Guardians of the nation
- and the wives and mothers they protect

A study of women's exclusion from the Myanmar peace process

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Abstract

After 60 years of civil war Myanmar started a nationwide peace process in 2011. The transition from conflict to peace has been led and dominated by men in public office and in military. Women have barely been visible, their voices have been silenced while they have been denied agency despite the National Ceasefire Agreement urging the inclusion of women across negotiations teams and processes.

This paper investigates how the socially constructed notions of masculinity and femininity that emerged during and after the conflict has excluded women from the Myanmar peace process. Using theory on militarized masculinity, imagined peace, and myth of protection this paper that the Myanmar nationalistic military – better known as the Tatmadaw – has had a huge part in constructing gendered dichotomous roles, with a dominant notion of protection being the domain of men and masculinity and being vulnerable as the domain of women and femininity.

This conditioning of men towards aggression and women to submission was necessary for the Myanmar military to justify the conflict with. Along with it came a discriminatory order in which women remain subjugated, masculinity was aligned with military traits such as strength, discipline and bravery, while leadership became synonymous with this type of militarized masculinity after 60 years of all male leadership in all public and military institutions.

During the conflict women, women's organizations and civil society started questioning these gendered dichotomous roles and alternative gender practices in private homes, communities and the military started appearing. In private homes and communities women took over as providers and leaders while the men were away fight. And the military opened for female recruits. However until 2013 the military maintained a gender hierarchy by using a gendered division of labor only allowed women in positions perceived as feminine, like care-giving. However in 2014 the Tatmadaw got its first female officers.

As Myanmar started getting ready to transition from military dictatorship to limited

democracy and from conflict to peace, the military secured influence and power in a new constitution in 2008. The 2008 constitution entrenches the military's independence, maintains its influence over the Parliament, establishes legal channels for a return to direct military rule if desired and once again underlines the association of military men or militarized masculinity with leadership and power.

Amongst the legislative secured rights are the right to 25% of the seats in all Myanmar parliaments and the peace process – and with women's extremely limited access to military leadership where the military picks its political representation from, it again limits women's access to power and the peace process.

The Tatmadaw's continued indirect and direct power constitutes another barrier to the inclusion of women, as it means there is a lack of political will to challenge the gender roles and hierarchy.

The military is sustained by the gender roles and hierarchy they were such a big part of constructing and thus they have very little interest in changing them and more interest in preserving them along with sustaining themselves.

Abbreviations

AGIPP   Alliance for Gender Inclusion in Peace Process

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

EAO   Ethnic Armed Organization

FSS   Feminist Security Studies

GII   Gender Inequality Index

KIO   Kachin Independence Organization

NCA   National Ceasefire Agreement

NCCT   Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team

MPC   Myanmar Peace Center

ULPT   The Union-Level Peace Team

UPC   Union Peace Conference

WLB   Women's League of Burma

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1. Intro

After 60 years of civil war, Myanmar is now on the brink of peace.[1] A National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) has been negotiated and signed and the Southeast Asian nation is ready to move forward in the peace process and shape the future of a peaceful Myanmar. But who got - and will continue - to decide the path to peace?

When a country transitions from conflict to peace, it is not only the people who decides how the post conflict political settlements should be who are the ones with power. A lot of power is put in the hands of those who negotiates the peace, simply because "Traditionally, those who negotiate official ceasefire arrangements go on to become those who negotiate the political settlements that follow."[2]

"Therefor, if women are included in pre-negotiation phases, they are more likely to be included in subsequent processes"[3]. And subsequently if women are excluded in the pre-negotiation and negotiation, they are more likely to also be excluded in the political settlements afterwards.

So it is no wonder that there is broad international agreement that including women in the subsequent processes (and the ones before that) is important - and not only because it is fair to include – in the case of Myanmar 51.8 percent – over half of the population in the shaping of the future;[4]

"*Since the unanimous adoption of the United Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security in 2000, international consensus has been built around the need to involve women in peace processes on order for peace building to be sustainable, democratic and inclusive*"[5]

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[1] In 1989 the military junta changed the country's official name from Burma to Myanmar. Throughout this thesis the author will only refer to

[2] Hedström, Jenny and Senarathna, Thiyumi, eds. "*Myanmar*" in Women in Conflict and Peace, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, Stockholm: Sweden (2015) p. 33.

[3] Ibid. Hedström & Senarathna. p.24.

[4] United Nations Population Fund. "*Country Profile*" at United Nations Population Fund's website <myanmar.unfpa.org> [27 July 2016] paragraph 4

[5] Hedström, Jenny. "*Where are the Women*?" Stockholm: The Swedish Burma Committee (2013) p. 4.

1.1 From inclusion to exclusion

Before the official signing of the NCA in 2015, the NCA and the Myanmar government was receiving a lot of criticism – mostly because of the fact that 16 EAOs were invited to the peace negotiations, but it looked as if only half would be willing to sign the NCA and still the government pushed for the signing of the agreement and thereby accepting the exclusion of 8 EAOs.

The exclusion of 8 ethnic armed groups caused a big stir. Can peace be sustainable, when so many are excluded, people questioned? Much less attention was given to the fact, that it was not only some ethnic groups that were excluded from the agreement, but women were also kept almost completely out of the negotiations and agreement, as women's organizations like WLB tried to draw attention to: "…the NCA is not only non-inclusive for the ethnic groups, it's also non-inclusive of women."[6]

On October 15th 2015 8 EAOs and the Tatmadaw and Myanmar government signed the NCA. "Despite a push to make this process 'all-inclusive'—defined as involving a multitude of government, military, and ethnic armed actors—civil society actors in general, and women in particular, were largely excluded."[7]

Despite a rhetoric intention of inclusiveness, the nationwide peace process that has been underway since 2011, has been wholly male-dominated with women barely visible. But if there were intensions of inclusion, the question that remains – and will be the focus of this paper- is:

Why are women excluded from Myanmar's peace process?

To answer the problem formulation, this paper will examine the Myanmar peace process through a gender lens with theories on myth of protection, militarized masculinity and Jane Parpart's theory of imagined peace, gender relations and post conflict transformation.

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[6] Women's League of Burma. *"Statement by the Women's League of Burma: A non-inclusive Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement will not bring peace"* at Women's League of Burma's website October, (2015) <www.womenofburma.org> [27 July 2016] paragraph 6.
[7] Barsa, Michelle, Holt-Ivry, Olivia and Allison Muehlenbeck, "I*nclusive Ceasefires: Women, gender, and a sustainable end to violence*" at The Institute for Inclusive Security's website <www.inclusivesecurity.org> [28 July 2016] p. 24.

2. Background

This chapter provides more in-depth context about Myanmar. It briefly touches down on the history of the civil war and the current peace process, before giving an insight to the number of women in the peace process and the overall status of women in Myanmar.

2.1 Civil war in Myanmar

The Myanmar civil war has been called the world's longest civil war in modern times – and with good reason. After Myanmar gained its independence from British rule in 1948, ethnic unrest started stirring and causing domestic unrest resulting in the military seizing power. "Burma has been ruled by successive military regimes since the military took power in a coup in 1962, ostensibly with the aim of stabilizing the country."[8].

It is very much open to discussion whether or not the military ever came anywhere near what they claimed to be their goal. The Burmese civil war has lasted over six decades and has included at least 40 ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) fighting the Myanmar Armed Forces (the Tatmadaw) for either natural resources, constitutional reforms, independence, self-determination or at the very least federalism.[9] [10] However throughout the years there have been several attempts at peace.

Until 2008 - where the military junta drafted a new constitution and a reform process paving the way for parliament elections in 2010 - a long line of ceasefires were agreed upon with various EAOs. "Ceasefires had been agreed with up to 25 non-state armed forces, including armed groups representing all of the major ethnic nationalities".[11] However the agreements were not made public, some were only verbal agreements where "...input from civil society was kept at a minimum and women effectively excluded"[12] and none of the agreements required the EAOs or the Tatmadaw to lay down arms or discussed a long term perspective.

The first semi-democratic parliament was elected in 2010 and in 2011 the government with former general Thein Sein in the lead officially issued an invitation for peace talks and rolled

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[8] Op.Cit. Hedström (2013) p. 5.
[9] Op.Cit.Hedström, Jenny et al. p.24.
[10] There are 135 ethnic groups in Myanmar, Burman is the largest group being the ethnicity of approximately 68% of the population and the ethnicity of the Tatmadaw. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark. "*Denmark – Myanmar Country Policy Paper 2016-2020*" 2015, p. 11.
[11] Op.Cit. Hedström (2013) p. 6.
[12] Op.Cit. Hedström (2013) p. 6.

out a plan for national reconciliation. In 2012 institutions and committees were in places to implement the peace plan.[13]

Thein Sein's invitation was accepted and for the very first time 16 EAO's joined hands and created the National Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT) with representatives from each EAO to work together on making the NCA a reality. [14]

2.2 The current peace process; Intention of inclusion

The Myanmar peace negotiations started out with intensions of inclusion, not only of ethnicity but also of gender. Not only has the government committed to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) guaranteeing equality between men and women in public and political life, it also ratified the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 mandating "inclusion of women at all levels of decision-making related to peacemaking, peacebuilding and peacekeeping"[15] and presented a National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women.

