Scott, Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis, p.1056

manifold. Most harmfully, gender manifests itself in forms of violence against women, particularly at the hands of the military.<sup>31</sup> Gender is frequently manipulated to categorise power and to structure relationships hierarchically, resulting in a conflict that is simultaneously militarised and masculinised, and in turn a peace process deeply influenced by these conceptions. This dynamic does not lend itself to sustainable or inclusive peace.

### *Women's Organizations and Civil Society in Myanmar*

How, then, can gender awareness be improved? In Myanmar, where gender roles are deeply entrenched, it is principally through women's networks that their experiences can be shared and suffering alleviated.<sup>32</sup> Women uniting with other women in shared experiences and shared aspirations for the future of their country is a powerful tool in Myanmar's pursuit for peace and in raising the profile of gender issues. An alliance of women's groups and civil society, starting from the small-scale grassroots level, may be the key to this nation's future, in which social justice, genuine democracy, and full women's human rights can become a reality.

For this to be achieved, and for gender to be made a priority, civil society and women's organizations need to move beyond the rhetoric of demands for inclusive processes; to re-strategize in order to counter the lack of forward-thinking in policymaking; and to facilitate more meaningful future engagement with the peace process from alternative angles, as demonstrated by the women's movements in the case studies in chapter 1.

## Methodology

This research utilises an extensive source base to shed light on these questions. Sources include publications and reports from women's organizations, NGOs, and civil society organizations. The research is also informed by media coverage of Myanmar's peace process from a range of newspapers, both national and international. It is guided by a number of secondary works on women and peace processes from the international case studies. Principally, it aims to convey the voices and experiences of Myanmar's women from across the country, through a series of eleven

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<sup>31</sup> For example, see Shan Women's Action Network, 'License to Rape,' <http://www.shanwomen.org/tai/images/leaflets/2002-LTR-leaflet-I.pdf> [accessed 2 June 2018]

<sup>32</sup> Htar Htar Thet interview, Yangon, March 2018

interviews, in order to gauge national perceptions of the past and current situation; the principal challenges faced; and the prospects of such challenges being overcome in order to achieve an inclusive peace. The interviews were all held in Yangon, Myanmar, with the exception of one which was conducted in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The interviews are structured according to a set of eight core questions, which are built upon in each interview according to the openness of and level of detail provided by each interviewee. The interviews were all recorded and partially transcribed, and carried out entirely in English. The decision was taken early on in the research to focus primarily on the voices of Myanmar women, in order to keep the study focused around their experiences and outlooks as actors, agents, and decision-makers. Ten women were interviewed, along with one man who is working with the NCA signatory groups in their preparation for peace negotiations. This is not to suggest that men as a whole are opposed to an inclusive peace process. On the contrary, there are men who are actively supportive of women's participation. Nonetheless, women's perspectives constitute the bulk of this research, as it is women's voices who have historically been suppressed (see chapter 3), and it is women who constitute the vast majority of those who are campaigning on behalf of gender equality and women's meaningful participation in Myanmar's peace process.

Being limited to English sources and English-speaking participants was not a major obstacle in carrying out the research and interviews, since the women's organizations in Yangon conduct their work and create publications in both English and Myanmar. The individuals interviewed were born, have lived and have worked in a variety of states and regions, and represent a diverse range of ethnicities. Some participants were selected by virtue of their involvement in the principal organizations and alliances promoting women's participation in the peace process, including the Alliance for Gender Inclusion in the Peace Process (AGIPP), the Women's League of Burma (WLB), the Joint Peace Fund (JPF), Burmese Women's Union (BWU), and Myanmar Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS). Several of these women are well known and well-respected political activists in Myanmar, and are among the few women to be actively involved in the high-level peace negotiations. Most of the women interviewed also have experience working at the grassroots level in their respective communities. While these women may have different ethnicities, political interests and/or religions, their ultimate priority is the same: an inclusive peace in Myanmar. The results of this research therefore reflect a concerted effort to draw upon women's voices from diverse backgrounds and political experiences, including civil society representatives, political

actors, those involved in local, regional and national negotiations or consultations, and those engaging with international actors in the peace process.

From the primary and secondary research conducted, and in light of the discussions held and the conclusions drawn in each chapter, it is argued that women's participation in Myanmar's peace process is fundamentally limited by structural, strategic, social and cultural barriers. Taking these challenges into account, this research proposes that international efforts are useful and necessary yet, at present, their impact in effecting sustainable change surrounding the quality and quantity of women's participation in Myanmar is limited. As such, the argument is made that the impetus for change must come from within Myanmar itself, at the grassroots level, but also within the high-level political structures.

The academic and social relevance of this research is twofold. Firstly, it moves beyond arguments of why women are needed in peace negotiations, taking a number of international case studies as the point of departure in order to bring fresh insight into the position of, and challenges faced by, women in peace processes worldwide. Secondly, it aims to position the voices of Myanmar's women themselves at the forefront, gauging their perspectives on the challenges faced and how these barriers impede the future prospects of achieving gender equality and inclusive peace in Myanmar. Importantly, it addresses each of these concerns with an awareness of, but without overstressing the importance of bringing Myanmar in line with, international frameworks and standards. Ultimately, through a combination of international case studies, and a close engagement with the voices of women actively campaigning for women's participation in Myanmar, a new narrative is crafted which is at once internationally oriented and locally grounded.

## Chapter 1: Recent History of Women in Peace Negotiations: International Case Studies and Myanmar

International examples of women gaining access to peace negotiations can serve as the benchmark for Myanmar, demonstrating the challenges faced and the levels of inclusivity that have been achieved in peace processes elsewhere. Whilst the peace processes presented in this research take place in vastly different political environments, a number of similarities arise across the case studies. The commonalities demonstrate how agency has been exercised by women worldwide, enabling them to enter into peace agreements or influence them from the outside in order to yield results for women's rights and gender equality. For example, in Colombia, the 2016 peace agreement is celebrated for incorporating notable gender recognition, thanks to the relentless lobbying of individuals and organizations from civil society.<sup>33</sup> This case study will be discussed briefly, before a more detailed investigation of two case studies which are less familiar in terms of women's participation. In Northern Ireland's peace negotiations, women from civil society leveraged their existing networks and formed a coalition across the political divide, succeeding in gaining legitimate representation at the negotiating table in 1997.<sup>34</sup> Finally, the Guatemalan peace process from 1994-1996 created space for women and women's groups through the formation of the Women's Sector of the country's Civil Society Assembly - *Asamblea de la Sociedad Civil* (ASC).<sup>35</sup>

By integrating Myanmar's peace process into the discussion, this chapter helps to place women's participation in Myanmar's peace process within a global and historical context. By the end of this chapter, the reader should have a greater understanding of how far the situation in Myanmar can be placed in the same mould as its international predecessors; the similar factors that are working to limit women's participation across the case studies; and the various ways in which these have been confronted by women internationally.

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<sup>33</sup> Virginia M. Bouvier, *Gender and the Role of Women in Colombia's Peace Process*

<sup>34</sup> Margaret Ward, *Gender, Citizenship, and the Future of the Northern Ireland Peace Process*, p.264; AGIPP, *Moving from Discrimination to Inclusion: Gender Perspectives on the Political Dialogue Themes*, Policy Paper No. 2, February 2017, p.23

<sup>35</sup> AGIPP, *Moving from Discrimination to Inclusion*, p.23

## Colombia

Colombia is generally held to be a prime example of a peace process in which women were able to exercise significant agency and influence over the resulting peace agreement. Bouvier illustrates how Colombian women from the early 1990s demonstrated their capacity to actively engage in political activities, from the grassroots to the highest echelons of peace negotiations, whilst being denied any formal recognition of their manifold roles.<sup>36</sup> This observation strongly correlates with Myanmar, where women are actively mobilizing in civil society, demonstrating their ability to engage in political life and their unwavering resolve in pursuit of women's political participation, yet where men continue to dominate the formal negotiations and official statistics as influencers and decision-makers. These activities in both countries reflect the positive impact women can bring to peace negotiations, and their ability to act as mediators within communities, profiting from well-established networks and relationships.

Activism from Colombian women's groups contributed to greater women's participation in the 2014-2015 peace talks in Havana and, according to Bouvier, encouraged negotiators to adopt greater gender sensitivity in their attitudes and their proposals.<sup>37</sup> Colombian women's engagement in its myriad forms reaffirms Bouvier's observation that 'the formal peace table is only one of many tables where negotiations take place.'<sup>38</sup> This observation will become increasingly resonant in the following two case studies.

## Northern Ireland

While much has been written surrounding Northern Ireland's political struggles, McWilliams pointed out in 1995 that 'too often it has been the women's experiences which have been left out.'<sup>39</sup> This is characteristic of the broader marginalization of women from historical and political attention, an issue discussed further in chapter 3.<sup>40</sup> In spite of their exclusion from the early

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<sup>36</sup> Virginia M. Bouvier, *Gender and the Role of Women in Colombia's Peace Process*, pp.20-21

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.* p.22

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.* p.28

<sup>39</sup> Monica McWilliams, *Struggling for Peace and Justice: Reflections on Women's Activism in Northern Ireland*, *Journal of Women's History*, Vol. 6 No. 4/Vol. 7 No. 2 (Winter/Spring, 1995) p.16

<sup>40</sup> Monica McWilliams, *Struggling for Peace and Justice*, p.16

scholarship, women in Northern Ireland from both Protestant and Catholic communities were at the vanguard of peace and civil rights activism prior to the initiation of the formal peace process.<sup>41</sup> Since the 1990s, a proliferation of research on women's activism and political engagement has come to the fore.<sup>42</sup>

Chang et al explain how Northern Irish women from civil society mobilised during the 1990s to create a cross-party women's coalition, profiting from pre-existing networks and a policy of inclusivity in order to achieve a diverse membership.<sup>43</sup> Chang et al discuss, via a number of interviews with Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC) members, how the coalition was founded by a group of women who felt disillusioned with and disenfranchised by day-to-day politics, and were inspired to counter the lack of women in political leadership positions.<sup>44</sup> They therefore decided to shape their own agenda focusing on issues that were excluded from formal politics and peace negotiations.<sup>45</sup>

The environment during the Northern Ireland conflict has been described by Cathy Harkin as an 'armed patriarchy.'<sup>46</sup> As McWilliams elaborates, women's experiences were characterised by the 'interaction of militarism and masculinism,' in a setting where guns held significant power not just on the battlefield, but within the domestic context too.<sup>47</sup> These observations apply closely to the situation in Myanmar, where military prowess is closely interrelated with masculinity, affecting power relationships not only during the conflict and in the political arena, but across society more broadly.<sup>48</sup> These power dynamics in Northern Ireland meant that many women experienced multiple manifestations of oppression, whether based on 'class, sex, religion, or ethnicity.'<sup>49</sup> Northern Irish women were therefore driven by their own experiences of the conflict and its impact

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<sup>41</sup> Patty Chang et al, *Women Leading Peace*, p.35; Monica McWilliams, *Struggling for Peace and Justice*, p.18, p.28; Rosemary Sales, *Women Divided*, p.195

<sup>42</sup> Monica McWilliams, *Struggling for Peace and Justice*, p.17

<sup>43</sup> Patty Chang et al, *Women Leading Peace*, p.44-45; Margaret Ward, *Gender, Citizenship, and the Future of the Northern Ireland Peace Process*, p.274

<sup>44</sup> Patty Chang et al, *Women Leading Peace*, p.39

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Cathy Harkin, cited in Monica McWilliams, *Struggling for Peace and Justice*, p.15

<sup>47</sup> Monica McWilliams, *Struggling for Peace and Justice*, p.15

<sup>48</sup> Tin Tin Nyo interview, Chiang Mai, March 2018; Su Su Swe interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>49</sup> Monica McWilliams, *Struggling for Peace and Justice*, p.31

on their communities and their families.<sup>50</sup> This is equally true for Myanmar, where women are targeted due to their sex, their ethnicity or their political affiliation, and where women's childhood and young adult experiences shaped to a considerable extent their own activism in the present day. One interviewee described herself as 'a product of the nation's politics,' explaining how her experiences of political turmoil at a young age (growing up in a refugee camp) determined who she has become (a distinguished women's rights advocate, based in Washington DC before returning to Myanmar in 2015).<sup>51</sup> Another woman, Tin Tin Nyo, described growing up in the jungle on the Myanmar border, where she witnessed 'so many different types of ethnic and gender discrimination.'<sup>52</sup> She cites these experiences as her main motivation 'to work for Burma, for ethnic self-determination, democracy and human rights.'<sup>53</sup> Lway Mount Noon was imprisoned twice in 1996 and 2007 for political activism during the democracy movement. She spent a total of five years and six months in prison, where she was tortured and raped by soldiers and policemen multiple times.<sup>54</sup> Her mother, her father and two of her brothers were killed during violent clashes with Tatmadaw forces.<sup>55</sup> In her own words, 'these experiences gave me my strong commitment' for a peaceful and democratic federal union in Myanmar.<sup>56</sup> In a similar vein, women in Northern Ireland who had experienced the conflict in its myriad forms hoped to directly influence the country's peace process, bringing previously unaddressed concerns to the table and greater inclusivity into the negotiations.<sup>57</sup>

The NIWC initially conducted a predominantly grassroots campaign, creating its own brand of politics by promising an alternative future to Northern Ireland's history of partisanship.<sup>58</sup> In very much the same way, women activists in Myanmar such as Tin Tin Nyo have been reaching out to different ethnic groups, 'advocating them to pursue sustainable and inclusive peacebuilding' in the country with a view towards a genuine federal democracy.<sup>59</sup> Porter underlines in particular processes that 'build positive relationships, heal wounds, reconcile differences' and 'respect rights'

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<sup>50</sup> Patty Chang et al, *Women Leading Peace*, p.40

<sup>51</sup> May Oo Mutraw interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>52</sup> Tin Tin Nyo interview, Chiang Mai, March 2018

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Lway Mount Noon interview, Yangon, April 2018

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Patty Chang et al, *Women Leading Peace*, p.40

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.* p.42

<sup>59</sup> Tin Tin Nyo interview, Chiang Mai, March 2018



as characteristic of peacebuilding at the grassroots level.<sup>60</sup> It is upon these foundations that grassroots campaigners in Myanmar and Northern Ireland have built their advocacy strategies in an effort to influence the direction of the peace negotiations and future peace.

In the case of Northern Ireland, through personal networks and with minimal resources, the women's coalition campaigned tirelessly to secure enough votes in the 1996 elections to participate in the Multi-Party talks.<sup>61</sup> By crafting informal and formal relationships with a broad range of constituents, the NIWC acted as a 'vehicle for women in civil society to access to the formal political negotiation process.'<sup>62</sup> However, Rosemary Sales explains that support for the coalition was far from 'universal' among feminists.<sup>63</sup> Many feared that the coalition's unity could only be maintained so long as the peace process remained at a standstill, otherwise 'differences would inevitably surface.'<sup>64</sup> One woman claimed to 'distrust the calls for more women to be involved,' arguing that a women's agenda is inadequate when kept separate from the discussion of mainstream 'politics.'<sup>65</sup> This illustrates the doubts that prevailed over and curtailed the progression of the women's movement, not only from men, but from women too. It also suggests that personal networks are not necessarily sufficient in sustaining a campaign across a deeply divided society in which considerable resistance to women's participation is displayed. This may be a word of warning to the women's movement in Myanmar; that relationship-building and the crafting of networks is a valuable starting point for any grassroots movement, but that this alone cannot guarantee longevity in political reform.

