The Big Y:
Institutional Legitimacy Considerations
for Gender Inclusion Initiatives to
Promote Gender Equality in Different
Cultural Contexts

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Master's Thesis

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Institutional Legitimacy Considerations for Gender Inclusion Initiatives to Promote Gender Equality in Different Cultural Contexts.

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Abstract

In a world where gender equality has become a common topic within all sectors of society, it is due to affect decision-making one way or the other. Inclusion and gender equality are interrelated concepts, the former leading to the latter in most cases, and work with social norms at multiple levels of society. However, the social norms favoring gender equality do not emerge out of nothing. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) play a significant role in altering, creating, and distributing social norms and can thus act as agents of change. Social norms and assumptions tied to gender are culturally embedded, and confusion about an organization's level of gender inclusion can emerge when one of the binary genders is emphasized, e.g., in the name. This is the case for the global organizations Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), which both actively work to promote and implement gender equality in their activities. Because of the similarities of these two organizations' ideologies, there are cases where they have joined on a national level into one organization, which helps to alleviate the confusion of who is welcome and who is not. This makes one wonder why there are not more national organizations that have joined into one, considering the impact NGOs have on social norms and the effect these, as well as inclusion, have on gender equality.

This thesis research was conducted as a qualitative case study with Denmark, which has one joint organization, as the country of comparison. It investigates four of the Danish organization's international partners based on primary data from interviews and field work, as well as secondary data from online documents, to allow triangulation. The study uses institutional theory and legitimacy theory to investigate the foundation for legitimately joining the two organizations within different cultural contexts concerning gender equality through inclusion. Structured by three research questions, the study first analyzes the regulative foundation for legitimacy for joining the two organizations within the four partner countries. Secondly, it analyzes the foundation for normative and cultural-cognitive legitimacy for joining the two organizations in the two organizations. Lastly, in the instance of joining the two organizations in each partner country, some relevant considerations and strategic recommendations are provided from a multilevel legitimacy perspective. The study finds that, in most cases, a foundation for legitimacy can be identified and angled strategically in the instance of joining the two organizations to further gender equality through inclusion. However, in one case, there is little to no foundation to be found for legitimately joining the two organizations with this goal, as gender-unequal practices are too culturally embedded and reinforced by social norms and cultural expectations. Cultural context is always important to consider when doing this type of research. Nevertheless, it is not necessarily a barrier as much as it is an opportunity to enlighten and engage in more conscious conduct.

Keywords: Institutions; Organizations; NGOs; Legitimacy; Gender equality; Inclusion; Social norms; Culture.

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List of Abbreviations

Appx.	Appendix	**PS**	Palestine
CA	Cameroon	**SDG**	Sustainable Development Goal
DK	Denmark	**UA**	Ukraine
(I)NGO	(International) Non-Governmental Organization	**YMCA**	Young Men's Christian Association
MM	Myanmar	**YWCA**	Young Women's Christian Association

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1. Introduction

We live in a world where the gender equality agenda has been growing exponentially in the past four decades ("Global Issues - Gender Equality," n.d.). This gender equality debate is affecting every aspect of living, from the conditions in the workplace to the gender roles in the home and, in general, questioning and challenging how people are treated and spoken to on all levels of society. Equality is directly connected to inclusion to achieve the aforementioned (Köllen et al., 2018). Inclusion is the endless effort to ensure that people can fully participate and are valued in all aspects of society (Tan, 2019). Understanding the production and reproduction of exclusion is a crucial part of inclusion (Nkomo, 2013). Inclusion can be a means to dissolve hierarchies and foster equality (Köllen et al., 2018). Equality is equal access to opportunities and resources stemming from moral values, essentially the goal of inclusion practices. Often equality is measured as a moral indication for organizations, legitimizing the inclusive measures taken by these (Köllen et al., 2018).

Perceived norms characterized by equality and inclusion can lead to lower levels of prejudice and discrimination (Schachner, 2019), essentially rewriting social and cultural norms. Social norms are the expected perceptions of how people ought to behave based on shared beliefs (Bicchieri & Mercier, 2014; The Social Norms Learning Collaborative, 2021). It has become increasingly recognized globally that context and social norms play an important part in behavior and altering this. "Social norms are central to how social order is produced and reproduced in society and, as such, reinforce power status" (The Social Norms Learning Collaborative, 2021, p. 7), which means that gender equality is dependent on changing social norms and power hierarchies through, e.g., inclusion and access. Norms change organically but can also be created to eliminate other norms or support new ones (Bicchieri & Mercier, 2014). Achieving gender equality is dependent on changing and eliminating certain norms in society. External actors can challenge normative beliefs to promote gender equality and soften the transition to new emerging norms (Bicchieri & Mercier, 2014). These external actors can be NGOs as they "inspire normative change and provide transparency" (Beyer, 2007, p. 513). NGOs can have significant effects on social norms as drivers of change (Murali, 2019; Lage & Brandt, 2008) by contributing to normative objectives (Elkin & McLean, 1976), impacting policy formulations and their role in implementing these as well as lobbying to empower and include certain social groups in society (Lage & Brandt, 2008), by helping to establish and formalize new norms for these to have a meaningful impact (Clark, 1995), and by promoting, monitoring, and implementing norms through internalized practices (Schneiker, 2017). Themudo claims that "the