Women's organization and female EAO delegates lobbied for women's inclusion and participation in the NCA and pushed for a 30 percent quota – a number in keeping with CEDAW. The EAOs was open for the suggestion, but kept discussing the precise wording to include in the draft - should it be "at least 30 percent"? Or maybe "up to 30 percent"? In the end the EAOs agreed on "30 percent women". And the government included the suggestion from NCCT in the early drafts of the NCA.[16]

However when the NCA was ready for signing, the guarantee of inclusion of women in the further peace process had been drastically altered. Instead it now read; "We shall include a reasonable number/ratio of women representatives in the political dialogue process"[17], not specifying how to define, determine or intrepid 'reasonable number/ratio'.

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[13] Op.Cit. Barsa et al. p. 22-24.

[14] Op.Cit. Barsa, et al. p. 24.

[15] Alliance for Gender Inclusion in the Peace Process, "*Women, Peace and Security Policymaking in Myanmar – Context Analysis and Recommendations*" at Inclusive Security's website (2015) <www.inclusivesecurity.org> [27 July 2016] p. 9.

[16] Op.Cit.. Barsa et al. p. 29.

[17] Op.Cit. Barsa et al. p. 29.

The specifics around this rather drastic change from a very concrete quota to a vague declaration of intention still remain unclear. In a statement before the signing of the NCA, Women's League of Burma (WLB) hinted that the government [placed in Myanmar's capital Napyidaw] had a change of heart: "Ethnic armed groups agreed (…) to amend the NCA text to guarantee a quota of at least 30% women in future political dialogue. However, Napyidaw has refused to amend the text"[18]. And WLB was backed up by other women's organizations: "Other women's groups have also blamed the government for "reneging" on a promise to amend the NCA draft to state a target number" [19].

So instead of issuing a guarantee for women's participation in this extremely important transition where the future of Myanmar is decided, the NCA does not ensure the future peace committees, institutions and teams include women – at all. "This vague, subjective wording provides no guarantee of meaningful women's participation, and directly contradicts the government's claims to be implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325"[20]

2.3 Women in Myanmar

Gender equality in Myanmar is relatively high ranked in a regional perspective ahead of Cambodia and Lao PDR. UNDP's Gender Inequality Index (GII) ranks Myanmar 85 out of 155 countries.[21] Myanmar has ratified CEDAW, UN Security Council resolutions 1325 and presented a National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women.

Nationally and internationally there seems to be a broad and general understanding of a pretty gender equal Myanmar. A message that the Myanmar government likes to tell and spread- like at the 2008 United Nations General Assembly: "Gender equality has never been a big issue in Myanmar mainly due to the fact that Myanmar women traditionally enjoy high degree of equal rights with men. Their rights are being protected by tradition and the existing laws"[22] and in a statement to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR): "The status of women in our society is unique. The Myanmar culture, traditions, laws and

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[18] Op.Cit.. Women's League of Burma. paragraph 5.
[19] Op.Cit. Barsa et al. p. 30.
[20] Op.Cit. Women's League of Burma. Ibid., paragraph 6
[21] United Nations Development Programme. "*Briefing note for countries on the 2015 Human Development Report- Myanmar*" at United Nations Development Programme's website (2015) <hdr.undp.org> [27 July 2016] p.5.
[22] United Nations General Assembly 63rd Session. "*Statement by Ms Aye Aye Soe Member of the Delegation of the Union of Myanmar to the Third Committee on Agenda 56 Advancement of Women.*" (2008) <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/documents/ga63/MYANMAR.pdf> [27 July 2016]

practices have all safeguarded the equality of women in marriage, inheritance and other social affairs. In Myanmar, women are treated with respect and have never been subjected to degrading treatment.".[23]

Burmese women do enjoy legal protection from discrimination as "...the 2008 Constitution positively states that "the Union shall not discriminate [against] any citizen of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar based on race, birth, religion, official position, status, culture, sex and wealth"[24]

This, however, does not change the fact that Myanmar still face significant challenges when it comes to gender equality. "Despite pervasive denial of gender discrimination, being born a woman in Myanmar generally limits opportunity."[25]

"...women face particular challenges including gender- based violence, lower wages than men, inadequate health care and information, and stereotypes socialised through the educational system and media."[26] The limited opportunities also manifests itself in the 2008 constitution where "Section 352 of the Constitution codifies discrimination by stating: "nothing...shall prevent the appointment of men to the positions that are suitable for men only."[27]

Another challenge lies in the gap in implementation of the well-intentioned laws and international conventions and resolutions.

> "...women do have equal rights under a host of laws and protocols to participation in public decision-making about their lives, their communities and countries. These rights are today underpinned by international law and international instruments, including human rights conventions and UN Security Council resolutions. The need now is for these rights to be fully implemented and guaranteed in Myanmar"[28]

Even though Myanmar has an obligation to implement UNSCR 1325, no national action plans has been developed nor any mechanisms for ensuring gender mainstreaming in the current

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[23] United Nations Commission on Human Rights. "*Statement by the Myanmar Observer Delegation to the 60th Session.*" (2004) <http://www.ibiblio.org/obl/docs/Myanmar-women.htm> [27 July 2016]

[24] Op.Cit. Alliance for Gender Inclusion in the Peace Process. p 10.
[25] Faxon, Hilary, Roisin Furlong and May Sabe Phyu. "Reinvigorating resilience: violence against women, land rights, and the women's peace movement in Myanmar" in *Gender & Development*, vol. 23, issue 3 (2015)

[26] Ibid. Faxon et al. p. 465.

[27] Op.Cit. Alliance for Gender Inclusion in the Peace Process. p 10.
[28] Op.Cit. Hedström (2013) p. 2.

peace process. Members of parliament point to "...actions for capacitation the Parliamentarians on the issues such as 1325 and its importance is highly needed".[29]

Instead Myanmar adopted the National Strategic plan for the Advancement of Women (NSPAW) in 2013 to ensure the empowerment of women in Myanmar by creating advancement enabling systems, structures and practices. The National Strategic plan for the Advancement of Women does touch down on women in emergencies – but focus is more on natural disasters and less on women in armed conflicts, so the areas remains uncovered.[30]

The status of women in Myanmar is furthermore evolved against a backdrop of exclusion from public life. With record high level of 4.7 percent of parliamentary seats held by female politicians, women struggle to secure decision-making positions in the public sphere. [31]

The absence of women at decision-making levels in Myanmar can be – and often am – explained with "social and cultural norms that dictate what is considered possible and appropriate strongly emphasise women's modesty and domesticity, and discourage public leadership or challenging the status quo."[32]

Other underlines that it is not about patriarchal cultural values, but simply about inequality.

> "*Whenever we talk about gender inequality, people say that we have no problem with gender issues. In my opinion, the problem is there because people are not seeing the problem as a problem ... even if people are seeing inequality between women and men within society, they usually use culture and religion as excuses 'It is not inequality ... this is our religious practice or this is our social practice.' (Interview with senior woman leader)*"[33]

2.4 Women in the peace process

Despite intentions of inclusiveness, both the negotiations of the NCA and the following implementation process turned out to be male dominated on both the government and ethnic side. "The government's negotiating teams are usually composed of governmental and

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[29] Khen, Salai Isaac and Yin Haung Nyoi, Muk, "*Looking at the Current Peace Process in Myanmar through a Gender Lens*" in Catalyzing Reflection, vol. 1 (2014) p. 26.

[30] Ibid. Khen et al. p. 26-27.
[31] Op.Cit. United Nations Development Programme. p. 5.
[32] Op.Cit. Faxon et al. p. 465.

[33] Op.Cit. Faxon et al. p. 465.

military high-ranking positions usually filled by men […] The parliamentary committees on ethnic and peace issues are also male dominated."[34]

Negotiation body	Female delegates
National Ceasefire Coordination Team	1 of 16
Senior Delegation [The negotiation delegation for the EAOs]	2 of 15
Union Peacemaking Central Committee	0 of 11
Union Peacemaking Working Committee [The government delegation]	2 of 52[35]

In total women only made 5 out of 96 delegates or 4,8 percent in the negotiating phase of the NCA. With the signing of the NCA the formal peace process began with the Union Peace Conference (UPC), where dialogue and outreach session where focused on resolving issues concerning the conflict and national reconciliation.

"The lack of mandate or political will around women's participation led to stark numbers at the outset of the UPC. As of January 2016, only two women served on the 48 member Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC), the leadership body of the Union Peace Conference. Women were just 7 percent of the Union Peace Conferenc e when it first convened"[36]

Implementation body	Inclusion of women
Joint Implementation Coordination Meeting	0 of 16
Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee	3 of 48
Union Peace Conference – January 2016	45 of 700[37]

 "Women's participation at only 7 percent of 700 delegates in the initial session is a direct consequence of the NCA's lack of mandate for their inclusion moving forward".[38] The lack of women in the UPC becomes a challenge, as the UPC is the foundation for political dialogue and where the future of Myanmar will be determined – leaving women without much influence on the future of their country.