Fundamentally, the NIWC acted as a 'conduit for the voices of women in civil society', bringing a new perspective to the peace talks.<sup>66</sup> Its main success was in ensuring that gender-sensitive issues and language were included in the final Good Friday Peace Agreement.<sup>67</sup> Porter argues that the coalition infused values of 'inclusivity and participation' into the political process, ensuring that a clause affirming 'the right of women to full and equal political participation' was included in the

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<sup>60</sup> Elisabeth Porter, *Women, Political Decision-Making, and Peace-Building*, p.258

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.* p.248; Patty Chang et al, *Women Leading Peace*, p.32; p.39; p.42

<sup>62</sup> Patty Chang et al, *Women Leading Peace*, pp.31-32

<sup>63</sup> Rosemary Sales, *Women Divided*, p.201

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Rosemary Sales, *Women Divided*, p.201

<sup>66</sup> Patty Chang et al, *Women Leading Peace*, p.50

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.* pp.49-50

final text.<sup>68</sup> Nonetheless, she highlights the lack of legal enforcement of the clause.<sup>69</sup> McWilliams observes how the established parties did not perceive the NIWC's proposals as 'relevant to either conflict transformation or as a necessary part of the reconstruction of the political system.'<sup>70</sup> In a similar way, academic and peace activist Cynthia Cockburn argues that, following a peace agreement, 'gender...relations are usually allowed to revert to the status quo ante.'<sup>71</sup> As a result, despite the clause included in the Good Friday Agreement on women's 'full and equal' participation, women have since 'remained largely excluded from participation in institutions' concerned with conflict prevention.<sup>72</sup> In this way, whilst the Women's Coalition challenged traditional values in Northern Irish society, persisting structural inequalities prevented gender inclusive reform, resulting in the continued male domination of formal politics.<sup>73</sup> This is one clear pattern to emerge across the case studies, and chapter 4 will reveal its pertinence in Myanmar's case.

As summarised by Ward, despite women's 'extensive grass roots activity' across the case studies, 'a huge gap' remains 'between these community-based processes and the formal, official negotiation processes of peace settlements.'<sup>74</sup> Northern Irish women went some way towards bridging this gap, as 'unusually visible' participants in the political sphere.<sup>75</sup> The NIWC's experience tells us, however, that even when the 'gap' is partially bridged, and when promises are made during the peace process and resulting agreement, the durability of gender-focused reform may be limited. Despite Northern Irish women's inclusion in the early phases of transition, and their ability to 'make the case for equality in all spheres,' in the consolidation and implementation phase there remained 'a significant gap between the political commitment to the inclusion of

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<sup>68</sup> Elisabeth Porter, *Women, Political Decision-Making, and Peace-Building*, p.260; Margaret Ward, *Gender, Citizenship, and the Future of the Northern Ireland Peace Process*, p.275

<sup>69</sup> Margaret Ward, *Gender, Citizenship, and the Future of the Northern Ireland Peace Process*, p.276; see also Monica McWilliams and Avila Kilmurray, *Northern Ireland: the Significance of a Bottom-Up Women's Movement in a Politically Contested Society*, in: Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, Naomi Cahn, Dina Francesca Haynes, and Nahla Valji (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Conflict*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2017, p.7

<sup>70</sup> Monica McWilliams and Avila Kilmurray, *Northern Ireland: the Significance of a Bottom-Up Women's Movement in a Politically Contested Society*, p.7

<sup>71</sup> Cynthia Cockburn, cited in Margaret Ward, *Gender, Citizenship, and the Future of the Northern Ireland Peace Process*, p.282

<sup>72</sup> Margaret Ward, *Gender, Citizenship, and the Future of the Northern Ireland Peace Process*, p.282

<sup>73</sup> Rosemary Sales, *Women Divided*, p.202

<sup>74</sup> Margaret Ward, *Gender, Citizenship, and the Future of the Northern Ireland Peace Process*, p.263

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.* p.264

women and practice on the ground.<sup>76</sup> Experience suggests that this gap in particular is equally, if not more prominent in Myanmar, where the political commitment made through the 30% quota (discussed in the following chapter) is yet to materialise in reality.

Although the limited implementation of gender-focused provisions has been a source of regret for the NIWC's members since 1998, this case study clearly demonstrates how women in a polarised society were able to mobilise 'on the basis of their shared experiences as women,' leveraging existing resources and personal networks in order to access the national peace process.<sup>77</sup> Northern Irish women demonstrated 'imaginative and innovative responses' to challenges faced on the path to political and social transformation.<sup>78</sup> The experience of the NIWC provides a valuable model for Myanmar. Northern Ireland constitutes a society highly divided, but in which women became united (to some extent) by their suffering, and strengthened (to some extent) by their relationships with other women. It is a society where inclusion, justice and equality were far from guaranteed in the peace process, but which had to be hard fought for, with significant, albeit regulated, success.

## Guatemala

Finally, this chapter will consider the case of Guatemala, where women in civil society found an entry point to the formal peace process through the national Civil Society Assembly (ASC). The ASC had been established as a result of international pressure for the need to include civil society perspectives in peace negotiations.<sup>79</sup> Comprising eleven sectors, it responsible for producing non-binding recommendations and proposals to the government and its opponent, the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unit (URNG).<sup>80</sup> For women, the space created through the ASC was unprecedented, offering a channel through which they could influence the formal peace process, albeit indirectly.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Margaret Ward, *Gender, Citizenship, and the Future of the Northern Ireland Peace Process*, p.283

<sup>77</sup> Patty Chang et al, *Women Leading Peace*, p.50

<sup>78</sup> Monica McWilliams, *Struggling for Peace and Justice*, pp.32-34

<sup>79</sup> Patty Chang et al, *Women Leading Peace*, p.60

<sup>80</sup> Sumie Nakaya, *Women and Gender Equality in Peace Processes*, p.462

<sup>81</sup> Patty Chang et al, *Women Leading Peace*, p.60

Chang et al explore the historical inequalities in Guatemalan society, noting its traditional ‘culture of sexism deeply entrenched in patriarchy.’<sup>82</sup> Many Guatemalan women were subjected to structural, sexualised violence during the country’s internal conflict, in which rape was frequently employed as a tactic of war.<sup>83</sup> In addition, Chang et al detail the way in which significant numbers of Guatemalan women suffered as secondary victims, as wives, mothers, daughters and sisters of those who disappeared as a result of the conflict.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, thousands of indigenous women were internally displaced.<sup>85</sup> These women’s experiences of the civil war in Guatemala draw clear links with Myanmar, where violence against women is pervasive, and where women’s suffering is heightened as a result of armed conflict. Many women in Myanmar endure a continuum of violence from conflict situations to so-called ‘peace.’<sup>86</sup> Such violence may be perpetrated by the military or other combatants; it may be perpetrated by those closer to home.<sup>87</sup> During the civil war in Guatemala, these experiences led to a proliferation of NGOs and women’s organizations encouraging women to ‘come together, share their grievances, and strive for a better reality.’<sup>88</sup> Through public marches and protests against the military’s brutal campaigns, Guatemalan women set an example for women’s activism globally.<sup>89</sup>

Within the ASC, women’s organizations formed the Women’s Sector (WS), a coalition comprising 32 women’s organizations.<sup>90</sup> The WS built alliances across ethnic, political, economic and geographical divides, striving to be ‘as inclusive as possible’ and to avoid hierarchy within its structures.<sup>91</sup> They prioritised subjects surrounding women’s rights and gender equality, but also focused on issues of reconciliation, violence against women, justice, land reform and return of

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<sup>82</sup> *ibid.* p.53

<sup>83</sup> Azza Karam, Women in war and peace-building, p.4; Patty Chang et al, Women Leading Peace, p.60

<sup>84</sup> Patty Chang et al, Women Leading Peace, p.54

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> Mike Hives, As Myanmar Democratizes, Women’s Rights Lag Behind, *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/16/world/asia/myanmar-women-violence-law.html> [accessed 5 June 2018]

<sup>87</sup> Yenny Gamming, The Unspoken Issue of Violence Against Women, *Frontier Myanmar*, <https://frontiermyanmar.net/en/the-unspoken-issue-of-violence-against-women> [accessed 2 May 2018]; Ei Cherry Aung, Abused at home, Myanmar women seek power to walk out on domestic violence, *Reuters*, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-myanmar-women-abuse/abused-at-home-myanmar-women-look-for-power-to-walk-out-on-domestic-violence-idUKKCN10G05Z> [accessed 3 April 2018]

<sup>88</sup> Patty Chang et al, Women Leading Peace, pp.59-61

<sup>89</sup> *ibid.* pp.59-60

<sup>90</sup> Sumie Nakaya, Women and Gender Equality in Peace Processes, p.462; see also Patty Chang et al, Women Leading Peace, p.62

<sup>91</sup> Patty Chang et al, Women Leading Peace, p.51; p.62

refugees, working to ensure that each issue was appropriately considered in the language of the final peace agreement.<sup>92</sup>

The Women's Sector in Guatemala faced a number of challenges. These include not being fully supported by ASC leaders due to the prevalence of misogynistic attitudes, and the high level of fragmentation among its member organizations.<sup>93</sup> With regard to the former, WS members recall the culture of discrimination that restricted their efforts: being 'quieted' by dismissive male ASC leaders, and the necessity therefore to be creative and flexible in order to promote their agendas and gain acceptance in the peace process.<sup>94</sup> One woman, Luz Méndez, who held an advisory role in the negotiations on behalf of the URNG, worked particularly hard to incorporate gender issues into the negotiations.<sup>95</sup> Chang et al cite Méndez, who 'had to speak very loud to be heard,' her contributions often falling on deaf ears.<sup>96</sup> In this political climate, the majority of WS member organizations were forced to make further compromises. Most notably, many 'did not pursue gender equality as their primary objective,' but focused instead on issues of human rights and social justice.<sup>97</sup> This led to an atmosphere of division within the Women's Sector, between those favouring more radical, hard-line objectives focused on transforming 'conventional notions of gender, class and identity,' and those preferring to work towards what were perceived as more attainable, short-term goals.<sup>98</sup> This lack of cohesion was an issue for the WS internally, perhaps contributing to their 'mixed success' in having their proposals incorporated by the ASC.<sup>99</sup> Further curbing the WS' influence over the formal negotiations was the minimal interaction facilitated between the members of the WS and the formal negotiators.<sup>100</sup> This comes back to the widespread and deep-set refusal of men to take women seriously as political subjects; an issue as prevalent in Guatemala in the 1990s as it is in Myanmar today.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> *ibid.* p.51

<sup>93</sup> *ibid.* pp.62-63

<sup>94</sup> *ibid.* p.63

<sup>95</sup> Sumie Nakaya, *Women and Gender Equality in Peace Processes*, p.464

<sup>96</sup> Patty Chang et al, *Women Leading Peace*, p.58

<sup>97</sup> *ibid.* pp.62-63

<sup>98</sup> Patty Chang et al, *Women Leading Peace*, p.62

<sup>99</sup> *ibid.* p.67

<sup>100</sup> *ibid.* p.67

<sup>101</sup> *ibid.* p.63

In the end, the language of the final Guatemalan peace agreements in 1996 points both to the Women's Sector's achievements 'as well as their limited influence.'<sup>102</sup> Each of the eleven thematic accords signed 'included language on women's rights and gender equality,' including a provision to promote women's political participation.<sup>103</sup> Ultimately, however, the language of specific gender-related provisions, such as redress for sexual abuse, was weak, indicating the 'superficial integration' of women's demands into the accords.<sup>104</sup> This may be due to the lack of influence the ASC itself had over the content of final agreement.<sup>105</sup> Another factor curtailing the influence of the WS' proposals was their subjection to several stages of dilution: initially within internal debates; secondly within ASC discussions; and thirdly when presented to URNG and government negotiators.<sup>106</sup> Ultimately, though, the underlying cause of the 'superficial integration' of women's demands comes back to women's exclusion from the peace table. Whilst Hanan Ashwari argues that women bring 'awareness and recommendations about a set of life and death issues' to the peace table, Karam highlights that without the inclusion of women at the peace table, 'these issues risk lacking the necessary priority.'<sup>107</sup> As a result of their physical exclusion, women's concerns were to some extent recognised in the Guatemalan peace agreements, but not prioritised. This surface-level recognition unsurprisingly did not lead to 'structural change and social transformation towards gender equality.'<sup>108</sup> This is where the combination of advocacy, political space and political participation are essential. Without all three, the changes are likely to be artificial or lacking in depth, and therefore unsustainable.

Due to a combination of the above factors, Guatemalan women from the WS recognise that 'much of what they sought to achieve has yet to materialize.'<sup>109</sup> Mendez conveys that, due to a lack of 'structural change in the political landscape,' the women's groups are 'failing in the struggle to maintain activism in the face of poverty, sporadic violence, and continued gender

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<sup>102</sup> *ibid.* p.68

<sup>103</sup> Azza Karam, *Women in war and peace-building*, p.15; Patty Chang et al, *Women Leading Peace*, p.52

<sup>104</sup> Patty Chang et al, *Women Leading Peace*, p.58; p.68

<sup>105</sup> The ultimate decision-makers of the country's peace process were in fact the guerrilla forces, the government and the UN, see: Alessandro Preti, *Guatemala: Violence in Peacetime – A Critical Analysis of the Armed Conflict and the Peace Process*, *Disasters*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (2002) p.111

<sup>106</sup> Patty Chang et al, *Women Leading Peace*, p.68

<sup>107</sup> Hanan Ashwari, cited in Azza Karam, *Women in war and peace-building*, p.12

<sup>108</sup> Sumie Nakaya, *Women and Gender Equality in Peace Processes*, p.470

<sup>109</sup> Patty Chang et al, *Women Leading Peace*, p.69

discrimination.<sup>110</sup> Pertaining to the ‘continued gender discrimination,’ Nakaya argues that Guatemalan women’s proposals constituted ‘measures to promote *women*, not gender equality.’<sup>111</sup> This is an important distinction, suggesting that the reforms did little to alter the ‘socially constructed designation of women and men,’ meaning that gender equality remained uninstitutionalized.<sup>112</sup> Recalling ideas discussed previously, promoting women, without addressing ‘underlying power relations,’ is inadequate both in achieving gender equality in a post-conflict society, and in ensuring that peace is sustainable.<sup>113</sup> Women’s organizations in Myanmar, by contrast, have demonstrated significant focus on raising awareness of issues of gender, although it remains to be seen how far this awareness will be reflected in both policy and practice.