nonprofit sector is believed to play a fundamental role in many areas of social improvement, including gender equality" (2009, p. 680), and similarly, according to Nkomo (2013), "organizations have a major role to play in addressing issues of exclusion and inequality in the broader society and the community" (p. 588). In other words, NGOs have the power to change social norms, thus promoting gender equality and acting as agents of change.

1.1 The Organization(s)

This study works with two large international non-governmental organizations (INGOs). These two major global youth movements are based on religion and gender, the YMCA and the YWCA. Both organizations have existed all over the world for decades. The YMCA was established in 1844 in London ("Our History," n.d.) and has led to the World Alliance of YMCAs (World YMCA), which is an international alliance of around 120 national YMCA branches. The mission of the YMCA "is to empower young people and communities worldwide to build a just, sustainable, *equitable* and *inclusive* world, where every person can thrive in body, mind and spirit" ("Empowering Young People Since 1844," n.d., emphasis added).
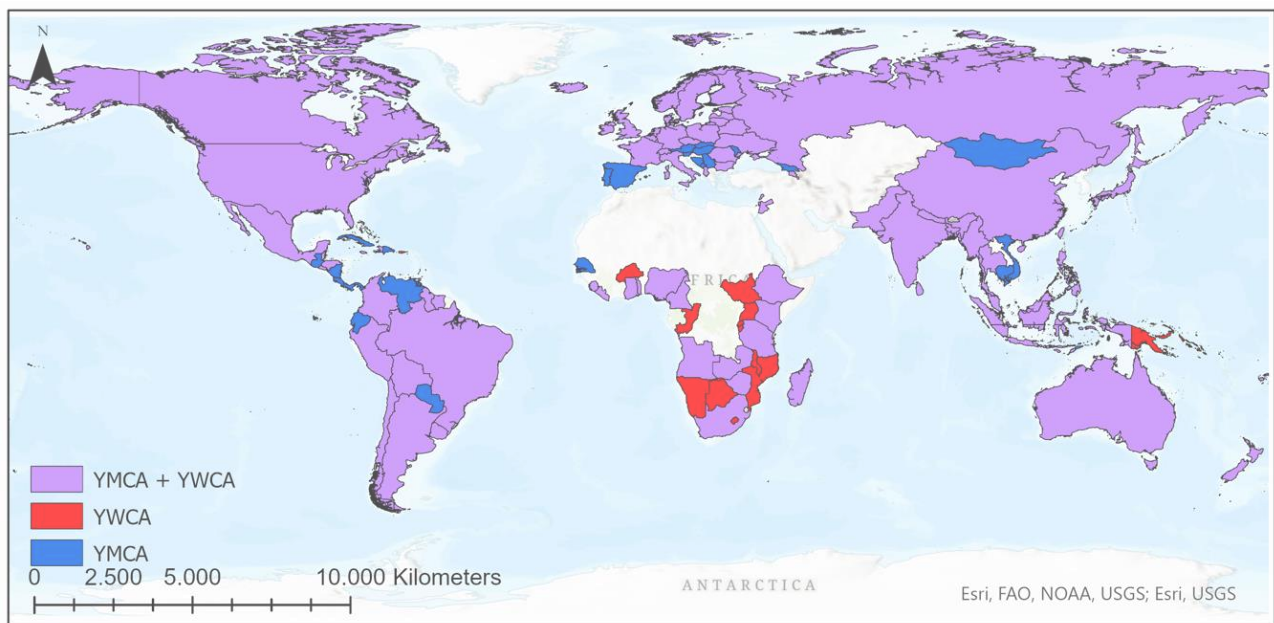
Figure 1.1: Map of countries with national YMCA and YWCA branches. The purple countries have YMCA and YWCA branches; the red countries have only YMCA branches; and the blue countries have only YWCA branches.