Of course, women haven't been completely excluded which is an improvement and for some the inclusion of a few women – especially from the EAO's - is an opening and opportunity for Burmese women. Furthermore "The presence of two female advisors and numerous

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[34] Op.Cit. Khen et al. p. 20.
[35] Op.Cit. Barsa et al. p. 25.
[36] Op.Cit. Barsa et al. p. 30.
[37] Op.Cit. Barsa et al. p. 31.
[38] Op.Cit. Barsa et al. p. 32.

observers to the process also provided needed space for women's voices and gender considerations to be heard both at and near the table".[39]

"Even though the participation of women is still low, this is a hopeful sign that the inclusion of women can be increased as the processes in Myanmar develop."[40]

3. Methodology

This chapter describes how this paper was conducted. It includes an overview of the data collected, methods of data gathering, what constraints and gaps there is found in the research, how the data will be analyzed and finally the chapter wraps up by reflecting on Chandra Mohanty, discursive colonialism and the author's own "lenses", norms and point of departure.

3.1 Method of Data Collection, Research Constraints and Gaps

The study was mainly done as a desk study based on secondary and tertiary sources. Myanmar's peace process is still very new with implementation of the NCA just starting, making information about the process – and more specifically women in the peace process – scarce. In the academic literature on conflict and peace in Myanmar focus has mainly been on civil war, ethnic nationalism, religious problems, reforms and geopolitical struggles, leaving roles and experiences of women almost completely out. "Women's experience of and voice in transitions from conflict to peace are still systematically ignored, both in Myanmar and elsewhere."[41]

However there are a few notable exceptions in the Myanmar context, like Jenny Hedström's investigation of women's involvement in the ethnic armed organizations in "We Did Not Realize About Gender Issues. So, We Thought It Was a Good Idea: Gender Roles In Burmese Oppositional Struggles".[42]

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[39] Op.Cit. Barsa et al. p. 31.

[40] Lahtaw, Ja Nan and Nang Raw. "*Myanmar's Current Peace Processes: A New Role for Women?*" in Opinion, Geneva: Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (2012) p. 7.

[41] Op.Cit. Hedström (2013)

[42]Hedström, Jenny. "*We Did Not Realize about the Gender Issues – Gender roles in Burmese oppotional struggles*" in International Feminist Journal of Politics, vol. 18, issue 1 (2016)

Ja Nan Lahtaw and Nang Raw document the roles that women (so far) have had in earlier and the current peace process in "Myanmar's Current Peace Processes: A New Role for Women?".[43] Ja Nan Lahtaw and Nang Raw points to patriarchy as the main barrier for women, but fails to investigate how it manifests or what can be done to eliminate it.

Hilary Faxon, Roisin Furlong and May Sabe Phyu's gives an account of how the women's organizations in Myanmar have mobilized themselves and joined forces to advocate first for peace and then women's inclusion in the peace process in "Reinvigorating resilience: violence against women, land rights, and the women's peace movement in Myanmar"[44].

The three above-mentioned texts are all used in this paper. They cover the EAO's and the CSO's, but do not investigate what part the government/the Tatadaw have played and still plays in excluding women. And that is an especially important part, as Cynthia Cockburn stresses: "gender relations are indeed a significant part of the big picture of militarism and war" and "not only is patriarchy strengthened by militarism, militarism needs patriarchy. Giving visibility tothose links is a "must" for any feminist analysis of war and peace"

This paper aims to add to the body of knowledge in unfolding the military's part in excluding women from the peace process by applying theories on myth of protection, militarized masculinity and Jane Parpart's theory of imagined peace, gender relations and post conflict transformation on the Myanmar conflict.

With few academic texts available on this specific topic, the paper is also relying on reports and analysis from civil society organizations, NGO's and INGO's. The reports includes Alliance for Gender Inclusion in the Peace Process's "*Women, Peace and Security Policymaking in Myanmar – Context Analysis and recommendations*", Swedish Burma Committee's "*Peace for Whom? The Institutionalization of Gender Inequality in Myanmar's Reform Processes*", International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance's "*Solidarity in exile? The influence of gender politics on the pro-democracy struggle in Myanmar*", Swisspeace's "*Looking at the Current Peace Process in Myanmar through a Gender Lens*" and the report "*No Women,*

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[43] Op.Cit. Lahtaw and Raw Nang.
[44] Op.Cit. Faxon et al.

No Peace: Gender Equality, Conflict and Peace in Myanmar" from the alternative policy group/think tank Transnational Institute.

Using reports from NGO's differs from academic reports. NGO's are not impartial; they have an interest in justifying and validating their own presence/work as well as a need to convince donors to support them. Thus there is always a possibility that the NGO exaggerate the challenges in precisely the area they work with or upplay the challenges they focus on, while downplaying other aspects. In this paper the NGO reports will be used as a supplement to the academic texts and the information from NGO report is only used, if the author could get it verified from other sources as well.

A background knowledge and understanding has been gathered from the author's two stays in Myanmar– first time doing capacity building with and training of youth activists with ActionAid in 2013 and second time in 2015 interning for the Embassy of Denmark in Myanmar, where the Embassy worked intensely on the peace process.

While the above mentioned authors and their report and texts does broaden the understanding of Burmese women's multiple wartime roles and their agency in war a little, feminist scholar Jenny Hedström still points to "a lack of scholarly attention analyzing the impact of gender relations on the conflict in Myanmar, limiting our understanding of the war and possible solutions to it".[45] Also missing from the literature is men in other roles than soldiers and the term gender becomes so closely linked to women and women's challenges, that men and men's challenges becomes invisible.

3.2 Own lenses
As postcolonial feminist theorist Chandra Mohanty advocated for in 'Under Western Eyes', it is important to examine and reflect on the 'lenses' we wear and the perspective it gives us, when analyzing others. [46]

In 'Under Western Eyes' Mohanty critiques the hegemonic discourse about women in 'third countries' from Western feminists, pointing to a monolithic, universalizing, and essentializing

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[45] Op.Cit Hedström (2016) p. 4.
[46] Mohanty, Chandra. "*Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses* " in *Feminist Review*, No. 30 (1988) pp. 61-88.

construction of 'Third World Women'. With an assumption that 'Third World Women' are an constituted, coherent group with identical interest and desires, regardless of class, ethnicity or race and uncritical use of certain methodologies in providing 'proof' of cross-cultural validity and universality, Mohanty argues Western feminists produces an image of an 'average third world women' – an image that is very much produced in contrast to Western feminist self-image.[47]

> "*This average third-world woman leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and being 'third world' (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, religious, domesticated, family-oriented, victimized, etc.). This, I suggest, is in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of western women as educated, modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the 'freedom' to make their own decisions.*"[48]

This kind of portrayal becomes a colonialist discourse that "exercises a very specific power in defining, coding and maintaining existing first/third-world connections"[49]

Mohanty also underlines that there is no such thing as a global sisterhood with common experiences and goals. At best, Mohanty argues, there is a 'sameness' in withstanding oppression no matter class, culture, or geographical borders. This distinction is important, otherwise you risk overlooks pluralism, impede the cause of women and replicate unequal power relations. [50]

In order to investigate my own lenses I need to look at my own point of departure. It stems from the West, where the values are humanist, the universal notion of patriarchy stresses the binary 'man vs. woman' and the model of power is the classic view of men as oppressors and women as oppressed. And because of that, my outlook is very paternalistic; I hold Western standards over economic, religious and familial structures.

That is my norm and in all likelihood it affects every part of this report; the choice of topic – a classic 'men vs. women' problem, perspective on women – as being oppressed and needs to fight to reach all of the same privileges as men or at least the choice of having them, and my perspective on women in Myanmar.

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[47] Ibid. Mohanty.
[48] Ibid. Mohanty. p. 65.
[49] Ibid. Mohanty. p. 22.
[50] Ibid. Mohanty.

However my perspective on women in Myanmar has changed quite a bit from two longer stays in Myanmar. Coming to Myanmar I did not exactly have the monolithic view on 'third world women', instead I had some regional perceptions along with the western view just mentioned. I was approaching Myanmar women as one group - and as very oppressed group.

One of my first encounters was with a youth activist from a conflict area. She is an active member of WLB, but she hasn't lived in Myanmar since she was three. Instead she was living in Thailand in an IDP camp, where safety was a constant concern and her biggest dream is to return to a safe Myanmar. Her life in an IDP camp was in the hands of men, which is why she became an activist. Now she is actively trying to build peace and take charge of her own life in the Thai IDP camp.

In Yangon I engaged in conversations about gender equality in Myanmar. And as I would have done in Denmark, I approached the subject with "it's still a long way from where we need it to be", my goal always being complete equality in opportunities, privileges and power. And I was again and again met with wonder and women telling me that women in Myanmar already has equality – 'it is in the law' they said.

As Mohanty also points to, using women as an analysis category is impossible. [51]
This is especially true in Myanmar as the two examples show. The differences in especially urban/rural/conflict area and ethnic/Burman, Buddhist/Christian/Muslim are huge – and so are their needs.