Bouvier concludes that the WS ‘showcased the abilities of a diverse group of women’ who came together to advocate a common cause, and its achievements signal ‘symbolic progress,’ ensuring ‘some legal protections’ for women, even if their final contributions to the peace accords were limited in both ‘depth and reach.’<sup>114</sup> Karam discusses how the women’s movement in Guatemala gave ‘a human face to otherwise abstract issues of social justice,’ bringing ‘personal consequences of violence’ amongst other issues into the light.<sup>115</sup> Importantly, the Women’s Sector ensured greater space for women’s political participation through the article ‘guaranteeing women’s right to organize and their participation, on the same terms as men, at the senior decision-making levels of local, regional and national institutions.’<sup>116</sup> In a political environment in which many believed the Women’s Sector ‘did not need to exist,’ and that women’s needs were not relevant to the peace negotiations, Guatemalan women’s resilience and adaptability contributed directly to a more progressive and inclusive peace agreement.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Luz Méndez, cited in Sumie Nakaya, *Women and Gender Equality in Peace Processes*, p.466

<sup>111</sup> Sumie Nakaya, *Women and Gender Equality in Peace Processes*, p.461

<sup>112</sup> *ibid.* pp.461-463

<sup>113</sup> *ibid.* p.462

<sup>114</sup> Patty Chang et al, *Women Leading Peace*, p.58; p.69

<sup>115</sup> Azza Karam, *Women in war and peace-building*, p.12

<sup>116</sup> Patty Chang et al, *Women Leading Peace*, p.69

<sup>117</sup> *ibid.* p.61; Sumie Nakaya, *Women and Gender Equality in Peace Processes*, p.461

## Conclusion

The above three case studies shed some light on the recent history of women's participation in peace processes worldwide. An understanding of these global precedents helps to place Myanmar's peace process in a global and historical context. Whilst each peace process is uniquely shaped by its own host of opportunities and constraints, there are many linkages that can be drawn between the situation for women in peace negotiations in Colombia, Northern Ireland, Guatemala and Myanmar. Most obviously, this chapter highlights the culture of discrimination and injustice faced by women internationally, in peace negotiations which are determined almost exclusively by men.

The underlying factors behind the limited participation of women and the lack of inclusion of women's concerns can be summarised as follows: 1) the potency of the social construction of gender; 2) the tendency of male negotiators to overlook women's concerns; and 3) structural barriers impeding women's influence and their decision-making authority. Each of these are discussed in more detail below.

### *The potency of the social construction of gender:*

Gender as a deeply embedded social construction, coupled with the difficulties faced in trying to challenge this in order to achieve genuine gender equality, are prevalent across each case study. This chapter has seen a number of efforts to integrate gender concerns, whilst at the same time a deep-set reluctance to transform the underlying power relations in society. This, on numerous occasions, has resulted in the superficial integration of gender issues and the ineffective inclusion of women in the peace process. As illustrated by Cohn et al, 'integrating gender...on a puddle-deep level often amounts to including the word 'gender' in reports, proposals or public information and calling the job of gender main-streaming done.'<sup>118</sup> Unsurprisingly, such an approach has done little to guarantee gender equality in post-conflict society, and equally to ensure sustainable peace.

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<sup>118</sup> Carol Cohn, Helen Kinsella and Sheri Gibbings, Women, Peace and Security Resolution 1325, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (June, 2010) p.135



*The tendency of male negotiators to overlook women's concerns:*

The challenges discussed in this chapter for different groups of women are symptomatic of the tendency of male negotiators to prioritise peace as a notion entirely separate from gender equality and women's participation. As a result of this lack of political commitment, women become 'unrecognized and undervalued partners for peace,' unsupported by male negotiators who feel that women's concerns are not relevant, or should not be prioritised in peace process negotiations.<sup>119</sup> The same problem prevails in Myanmar: an Oxfam report reveals one Myanmar parliamentarian's rationale that, due to the country 'rapidly embracing change on multiple fronts,' the priorities must be 'changing the law and building the peace.'<sup>120</sup> There is no indication that this 'change' should encompass gender equality. Whilst of course peacebuilding is and should be a central concern for any country suffering from internal conflict, the literature demonstrates considerable reluctance, even refusal, on the part of male negotiators to recognise women's concerns as an essential component to the longer-term goal of peace and development.<sup>121</sup> This claim will be substantiated in the case of Myanmar in chapter 4.

*Structural barriers impeding women's influence and their decision-making authority:*

Finally, women's participation is limited by structural barriers. Typically excluded from the negotiating teams, women's groups and organizations generally 'lack the access to power to make key decisions' and to enter into the formal peace negotiations.<sup>122</sup> As a result, many women remain confined to local level activism within their communities and civil society. In the cases where women ('s groups/coalitions) are able to overcome these challenges and achieve some level of participation, they are restricted by their lack of decision-making authority within the negotiations, and in the post-agreement implementation phase. The case studies in this chapter have proven that civil society activism has significant potential, yet is generally inadequate in effecting meaningful change at the policy level. Structural barriers impeding civil society in Myanmar's case will be

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<sup>119</sup> Virginia M. Bouvier, *Gender and the Role of Women in Colombia's Peace Process*, p.19

<sup>120</sup> Oxfam, Care, Trocaire, Actionaid, *Women & Leadership*, 2015, <https://www.care.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Myanmar-Women-and-Leadership-in-Myanmar-Report.pdf>, [accessed 3 May 2018] p.22

<sup>121</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> Elisabeth Porter, *Women, Political Decision-Making, and Peace-Building*, p.248

addressed in more detail in chapter 4. Moreover, the case studies demonstrate that the presence of women at the peace table is important yet insufficient in guaranteeing the meaningful integration of women's concerns in peacebuilding and post-conflict structures and institutions. Structural change is required on both counts, to bring women's grassroots activism and their engagement in high-level negotiations closer together. By doing so, greater harmony can be achieved between women's agency from below, and the influence they are able to exercise from above.

In summary, this chapter demonstrates the gravity of the challenge faced by women attempting to influence peace negotiation processes. An understanding of the principle challenges faced by women elsewhere is the first step in crafting a new narrative on women's participation in Myanmar's peace process. In spite of the challenges addressed, the case studies demonstrate the resilience shown by women's movements. Each one highlights women's capacities, in diverse and challenging political contexts, to influence and participate in peace negotiations, even when the formal processes seek to exclude them. They also show inclusivity to be a major strength of women's movements internationally. In each country discussed, the groups, networks and coalitions strove for diverse membership, encouraging women to come together on the basis of shared experiences, and in the most part sought to eliminate hierarchy from their structures.

The experiences of Colombian, Northern Irish and Guatemalan women illustrate that recognition of women's concerns at the peace table is inadequate, unless accompanied by women's meaningful participation to ensure the prioritization and implementation of their concerns. Equally, this research argues that the inclusion of women in peace negotiations is insufficient unless accompanied by genuine recognition of issues of gender and the structural inequalities inherent in the conflict and the peace process alike. This 'dual ambition of practical and conceptual inclusion' is captured by Christine Bell, who explains how 'women must simultaneously find ways of accessing the process as conceived of without them, while reframing the issues at the heart of the process.'<sup>123</sup> Women in Colombia, Northern Ireland and Guatemala were, to varying extents, able to move into this political space. They enjoyed mixed success in ensuring that gender equality was realised in the resulting peace agreements. As concluded by Bell, 'women must learn from the

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<sup>123</sup> Christine Bell, Women Address the Problems of Peace Agreements, Transnational Justice Institute Research Paper, No. 11-03, 2011, p.99

little documented experiences of women in other peace processes, which, despite different contexts, nonetheless offer a valuable resource.’<sup>124</sup> Similarly, Enloe summarises that women’s energy at the national and local level must be ‘infused with global consciousness.’<sup>125</sup> This reinforces the importance that those involved in peace negotiations in Myanmar, and equally those engaging academically in Myanmar’s peace process, are informed by international experiences of women in the peace process, taking on board what was achieved and how, and understanding what may be done differently in order to achieve more meaningful, more widespread and longer lasting results in the future.

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<sup>124</sup> Christine Bell, Women, Peace Negotiations, and Peace Agreements: Opportunities and Challenges, in: Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, Naomi Cahn, Dina Francesca Haynes, and Nahla Valji (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Conflict*, p.13

<sup>125</sup> Cynthia Enloe, *The Big Push*, p.166

## Chapter 2: International Frameworks and Myanmar's Peace Process

A common thread throughout the peace processes discussed is the influence of international conventions and norms, to which extensive pressure has been placed on governments and societies to adhere. A barometer of success for women's rights and gender equality in past peace processes and agreements is the extent to which Women, Peace and Security (WPS) frameworks have been integrated. The most important of these include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA), and UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325. This chapter will consider these agendas in more detail in relation to Myanmar, focusing in particular on the challenges encountered in improving women's political participation and gender equality in line with international guidelines. It will assess the usefulness and effectiveness of international standards and subsequent quotas in improving women's participation in Myanmar's peace process.

### Postcolonial Theory and Myanmar

The abovementioned international developments are essential in the pursuit of gender equality, yet their analysis should be accompanied by an awareness of postcolonial theory. Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe* is notable in this regard, combining subaltern studies and postcolonial theory in his discussion of the shortcomings of Western social science's depiction of political modernity in non-Western societies.<sup>126</sup> Chakrabarty questions the longstanding academic engagement with postcolonial societies. He recognises that most scholars in the social sciences operate from a distinctly European 'point of departure.'<sup>127</sup> For Chakrabarty, it is problematic how the European model and Western concepts are ingrained in history writing, taken as the template of modernity in cases where historical realities are often disconnected from or incompatible with the Western model.<sup>128</sup> Chakrabarty acknowledges that 'European thought' is 'indispensable' in conceptualizing the 'various life practices that constitute the political and the historical,' yet that,

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<sup>126</sup> While his primary focus is India, Chakrabarty's broader observations can be applied to Myanmar, particularly given the shared colonial pasts and geographical proximity of the two countries, see: Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, Part One

<sup>127</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, p.xiii

<sup>128</sup> *ibid.* Part One

alone, it is ‘inadequate.’<sup>129</sup> He therefore positions himself between the ‘simultaneous indispensability and inadequacy of social science thought;’ a valuable platform from which to embark on this research.<sup>130</sup> Whilst the former warrants an exploration of international standards and the importance of their adoption in Myanmar, the latter cautions against their unconditional enforcement for the purpose of meeting international (Western) demands. Chakrabarty, without discarding European thought entirely, aims to move beyond Eurocentrism, and to renew various trends of the social sciences ‘from and for the margins.’<sup>131</sup> This, in many ways, is the ambition of this research; bringing women in Myanmar with their voices and experiences, previously confined to the margins of the peace process, to the foreground.

‘Political modernity,’ Chakrabarty argues, is inconceivable without ‘invoking certain categories and concepts’ which necessarily originate in European traditions.<sup>132</sup> Among these concepts are human rights, civil society, democracy and social justice. Gender equality is no exception. Many of these categories, in the words of Chakrabarty, ‘bear the burden of European thought and history.’<sup>133</sup> This statement reflects the interpretation, by some members of Myanmar’s government and military, that ‘women’s rights are a Western concept.’<sup>134</sup> Whilst this remains a minority view, its existence in the upper echelons of Myanmar’s power structures is a cause for concern for many. May Oo Mutraw is a well-respected political and women’s rights activist in Myanmar, who states that she absolutely rejects the validity of such arguments put forward by government and Tatmadaw officials.<sup>135</sup> She qualifies this statement by proposing that the question of women’s rights should be approached with ‘the greatest cultural sensitivity.’<sup>136</sup> It is at this juncture where Chakrabarty’s theories become most useful, in the suggestion that non-Western societies need not all progress towards ‘modernity’ along the same timeline.<sup>137</sup> Indeed, it is the lack of universality and the existence of diversity - each country’s ‘contradictory relationship’ to European thought - which contributes their own unique and culturally sensitive versions of modernity.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> *ibid.* pp.5-6

<sup>130</sup> *ibid.* p.6

<sup>131</sup> *ibid.* pp.16-17

<sup>132</sup> *ibid.* p.4

<sup>133</sup> *ibid.* p.4

<sup>134</sup> May Oo Mutraw interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>135</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, Introduction

<sup>138</sup> *ibid.* p.7

Since historical experiences across the globe are diverse and fragmented (this is hard to deny), and if not all histories should be subsumed under the European lens, how should one approach the themes of this research? Myanmar is a society which consistently reaffirms its commitment to its own way of conducting politics and interpreting the past.<sup>139</sup> This may be a symptom of its colonial history, or more likely its decades under military rule. During my time in Myanmar, I heard repeated reference to ‘the Myanmar way,’ the excuse cited by those in power for not abiding by international norms, or for not meeting Western expectations of what constitutes modernity.<sup>140</sup> As Nan Aye Than Dar phrases it, ‘the major players in the country do not want to accept international norms and standards,’ instead ‘they always talk about the ‘Myanmar way’ to democracy and to the peace process.’<sup>141</sup> This view is representative of the way in which, as the country has democratised and freedom of speech has become (more of a) reality, ‘the Myanmar way’ has been criticised by citizens tired of military intransigence and government refusal to promote genuine reform. Mi Kun Chan Non, chairwoman of AGIPP, underlines how ‘Myanmar always implements the standards and establishes policy based on the experience of Myanmar.’<sup>142</sup> She identifies this as a longstanding and negative political approach. In spite of the values of postcolonial theory mentioned above, a closer examination of the Myanmar context exposes some flaws in Chakrabarty’s theories. He rebuts the Euro-centric approach of analysing what is lacking in non-European societies, yet offers little nuance for cases where that society is embracing its own vision of modernity in direct challenge to the Western model, and to the (increasingly recognised) detriment of its own people. As such, while this research is informed and enriched by an awareness of postcolonial theory, it is not governed by an uncritical acceptance of postcolonial values.

Porter’s argument surrounding the international approach to issues of conflict and peace-building provides a second challenge to the ‘Myanmar way,’ and sheds further light on the postcolonial debate. She recognises the need to pay attention to cultural specificity and to remain respectful of cultural traditions, but argues that these sensitivities ‘cannot be at the expense of universal human

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<sup>139</sup> Nan Aye Than Dar interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>140</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> Mi Kun Chan Non interview, Yangon, March 2018

rights.<sup>143</sup> In her view, when there is a conflict between universal rights to equality and culturally specific subjection of women, rights to equality should take normative priority.<sup>144</sup> As such, Porter seems to support the idea of a universally binding set of norms. However, she goes on to state that ‘building peace is a process; it is contextual, grounded, and shaped by the particular conflict and all the historical, religious, economic, political, cultural, and regional factors that have contributed to hostilities and the need to build peace.’<sup>145</sup> In this way, she argues that each peace process is unique and should be approached as such, yet at the same time argues that an overarching set of values should be prioritised over potentially harmful cultural practices. This is the paradox faced by international actors engaging in peace processes worldwide. It is summarised by Khin Ma Ma Myo in the Myanmar context, when she argues that ‘we need to bridge the concepts of international community and local communities, so that local communities can understand the [international] concept of gender and women’s rights.’<sup>146</sup> Problematically, in situations where human rights discourse ‘is perceived as out of tune with local mores,’ the former often suffers the fate of lacking ‘moral legitimacy.’<sup>147</sup> But at what point do local values supersede the international legal and institutional instruments? How far should postcolonial critique govern our approach to real life challenges in postcolonial societies? These are questions to bear in mind over the course of this chapter.

### Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

The remainder of this chapter will elucidate a timeline of international frameworks affecting women’s participation in Myanmar’s peace process. Adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979, CEDAW is a treaty equating to an ‘international bill of rights for women.’<sup>148</sup> It aligns itself with the WPS agenda by placing emphasis on the importance of women’s participation and women’s leadership.<sup>149</sup> Of particular importance to this research are the Convention’s provisions on the elimination of ‘discrimination against women in the political and public life of the

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<sup>143</sup> Elisabeth Porter, *Women, Political Decision-Making, and Peace-Building*, p.252

<sup>144</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> *ibid.* p.258

<sup>146</sup> Khin Ma Ma Myo interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>147</sup> Christine Chinkin, *Gender Inequality and International Human Rights Law*, p.25

<sup>148</sup> AGIPP, *International Standards Guiding Gender Inclusion*, Policy Paper No. 3, May 2017, p.8

<sup>149</sup> *ibid.*

country.’<sup>150</sup> The Government of Myanmar (GoM) acceded to CEDAW in 1997, promising significant changes to political life in the country and later for the peace process itself.<sup>151</sup> However, many of these changes have yet to materialise.