The YWCA can be traced back to 1855 in the United Kingdom and properly caught ground in 1877, where it spread globally. The World YWCA is the international alliance of national YWCAs "at the forefront of the fight for women's rights around the world" and is present in more than 100 countries ("WorldYWCA History," n.d.). In *Figure 1.1,* the global scope of the two organizations is illustrated.

The YMCA and YWCA organizations have national branches in 82 countries (purple); the YMCA has national branches in additionally 33 countries (blue), whereas the YWCA has an additional 18 national branches (red).

Both World alliances represent the ideologies and methods of the respective organizations. For this case, it is relevant to investigate the attitudes and work in relation to gender equality. The YMCA

> believes in the power of young people and communities to promote and advance justice, peace, equity and human rights for all. We are becoming a global voice in the fight against systemic discrimination, *inequity*, injustice and racism in all its forms, amplifying the voices of young people and communities where it is active to ensure that *everyone´s* voice is heard. (Elsig, 2022, emphasis added)

Furthermore, the international organization expresses that it pledges "to continue to work towards ensuring gender equality, for a world where every young person feels *equal,* empowered and *included* regardless of their identity or background" ("International Women's Day 2021," 2021, emphasis added). The YMCA considers gender equality in its work and agendas by, e.g., doing themed co-labs during the 2022 World Council[1] (Elsig, 2022) and actively engaging in gender-related political events ("International Women's Day 2021," 2021; "Are we getting closer to gender equality or further away?," 2020; "Advocating for a just, equal and inclusive world," 2021). The YWCA focuses on activities for girls, women, and families "across all faiths, cultures, and religions" ("World YWCA Overview," n.d.). The international organization is "grounded in local communities, and rooted in the transformational power of women" ("World YWCA About Us," n.d.). It works with matters such as "Young Women's Transformative Leadership … Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights … Violence Against Women (Young Women) and Girls … Women, Peace with Justice and Security" ("WorldYWCA Our Work," n.d.).

The YMCA was originally created based on providing young Christian men with a place of refuge and to act on social matters however, it "now welcomes *men and women* of any or no faith, of any race or background" ("About YMCA," n.d., emphasis added). The YWCA generally only offers activities for girls, women, and families. What message does this send to the young people participating and wishing to participate in the activities offered by both organizations? People who

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[1] The YMCA World Council "is the highest governing body of the global YMCA Movement" ("World Council," n.d.).

are unfamiliar with the organizations might misunderstand this. The two organizations have a clear binary gender division vis-á-vis name and are also very old as well as based on Christianity. This might suggest, to some, that the organizations are of the more conservative kind, including when it comes to gender and equality. However, based on the topics on which the YMCA and YWCA base their activities and international work, it is fair to claim that they are both organizations that are willing and capable of changing as society changes, as well as interested in acting towards furthering gender equality.

1.2 Presenting the problem

In a few national cases, the two old gender- and religion-based organizations have chosen to become one joint organization with a common cause. The first country to do this was Norway, where the joining of the national YMCA and YWCA[2] can be traced back to 1894 ("Norway – National Council of YMCAs," n.d.). Later, other Nordic countries followed. In Sweden, in 1966, the two organizations joined under the name KFUM-KFUK and later, in 2011, chose to only go under the abbreviation KFUM ("Vår Historia," n.d.) where the '*M*' stands for Människor, the Swedish word for human beings ("Om KFUM," n.d.). In Denmark[3], the organization joined in 1978, after many years of close cooperation between the two separate organizations before this merger ("Historien Bag," n.d.). Also, the Icelandic national branch, KFUM og KFUK Iceland, is one joint organization ("YMCA/YWCA Iceland," n.d.). Besides the Nordic countries, the Baltics have joint national YMCA and YWCA branches. There are YMCA/YWAC Latvia since 1937 ("Latvia – National Council of YMCAs," n.d.), Estonian YMCA-YWCA since 1994 ("Estonia – National Council of YMCAs," n.d.), and YMCA-YWCA Lithuania since 1994 ("Lithuania – National Council of YMCAs," n.d.). Lastly, Switzerland, in 1998, also merged into one organization, the YMCA/YWCA Switzerland ("Switzerland – National Council of YMCAs," n.d.). These countries with one joint organization (orange countries) can be seen as illustrated in *Figure 1.2*.

Considering the number of countries where the YMCA and YWCA have national branches (purple countries), the number of countries with one joint organization is underwhelming. Out of the 82 countries in which both the YMAC and the YWCA have national branches, the two organizations are joint as one in only eight. That is less than ten percent of the national branches.