The theory applied in this paper comes from western feminists and as such western feminism, with its priorities, values and outlook is an underlying norm. This becomes especially clear as Burmese activists and scholars do not use the label 'feminism'. "Feminism, as a concept, has not been commonly used by Burmese activists". [52] Instead "…in the context of Myanmar, the

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[51] Ibid. Mohanty. p. 6.
[52] Op.Cit. Hedström (2016) p. 63-64.

women's movement structured its claims and discussions around ideas emerging from a women's rights discourse, rather than a feminist terminology".[53]

It has been important to find and include as many Burmese sources as possible. This paper draws on information from Burmese scholars Ja Nan Lahtaw and Nang Raw, activist May Sabe Phyu and a report from Myanmar civil society organization Alliance for Gender Inclusion in the Peace Process. It has been important, not only because their voice is the most important, but also because they seem slightly better at using an intersectional approach, acknowledging that women in Myanmar is far from a unified, homogenous group with the same experiences, needs and wishes.

Overall the Myanmar peace process has had a unitary approach with the emphasis on ethnicity as the only relevant social category, forgetting other very important social categories such as ethnicity, religion, class etc. and how they interact.

4. Theory; Gendered conflict and peace process

This chapter describes and discusses feminist approaches to conflict and peace. It investigates how gender relates to power, conflict and peace and how conflict and peace processes can be gendered and reproduce gender dynamics. " When we talk about gender we are talking about power and the relationship that is established between men and women in all social spheres, either public or private. Armed conflicts and peace processes reproduce these gender dynamics and every feminist approach to this issue has to question them.".[54]

4.1 Feminist approaches to peace and conflict

"[…] Giving visibility to the absence of gender analysis when approaching the issues of war and peace and highlighting its importance in order has been one of the main contributions of academic feminism*.".*[55] Not only has gender as a lens been applied to the study of conflict and peace, it has formed a subfield within security studies - Feminist Security Studies (FSS).

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[53] Op.Cit. Hedström (2016)

[54] Arino, Maria Villellas. "*The Participation of Women in Peace Processes. The Other Tables*" Barcelona: Institut Català Internacional per la Pau (2010)

[55]Cockburn, Cynthia, "*War and security, women and gender: an overview of the issues*" in Gender & Development, Vol. 21, No. 3 (2013) p. 441.

Over time three distinctly different approaches to analyzing women, war and peace have evolved. The first approach uses an essentialist point of view, perceiving women as "naturally peaceful, incapable of exercising violence, and at the same time, men are contemplated as 'violent beings'".[56]

Scholars like Betty Reardon[57] and Carol Pateman[58] has described the conditioning of men towards aggression and women to submission as the patriarchal foundation war is based on – a notion this paper will touch down on in the chapters on 'gendered construction of war' and 'militarized masculinities and myth of protection'.

The perception of women's inherent pacifism has been strongly criticized by feminists, calling it problematic and counterproductive, arguing that it is just another way of keeping women out of power by categorizing them as passive victims. María Villellas Ariño argues, "it serves to depoliticise women's positions in relation to war and peace. Furthermore, it serves to perpetuate a discriminatory order in which women remain subjugated"[59].

The second approach also comes from essentialist point of view, where women's role as mothers are linked to their involvement in the cause of peace. This approach sees motherhood as the opposite of violence and suggests that women involves themselves in peace building in order to improve the conditions for their children and families. "The socialization experienced by women historically, reinforcing their role as care-givers and nurturer would explain many women's involvement in pacifism". [60]

According to Amy Schneidhorst this approach was instrumental for the first wave of feminists as a strategy to recruit members, prevent violent repression and "to defend their political activities in male dominated politics […] within the context of pre-feminist ideas of acceptable female behavior"[61]

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[56] Op.Cit. Arino. p. 20.
[57] Reardon, Betty. "*Sexism and the War System*" N.Y., London: Teachers College; Columbia University (1985)
[58] Pateman, Carol. "*The Sexual Contract*" Stanford: Stanford University Press (1988)
[59] Op.Cit. Arino. p. 20.
[60] Op.Cit. Arino. p. 21.
[61] Schneidhorst, Amy. ""*Little Old Ladies and Dangerous Women": Women's Peace and Social Justice Activism in Chicago, 1960-1975*" in Peace & Change, Vol. 26, issue 3 (2001) p. 375.

This discourse has been helped along with peace organizations such as; American 'Women Strike For Peace' and 'Another Mother For Peace', still active 'The Madres and Abuelas of the Plaza de Mayo' in Argentina and most recently Russian 'Committee of Soldiers' Mothers' in Chechnya[62][63].

Just like the first approach, this approach has been criticized for its essentialism and being counterproductive. Ann Tickner argues "[…] the association of women with maternal qualities and peacemaking has the effect of disempowering both women and peace and further delegitimating women's voices in the matter of international politics".[64]
Furthermore feminists criticizes that it excludes all the women who are not mothers.[65]

The main argument against the essentialist perception that women and men are fundamentally and inherent different and that femininity and masculinity exists as opposing dichotomies has come from constructivist feminists like leading scholar Judith Butler, pointing to gender as a socially constructed concept instead of being biological.

Butler argues that in a given society there is no single, fixed notion of masculinity and femininity. Instead, she argues, femininity and masculinity are very much changeable depending on other social aspects as class, ethnicity, culture, age and sexual orientation.[66]

However some scholars questions if mothers' movements really reinforce gender stereotypes, like Ariño noting that motherhood is "[…] an important aspect of most women's lived experience, it can unify women, can be a source of authority and a powerful tool for resistance".[67]

[62] Bunch, Charlotte. "*Feminism, peace human rights and human security*" in Feminist politics, Activism and Vision: Local and global challenges (2005) p. 81.
[63] Traynor, Ian. "*Russian mothers mobilise against Chechnya campaign*" at The Guardian's website. 3 February (2000) <www.theguardian.com> [27 July 2016]
[64]Tickner, J. Ann. "*Gendering World Politics: issues and approaches in the post-Cold War era*" New York: Columbia University Press (2001) p. 21.
[65] Op.Cit. Arino.p. 21.
[66] Butler, Judith. "*Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*" New York: Routledge (1999)
[67] Op.Cit. Cockburn.

And she receives some support by Charlotte Bunch;" [...] such images may serve a useful purpose for women in a particular time or place – particularly when these are the only roles in which society gives them legitimacy."[68]

However Bunch underlines, that women should not need any legitimacy to be included. The right to be included is not only pragmatic or a democratic right it should also be self-evident why; because it is only fair:

> *"The need for women to be a part of all aspects of the peace-building process should be self-evident and does not rest on claims to their being innately more peaceful. This is a right that rests on the simple but profound principles of justice and democracy. As half or more of humanity, women have the right to be part of the decision-making on all critical activities that deeply affect their lives. Gender balance, as a democratic principle, should apply to the full range of peace-building activities."*[69]

The third approach arose alongside accounts of women participating and/or fighting in liberation movements. The experience of female fighters in Africa[70], Eritrea[71], Nicaragua[72], Mozambique[73] and Vietnam[74] claiming women's place as active fighters, women warriors as well as victims questioned the two previous approaches of maternal care and inherent peacefulness. Instead focus turned to the political dimensions and women's limited room for agency and "the fact that women's agency for peace is connected to their exclusion from the public sphere (and from war)".[75]

4.2 Gendered construction of conflict

"That we even need to talk about "women and war" underscores the gendering of our construct of war. War has been perceived as men's domain, a masculine endeavor for which women may serve as victim, spectator, or prize. Women are denied agency, made present but silenced"[76]

To examine gendered construction of conflict Laura Sjoberg argues there is a need to pay attention to men and women, as well as the socially constructed notions of masculinity and femininity that emerged during and after conflicts. These gender roles and notions are some

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[68] Op.Cit. Bunch. p. 81.
[69] Op.Cit. Bunch. p. 82.
[70] Turshen, Meredeth and Clotilde Twagiramariya., ed. *"What Women Do in Wartime: Gender and Conflit in Africa"* London: Zed Books (1989)
[71] Wilson, Amrit. *"The Challenge Road: Women and the Eritrean Revolution"* London: Earthscan (1991)
[72] Randall, Margaret. *"Sandino's Daughters Revisited"* New Jersey: Rutgers University Press (1994)
[73] Urdang, Stephanie. *"And Still They Dance. Women, War and the Struggle for Change in Mozambique"* London: Earthscan (1989)
[74] Bennett, Olivia, Jo Bexley, and Kitty Warnock, eds.*"Arms to Fight - Arms to Protect"* London: Panos (1995)
[75] Op.Cit. Arino. p. 21.
[76] D'Amico, Francine. *"Feminist perspectives on women warriors"* in Peace Review, Vol. 8, Issue 3 (1996) p. 1.

of the conditions that made war possible in the first place – and what needs to be change if looking for sustainable peace:

"Men and women play different roles in conflict situations, some of them strictly defined by social stereotypes of what is right for a woman or for a man, but others do not obey to these socially sanctioned gender roles. All of them have to be acknowledged if the final aim of peace processes is to transform the social conditions that made war possible."

It is the social stereotypes that especially have been interesting in FSS or rather how and why they are constructed and how it affects conflict and peace.