There are several factors limiting the influence of CEDAW in Myanmar. The CEDAW Committee’s 2016 report on Myanmar noted in particular the ‘lack of clarity on the applicability of the Convention,’ and the ‘lack of visibility of the Convention among the public.’<sup>152</sup> Mi Kun Chan Non takes this a step further, stating that ‘not many people from the government... understand about CEDAW or about gender.’<sup>153</sup> Furthermore, it is evident from the Committee’s report that Myanmar’s national legal framework is inherently incompatible with CEDAW.<sup>154</sup> This may be a result of the country’s ‘colonial and traditional norms’ and its legislative foundations.<sup>155</sup> On top of this, Myanmar’s 2008 Constitution obstructs the implementation of CEDAW, with a long list of clauses serving to prohibit women from gaining equal rights to men.<sup>156</sup> For example, military personnel are granted immunity from human rights violations and gender-based violence through Article 343 (B), whilst Article 352 states that ‘nothing... shall prevent appointment of men to the positions that are suitable for men only.’<sup>157</sup> As such, a number of important positions are reserved for men, in a document which also states that there shall be no discrimination ‘on the basis of race, birth, religion or sex.’<sup>158</sup> The contradictory and discriminatory nature of the Constitution is evident, thereby curtailing CEDAW from operating effectively in Myanmar. One of the greatest injustices inherent in the constitution is Article 109, allocating 25% of seats in both houses of Myanmar’s parliament to members of the armed forces.<sup>159</sup> This, coupled with Article 436, which requires a 75% majority to pass any amendment to the constitution, makes it seemingly impossible to rectify

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<sup>150</sup> Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, 1979, see full text at: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm>

<sup>151</sup> Myanmar acceded to CEDAW with two reservations: Article 29 and the Optional Protocol, see: AGIPP, International Standards Guiding Gender Inclusion, pp.8-9

<sup>152</sup> AGIPP, International Standards Guiding Gender Inclusion, p.10

<sup>153</sup> Mi Kun Chan Non interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>154</sup> AGIPP, International Standards Guiding Gender Inclusion, p.10

<sup>155</sup> *ibid.* pp.10-11

<sup>156</sup> *ibid.* p.11

<sup>157</sup> AGIPP, International Standards Guiding Gender Inclusion, pp.11-12; Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar (2008) chapters 5; 7; 8

<sup>158</sup> AGIPP, International Standards Guiding Gender Inclusion, p.12

<sup>159</sup> *ibid.*



the embedded gender inequality.<sup>160</sup> Given such constitutional limitations, Myanmar's commitments in CEDAW provide little reassurance to those campaigning for women's rights, justice and equal participation.

Nonetheless, CEDAW's stipulations have been pivotal for women's organizations in Myanmar.<sup>161</sup> Several of the women interviewed described how their organizations use CEDAW's reports and recommendations as a 'tool' in their advocacy approach and to hold their government accountable for its responsibilities as a CEDAW state party.<sup>162</sup> CEDAW might not be embedded in the psyche of Myanmar's military or government rulers, however it appears to be a central tenet of women's and civil society organizations' awareness-raising campaigns and advocacy strategies. As such, not only can women's organizations in Myanmar be reassured by knowledge of women's experiences in previous peace processes; they can also be emboldened by international legal and institutional frameworks.

### Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

From the groundwork laid by CEDAW arose the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) in 1995.<sup>163</sup> Myanmar committed to the declaration in 1997.<sup>164</sup> Fundamentally, it lays out state commitments to enhance the rights of women, and remains 'the most comprehensive global policy framework aimed at advancing gender equality, development and peace.'<sup>165</sup> The Beijing Declaration forms a central pillar in efforts to integrate women in peacebuilding, due to the links it draws between the achievement of gender equality and sustainable peace.<sup>166</sup> Subsequent agreements resulting from a five-yearly review of the BPfA were put in place to 'urge states to

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<sup>160</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> *ibid.* p.10

<sup>162</sup> Mi Kun Chan Non; Htar Htar Thet, Tin Tin Nyo interviews, Yangon, March 2018; AGIPP, International Standards Guiding Gender Inclusion, p.10

<sup>163</sup> Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 1995, see full text at:

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf>; AGIPP, International Standards Guiding Gender Inclusion, p.14

<sup>164</sup> Oxfam, Political Gender Quotas: Key debates and values for Myanmar, June 2016, p.4

<sup>165</sup> AGIPP, International Standards Guiding Gender Inclusion, p.14

<sup>166</sup> The document declares that 'women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace,' see: Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 1995, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf>

ensure the effective participation of women and girls at all levels of decision-making and at all stages in peace processes and mediation efforts, conflict prevention and resolution, peace-keeping, peace-building and recovery.<sup>167</sup> Such statements and active encouragement from the international community signals a major increase in momentum to improve the position of women in peace processes, with mixed success in Myanmar.

One of the most important mechanisms resulting from the BPfA for ensuring that women's participation reaches a 'critical mass' is the imposition of a 30% quota, adopted by Myanmar in its January 2016 UPC.<sup>168</sup> While the NCA calls for the inclusion of a 'reasonable number' of women, the National Framework for Political Dialogue itself (December 2015) specifies 'at least 30% participation by women at different levels of political dialogues.'<sup>169</sup> Attaining this 'critical mass' is believed to be essential in raising the profile of gender issues in politics.<sup>170</sup> To buttress this commitment, major donor organizations such as the Joint Peace Fund (JPF) have pledged a minimum of 15% of project funding towards gender-focused activities.<sup>171</sup> The success of these two quotas in Myanmar, however, has thus far been limited. Figures reveal how, in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> 21<sup>st</sup> Century Panglong Conferences (the highest-level peace negotiations), women's participation stood at 13% and 15% respectively.<sup>172</sup> May Oo Mutraw, a women's rights activist in Myanmar and senior officer at the JPF, argues that further evaluation and analysis are necessary in order for the two quotas to become mutually beneficial. She describes how political actors must have an 'in depth understanding of different societies and communities' in order to ensure that the 15% financial commitment is used most effectively 'to ensure that at least 30% are able to participate.'<sup>173</sup> Without this 'systematic connection' of the two numbers, it is unlikely that Myanmar will witness an increase in the number of women participating in the peace process.<sup>174</sup> Chinkin takes an alternative view, arguing that the BPfA takes for granted the fact that participation

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<sup>167</sup> AGIPP, International Standards Guiding Gender Inclusion, p.14; United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) 58 (2014) and 60 (2016)

<sup>168</sup> Oxfam, Political Gender Quotas: Key debates and values for Myanmar, June 2016, pp.4-5; AGIPP, International Standards Guiding Gender Inclusion p.13; p.16

<sup>169</sup> Roslyn Warren et al, Women's Peacebuilding Strategies, p.21; AGIPP, International Standards Guiding Gender Inclusion, p.13; p.16; Oxfam, Political Gender Quotas: Key debates and values for Myanmar, June 2016, pp.4-5

<sup>170</sup> Oxfam, Political Gender Quotas: Key debates and values for Myanmar, June 2016, p.5

<sup>171</sup> AGIPP, International Standards Guiding Gender Inclusion, pp.6-7

<sup>172</sup> Nwe Zin Win, Gender Statistics in Myanmar, 2017

<sup>173</sup> May Oo Mutraw interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>174</sup> *ibid.*

of women at decision-making levels will automatically bring about women's empowerment and greater equality.<sup>175</sup> It is not necessarily true, she argues, that greater women's participation (i.e. meeting the quotas) will be mirrored in greater gender awareness.<sup>176</sup> As Porter concludes, 'without culturally sanctioned gender equality and rights, the obstacles to women's participation in political decision-making remain powerful.'<sup>177</sup>

But how likely is Myanmar to achieve culturally sanctioned gender equality in order to facilitate higher levels of women's participation? When considering the need for a society to transform its traditional/colonial norms in order to align itself with global practice, it is important to recall Chakrabarty's theories of postcolonialism and his critique of the universal validity of European ideals.<sup>178</sup> He asks whether thought can 'transcend places of their origin.'<sup>179</sup> In other words, if ideas of rights, democracy and social justice originated in Europe centuries ago, can these concepts be extended beyond European borders and integrated by non-Western societies?<sup>180</sup> Porter, in her critical analysis of the BPfA, argues that 'while trying to be inclusive, it fosters claims of cultural relativity and of incommensurable contexts and thus detracts from formulating clear notions of equality.'<sup>181</sup> This raises the question, how realistic is the imposition of international quotas in the Myanmar context, particularly when the quotas remain a political commitment with no legal obligation?<sup>182</sup> May Oo Mutraw argues that the international role is important yet 'limited.'<sup>183</sup> International frameworks, she argues, are useful insofar as offering a support mechanism for women, but that 'a great deal of sensitivity' is required in their application to a national context.<sup>184</sup>

To this end, Myanmar initiated its own ten-year National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (NSPAW) in 2013, founded on the principles of CEDAW and BPfA.<sup>185</sup> This is the

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<sup>175</sup> Christine Chinkin, *Gender Inequality and International Human Rights Law*, p.22

<sup>176</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>177</sup> Elisabeth Porter, *Women, Political Decision-Making, and Peace-Building*, p.251

<sup>178</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, p.xiii

<sup>179</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>180</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>181</sup> Elisabeth Porter, *Women, Political Decision-Making, and Peace-Building*, p.251

<sup>182</sup> May Oo Mutraw interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>183</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>184</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>185</sup> Myanmar National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (2013 – 2022), see full text at: [https://myanmar.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/NSPAW2013-2022\\_0.pdf](https://myanmar.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/NSPAW2013-2022_0.pdf)

framework through which the key issues faced by women in Myanmar are addressed.<sup>186</sup> In 2016 Myanmar extended its BPfA and NSPAW commitments, now enshrined in Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), by announcing it was ‘stepping up its efforts to advance their [women’s] rights and participation in the country’s political and administrative arenas.’<sup>187</sup> These formal guidelines set powerful precedents through which the GoM could address the lack of women’s participation in public life and the peace process. However, severe shortfalls in Myanmar’s commitment to such principles have become evident, as ‘the process of translating policy into tangible action has been slow.’<sup>188</sup> With implementation support underway, and UN indicators on WPS and the implementation of NSPAW in place, there is potential for reform, dependent to a large extent on the willingness of Myanmar society and government.<sup>189</sup> Chapter 4 will elucidate this argument in more detail.

### United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325

Beyond the frameworks already addressed, perhaps the most significant international driver of the WPS agenda is UNSCR 1325, passed in October 2000.<sup>190</sup> Following intensive advocacy from global civil society, this signalled the first formal recognition by the UNSC of the ‘disproportionate impact of armed conflict on women and girls,’ and the ‘connection between gender equality and women’s participation in international peace and security.’<sup>191</sup> It calls for ‘increased representation of women at all decision-making levels’ in conflict prevention and conflict resolution, and for a ‘gender perspective’ to be adopted in peace agreements and negotiations.<sup>192</sup> Importantly, this resolution serves to ‘raise the visibility of and attention to women’s grassroots local and national peace building efforts.’<sup>193</sup> It also calls for women to be appointed as envoys and special representatives, and to increase the numbers of women in UN field-based operations.<sup>194</sup> In leading

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<sup>186</sup> AGIPP, International Standards Guiding Gender Inclusion, p.14

<sup>187</sup> United Nations Sustainable Development Goals,

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf> (Goal 5); International Standards Guiding Gender Inclusion, p.16

<sup>188</sup> AGIPP, International Standards Guiding Gender Inclusion, p.16

<sup>189</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>190</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, see full text at: <http://www.un-documents.net/sr1325.htm>

<sup>191</sup> AGIPP, International Standards Guiding Gender Inclusion, p.17

<sup>192</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, see full text at: <http://www.un-documents.net/sr1325.htm>

<sup>193</sup> Carol Cohn, Helen Kinsella and Sheri Gibbings, Women, Peace and Security Resolution 1325, p.132

<sup>194</sup> Elisabeth Porter, Women, Political Decision-Making, and Peace-Building, p.253

‘by example,’ the argument is that the UN can encourage local women to be included in formal peace process mechanisms.<sup>195</sup>

Whilst the resolution contains promising rhetoric, there have been a series of failures in its implementation.<sup>196</sup> Porter highlights how, since the passing of UNSCR 1325, many opportunities ‘that might have made a lasting impact on women...have been lost.’<sup>197</sup> The literature points to UNSCR 1325’s inability to connect the multiple and overlapping forms of peacebuilding.<sup>198</sup> Problematically, the UN does not recognise the pre-existing engagement of countless women in community-based groups and peace-building processes.<sup>199</sup> UNSCR 1325 ‘positions peace-building and negotiations as part of formal peace processes,’ rendering ‘invisible the many women who are involved in informal practices that they believe are integral to building peace.’<sup>200</sup> In this sense, the parameters need to be redefined, to understand peace-building as encompassing ‘both formal and informal processes.’<sup>201</sup>

Whilst each of the United Nations WPS resolutions dedicates rightful focus to the impact of armed conflict on women and the suffering they endure as victims of sexual (and other forms of) violence, it is important not to overemphasise this fact exclusively.<sup>202</sup> Cohn et al take issue with the confinement of women’s roles in the text of UNSCR 1325 as ‘victims, peace-builders and peace-makers.’<sup>203</sup> As prescribed by Enloe, scholars should avoid homogenizing women’s experiences as victims who are weak and helpless and therefore targeted as victims during armed conflict.<sup>204</sup> Women must be recognised, and supported in their role as ‘powerful political actors,’ alongside the many other roles they perform.<sup>205</sup> Gender mainstreaming is defined as ‘making the concerns

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<sup>195</sup> *ibid.* p.254

<sup>196</sup> *ibid.* p.255

<sup>197</sup> *ibid.* p.254

<sup>198</sup> Elisabeth Porter, *Women, Political Decision-Making, and Peace-Building*, pp.253-56; Carol Cohn, Helen Kinsella and Sheri Gibbings, *Women, Peace and Security Resolution 1325*, p.132

<sup>199</sup> Elisabeth Porter, *Women, Political Decision-Making, and Peace-Building*, p.255

<sup>200</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>201</sup> *ibid.* p.256; Margaret Ward, *Gender, Citizenship, and the Future of the Northern Ireland Peace Process*, p.263

<sup>202</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000); United Nations Security Council Resolution 1820 (2008); United Nations Security Council Resolution 1888 (2009); United Nations Security Council Resolution 1960 (2010); United Nations Security Council Resolution 2106 (2013)

<sup>203</sup> Carol Cohn, Helen Kinsella and Sheri Gibbings, *Women, Peace and Security Resolution 1325*, p.136

<sup>204</sup> Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*, California: University of California Press, 2014, p.27; p.31

<sup>205</sup> Carol Cohn, Helen Kinsella and Sheri Gibbings, *Women, Peace and Security Resolution 1325*, p.25

and experiences of women as well as of men an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic and societal spheres, so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated.<sup>206</sup> For this to be achieved, both international and national discourse must move away from the focus on women as victims and peace-builders. Instead, it should be recognised that women, like men, have a catalogue of roles to perform before, during, and after conflict.

In terms of adhering to the participation pillar of UNSCR 1325, Myanmar has fallen significantly short, despite the existence of a 30% quota.<sup>207</sup> AGIPP attributes this shortfall to ‘numerous structural and practical barriers,’ alongside a lack of ‘enabling policies and practices’ which are necessary in ensuring UNSCR 1325’s more successful enforcement.<sup>208</sup> Lway Mount Noon explains the issues women’s organizations faced in adhering to UNSCR 1325. For her, the main obstacle has been the prevalence of cultural norms and traditions in ethnic areas, which made it ‘difficult to come in line with international expectations.’<sup>209</sup> She cites the traditions and customs in her own Ta’ang community, and argues that these challenges in particular meant that women’s organizations felt, prior to 2013, that ‘some points of 1325...couldn’t apply in Myanmar.’<sup>210</sup> This alludes to the influence held by the ‘Myanmar way’ ideology. However, since 2016, she recalls how ‘mind-sets had changed’ among women’s organizations, as had the cultural practices such as dowries in certain communities.<sup>211</sup> These developments enabled women’s organizations to embrace rather than shy away from the pillars of UNSCR 1325.<sup>212</sup>

The signing of the NCA in October 2015 presented a major opportunity for the adoption of the abovementioned international standards and recommendations. However, Myanmar’s peace process has fallen significantly short in meeting the obligations outlined in UNSCR 1325 and its sister resolutions. Maha Muna, a member of the NGO Working Group on WPS, explains that the passage of UNSCR 1325 ‘means very little to women in conflict zones unless they know about it

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<sup>206</sup> *ibid.* pp.134-5

<sup>207</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, see full text at: <http://www.un-documents.net/sr1325.htm>

<sup>208</sup> AGIPP, *International Standards Guiding Gender Inclusion*, p.18

<sup>209</sup> Lway Mount Noon interview, Yangon, April 2018

<sup>210</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>211</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>212</sup> *ibid.*

and have the security, resources and political space to organize and access decision-makers.’<sup>213</sup> Equally, the interviews conducted for this research reveal that public awareness in Myanmar of such international frameworks is minimal. Htar Htar Thet in particular describes the lack of military and government awareness of CEDAW, the BPfA and UNSCR 1325.<sup>214</sup> In her opinion, the crux of the problem is that people in Myanmar are not aware of their own rights, as a result of inadequate education and opportunities.<sup>215</sup> These challenges curtail the influence of international frameworks and concomitantly the realisation of equality in Myanmar. They will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

According to AGIPP, the international system itself lacks an effective accountability mechanism for those states who fail to implement UNSCRs.<sup>216</sup> Further hindering progress is the ‘persistent gap between the normative advances in the WPS policy arena and actual implementation.’<sup>217</sup> However, the fault does not lie solely with the international system. To close this gap and to improve implementation and performance, AGIPP summarises that: monitoring systems should be put in place; budgets should be more carefully allocated; accountability mechanisms implemented; technical capacities improved; political will and commitment increased; and greater coordination and consultation ensured.<sup>218</sup> Essentially, the changes must come from above and below. Pressure from the international system is ineffective unless accompanied by political reform at the national level. Equally important is awareness raising, capacity building and confidence building at the opposite end of the spectrum, in communities and civil society.

## Conclusion

The frameworks introduced in this chapter present a formidable force towards gender equality, the importance and influence of which – in Myanmar and elsewhere – cannot be denied, regardless of the weight of postcolonial theory. Gaining an in-depth understanding of the international context

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<sup>213</sup> Maha Muna, cited in Carol Cohn, Helen Kinsella and Sheri Gibbings, *Women, Peace and Security Resolution 1325*, p.132

<sup>214</sup> Htar Htar Thet Interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>215</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>216</sup> Carol Cohn, Helen Kinsella and Sheri Gibbings, *Women, Peace and Security Resolution 1325*, p.25

<sup>217</sup> AGIPP, *International Standards Guiding Gender Inclusion*, p.25

<sup>218</sup> *ibid.* p.29

of women, peace and security in its myriad forms is crucial because the campaign for greater women's participation in Myanmar's peace process is not taking place in a vacuum. On the contrary, it is moulded to a significant extent by the precedents set and blueprints formulated elsewhere, and by overarching guidelines administered from above.

Nonetheless, it is clear that the existence of international norms and standards alone is insufficient in mainstreaming gender and guaranteeing women's political participation. As such, the guidelines and frameworks imposed from above (through the UN and similar channels) must be better integrated into national mechanisms, a task which cannot be achieved in the short term. Supporting this argument, Nakaya explores the dilemmas of external assistance in peace processes. She argues that international advocacy, donor funding, and pressure placed on political parties are all ways of bringing women to the negotiating table 'for the short term;' however 'the categorization of women's participation as an "international priority" does not guarantee the sense of ownership for social transformation at the local level.'<sup>219</sup> It was outlined in the introduction how, along with inclusivity, national ownership is a crucial factor in the success of a peace process. It appears that local ownership will be equally crucial in improving women's participation. Nakaya concludes that 'it is ultimately the responsibility of domestic society to promote and institutionalize gender equality,' requiring 'long-term commitment, resources, empowerment, and partnerships with various groups in society.'<sup>220</sup> This offers valuable insight with regard to Myanmar, and closely reflects May Oo's argument that, if mechanisms towards women's participation and gender equality are to be sustainable, they must be 'organic and home grown,' supported by international frameworks in a secondary capacity.<sup>221</sup>

However, this approach is only sustainable if domestic society is willing to promote and develop nationally-owned and systematised gender equality. According to Porter, there is generally a distinct 'paucity of political commitment' to improving the participation of women in the formal peace process, leaving 'heavy responsibility on women's civil organizations.'<sup>222</sup> The next two chapters will hone in on women's voices from these organizations in Myanmar, gauging their

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<sup>219</sup> Sumie Nakaya, *Women and Gender Equality in Peace Processes*, pp.470-471

<sup>220</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>221</sup> May Oo Mutraw interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>222</sup> Elisabeth Porter, *Women, Political Decision-Making, and Peace-Building*, p.248



responses to the exclusion of women and looking closely at the struggles they have faced in improving women's participation in the peace process. It will become clear that one of the greatest barriers to the implementation of internationally recognised standards in this regard may in fact be the existence of deeply entrenched social and cultural norms. Correspondingly, Chinkin highlights how inequality 'in all its aspects' derives from 'cultural patterns,' which serve to deprive women of 'the opportunity of full and equal participation as citizens within their own societies, and within international society.'<sup>223</sup> As such, regardless of the usefulness and effectiveness of international standards and frameworks in improving women's participation in Myanmar's peace process, the driving force for change may in fact need to come at the local level.

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<sup>223</sup> Christine Chinkin, *Gender Inequality and International Human Rights Law*, p.5

## Chapter 3: Women's History and Women's Consciousness: Winds of Change in Myanmar?

As invoked by Gerda Lerner, 'women have always been making history, living it and shaping it.'<sup>224</sup> In her ground-breaking work which positioned her at the centre of the field of women's and gender history, she recognised that 'the history of women has a special character, a built-in distortion: it comes to us refracted through the lens of men's observations; refracted again through values which consider man the measure.'<sup>225</sup> Lerner proposed, back in 1979, that 'to construct a new history that will with true equality reflect the dual nature of human-kind – its male and female aspect – we must first pause to reconstruct the missing half – the female experience: women's history.'<sup>226</sup> Joan Kelly, another important academic in this field, assigned women's history the task of making sex 'as fundamental to our analysis of the social order as other classifications such as class and race.'<sup>227</sup> One way to approach this undertaking, explored by Joan Scott, is to examine social definitions of gender, 'constructed in and affected by economic and political institutions' and 'expressive of a range of relationships,' including sex and power.<sup>228</sup> The end goal of such endeavours is 'to throw new light not only on women's experience but on social and political practice as well.'<sup>229</sup> Such is the aim of this research. Not only can women's understandings and experiences be better understood when women's voices are brought to the fore, but equally the inner structures of the peace process and the ideologies on which it is constructed can be exposed. Nonetheless, it is important to bear in mind Lerner's acknowledgement that 'no single methodology and conceptual framework' can encompass the complexities of women's historical experiences.<sup>230</sup> The views and experiences discussed in this research, stemming from a collection of interviews, are by no means representative of women in Myanmar society as a whole. The interviews conducted offer one lens through which women's experiences can be researched and understood, without refraction, offering one small but not insignificant contribution to the field of women's history.

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<sup>224</sup> Gerda Lerner, *The Majority Finds its Past*, p.127

<sup>225</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>226</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>227</sup> Joan Kelly-Gadol, *The Social Relation of the Sexes*, p.816

<sup>228</sup> Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, p.23

<sup>229</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>230</sup> Gerda Lerner, *The Majority Finds its Past*, p.125

In moving away from ‘his-story,’ new understandings can be reached and new hypotheses can be drawn. Women’s history, Scott explains, ‘seeks to illuminate the structures of ordinary women’s lives.’<sup>231</sup> It places central focus on ‘female agency;’ ‘the causal role played by women in their history;’ and ‘the qualities of women’s experience that sharply distinguish it from men’s experience.’<sup>232</sup> This is achieved by moving away from the mainstream historical methodology, and examining instead ‘personal experience, familial and domestic structures, collective (female) reinterpretations of social definitions of women’s role, and networks of female friendship.’<sup>233</sup> This history, Lerner argues, ‘must contain not only the activities and events in which women participated, but the record of changes and shifts in their perception of themselves and their roles.’<sup>234</sup> Here, she is referring to the development of a feminist consciousness; ‘a system of ideas that not only challenged patriarchal values and assumptions, but attempted to substitute for them a feminist system of values and ideas.’<sup>235</sup> This is not to say that women should be isolated as a ‘special and separate’ topic of history, which would risk further entrenching the concept of difference and thus threatening any hope of equality.<sup>236</sup> Rather, women’s experiences, actions, and self-perceptions should be granted equal historical significance to those of men, especially given that the two are often deeply intertwined.

The field of women’s history has thus been characterised by its scholars’ evaluation and re-evaluation of the questions asked, frameworks used and methodologies employed, and their creation in turn of new approaches to dealing with historical material.<sup>237</sup> They began asking about ‘the actual experience of women in the past,’ using women’s letters, autobiographies, diaries, and oral history sources.<sup>238</sup> It is the latter upon which this research is grounded, and from which the central ideas and arguments in this and the following chapter are drawn. This research builds upon Gordon, Buhle and Dye’s argument that ‘personal, subjective experience’ matters just as much as

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<sup>231</sup> Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, pp.19-20

<sup>232</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>233</sup> *ibid.* p.20

<sup>234</sup> Gerda Lerner, *The Majority Finds its Past*, p.127

<sup>235</sup> *ibid.* p.128

<sup>236</sup> Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, pp.19-20

<sup>237</sup> Gerda Lerner, *The Majority Finds its Past*, p.121

<sup>238</sup> *ibid.*

‘public and political activities’ – that, indeed, ‘the former influence the latter.’<sup>239</sup> In this case, women’s experiences before, during and after the armed conflict in Myanmar inform, enable and justify their engagement in and contributions to the nation’s politics, particularly its peace process.

Women’s voices are placed at the centre of this research not only to restore some balance to the historical narrative. They are also a valuable source of knowledge in their own right, bringing nuance to a highly complex and often contradictory story. Women should be treated as serious historical subjects and their voices should be utilised as necessary and often illuminative historical sources. Oral history, despite a number of flaws of its own, ‘crosses the boundaries of both archive and voice to become something new again: a cultural instrument.’<sup>240</sup> In the case of the women interviewed for the purpose of this research, their lives have been transformed and moulded by Myanmar’s civil war, either directly or indirectly, yet their experiences of the conflict had, until recently, been subsumed under a narrative which assumed armed struggle and peace to be exclusively male domains. Oral history offers an opportunity for women to rewrite this narrative, and for the historian to position women’s perspectives at the foreground of their analysis. It is an opportunity to establish ‘the vividness of individual experience’ in cases where such experiences have previously been overlooked.<sup>241</sup> Oral history has the potential to reinstate ‘what it means to be human,’ or in this case what it means to be a woman, and all that this entails in contexts of war and peace; a reality that has so often been lost on the pages of Myanmar’s history books.<sup>242</sup> Furthermore, by foregrounding women’s voices and women’s experiences as the focus of study, greater understandings can be reached surrounding the social manifestations of gender.

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<sup>239</sup>Ann D. Gordon, Mari Jo Buhle, Nancy Schrom Dye, ‘The Problem of Women’s History’, in Berenice. A. Carroll, ed., *Liberating Women’s History, Theoretical and Critical Essays*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976 p.89; Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, p.20

<sup>240</sup>For more on the uses and shortcomings of oral history, see J. Sangster, Telling Our Stories: feminist debates and the use of oral history, *Women’s History Review*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (1994); Editorial, The Guardian View on Oral History, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/aug/10/the-guardian-view-on-oral-history-the-power-of-witness> [accessed 14 June 2018]

<sup>241</sup>Editorial, The Guardian View on Oral History, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/aug/10/the-guardian-view-on-oral-history-the-power-of-witness> [accessed 14 June 2018]; J. Sangster, Telling Our Stories; pp.22-23

<sup>242</sup>Editorial, The Guardian View on Oral History, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/aug/10/the-guardian-view-on-oral-history-the-power-of-witness> [accessed 14 June 2018]

This research is informed by, and draws upon, the experiences and understandings of ten Myanmar women and one man, focusing on issues faced in mainstreaming gender in the peace process and the emergence of a movement to challenge the status quo in the pursuit for gender equality. In ensuring that a ‘female-oriented consciousness’ is the focal point of the research, new and challenging interpretations can be made in the Myanmar context.<sup>243</sup> As previously discussed, between 1962 and 2011, Myanmar was governed by a brutal and repressive military dictatorship. This plays heavily into the current social and political environment in Myanmar. The very fact that the individuals interviewed were so forthcoming about their own experiences, and willing to openly voice their opinions on the past and current political situation, indicates a far greater sense of freedom in Myanmar than existed ten years ago. Collectively, the content of the interviews demonstrates the existence of a shared consciousness among Myanmar’s women. Whether or not they would define this as a feminist consciousness in line the Western definition, these women have in common their quest for civil rights; women’s rights; human rights: for autonomy. In the west, Lerner spoke in 1979 of an emerging academic environment in which women were ‘fully claiming their past and shaping the tools by means of which they can interpret it.’<sup>244</sup> This research reveals the efforts being made by Myanmar’s women to do the same. By remembering their past, reflecting on their present and anticipating their future, women in Myanmar are treading the same path as their international predecessors. Their journey is not a recent one - indeed, women have been engaging in the struggle for more than twenty years - but it is only recently that their voices have been heard and listened to in the public sphere, and that their struggles have begun to be understood.<sup>245</sup>

The visible manifestations of agency and unity among women in Myanmar contributes, at minimum, to an increased awareness of the issues surrounding gender. But how far can this awareness be translated into greater liberation and mobility for women? One interviewee observed how women in Myanmar, particularly in urban settings, are increasingly able to get out; to access education; to see the world and get a sense of the ways in which women are shaping politics elsewhere.<sup>246</sup> Notably, this woman is the youngest among the interviewees. Perhaps this signifies

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<sup>243</sup> Gerda Lerner, *The Majority Finds its Past*, p.122

<sup>244</sup> *ibid.* p.132

<sup>245</sup> Tin Tin Nyo interview, Chiang Mai, March 2018

<sup>246</sup> Yadana Aung; Ja San Ra Maran interviews, Yangon, March 2018

a generational change. Having grown up in a democratic country, unlike their mothers and grandmothers, there appears to be far greater hope among younger women in Myanmar.<sup>247</sup>

In spite of the above observation, May Oo Mutraw addresses how:

‘Women’s participation generally in politics is a little bit deceptive in the Burmese context. On the one hand, if you look at Burmese women you can see that they are independent, they are free-minded people. But on the other hand, if you actually look deeper into the prevailing cultures in society you can see that this independence and free-thinking is quite deceptive – everyone in society is bound by this cultural perception of what women must be like. You can see both men and women subscribe to that view, either knowingly or unknowingly, still today.’<sup>248</sup>

Tin Tin Nyo supports this, arguing that ‘women’s rights violations and gender discrimination in a country like Burma are very subtle.’<sup>249</sup> On the surface, she explains, it appears that women have many opportunities – to study, to vote, to be elected – as ‘the policy doesn’t discriminate obviously.’<sup>250</sup> However, in reality, social and cultural norms result in the prominence of gender-based discrimination, reinforcing a ‘system of patriarchy’ which serves as ‘the main driving force for the peace process and political reform.’<sup>251</sup> In this way, Porter explains how ‘breaking down the cultural prejudices about women’ has proven to be the greatest challenge in overcoming women’s exclusion from political decision-making.<sup>252</sup>

In this sense, women’s optimism should not be without realism. The question remains whether women’s voices and their agency can be recognised and accounted for in Myanmar’s peace process structures which are essentially dominated by men and firmly grounded in traditional, cultural and patriarchal values. Despite the extensive agency exercised by women and the emergence of a public and collective consciousness, their activism has thus far proven insufficient in altering the

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<sup>247</sup> Yadana Aung; Ja San Ra Maran, Htar Htar Thet interviews, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>248</sup> May Oo Mutraw interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>249</sup> Tin Tin Nyo interview, Chiang Mai, March 2018

<sup>250</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>251</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>252</sup> Elisabeth Porter, *Women, Political Decision-Making, and Peace-Building*, p.251

status of women in the peace process. Narrating their own experiences of the conflict and their perceptions of the peace process, and coming together in a public display of female agency and consciousness, are both major steps forward for the women's movement in Myanmar. However, it may not be enough to effect significant change at the national level. The following chapter will go further in explaining the principal challenges faced by these women attempting to forge their own path in Myanmar's history and determine the future course of the national peace process. These include the social and cultural barriers mentioned above, but also strategic and structural barriers.