4.2.1 Militarized masculinity and the myth of protection

At the center of FFS is militarized masculinity - the discussion of the association men with militarism and women with pacifism - something D'Amico defines as:

"Militarized masculinity, at its most basic level, refers to the assertion that traits stereotypically associated with masculinity can be acquired and proven through military service or action, and combat in particular."

Just as a lot of feminist International Relations scholars questioned women's inherent peacefulness, they have questioned the link between men and militarism and begun exploring how masculinities and men become militarized. One of those scholar are D'amico, starts at the militarization of societies, a process she argues is a highly gendered process:

"The essence of military training consists of the subordination of the individual to the institution, a desensitization to violence, and a dehumanization of the potential opponent. For male recruits, it also includes a process of masculinization where female and feminine are defined as "other" and as unworthy. The military seeks "to make a man out of you" or "to separate the men from the boys," and from the women. Military service constitutes a quintessentially male activity, a confirmation of masculinity, a proof of manhood. The military as an institution is thus sustained by this gender differentiation. The military milieu celebrates and privileges maleness"[77]

Feminist scholar Jane Parpart designate the military as "... a crucial site for understanding the gendered impact of war"[78] for two reasons:

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[77] Ibid. D'Amico. p. 1.
[78] Parpart, Jane L. "*Imagined Peace, Gender Relations and Post-Conflict Transformation: Anti-colonial and post-Cold War conflicts*" in J. Kaufman and K. Williams (eds) "Women, Gender Equality and Post-conflict Transformation" Routledge (2016)

1) Its almost all male leadership in military and civilian institutions in anti-colonial and post-Cold War conflicts has created an "association of leadership with certain masculine traits"[79] and left the military command a masculine space.

2) "The gender division of labor in most military and civilian institutions during conflicts often reinforced gender hierarchies associating women and the feminine with care-giving and men and masculinity with power and authority" [80]

Competitiveness, combativeness, physical strength and assertiveness, courage, and ambition are some of the traits typically perceived as masculine and associated with leadership, while the gendered division of labor reveals the "gendered assumptions underlying military policies in conflicts".[81]

Parpart is one of the critics of the notion of militarized masculinity, she recognizes how the military monopolizes and shapes masculinity, but perceives gender differences as socially constructed rather than biologically inherent, drawing lines back to the third approach to analyzing conflict, peace and gender described in the previous subchapter.

So if women are not inherently peaceful, men are not inherently militaristic. Still militarized masculinity remains in important aspect when investigating violence in International Relations, as many feminist scholars argue "the link between masculinity and the military is constructed and maintained for the purposes of waging war"[82] – for instance through the use of stereotypical military and state security discourse of 'brave and just warriors (masculine)' protecting the 'vulnerable and beautiful(feminine)'.

Cynthia Cockburn acknowledges the militarized masculinity theory, but points to the fact that such notion couldn't exist if weren't for patriarchal gender hierarchies:

   "*...what disposes society to war is the dichotomous and complementary nature of the gender relation, in which the sexes are specialised in such a way that each lacks half of the human range of qualities. Males are designated protector, females (and young) as protected. At the same time, perversely, males are cast as wielders of the means of coercion, women as 'natural' victims. In*

[79] Ibid. Parpart. p. 12.
[80] Ibid. Parpart. p. 12.
[81] Ibid. Parpart. p. 4.
[82] Eichler, Maya. "*Militarized Masculinities in International Relations*" in Brown Journal of World Affairs, vol. XXI, issue 1(2014) p. 81.

such a gender order, war can seem the fulfilment of gendered destinies."[83]

As mentioned in the previous chapter many scholars have critiqued the essentialist point of view, questioning whether some traits are natural or socially constructed – and thus, if women really naturally vulnerable victims in need of protection. According to Tickner these 'natural traits' is merely a myth, a notion used to legitimize armed conflict. And in reality the myth exposes women to a lot of risks.

"…despite a widespread myth that wars are fought, mostly by men, to protect "vulnerable" people – a category to which women and children are generally assigned – women and children constitute a significant proportion of casualties in recent wars."[84]

Being a casualty is not the only risk the perceived "vulnerable" women face in armed conflict. Wartime rape, sexual exploitation and/or trafficking, being main caretakers and primary providers during conflict, loss of relatives and forced displacement is also risks women face.

Just as the risks are multiple, so are women's roles – also during armed conflict. They serve as combatants in patriarchal military and rebel movements, while others are provided with opportunities for empowerment and access to social realms they would otherwise have been excluded from – e.g. active social and political participation.[85]

So when armed conflicts are justified as being fought to protect "vulnerable" people (women), what it instead ends up doing is putting those people at great risk and undermining the argument used to legitimize the conflict to begin with.

 "When we reveal social practices that support war and that are viable across societies, we find that war is a cultural construction that depends on myths of protection."[86]

The masculine military becomes extra important post-conflict. In transitions from conflict to peace new political leaders are often emerging from the all-male military command where this certain militarized masculinity is the culture. New political leaders are often picked from

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[83] Op.Cit. Cockburn (2013) p. 438-439.

[84] Op.Cit. Tickner. p. 49.
[85] Op.Cit. Arino. p. 24.
[86] Op.Cit. Tickner. p. 51.

the military because of "their nationalist "struggle credentials" and their display of courage under fire, decisiveness and [masculine] leadership skills"[87]. And that typically excludes women completely.

4. 3 Gendered peace processes

While a lot of feminist security literature has focused on gendered wars, it is important to note that "peace processes are as gendered as wars".[88]

In fact even the term 'peace process' is gendered Christine Bell argues:

"The label 'peace process' tends to be used only at the point when the main military protagonists come together and focus on ending violence. The 'male nature' holds true of both internationally driven and domestically driven peace processes. [...] Assuming that the primary aim of a peace process is usually to bring about a military ceasefire, it is inevitable that the process itself will focus on men."[89]

As Bell points out, the main military protagonists coming together at the peace-negotiating table are almost exclusively male. However other stakeholders such as mediators and observers tend also to be men, leaving women "quite often underrepresented at all levels including in international agencies supporting peace negotiations, in negotiation teams representing the warring parties, and in other institutions invited to the negotiation table"[90]

Women tend to be excluded at the official or formal peace process, however the unofficial or informal peace processes is often seen and used as an opportunity for involvement in the public and political arenas and to organize themselves.

These new roles and responsibilities might be in new and formerly inaccessible social, economic and political realm equality. The acquired gains of equality often end, as traditional gender power relations tend to reemerge at formal peace negotiations where women typically are excluded.

That is the exact dilemma Jane L. Parpart discusses in her paper 'Imagined Peace, Gender Relations and Post-Conflict Transformation: Anti-colonial and post-Cold War conflicts'.

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[87] Op.Cit.Parpart. p. 9.
[88] Op.Cit. Arino. p. 4.
[89] Bell, Christine. "*Women Address the Problems of Peace Agreements*" in Peace Work: Women, Armed Conflict and Negotiation, eds. Radhika Coomaraswamy, Dilrukshi Fonseka, New Delhi, Sri Lanka: Women Unlimited (2004)

[90] Op.Cit. Arino. p. 4

"… most anti-colonial and post-Cold War conflicts promised a more gender equal peace, yet this has rarely occurred. Political and economic leadership has remained a largely masculine affair. Women has been tasked with reestablishing the stable families and social order so often imagined as the post-conflict "normal", constraining their access to economic and political activities."[91]

Parpart argues that gendered assumptions of military and citizens as well as a gendered imagined peace are fundamental to understand the limits of gendered change during post-conflict transformations"[92] in anti-colonial and post-Cold War conflicts. Her main argument is, that even though alternative gender practices emerge during conflict, it all remains a temporary change if the gender hierarchies are not confronted and questioned during conflict.[93]

In the chaos, violence and danger of war civilians tend to focus less on questioning gender hierarchies and instead focuses on "imagining a peace that returned to established gender hierarchies"[94] where there were much less uncertainty, chaos and violence.

> *"Traditional and colonial rules of order, particularly gendered rules that regulated marriage, sexual access and familie life, including disciplining young men and women into proper behaviour began to look very attractive. Many civilians began to hope for/imagine a very different future, one that restored social order, particularly."*[95]

However the longing for stability and social order are not enough to explain the resilience of gender hierarchies in transitions. Parpart points to gender and the military as key factors. As military leadership often consists entirely of men "the association of leadership with certain masculine traits"[96] happens and "This practice enabled and legitimated […] the continuing dominance of male leaders, with a few women who play by these rules".[97]

"These gendered practices and assumptions legitimated post-conflict transformations based on patriarchal authority, particularly control of insubordinate women (and men) and sidelined promises of a more gender equitable peace".[98]

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[91] Op.Cit. Parpart. p. 9.
[92] Op.Cit. Parpart. p. 15.
[93] Op.Cit. Parpart.
[94] Op.Cit. Parpart. p. 8.
[95] Op.Cit. Parpart. p. 8.
[96] Op.Cit. Parpart. p. 12.
[97] Op.Cit. Parpart. p. 12.
[98] Op.Cit. Parpart. p. 12.