## Chapter 4: At an Impasse: The Struggle to Achieve Meaningful Participation and Gender Awareness in Myanmar

Women in Myanmar today are, in many ways, in ‘a better position’ than their predecessors.<sup>253</sup> But despite their increasing awareness of themselves as actors in an international context, and their agency exercised in light of this, the status of women in Myanmar’s formal peace process has not been substantively improved. The interviews conducted collectively point to four principle challenges to women’s participation, all of which are intrinsically connected and often overlapping. These can be summarised as follows:

- 1) Views of women’s participation and gender inclusion among the key stakeholders in the formal peace process
- 2) Social and cultural norms
- 3) Lack of strategy and unity in the women’s/civil society movements
- 4) Suppression of civil society

### Views of women’s participation and gender inclusion among the key stakeholders in the formal peace process

Despite international pressure, and despite evidence that demonstrates that a peace process that is inclusive is more likely to be sustainable, the majority of the findings in this research point to the fact that women’s participation and gender concerns are not a priority for the government, the Tatmadaw, and the ethnic armed organizations in Myanmar. The interviews reveal that the government and Tatmadaw are the stakeholders most resistant to change. Meanwhile, the interviews demonstrate mixed feelings surrounding the willingness of ethnic armed organizations to accept the need for gender inclusion and women’s participation.

#### Government and the State Counsellor:

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<sup>253</sup> Yadana Aung interview, Yangon, March 2018



Aung San Suu Kyi is constitutionally barred from presidency, yet she has since early 2016 been the de facto head of government in Myanmar, formally recognised as the State Counsellor. Despite this fact, since the country's transition to civilian government in 2011, the military have retained 'significant political power,' and are 'independent of civilian oversight.'<sup>254</sup> Nonetheless, major hopes and aspirations were pinned on Suu Kyi following her ascent to power. In the eyes of Yadana Aung, having 'the lady' as Myanmar's leader 'fosters the willingness of women to participate more in politics and the peace process.'<sup>255</sup> She is undoubtedly a role model for many. Conversely, her political conduct has been a source of disappointment for many others, bringing few tangible improvements to women's political participation.

Women's groups in particular, whilst feeling a sense of loyalty towards their democratic figurehead, are beginning to doubt Suu Kyi's integrity. 'We have trust in her leadership, but we have so many questions. How much can we trust her when it comes to women's issues?'<sup>256</sup> Mi Kun Chan Non argues that, whilst Suu Kyi is a 'very strong woman leader,' 'she is not really focused on women's issues.'<sup>257</sup> In the opinion of Tin Tin Nyo, Chairperson of Burmese Women's Union (BWU), Suu Kyi had the opportunity to change the country's constitution, but she failed to act on it.<sup>258</sup> This was a 'missed opportunity' in improving the status of women and civil society, which has prompted people in Myanmar to lose their faith in their de-facto leader as a harbinger of change, and to instead become 'increasingly suspicious' of her plans in government.<sup>259</sup> Recently, Aung San Suu Kyi made a speech stressing the need to give 'priority to promoting the role of women in Myanmar's rural areas,' arguing that 'human rights start with women's rights.'<sup>260</sup> May Oo explains that this speech is 'a good place to start,' but that focusing on promoting the role of rural women runs the risk of excluding other crucial factors, including education, building women's capacities, their political participation, and their economic power.<sup>261</sup> May Oo does, however, concede that Suu Kyi's emphasis on addressing the root cause of issues in the home and

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<sup>254</sup> Amnesty International Report, 2017-2018, The State of the World's Human Rights, London, 2018, p.270

<sup>255</sup> Yadana Aung interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>256</sup> Tin Tin Nyo interview, Chiang Mai, March 2018

<sup>257</sup> Mi Kun Chan Non interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>258</sup> Tin Tin Nyo interview, Chiang Mai, March 2018

<sup>259</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>260</sup> Myanmar News Agency, Human rights start with women's rights: State Counsellor, *Global New Light of Myanmar*, <http://www.globalnewlightofmyanmar.com/human-rights-start-womens-rights-state-counsellor/> [accessed 2 April 2018]

<sup>261</sup> May Oo Mutraw interview, Yangon, March 2018

the family – ‘giving equal rights should begin with the family, at home’ - is an important message, demonstrating some recognition of the patriarchal dynamics inherent in Myanmar’s familial structures.<sup>262</sup>

It is clear, however, that Suu Kyi’s presence at the helm of government and her speeches, so long as they are unaccompanied by policy change, are not enough to bring about reform towards gender equality, and do not signify a prioritisation of women’s concerns. This was the general feeling conveyed across the interviews, although few women were willing to voice particularly strong criticism. Lway Mount Noon articulates this dilemma, ‘I don’t want to blame her. She is struggling in the Tatmadaw groups.’<sup>263</sup> The Chair of WLB was prepared to voice direct condemnation, stating that ‘nothing has changed’ for women since the NLD came to power: her speech is ‘just a speech, not policy.’<sup>264</sup> Similarly, Nan Aye Than Dar states that, since 2016, the NLD and Suu Kyi have done little for women’s participation and women’s rights, and for this reason she does not have much belief in her speech: ‘she just speaks generally but nothing happens. A speech without action means nothing.’<sup>265</sup> As one WLB member summarises, ‘we have a woman leader but we do not understand women’s rights.’<sup>266</sup> As such, there seems to be little hope of gender concerns being mainstreamed in government structures in the near future, and of women’s participation being encouraged by government representatives in the peace process.

#### Ethnic Armed Organizations:

Several of the interviewees mentioned that the EAOs have demonstrated a willingness to welcome women into their negotiation teams.<sup>267</sup> Reflecting this, the figures of women’s participation within

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<sup>262</sup> Myanmar News Agency, Human rights start with women’s rights: State Counsellor, *Global New Light of Myanmar*, <http://www.globalnewlightofmyanmar.com/human-rights-start-womens-rights-state-counsellor/> [accessed 2 April 2018]; May Oo Mutraw interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>263</sup> Lway Mount Noon interview, Yangon, April 2018

<sup>264</sup> Su Su Swe interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>265</sup> Nan Aye Than Dar interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>266</sup> WLB member, meeting with WLB and AGIPP, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>267</sup> Htar Htar Thet; Ja San Ra Maran interviews, Yangon 2018

EAO delegations are generally higher than those of the government and the military.<sup>268</sup> Nan Aye Than Dar argues that ‘EAOs are familiar with the [gender] terminology, and are confident women’s participation is needed.’<sup>269</sup> Salai Aung Myint similarly argues that the EAO leaders ‘are aware of the concept of gender sensitivity and the importance of the role of women.’<sup>270</sup> For him, the main barrier to achieving this lies in the recruitment system; the low numbers of women’s soldiers and the structural barriers that prevent them from becoming decision-makers.<sup>271</sup> According to Ja San Ra Maran, the main issue is that the EAOs are looking for women with certain qualities, but they don’t have enough ‘suitable’ women to choose from.<sup>272</sup> Salai Aung Myint echoes this sentiment, arguing that in the EAO setting ‘leaders are respected based on their individual credentials...regardless of their gender.’<sup>273</sup> In his view, ‘if women show expertise, confidence, and participate actively, they will be seen as meaningful participants and will be respected.’<sup>274</sup> Khin Ma Ma Myo agrees with Ja San Ra Maran and Salai Aung Myint, arguing that EAOs are open to having women, but they want those with expertise and experience.<sup>275</sup> It is implied that there is an absence of confident, capable and knowledgeable women. Having been historically excluded from the political sphere, women generally lack experience in formal politics. It is difficult to envisage this circle being altered unless women are given the opportunity to engage meaningfully and in greater numbers in politics and the peace process. It appears that more emphatic and genuine government and EAO support will be necessary in order for this to be achieved.

Salai Aung Myint, the male interviewee who works closely with the signatory EAOs in their Yangon office, defends the need for women’s participation in stating the need for greater ‘commitment...from all stakeholders’ and a more ‘systematic approach’ to improve women’s

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<sup>268</sup> AGIPP data indicates that most women delegates at the Second Union Peace Conference were from EAOs, see: AGIPP, Analysis of Myanmar’s Second Union Peace Conference – 21<sup>st</sup> century Panglong from a Gender Perspective, June 2017; Roslyn Warren et al, Women’s Peace Building Strategies, p.21; Ja San Ra Maran interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>269</sup> Nan Aye Than Dar interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>270</sup> Salai Aung Myint interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>271</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>272</sup> Ja San Ra Maran interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>273</sup> Salai Aung Myint interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>274</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>275</sup> Khin Ma Ma Myo interview, Yangon, March 2018

participation and their access to leadership positions.<sup>276</sup> However, at the same time he dismisses ‘women’s issues’ - domestic and sexual violence and their experiences of the conflict - as ‘another story;’ one which ‘doesn’t really have an impact on women’s participation in the peace process.’<sup>277</sup> Not recognising the intrinsic connection between the two is reflective of the underlying attitude held by men towards women’s issues, viewing them as a separate, and less important, concern.

In light of the above, Tin Tin Nyo discusses how the peace process is moving forward ‘without looking at the face of the people and without including the work of different politically active CSOs and women’s organizations who have been in the struggle for so many years.’<sup>278</sup> In her view, gender equality is too ‘sensitive’ an issue for the male dominant groups, who ‘don’t want to hear it.’<sup>279</sup> In the EAO setting, the ‘men in charge’ do not feel that issues raised by women should be the priority in negotiations and discussions, and therefore they are ‘never raised to the high levels, or even talked about.’<sup>280</sup> As such, the parties at the negotiating table fail to recognise issues of human security, and ‘do not distinguish the differences of suffering based on gender.’<sup>281</sup> May Oo elaborates: ‘men’s excuse is that they are the ones fighting the war, the key actors in the conflict,’ without recognising that ‘from the start of history to this date, women have been a part of the conflict.’<sup>282</sup> Indeed, women ‘bear the brunt,’ as she experienced in her own village growing up, where men were forcibly drafted into the military and girls were ‘forced to leave school’ and were ‘left responsible for the household.’<sup>283</sup> Regardless of men’s arguments, May Oo reasons that ‘the peace process is not just about ending conflict, it is about peace time. We cannot be marching towards a democratic federal union and disregard 51% of the population. I don’t think any argument stands for the exclusion of women.’<sup>284</sup> Women’s participation has not been a priority, or even a consideration for many of the peace process stakeholders, but the consensus among the interviewees is that it should be. ‘There are no good reasons not to have women at the negotiation table; not to have women at the leadership level.’<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> Salai Aung Myint interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>277</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>278</sup> Tin Tin Nyo interview, Chiang Mai, March 2018

<sup>279</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>280</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>281</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>282</sup> May Oo Mutraw interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>283</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>284</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>285</sup> *ibid.*

In cases where women have been able to access the peace negotiations, they are faced with further challenges. During the first UPC in 2015, Khin Ma Ma Myo, was one of two women present during the security sector discussions. She describes how she was initially barred from entering the security sector discussion, met with the retort ‘this room is for security, there is another room for the social sector.’<sup>286</sup> Once she had persuaded them to let her enter, she realised that she was the only woman.<sup>287</sup> ‘All of the people were looking at me asking ‘what kind of woman is this;’ they thought that security is not related to women.’<sup>288</sup> When she began her speech, the men in the room ‘put down their pens and closed their books,’ and she explains how the note-taker ‘did not include any of my ideas in the minutes.’<sup>289</sup> This dismissal of women as inconsequential participants, not worthy of male attention, represents a broader societal attitude which will be discussed in the next section. According to Su Su Swe, ‘without opening space for civil society representatives and experts to talk about human security in the security sector, the negotiators ‘will never bring genuine peace.’<sup>290</sup> Cynthia Enloe confirms this, arguing that ‘civil society activists, many of them women, bring to the table their knowledge of local conditions and their commitment to creating sustainable peace and meaningful security in ways that produce more genuine security,’ offering the best chance of producing a final peace agreement ‘that fosters authentic citizenship and political transparency.’<sup>291</sup>

Although there has been some recognition of the importance of women’s participation from EAOs and those working closely with them, women’s participation in terms of numbers is demonstrably ineffective unless accompanied by genuine gender sensitivity and awareness. Cynthia Enloe, in her discussion of the Syrian peace negotiations, reiterates the difference between ‘authentic representation’ and mere ‘window dressing.’<sup>292</sup> In Myanmar’s case, it appears to predominantly be a case of the latter. There are few signs of women’s participation being prioritized among the

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<sup>286</sup> Khin Ma Ma Myo interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>287</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>288</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>289</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>290</sup> Su Su Swe interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>291</sup> Cynthia Enloe, *The Big Push*, p.37

<sup>292</sup> *ibid.* p.31

government, the Tatmadaw, and EAOs alike.<sup>293</sup> In this way, Nan Aye Than Dar summarises how ‘the whole structure is in need of gender mainstreaming; every step and every process.’<sup>294</sup>

## Social and cultural norms

Building on this discussion is the prevalence of social and cultural norms in Myanmar. Social norms are defined by Oxfam as ‘codes and rules of behaviour, both explicit and implicit,’ which are often ‘reinforced through institutions and relationships,’ serving to ‘either enable or constrain the political voice and influence of women.’<sup>295</sup> In Myanmar, it appears that such codes of behaviour are widely adhered to by both men and women, shaping societal perceptions and endorsing gender roles, and therefore acting as a barrier to women’s participation.