Julie Arostegui has examined how gender has been confronted and questioned successfully during conflicts in Rwanda and Uganda, where it has led to positive changes like strong legal and policy frameworks around gender equality and women's rights.

Arostegui found that women's advocacy has been critical in this progress and that there were several factors that made the time right for women's participation in advocacy and policy-making in both countries, but especially four stood out:[99]

1) National women's movements was created and drew inspiration from international women's movements on how to get organized and advocate for their rights.

2) Alternative gender roles or a shift in gender relations as conflict left women as the head of households and breadwinners while the men were away fighting. "Many died in the conflicts, or came back unable to resume their previous roles, leaving women to sustain families."[100]

3) *"Political will: the governments realised that they needed to win the support of women. Women had participated in the liberation movements in both Rwanda and Uganda, and their roles in society were changing. Both governments also realised the efficiency of channelling resources through the women's organisations that were forming."*[101]

4) Women's organizations were able to "take advantage of this new political space and bring women's concerns into institution-building"[102].

The wake of a conflict/beginning of a peace process can be an opportunity for women's advocacy, Arostegui argues. However is often argued, as in the case of Myanmar that the priority of a peace process should be the end of armed conflict and not a place for discussions of gender equality or women's issues, which are perceived as cultural norms instead of structural gender dynamic[103]. However if peace processes are designed to take place along gendered norms and "if peace agreements are written, accorded and implemented solely by

[99] Op.Cit. Cockburn (2013) p. 539.

[100] Op.Cit. Cockburn (2013) p. 539.
[101] Op.Cit. Cockburn (2013) p. 539.
[102] Op.Cit. Cockburn (2013) p. 539.
[103] Op.Cit. Arino.

men, the gender dynamics that were present throughout the armed conflict remain unquestioned and intact."[104]

5. Analysis

Using the theories of myth of protection, militarized masculinity and Jane Parpart's imagined peace this chapter will analyze if and how the military has excluded women from the peace process.

5.1 Guardians of the nation and the wives and mothers they protect

For almost 54 years Myanmar's leadership, both of military and civilian institutions, has been entirely male and from the military, excluding women almost entirely from positions of power and leaving the country with a profoundly militarized culture. Cynthia Enloe has defined militarization as a socio-political process in which "individual or political systems either become increasingly dependent upon, controlled and affected by the military".[105]

But how did it come to that? According to Tickner the Myanmar conflict is built on the myth of protection. It was the civilian politicians' alleged inability to manage the ethnic unrest and a threat from ethnic separatism that prompted the military coup in 1962. The Tatmadaw claims it took over power to unify the country, perceiving themselves as "the only reliable guardians of Burma's national survival"[106].

Perceiving and positioning themselves as the guardians of the national interest and survival, saving the nation from the possible disaster brought on by incompetent civilian politicians, is another way of telling just how brave and just the military really are, while also making it clear that the nation is vulnerable and in need of saving.

At the same time the anticolonial notion of positioning the women as the symbol of the nation and the keeper of the country's traditions were in play, and in Myanmar "women were cast as

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[104] Op.Cit. Arino. p. 17

[105] Enloe, Cynthia. "*The Curious Feminist: Searching for Women in a New Age of Empire*" Berkeley: University of California Press (2004) p. 219-220.

[106] Jones, Lee. "*Explaining Myanmar's regime transition: the periphery is central*" in Democratization Vol. 21 No. 5 (2014) p. 785.

wives and mothers of the nation"[107] - also linking the home to the nation.[108]

"The utilization of women as symbols of the nation has been a recurrent theme in Myanmar history […]As such, both within the country and in exile, female participation has dominantly been reasoned around notions of traditional domestic confines and, importantly, the return to these once the conflict is over"[109]

Thus when the Tatmadaw deemed the nation in danger - it was the homes, the traditions and the women that were in dire need of saving and the all male military were the only ones brave and righteous enough to save it/them. – creating and constructing a linkage between the military and masculinity. The military men became justified warriors, saviors and guardians who knew what was right and what the country, the homes, the traditions and the women needed. On the other side of that were the women – or actually some of the roles women have as mothers and wives. They became the reoccurring embodiment and image of all that was and still am good; the home, the traditions and the nation and who were vulnerable and in need of rescue.

There might have been some truth to the Tatmadaw's assessment of the situation in Myanmar. The country was unstable and desire to separate and gain independence were outspoken by several ethnicities. However military intervention did not create a stable Myanmar, instead it created what some calls the longest civil war in modern times, and ethnic groups continue to push for independence or federalism.

By using or even constructing the essentialist perception that women and men are fundamentally and inherent different and that femininity and masculinity exists as opposing dichotomies, they justified their waging of war. The use of a stereotypical military and state security discourse of 'guardians of the nation' constructed a link between masculinity and the military and served to justify the rule of the regime and was and still are used to mask self-interest in seeking to rule the country, pocket profits and secure the Tatmadaw's own future. However it also perpetuated a discriminatory gender hierarchy, excluded women completely from the broad political life and left them subjugated.

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[107]Ikeya, Chie. "*Refiguring Women, Colonialism, and Modernity in Burma*" University of Hawai'I Press (2011) p. 79.
[108] Ibid. Ikeya. p.168.
[109] Op.Cit. Hedström (2016) p. 69.

5.2 Masculinity as an equivalent of the military's physical force

As the Tatmadaw seized power to unify the country[110], it was clear it was to be in the image of the Tatmadaw; Buddhist, Burman and with all male leadership creating what Parpart refers to as "association of leadership with certain masculine traits".[111]

Some of those traits were made clear as the attempt to unify the country was done or attempted done with strength, discipline and of course threats of or actual use of force and it shaped not only the political and economic power, it also constructed and shaped socially notions of masculinity and femininity.

"The military has the power to shape gender roles in Burmese society and construct masculinity as an equivalent of the military's physical force. The visibility of the military, and the lack of women in it, reinforces the perception that women should take on submissive social roles."

The visibility of the all male military furthermore reinforces the perception of men as defenders, active contributors to society, leaders and as the main forces of change.

"The centrality of the military and of security in society leads to a marginalization of women on a symbolic level. Because they are not regarded as capable of defending the country and taking part in security discourse it is no wonder that in the public consciousness the soldier as a defender is male."[112]

To underline what the Tatmadaw perceives as the dichotomous and complementary nature of gender relations "The regime praises Burmese women for attributes such as modesty and obedience, reinforcing the perception of women as passive social actors".[113] The otherness is furthermore reinforced in legislation, where the constitution includes references to women principally as 'mothers' and contends that their reproductive roles are in need of protection.[114]

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[110] Op.Cit. Hedström (2013) p. 5.

[111] Op.Cit. Parpart

[112] Klein, Uta.*"The gender perspective of civil-military relations in Israeli society"* in Current Sociology, vol. 50, issue 5 (2002) p. 679.

[113] Social Watch. "*A grim perspective for Burmese of women*" 06 occasional paper – putting gender economics at the forefront at *Social Watch's website* (2009) < www.socialwatch.org > [27 July 2016] paragraph 15.

[114] Ministry of Information, "*Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar*" (2008) at Burma Library's website <www.burmalibrary.org> [27 July 2016] p. 6., section 32.

The construction of the dichotomous gender roles and militarized masculinity is working. "According to our cultural norms and values, we want men to be leaders and women to be those who sit around men for support. Men have to decide and lead, women have to obey and follow. This is how we are being socialized, and what we have internalized."[115]

One of the main channels for the Tatmadaw to voice their view on gender are the Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs – a committee formed by generals and led by their wives as the" National Focal Point for Women's Affairs" promoting the status of women and girls.[116]

The Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs is assigned to implement programs for the advancement of women. One of the areas the committee is focusing on is the Myanmar culture, promoting ideas focused on culture, traditions and women's part in these.

"As Myanmar opens its doors to the world, foreign influences have entered and to a certain extent, Myanmar cultural norms have come under pressure and this is now a concern to society. Therefore the cultural sub-committee, through video and radio plays, has made concerted efforts to preserve and safeguard the cultural heritage and national characters of Myanmar society. The sub-committee encourages young Myanmar women to uphold Myanmar cultural norms, to love and respect the country and its people, to honour and value parents, teachers and elders, to cherish family and society and safeguard their honour and dignity."[117]

The committee stresses how the country is in need of protection and how it is the women's duty to uphold these Burmese norms – not by force, discipline or strength like the military – but by perceived feminized traits such as love, honor, cherish, value and obeying, again making women passive social actors.

The Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs also carefully sets out Burmese cultural norms (for women) and values and urges women not to go against these norms and values. The norms and values are however restricted to the household.