Myanmar society, Htar Htar Thet remarks, is dominated by a combination of militarism and religion (predominantly Buddhism), both of which are governed fundamentally by men.<sup>296</sup> She observes how senior monks and military officers alike ‘don’t like to see women engage in the traditional structures’ and are ‘reluctant to step aside.’<sup>297</sup> In the context of the peace negotiations, one woman explained the perception that women ‘talk too much’ and pay ‘too much attention to detail.’<sup>298</sup> Perhaps it is this preconception that led men to discount Khin Ma Ma Myo in the security discussions. But it is not only at the high level that this attitude prevails. Htar Htar Thet cites her own experiences in which taxi drivers and trishaw drivers ‘think of themselves as more powerful than women.’<sup>299</sup> She asks, ‘in what way are their capacities and abilities better than women’s?’<sup>300</sup> In many cases, she argues, they are not. It is simply that they are male, and that they are the ones who have historically determined the criteria of what it means to be ‘qualified’ and ‘capable’ in all walks of life.<sup>301</sup> Yadana Aung similarly voiced her anger about ‘women’s societal roles’ and the

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<sup>293</sup> According to AGIPP data, women represent less than 1% of all Tatmadaw delegates in peace negotiations, see: Roslyn Warren et al, *Women’s Peace Building Strategies*, p.21

<sup>294</sup> Nan Aye Than Dar interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>295</sup> Oxfam, *Political Gender Quotas: Key debates and values for Myanmar*, June 2016. p.5

<sup>296</sup> Htar Htar Thet interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>297</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>298</sup> Ja San Ra Maran interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>299</sup> Htar Htar Thet interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>300</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>301</sup> *ibid.*

way in which ‘culturally, men are superior.’<sup>302</sup> It is apparent that these attitudes and practices have prevented women from ascending to leadership positions at the grassroots level as much as the union level.

Many of the interviewees commented how the combination of culture and religion has been particularly damaging for women. In Myanmar, religion and culture are deeply intertwined, and therefore religious leaders are responsible for teaching the ‘ethics, behaviour, and ideology of the people.’<sup>303</sup> So far, religion has done little to ‘tackle gender inequality,’ although Mi Kun Chan Non recognises that certain Buddhist monks are becoming more supportive of women leaders.<sup>304</sup> Yadana Aung and Lway Mount Noon explain how religious teaching in Myanmar have been ‘misinterpreted over generations’ leading to a widespread perception that women are ‘more vulnerable than men.’<sup>305</sup> It is due to this perception that women are not taken seriously; seen as ‘weak and too emotional to become involved in politics.’<sup>306</sup> ‘Traditionally and culturally, we practice that women are not leaders of society,’ explains Mi Kun Chan Non.<sup>307</sup> Although stereotypes and prejudice are fading to a certain degree in urban areas, there is a ‘glass ceiling’ that remains far from being shattered.<sup>308</sup>

It became clear throughout the interviews that cultural norms not only prevent women from participating in politics. They also reinforce traditional gender roles, by prescribing certain gendered expectations of women, namely that ‘women will stay at home and raise children.’<sup>309</sup> May Oo explains how, in Myanmar’s society, ‘women are held domestically responsible, and that tradition is deep.’<sup>310</sup> Nan Aye Than Dar similarly illustrates the way in which women are ‘still seen as housewives and responsible for domestic work;’ a responsibility which men will not share

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<sup>302</sup> Yadana Aung interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>303</sup> Khin Ma Ma Myo; Mi Kun Chan Non interviews, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>304</sup> Mi Kun Chan Non interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>305</sup> Yadana Aung interview, Yangon, March 2018; Lway Mount Noon interview, Yangon, April 2018

<sup>306</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>307</sup> Mi Kun Chan Non interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>308</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>309</sup> Yadana Aung interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>310</sup> May Oo Mutraw interview, Yangon, March 2018; H. Faxon, R. Furlong & May Sabe Phyu, Reinvigorating Resilience: violence against women, land rights, and the women's peace movement in Myanmar, *Gender and Development*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (November, 2015) p.465

(if they do, they are seen as weak and afraid of their wives).<sup>311</sup> May Oo observes that, beyond Yangon, society is very different: ‘women are still very traditionally bound and society is very unliberated from a gender perspective.’<sup>312</sup> Even in Yangon, however, women are far from liberated. One interviewee comments how her husband, an educated man, refuses to allow his clothes to be washed together with her longyi (traditional clothing for women) and underwear.<sup>313</sup> Another described how women are seen as ‘a burden,’ ‘unable to focus on politics’ since they are responsible for pregnancy, breastfeeding and raising their children.<sup>314</sup> It is not always an urban vs rural, or educated vs non-educated, divide. It is, Nan Aye Than Dar deduces, ‘religion and tradition’ that combine to blind so many in Myanmar of equality and justice.<sup>315</sup> All of these perceptions and practices seem to be interlinked, together ‘reinforcing the system of patriarchy’ and preventing women from ascending through the deeply rooted hierarchical structures.<sup>316</sup>

From the above discussion, it is clear that women in Myanmar have been ‘in constant struggle to create space for women,’ but May Oo underlines that ‘what women need is not just a space to participate, they also need to be released from their domestic responsibilities.’<sup>317</sup> In her view, ‘you cannot expect a person to be tied up in domestic/practical responsibility and at the same time take up a leadership position.’<sup>318</sup> Problematically, ‘if you sound critical’ of women’s assigned role in the family and the home, ‘you are not a good enough woman, or not a very culturally sensitive person.’<sup>319</sup> In this sense, enabling women in the true sense requires more than simply creating space: ‘domestic responsibility has to be shared between genders, just as much as political life must be shared between men and women.’<sup>320</sup> This process necessarily begins in the home and within familial structures, recalling the central message of Suu Kyi’s speech.<sup>321</sup> At the same time, since it is very much a cultural problem, it is fundamental that an impetus for reform comes from

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<sup>311</sup> Nan Aye Than Dar interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>312</sup> May Oo Mutraw interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>313</sup> Nan Aye Than Dar interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>314</sup> Lway Mount Noon interview, Yangon, April 2018

<sup>315</sup> Nan Aye Than Dar interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>316</sup> Tin Tin Nyo interview, Chiang Mai, March 2018

<sup>317</sup> May Oo Mutraw interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>318</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>319</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>320</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>321</sup> Myanmar News Agency, Human rights start with women’s rights: State Counsellor, *Global New Light of Myanmar*, <http://www.globalnewlightofmyanmar.com/human-rights-start-womens-rights-state-counsellor/> [accessed 2 April 2018]



above, too: ‘if the state does not intervene, you will hardly see any change, because it is in the name of culture.’<sup>322</sup> It can be argued that women should be enabled economically, and empowered educationally, whilst at the same time space is created for them in the political sphere: ‘the efforts have to take place simultaneously.’<sup>323</sup> This draws a direct linkage between the stakeholders’ priorities outlined in the previous section, and the social and cultural norms affecting women’s political mobility outlined in this section, and echoes the arguments made in previous chapters that the impetus for change must come both from above and from below.

Surprisingly, many of the women interviewed conveyed how women themselves are often complicit in endorsing traditional beliefs and values. Regarding the idea that women should not get involved in politics, Lway Mount Noon argues that ‘the majority of women’s views are also like that.’<sup>324</sup> In Myanmar society, Nan Aye Than Dar argues there is an urgent need for change surrounding ‘the generalizations,’ made by men and women alike, ‘of what a woman can and can’t do.’<sup>325</sup> Khin Ma Ma Myo recalls her own experiences where women have displayed little interest in the issues at stake in politics and the peace negotiations.<sup>326</sup> It may be asked, is this an example of women’s unsuitability for, and inability to act in, the political arena, or is it symptomatic of a highly developed patriarchy which has convinced women themselves that such tasks are best left to the “more experienced and more capable” men? Whilst the latter seems more likely, women cannot be blamed for internalizing patriarchal assumptions and roles. Htar Htar Thet addresses how women remain ‘reluctant to engage in politics because of their social environment.’<sup>327</sup> Ja San Ra Maran argues similarly that ‘the attitude does not come from women. If we say it does, it’s not fair to them. It’s not their fault – this is how they have grown up. It is because of society and the social environment that we live in.’<sup>328</sup> The potency of social and cultural traditions, stereotypes and customs have seemingly left many women with a ‘lack of confidence’ and a lack of desire to challenge the existing power structures.<sup>329</sup> For these reasons, many of the interviewees reiterate previous arguments that women need capacity building; leadership training; awareness raising;

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<sup>322</sup> May Oo Mutraw interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>323</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>324</sup> Lway Mount Noon interview, Yangon, April 2018

<sup>325</sup> Nan Aye Than Dar interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>326</sup> Khin Ma Ma Myo interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>327</sup> Htar Htar Thet interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>328</sup> Ja San Ra Maran interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>329</sup> Htar Htar Thet interview, Yangon, March 2018

and confidence building.<sup>330</sup> This brings us to a discussion of the women's movement and civil society organizations working at this level.

### Lack of strategy and unity in the women's/civil society movements

One of the central aims of many women's and civil society organizations is to empower individuals and groups at the grassroots in order to facilitate greater political engagement. Women's groups have made significant headway in promoting gender as a priority in the negotiations, in spite of the resistance displayed by the key stakeholders and the cultural and social norms expressed above. Most notable in their recent efforts is the creation of a WPS Technical Working Group at the Union level, headed by the Department for Social Welfare and co-chaired by AGIPP, as well as their advocacy for a National Action Plan on WPS 'with strong involvement of women's groups and consultation with different stakeholders.'<sup>331</sup> Nevertheless, a major factor to arise from the interviews that has contributed to the limited improvement in women's participation in Myanmar's peace process is the lack of strategy and lack of unity inherent in the national women's movement. Several women cited in addition the movement's lack of specialisation and the collective absence of a common goal.<sup>332</sup> There also appears to be a lack of unity between women's groups and broader civil society and political parties. In order to truly and effectively represent the people of Myanmar, most of the women interviewed conclude that women's groups and civil society need to join together as a more coherent whole.<sup>333</sup>

The strategy and unity of the women's movement are intrinsically connected. It is important to bear in mind that many of the women's groups comprise diverse ethnicities and religions. Among the women interviewed for this research, Nan Aye Than Dar and May Oo Mutraw are Karen; Su Su Swe is Tavoyan; Khin Ma Ma Myo is Shan/Bamar/Mon; Lway Mount Noon is Ta'ang and Ja San Ra Maran is Kachin. Many of these women are current or past members of the Women's

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<sup>330</sup> Htar Htar Thet; Mi Kun Chan Non; Yadana Aung; Salai Aung Myint interviews, Yangon, March 2018; Lway Mount Noon interview, Yangon, April 2018

<sup>331</sup> Khin Ma Ma Myo; Mi Kun Chan Non interviews, Yangon, March 2018; Tin Tin Nyo interview, Chiang Mai, March 2018

<sup>332</sup> Tin Tin Nyo interview, Chiang Mai, March 2018; Khin Ma Ma Myo; Mi Kun Chan Non; Su Su Swe interviews, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>333</sup> Ja San Ra Maran; Khin Ma Ma Myo; Mi Kun Chan Non; Su Su Swe, Nan Aye Than Dar interviews, Yangon, March 2018; Tin Tin Nyo interview, Chiang Mai, March 2018

League of Burma (WLB), which was established ‘in the wake of the revolution’ in Myanmar.<sup>334</sup> The political situation is therefore ‘their main concern,’ and a driving force behind their desire for women to gain a seat at the table.<sup>335</sup> The majority of the individuals in women’s organizations are campaigning for gender equality and women’s participation alongside their wider pursuit for federalism and self-determination for their respective ethnic groups. These women have a major stake in the future direction their country takes, and have skills and knowledge in this field to bring to the political sphere.<sup>336</sup> The women’s movement is faced with the task of ensuring that the diversity in political commitment does not compromise the unity and strategy of the women’s movement.

In light of the above, and in view of the political dynamics underlying the conflict, the women’s movement as a whole will need to develop clear policies on the key political issues to be brought to the negotiations. This is perhaps the most effective way of uniting the women’s movement and legitimising their demands. To achieve this will require significant collaboration, communication, and consensus among women from different backgrounds. Khin Ma Ma Myo elaborates upon this, detailing the need for the women’s movement to demonstrate ‘a collective voice on federalism, security sector reform, and national security.’<sup>337</sup> She herself is involved in advising five of Myanmar’s major political parties, including the NLD, on the creation of a gender policy, but recognises the notable absence of such initiatives among the women’s movement.<sup>338</sup> Essentially, she summarises, women should be demonstrating their expertise by formulating a common position on ‘the policy they would like to see integrated,’ which can then be submitted to the high level negotiators in the Union Peace Conference, even if the women themselves continue to be excluded.<sup>339</sup>

However, it seems that clear and decisive policies on these issues are far from being reached. Khin Ma Ma Myo observes the ‘lack of expertise and specialisation within organizations’ in the women’s movement, resulting in an impression that women are ‘just running around the issues

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<sup>334</sup> Tin Tin Nyo interview, Chiang Mai, March 2018

<sup>335</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>336</sup> Cynthia Enloe, *The Big Push*, p.39

<sup>337</sup> Khin Ma Ma Myo interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>338</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>339</sup> *ibid.*

rather than focusing on building expertise on one issue.<sup>340</sup> She herself has chosen to focus on WPS issues, and states ‘I want my fellow women to have a focus as well. We cannot create expertise if we are doing everything related to gender.’<sup>341</sup> Tin Tin Nyo reiterates this: women’s organizations are now faced with a ‘bigger platform’ than ever.<sup>342</sup> She explains how women in Myanmar are faced on the one hand with all of the issues presented in trying to gain access to the peace process; on federalism and self-determination; whilst on the other hand ‘the conflict continues,’ imposing an unprecedented burden on the women’s movement.<sup>343</sup> Tin Tin Nyo addresses how, during the conflict, women and children are ‘suffering the worst,’ and, as a result, for the women’s groups, ‘every issue becomes our issue. Every concern becomes our concern.’<sup>344</sup> It appears that women’s organizations are struggling to withstand the weight of the many pressures placed upon them. Their approach of tackling all issues relating to women, conflict and peace at once has seemingly hindered their strategization and focus, and has prevented them from formulating clear policies on the core topics of the peace negotiations. Tin Tin Nyo recognises this, conceding that ‘until now, we do not have a good strategy to influence the mainstream peace process and the whole country’s nation building.’<sup>345</sup>

Further hampering the strength of the women’s movement, the interviews indicate that a chasm persists between women’s organizations and civil society. The burden of their heavy workloads since the renewal of the peace process, Tin Tin Nyo argues, has resulted in a ‘lack of updates and exchange of information’ and therefore no ‘common strategy.’<sup>346</sup> This separation has, she remarks from her own experience visiting different women’s groups and civil society organizations, contributed to both movements appearing ‘very weak’ in the face of the formal peace process, as they are held together by fragile and often tenuous political alliances.<sup>347</sup> The diversity of political, religious and ethnic affiliations in Myanmar requires a broad-based, unifying alliance between women’s groups and civil society, to bring both movements together in a common purpose. In this way, Khin Ma Ma Myo feels that women’s groups and civil society ‘need to broaden their reach’

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<sup>340</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>341</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>342</sup> Tin Tin Nyo interview, Chiang Mai, March 2018

<sup>343</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>344</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>345</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>346</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>347</sup> *ibid.*

to a more diverse array of communities, including those in rural and isolated areas, and to likeminded members of civil society, to promote the common goal of political participation and gender equality in the peace process.<sup>348</sup> Tin Tin Nyo signifies that this process is underway, explaining that an important element of women's groups' recent advocacy strategy has been to broaden their range of stakeholders.<sup>349</sup>

'Women's organizations don't have the power to solve all the problems. The power is with those with guns. We have to approach and advocate them. We have to show them how to use our experiences, our skills and our knowledge for the benefit of nation building.'<sup>350</sup>

Enloe questions what needs to be done to convince peace stakeholders and 'masculinized officials' that 'including only men who wielded guns (and the men with briefcases who had large armies behind them), plus a few token women, could not be a formula for creating a sustainable peace.'<sup>351</sup> This is particularly resonant in Myanmar's case, and captures the mission of the women's movement. Tin Tin Nyo herself has worked with political parties and ethnic armed groups to discuss women's issues and how to integrate women's skills, experiences and knowledges into their agendas to ensure 'a more comprehensive peace process' shaped by 'sustainable and inclusive peacebuilding.'<sup>352</sup> Within this 'inclusive' peacebuilding, women from Myanmar's ethnic groups have recognised the importance of including the Bamar people in their struggle. The Bamar are Myanmar's majority group - constituting the vast majority of the political ruling elite and Tatmadaw officials. In her role as director of the Myanmar Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS), Khin Ma Ma Myo articulates that civil society and women's groups cannot progress without the support of the country's majority group: 'at first we focused on ethnic areas, but soon realised that we cannot leave out Bamar people. If they do not understand WPS or federalism, the movement cannot move forwards.'<sup>353</sup> This is indicative of how women's groups have begun to change their strategies to become more inclusive in light of their limited success in recent years. This

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<sup>348</sup> Khin Ma Ma Myo interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>349</sup> Tin Tin Nyo interview, Chiang Mai, March 2018

<sup>350</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>351</sup> Cynthia Enloe, *The Big Push*, p.29

<sup>352</sup> Tin Tin Nyo interview, Chiang Mai, March 2018

<sup>353</sup> Khin Ma Ma Myo interview, Yangon, March 2018

adaptability and forward-thinking will be an important factor in their future success in influencing the mainstream peace process.