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[115] Op.Cit. Khen & Muk. p. 25.
[116] Myanmar national Working Committee for Women's Affairs, "Welcome to the MNCWA web site!" at Myanmar national Working Committee for Women's Affairs' website (2001) <mncwa.tripod.com> [27 July 2016]
[117] Myanmar national Working Committee for Women's Affairs, *"Status of Myanmar Women" at* Myanmar national Working Committee for Women's Affairs' website (2001) <mncwa.tripod.com> [27 July 2016]

"In Myanmar family, the husband and wife share equal household responsibilities. The husband provides the financial needs and it is the woman who manages the family decision making in providing food, clothing and schooling etc. The women may go out to work for the social development; they still have the major responsibility to look after the family. The two responsibilities must be balanced for a woman who wishes to lead a harmonious and happy life both at home and in the society. One must be careful not to go against the cultural norms and values attached to our families."[118]

The only thing deemed appropriate for women to do outside of the home is work for social development. Unless governing the country, running successful businesses or fighting in the Tatmadaw or ethnic armies somehow falls under the category of 'social work', these gendered stereotypes coming from the highest levels of government makes it difficult for women to participate in public life – as this is clearly outside of the accepted norm.

These discourses again justifies the Tatmadaw's continued power; they are protecting the Burmese cultural norms now that society, apparently, are concerned that cultural norms are under pressure from foreign influence. This positions the Tatmadaw as the good, just protectors and foreigners as evil suppressors. The discourse can also be used discredit oppositional women, like Aung San Suu Kyi and keep women in the gender hierarchy the military constructed – or face threats if they venture outside the narrow gender roles.

"Cast as 'bearers' of culture, linked to gendered norms that hold women to be foremost reproductive beings, women who do not conform to expected norms face threats of violence, often articulated or manifesting in sexual violence, and are held responsible for the abuse they may encounter. These risks form significant barriers to more women entering the public sphere."[119]

NGO's like 'Alliance for Gender Inclusion in the Peace Process' perceives the committee as proof of the Tatmadaw's paternalistic attitude.

"...the so-called 'know everything' attitude. Men, especially those who are in power, think they know what women need and want, and what they should do for women. Thus, they habitually set programmes and policies without consulting women. This happens within families right up to

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[118] Ibid. Myanmar national Working Committee for Women's Affairs.
[119] Op.Cit. Alliance for Gender Inclusion in the Peace Process. P.11.

national politics."[120]

Ja Nan Lahtaw and Nang Raw argues that women in Myanmar "are particularly inclined to submit to any kind of paternalistic behavior in decision-making involving politics or development"[121] after decades of autocratic regime and poor educational opportunities. Likewise men have been accustomed to expecting and accepting it.

> *"This has also led to a situation in which women in Myanmar tend not to raise concerns themselves but let the men discuss and decide on their behalf. Even in contemporary society, many parents, even amongst the educated and urban dwellers, recommend their soon-to-be married daughters to obey their husbands. In Myanmar society 'respect' is less popular than 'obedience' which demands submission."*[122]

While Ja Nan Lahtaw and Nang Raw's argument may hold some truth to it, there are – especially in recent time – quite a few examples of the opposite, where women let their voices be heard nationally either as activists like Phyo Phyo Aung demonstrating for school reforms and being jailed for inciting the public to commit offenses against the state[123], politicians like Aung San Suu Kyi leading the political party 'National League for Democracy' or with and through NGO's and networks like 'Alliance for Gender Inclusion in the Peace Process', 'Gender Equality Network' and 'Womens League of Burma' demanding the inclusion of women in the peace process amongst other things .

This shows a picture of active women demanding and standing up for change, being brave and active contributors to society and finally being leaders – traits that otherwise has been monopolized by the military.

5.3 Male pipeline to power
Militarized masculinity and access to the military and leadership positions within the military becomes especially important when investigating the Tatmadaw's legal right to power. Through legislative framework the Tatmadaw has secured rights, privileges and influence – something that is largely out of grasp for women as they have limited access to the military

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[120] Op.Cit. Lahtaw & Raw. p. 9.

[121] Op.Cit. Lahtaw & Raw. p. 8.

[122] Op.Cit. Lahtaw & Raw. p. 8.

[123] Gerin, Roseanne."*Myanmar Activist Arrested For Role in Education Reform Protest*" at Radio Free Asia's website. 4 November (2015) <www.rfa.org> [27 July 2016]

and thereby limited access to acquire traits such as leadership and strength that are associated with the military.

Limited access to these legislative secured rights and privileges thus leads to limited access to the peace process – a fact that many NGO such as the Alliance for Gender Inclusion in the Peace Process points to as one of the main barriers for women's inclusion in the peace process:

> *"The male dominance of the UPWC [Union Peacemaking Working Committee] is exacerbated by the 25% quota system in place for the Tatmadaw across all parliaments in Myanmar. This effectively provides a pipeline for men into public office regardless of their skills, expertise or competencies."*[124]

When remaking the constitution in 2008, before the military junta 'stepped down from power', the Tatmadaw made sure to constitutionally secure and protect itself with exemption from civilian oversight and independence from the government. They did so by firstly securing 25% of the seats in Myanmar parliaments – both at upper and lower house – as a constitutional right. Secondly constitutional changes were effectively blocked without military approval as they can only be made with the votes of more than 75% of parliament.

Furthermore the constitution guarantees the Tatmadaw the power to appoint ministers for the ministries of defense, interior and border affairs, giving them full authority over three ministries along with the National Defence and Security Council, an executive body that can "impose martial law, disband Parliament and rule directly if a state of emergency is declared." [125] [126]

Through these provisions the military has constructed a system that entrenches its independence, maintains its influence over the Parliament, establishes legal channels for a return to direct military rule if desired and once again underlines the association of military men or militarized masculinity with leadership and power.[127]

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[124] Op.Cit. Alliance for Gender Inclusion in the Peace Process. p. 12.
[125] MacDonald, Adam P. *"The Tatmadaw's new position in Myanmar politics"* at The East Asia Forum's website. 1 May (2013) <www.eastasiaforum.org> [27 July 2016]

[126] Ibid. MacDonald.
[127] Ibid. MacDonald.

The Tatmadaw's continued presence in every lever of power and every part of the government administration is evident - unfortunately so are women's limited access to the military. While not completely excluded, women have limited access – especially to the decision making level. There are no official statistics about women and their roles in the Tatmadaw available "due to the opaque nature of the military".[128] However "Until October 2013 women were only allowed entry into entirely feminised roles in the army: secretaries, nurses, and support staff".[129]

Opening the military for women may have given of an appearance of a more gender equal military, the division of labor within the military said much more about the gender hierarches at work - associating women and the feminine with caregiving and men and masculinity with power and authority.

"The gender division of labour in nationalist military forces reveals the gendered assumptions underlying military policies in particular conflicts". [130] Instead of a more equal access to the pipeline to power, "The specific training given to men and women, and the particular tasks they are assigned, reinforce the "differentness" of gender"[131] and traditional gendered assumptions remain unchallenged.

In Uta Klein's investigation of women in the Israeli military, Klein notes the same gender division of labor as in Myanmar. However Klein focuses on the combatant or fighter is seen as the symbol of masculinity and how women are excluded particularly from that role. In the case of Israel, until 2000 women were simply not allowed in combat roles even though women were and are drafted just like men. "The exclusion of women had important effects on a material and symbolic level. Symbolically, female soldiers were not to disturb the male preserve and not to disturb the dichotomy of the male protector and the female protected in society".[132]

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[128] Op.Cit. Alliance for Gender Inclusion in the Peace Process. p. 12.
[129] Op.Cit. Alliance for Gender Inclusion in the Peace Process. p. 12.
[130] Op.Cit. Parpart. p. 4.
[131] Op.Cit.D'Amico, pp. 379-84.

[132] Op.Cit. Klein. p. 677.

Thus while publically supporting gender equality and providing an opening for alternative gendered practices by opening the military for women and drafting them as their male counterparts, the military still privileged the traditional gendered assumptions and the linking of military and masculinity.

January 2014 the Tatmadaw allowed its first female leaders. "Lieutenant Colonel Soe Soe Myint and Lieutenant Colonel San Thida Khin became the first female military officers appointed to parliament. Both joined the military in medical roles."[133] With these appointments 2 out of 110 military appointees in the 440-member lower house became women.

It could be seen as a further for alternative gendered practices – women taken on roles previously perceived as masculine - as a step toward a more gender equal Myanmar. However experience shows that this is often not the case, Parpart cautiously warns.

> "…while opening new gendered spaces for some military women (and men) and fueling their hopes for a more gender-equal future, the transformative potential of women combatants and alternative gendered practices in the military has been disappointingly low"[134]

In the case Zimbabwe no female officer got promoted beyond General Staff level. In the Congo/Democratic Republic of Congo conflice women remained absent from the military top leadership, just as in El Salvador, Peru and Columbia where there a few women that held some sort of power, but non with supreme command responsibility. Thus military leadership remains a male domain.[135]

Instead "women's involvement has been intended to complement – rather than question – the male military authority of the armed forces."[136] This making their involvement more for show for show, a notion that Sjoberg and Gentry refers to as 'militarized feminism'. In militarized feminism women's involvement in the military doesn't requires an ability to perform violence, but instead centers on presupposed notions of innocence.[137]

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[133] McLaughlin, Tim. "*First women graduate from officer training*" at Myanmar Times' website, 30 August (2014) < www.mmtimes.com> [27 July 2016] paragraph 5.
[134] Op.Cit. Parpart. p. 6.
[135] Op.Cit. Parpart. p. 6.
[136] Op.Cit. Hedström (2016) p. 67.
[137] Sjoberg, L and C. Gentry. "Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Women's Violence in Global Politics" New York: Zed Books. (2007) p. 59.