Regardless of the strategies in place, all of the interviewees recognise that substantive progress will take time. Tin Tin Nyo explains how ‘it is the mind-set we have to change, not only the policy and the laws.’<sup>354</sup> This encompasses the mind-sets of male leaders, civil society, and ‘the women themselves.’<sup>355</sup> In a similar way, May Oo speaks of the ‘uphill struggle’ that women face, particularly given the ‘lack of political will’ in society generally.<sup>356</sup> She speculates that ‘many women will not have the desire to go as far as it will take,’ as it is ‘emotionally and physically very draining’ to try and open space that, ‘for the longest time,’ has been occupied by men, and which, due to their own sense of entitlement, there is little evidence men are willing to give up.<sup>357</sup>

### Suppression of civil society

The fourth major challenge identified in limiting women’s participation is the suppression of civil society. In this sense, the lack of strategy outlined above is not the only factor curtailing women’s groups and civil society organizations. The general consensus from the interviews is that the space in which civil society is able to operate has, since 2016, been increasingly restricted.<sup>358</sup> The lack of unity mentioned previously is perhaps a direct consequence of the increasing control exercised by the government over civil society, which has weakened the forces from below and resulted in a splintered movement.<sup>359</sup> Myanmar is not alone in this. Enloe explains how, in ‘so many recent peace processes,’ civil society representatives have been marginalized.<sup>360</sup>

The NLD has had a big part to play in this. Problematically, Htar Htar Thet underlines, many of the ministries and government departments at present are served by members of the previous

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<sup>354</sup> Tin Tin Nyo interview, Chiang Mai, March 2018

<sup>355</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>356</sup> May Oo Mutraw interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>357</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>358</sup> Tin Tin Nyo interview, Chiang Mai, March 2018

<sup>359</sup> Su Su Swe interview, Yangon, March 2018; Ei Ei Toe Lwin, Sidelining CSOs is not the right path, *Myanmar Times*, <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/sidelining-csos-not-right-path.html> [accessed 2 April 2018]

<sup>360</sup> Cynthia Enloe, *The Big Push*, p.38

military government, now in ‘civilian clothing.’<sup>361</sup> In her view, this has resulted in few improvements in terms of the tolerance of civil society, and has triggered considerable blame from the general public on the civilian government for failing to move beyond certain draconian elements of the previous military leadership.<sup>362</sup> Tin Tin Nyo elaborates on this, arguing that ‘all of the different forces are weakening,’ leaving ‘CSOs and women’s groups with ‘no power’ due to their activities being restricted.’<sup>363</sup> As a result of heavy NLD restrictions on freedom of assembly, civil society groups are banned from protesting, and cannot criticise Suu Kyi’s leadership.<sup>364</sup> Su Su Swe, chair of WLB, explains how the organization has to be ‘careful about who we contact, otherwise we can be charged under the unlawful association act.’<sup>365</sup> The WLB itself is prevented from registering as a formal organization due to the existence of ‘Burma,’ rather than ‘Myanmar,’ in its title.<sup>366</sup> Tin Tin Nyo was one of the early members of the WLB, and explains how the league was perceived as a threat to the military government, and was therefore forced to operate out of Chiang Mai for many years until its gradual relocation to Yangon since the transition to a civilian government.<sup>367</sup> The fact that the WLB is now able to operate in Myanmar is a sign of the country gradually opening up and becoming more liberal, however Su Su Swe states that the situation is ‘still very tightly controlled.’<sup>368</sup> Regardless of the extent to which women’s organizations are able to strategize and unite with civil society and broader stakeholders, their influence in the political sphere and the peace process will remain limited due to the authoritarian tendencies that persist in Myanmar.

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<sup>361</sup> Htar Htar Thet interview, Yangon, March 2018

<sup>362</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>363</sup> Tin Tin Nyo interview, Chiang Mai, March 2018; Dr Stefan Bachtold, *An Eclipse of Myanmar’s Civil Society?* Heinrich Böll Stiftung, July 2017

<sup>364</sup> Tin Tin Nyo interview, Chiang Mai, March 2018; Article 66 has been criticised for preventing freedom of expression in Myanmar, and for curbing criticism of the government and authorities. Article 66(D) prohibits the use of telecommunications networks to ‘extort, defame, disturb or intimidate.’ See: Shoon Naing, *Reuters*, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-media/myanmar-retains-tough-clause-in-communications-law-despite-calls-for-repeal-idUSKCN1AY13J> [accessed 23 June 2018]

<sup>365</sup> Su Su Swe interview, Yangon, March 2018; Article 17/1 was widely used during the military dictatorship to imprison political activists. It stipulates that membership of, or association with, an unlawful association can result in up to three years in prison, whilst 17/2 states that active involvement in that association can result in five years. See: Oliver Slow, *Frontier Myanmar*, <https://frontiermyanmar.net/en/of-unlawful-associations-and-arbitrary-arrests> [accessed 22 June 2018]

<sup>366</sup> Tin Tin Nyo interview, Chiang Mai, March 2018

<sup>367</sup> Su Su Swe interview, Yangon, March 2018; *Women’s League of Burma, The Founding and Development of the Women’s League of Burma, A WLB Herstory* (2011)

<sup>368</sup> Su Su Swe interview, Yangon, March 2018

## Conclusion

This chapter has underlined four principal factors contributing to women's limited participation in Myanmar's peace process. There is significant overlap with the underlying challenges summarised in chapter 1 that have prevented women from accessing peace negotiations internationally. Many of the ideas explored in this chapter point to broader patterns, most notably the familiar recurrence of patriarchal structures and attitudes. In Myanmar, it appears that the continuation of the conflict is perpetuating the gender imbalance. It is argued that these structures and attitudes are reinforced by culture and religion, and continually shaped by a people who, in the most part, appear to favour continuity over change.

As has been made clear, significant efforts are underway to rectify this reality. Nonetheless, the impact of these efforts has been limited. Myanmar's peace negotiations are at risk of becoming what Enloe has described as 'yet a new round in masculinized politics,' sustaining the myth that 'only men with guns can make peace.'<sup>369</sup> This research argues that the above four factors are the principle reasons behind this limited progress for women's participation. Highlighting these factors and the way in which they work together to sustain the status quo is an important step forward in rewriting the narrative of women's participation in Myanmar's peace process. As argued by Enloe, identifying these patterns, and the patriarchal tendencies and assumptions inherent in them, 'pulls back the camouflaged cover on patriarchal politics' and reveals a 'deliberately scripted,' hierarchical peace process.<sup>370</sup> Women's organizations and their supporters face the task of exposing it, challenging it, and holding 'all parties accountable, every step of the way.'<sup>371</sup>

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<sup>369</sup> Cynthia Enloe, *The Big Push*, p.28; p.134

<sup>370</sup> *ibid.* p.47

<sup>371</sup> *ibid.*



## Conclusions: Towards a New Narrative?

This research lays the foundations for a new narrative on the participation of women in Myanmar's peace process. Each chapter serves as a building block for this revised narrative, broadening the reader's understanding of the principle factors working to limit women's participation in Myanmar's peace process and the effectiveness of national and international efforts to promote women's meaningful engagement in the future.

By taking the case studies of Colombia, Northern Ireland and Guatemala as the point of departure, a clear understanding is developed surrounding the key challenges faced by women attempting to access peace negotiations internationally. A number of patterns are identified across the case studies that serve to limit substantive improvements in women's participation and gender awareness at the peace table. The most prevalent among these is the culture of discrimination and injustice faced by women in international peace negotiations which are dictated to a significant extent by men and male interests. In each case study, the peace negotiations serve as a microcosm for society more broadly, in which power dynamics underwritten by patriarchal assumptions result in women being marginalized and their concerns set aside. Nonetheless, the cases of Guatemala, Northern Ireland and Colombia validate women's agency and creativity in finding spaces to influence and participate in peace-making, even when they are side-lined by the formal processes.

This discussion is built on by a focused analysis of international frameworks and standards, which carry significant potential in altering the structural inequalities inherent in the realms of conflict and peace. It is argued, however, that the guidelines and norms prescribed in the international system are ineffective in guaranteeing change at the national level unless integrated into national mechanisms and adopted in accordance with the cultural specificity of the national context. This section of the research engages closely with postcolonial theory, and argues that bridging the local and the international will be fundamental in assuring that changes towards gender equality and more meaningful women's participation are achieved and sustained. With a number of international frameworks already in place, it is argued that the impetus for change is needed primarily at the national level.

In this regard, the latter half of the research is heavily informed by the voices and experiences of Myanmar's women, addressing the agency being exercised at the local level to challenge women's exclusion from the political sphere. The unique source material at the core of this research confronts the previous marginalization of women from the historical narrative, and adds nuance to discussions of the political, social and cultural dynamics at play in Myanmar's peace process.

Importantly, the final section of the thesis recognises the magnitude of the challenge ahead for women's participation in Myanmar's peace process. It argues that women's participation is fundamentally limited by structural, strategic, social and cultural barriers. The 'full workings of patriarchy,' as Enloe explains, include not only the high level political structures.<sup>372</sup> They also include more 'local, even intimate patriarchies.'<sup>373</sup> As such, the argument is reiterated that the driving force for change must come from within Myanmar itself, in the high-level political structures, but equally at the grassroots level.

Holistically, this research moves beyond the existing literature of why women are needed in peace negotiations. It establishes a pattern in the challenges faced by women attempting to access peace negotiations in a number of historical case studies before highlighting the recurrence of several of these factors in Myanmar's peace process itself. In the Myanmar context, a combination of these established challenges as well as a number of factors particular to Myanmar, most notably cultural norms, impede the future prospects of gender equality in the peace negotiations, and indeed the likelihood of an inclusive and sustainable peace.

A notable strength of this research has been its access to the voices of several highly influential and well-respected individuals within Myanmar's women's movement. Presenting these particular voices alone may limit the scope of the findings, as all of the women interviewed are exposed to international networks and influences. Moreover, the women interviewed are all peace and gender activists, many among whom occupy senior positions in national organizations, which shapes to a significant extent their outlook on the political process. Placing these women at the centre of the research therefore raises the issue of how far the views presented are representative of women in Myanmar as a whole. However, narrowing the focus in this way was a deliberate decision given

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<sup>372</sup> Cynthia Enloe, *The Big Push*, p.137

<sup>373</sup> *ibid.*

the desire to focus on women's organizations in particular. This thesis does not claim to speak to the voices of women in Myanmar as a whole, but offers one lens through which to view the core issues limiting women's participation in the peace process. Another potential shortcoming common to this type of research is the scope for the researcher to impose his or her own views on the subject.<sup>374</sup> Whilst interviews and oral history necessarily raise such concerns of positionality and bias, in this case each of the interviews were conducted according to a set of pre-determined questions, and the transcripts were analysed alongside the core literature in order to identify common themes which were then positioned against the literature before being drawn out into broader discussion.

A further avenue for research would be to investigate civil society in Myanmar in more detail through a gendered lens. By gaining greater insight into the machinations of civil society in relation to women's organizations and the question of women's participation, the possibilities for further coordination and collaboration between the two groups can be explored, with potential value for policymakers at the national level and activists at the grassroots level alike. Alternatively, a study focusing on the topic of women's participation through the perspective of political parties and ethnic armed organizations in Myanmar would introduce new and challenging angles to an already complex picture. In this sense, the research presented in this thesis does not offer a comprehensive analysis of women's participation in the peace process in Myanmar. It is one approach to answering the fundamental questions surrounding women's participation, focusing on women's organizations themselves who are arguably the most important, yet by no means the only, actors in the campaign for gender equality in Myanmar's peace process.

This study was undertaken due to the need for a shift in the narrative surrounding women's participation in Myanmar's peace process. The result of this is a detailed analysis of women's participation which is thoroughly informed by the international context of women, peace and security, yet which is simultaneously grounded by an awareness of the local context and local understandings. Having identified the principle factors limiting women's participation, and having assessed the effectiveness of existing efforts (both national and international) to promote women's meaningful engagement in the future, the future of Myanmar's peace process could go one of two

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<sup>374</sup> Patty Chang et al, *Women Leading Peace*, p.22

ways. Either Myanmar will continue along the current trajectory and women's organizations will eventually be forced to step back and ask themselves, what is 'good enough' women's participation in the context of Myanmar? Alternatively, women's organizations and civil society may combine to formulate an effective strategy to challenge social and cultural norms and political indifference; to advocate international standards; to promote gender awareness and women's participation as indispensable to Myanmar's nation-building and the creation of a federal democratic union; and eventually to bring their knowledge and experiences to the peace table to ensure a more inclusive, comprehensive and sustainable peace.

In order for the latter to be achieved, this research contends that social, cultural, strategic and structural barriers will need to be overcome. Changes will need to be implemented gradually, over the long term, and they will need to come simultaneously from above and below. This struggle is still unfolding on the ground, but women's organizations remain confident that their ambitions can be realised. This is reflected clearly by Tin Tin Nyo. As a leading member of the women's movement, and having been engaged in the struggle for over twenty years, she articulates: 'we have learnt so much from our experiences and we have a very strong political commitment. This determination cannot be easily removed. Even though there is so much frustration and disappointment among women, we will continue this struggle for as long as it takes.'<sup>375</sup>

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<sup>375</sup> Tin Tin Nyo interview, Chiang Mai, March 2018

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