In the case of Myanmar Aung San Sui Kyi points out that the female officers potential transformative power are very little no matter what, as "Their decisions, like those of other military representatives, would likely be determined by the commander-in-chief of the armed forces.".[138]

5.4 Lack of political will

During the Myanmar conflict alternative gender practices emerged as described in the previous chapters; women (and men) taking roles that earlier was perceived as masculine, while other women became the sole or primary provider as the men were out fighting or even died fighting.

However these newfound gender practices does not seem to have challenged or questioned the Myanmar gender hierarchy and thus according to Parpart, it remains a temporary change that will change back as soon as peace is restored.

Using Arostegui's four factors for how other countries have succeeded in breaking the gender relations, it becomes clear that there have been some steps towards challenging the gender practices, norms and hierarchy in Myanmar.

Firstly Burmese women's organizations have organized themselves and found a great deal of inspiration and help from international women's organizations. The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 turned out to be a big inspiration for the Burmese women's organizations:

> *"...they learned about the conference and decided to prepare a report on the status of women living on and across the borders of Myanmar . Inspired by the discussions at the conference, the women demanded that women's rights be given equal consideration in the struggle for democracy and that gender issues be put on the agenda. Through contacts with international women's rights agencies, the women were able to secure funding for their initial activities, such as participation at international and regional conferences and human rights workshops."*[139]

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[138] Vandenbrink, Rachel. *"Myanmar Military's First Women Representatives Join Parliament"* at Radio Free Asia's website January (2014) <www.rfa.org> [27 July 2016]

[139] Hedström p. 70.

The national women's organizations "...accelerated their activities in promoting the rights of women and seeking to ensure that women's representatives achieve rightful participation in national reform, peace processes and decisions about the country's future".

Secondly the Myanmar conflict has meant a shift in gender relations as conflict left women as the providers, while the men were away fighting. "...the steep rise in female-headed households and female responsibility in the family [...] the drafting of male soldiers to the front and the prevalence of drug addiction among young men has resulted in a shift in responsibilities"[140]

Womens new responsibilities included roles as community leaders and village leaders organizing thing like relief aid.[141] Other alternative gender practices were seen in the military where the division of labor were changed from only assigning female cadets perceived feminine duties to accepting females in positions perceived as masculine - like an officer. However, just like Parpart warned, the transformational power is very low, especially when the alternative gendered practices constructed and percieved as an exception:

"...the increase in the number of women active in both military and in the civil society is framed as an anomaly, ensuring that their inclusion does not upset gender roles, but is rather seen as an exception: in times of national crisis, everyone is responsible for defending the nation."[142]

It is the third factor where Myanmar hasn't been successful. There has been a lack of political will to change gender relations and women's right:
"Myanmar's political and ethnic leaders appear to lack understanding of their responsibility to implement women's equal rights in decision-making on peace-building and national transition"[143]

Furthermore or maybe because of just that there is no understanding of the need to win the support of women and no opening to take advantage of.

[140] Op.Cit. Hedström & Senarathna. p. 74.
[141] Op.Cit. Hedström & Senarathna. p. 74.
[142] Op.Cit. Hedström & Senarathna. p. 75.
[143] Transnational Institute. "*No Women, No Peace: Gender Equality, Conflict and Peace in Myanmar*" at Transnational Institute's website (2016) <www.tni.org> [27 July 2016] p. 1.

Lastly, however, other political spaces have opened up – and Burmese women's organizations have taken the chance to push their agenda of inclusion and participation in the reform work of the transition, decision-making on all levels and peace process. The international attention following in the wake of the military relinquishing power was an opportunity for advocating gender equality and getting international support to do so and to pressure the Myanmar government. And so they did:

> "*In the past three years, an unprecedented space for advocacy and campaigning on women's rights and gender equality has opened up. Within an extremely short time, the women's movement in Myanmar, and beyond its borders, has risen up to capitalise on this space and use every available inch. A resilience has grown across this movement in the face of countless threats, obstacles, and challenges*"[144]

5.5 Military interest in maintaining gender roles

The question that remains is; why is there a lack of political will to question or change the gender norm, roles and hierarchy? Or maybe the question is; why is there an interest in keeping them?

The answer might be found in Parpart's theory of imagined peace. After decades of violence, rape and killings along with alternative gender roles might leave people wanting to return to a time with peace, where the rules and gender roles might have been worse, but at least clear to everyone and everyone know which role they have to fill.

Or the answer may lay in the combination of essentialized construction of masculinity and femininity along with a militarized masculinity, the myth of protection and the military's desire and need to maintain power.

The essentialized construction of masculinity and femininity as opposing dichotomies where women are in need of protection and the men are strong and brave protectors is important for the military, where they seek to 'separate the men from the boys' – or even more

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[144] Op.Cit. Faxon et al. p. 477.

importantly women. "The military as an institution is thus sustained by this gender differentiation."[145]

The gender differentiation, militarized masculinity along with the myth of protection from ethnic separatism provided the Tatmadaw with grounds for waging war. However now that the conflict is seemingly coming to an end without a victorious party, the Tatamadaw needs to protect themselves – from 'theft' of the fortune they extracted during the decade long conflict, prosecution for wartime crimes, jail or even worse.

To ensure protection the military has introduced limited democracy with special privileges for the Tatmadaw mentioned in the previous chapter. This is a way to secure that a democratic transition can happen - or it might be an excuse to get sanctions against the country lifted and get foreign investment in the country so the military can extract even more money while still in power, though not directly.

No matter the motives for the military's embankment into limited democracy, D'Amico's argument that the military is sustained by the gender differentiation suggests that as long as the military are in power – directly of indirectly- they have an interest in maintaining the gender roles and hierarchy that they played a big part in constructing and that now sustains them. This, however, undermines work towards building sustainable peace according to Parpart.[146]

6. Conclusion

This paper set out to investigate why women are excluded from Myanmar's peace process by using theories on myth of protection, militarized masculinity and Jane Parpart's theory of imagined peace, gender relations and post conflict transformation.

Investigating the socially constructed notions of masculinity and femininity that emerged during and after the conflict showed a gendered dichotomous construction of femininity and masculinity in Myanmar, one that links men and masculinity with the military as protectors and leaders and women and femininity with maternal qualities and care-giving.

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[145] Op.Cit. D'Amico. P. 1.
[146] Op.Cit. Parpart.

The Tatmadaw has and continues to maintain masculinity and femininity as opposites and stresses the different roles and responsibilities of each gender. First they used the construction to justify the waging of war as they had to protect the country, the homes and thereby the women from a country threaten by ethnic separatism.

Later on the notion was sustained by only having institutions governed by men only. This produced and recreated norms and practices linking men, masculinity, military and leadership and men's presence within these spaces looked natural, unquestionable and beyond discussion .It became normalized and resilient and as a result women's voices became delegitimizing, leaving them depoliticized as all deciding power were in the hands of men.

According to Parpart the resilience of these patriarchal forces and the failure to confront them during the conflict that has kept women from the peace process.

There were attempt to challenge the gender hierarchy during the conflict. Alternative gender practices emerged in both civil society and the military, however they remained temporary. Women's organizations united and did advocacy work and campaigns to get women included at the decision-making level – both in Parliaments and at the peace process. The lobby work almost paid off, as their proposal to include a quota of 30% women present in the NCA, got the support from the EAOs. In the end, however, the government rejected the proposal and as result very few women were included in the both the negotiating and implementing of the NCA.

The Tatmadaw has gradually opened the military for women, which seems to give hope for a more gender equal future. However it does not seem to give women more agency. They are barely present, just like the intentions of including women in the peace process.

This paper has shown a link between the tenacity of the patriarchal forces that the military has been a huge part in constructing and maintaining and the continuing power of the nationalistic military. The Tatmadaw is sustained by the gender hierarchy and other-ring of others outside the military and thus has no interest in changing these. This fact undermines

the work towards building sustainable peace as the Tatmadaw continues to enjoy a high level of power secured in the country's legal framework.

Unless these gender roles and notions, that are some of the conditions that made war possible in the first place, are challenged "…Myanmar's peace process will be like so many others: exclusive and unsustainable. It will reinforce existing power inequalities rather than changing them for more inclusive and democratic arrangements. The voices and experiences of women will be missing from post-war initiatives and arrangements."[147]

An opportunity has presented itself as Aung San Suu Kyi and her opposition party National League for Democracy won the 2015 general elections.

"A new government was elected in November last year. This is an excellent opportunity for them to show that they are serious about the democratic transition. However, if the conversation continues to be as male-dominated and one-sided as it was during the UPC, opportunities to make the transition, and the peace process, both inclusive and democratic will be lost."[148]

The constitution bans her from being president, however Aung San Suu Kyi has accepted the position as State Counsellor, but officially announced that she is 'above the president', in charge and setting the path for Myanmar along with the rest of the government. This also gives hope for a more gender equal future for Myanmar, however getting a women to run the country, the transition and the peace process is no guarantee for a more gender equal nation, unless she starts changing the gendered logic that privileges certain masculine traits over femininities.

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