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[2] Norwegian name: Kristelig forening for Unge Kvinner – Kristelig Forening for Unge Menn Norge (KFUK-KFUM Norge) ("KFUK-KFUM," n.d.).
[3] Danish name: Kristelig Forening for Unge Mænd og Kristelig Forening for Unge Kvinder Danmark (KFUM og KFUK i Danmark).

They have all acted as joint organizations for decades successfully, which makes one wonder why not more national branches have done the same.
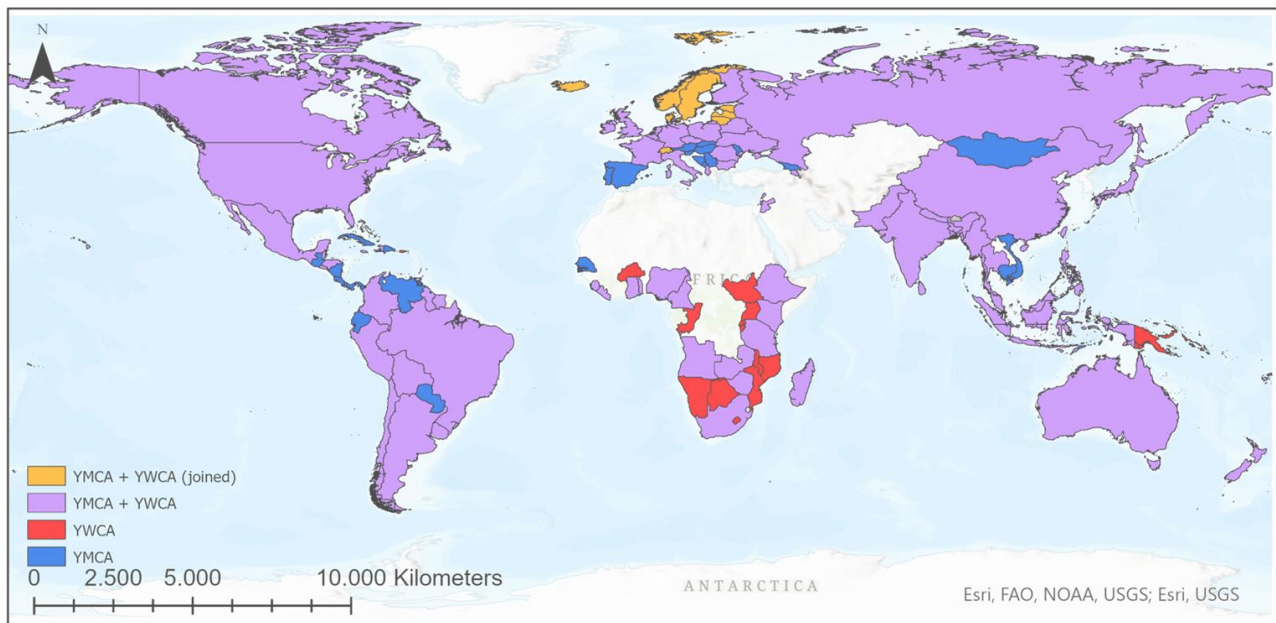

Figure 1.2: Map of countries with national YMCA and YWCA branches showing the countries where the organizations are one joint (orange countries).[4]

As mentioned, organizations play a big part in changing and challenging social norms. They are crucial when it comes to promoting and developing inclusion practices, and according to Köllen et al. (2018), most scholars assume that a high level of inclusion directly relates to a high level of equality. Considering the role of organizations and the importance of inclusion when it comes to equality, it is relevant to look at these in relation to the gender equality debate. Initial perceptions of gender inclusion and equality from unaware target groups when hearing a gender-related name of an organization, such as the YMCA and YWCA, can create confusion regarding who is welcome in the two organizations. Furthermore, not having access to certain arenas and opportunities does not exactly correlate with the two organizations' work towards gender equality, as inclusion is a determinator of this.

Because of the power NGOs have over social norms and how they can challenge and change these by promoting gender equality through inclusion, the problem this thesis seeks to address is: *Considering the scale of the gender equality debate, the role of organizations in impacting social norms, and the gender equality effects of inclusion, why have not more national YMCAs and YWCAs*

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[4] Data for *figures 1.1* and *1.2* were collected from "Find Your YWCA" (n.d.) and "YMCA Worldwide" (n.d.).

merged into one organization? This problem formulation is supported and further focused by three research questions (RQ):

- *Research question 1:* What is the national status of gender equality vis-á-vis political initiatives and commitments, and thus the foundation for regulative legitimacy, of each respective country?

- *Research question 2:* What are some of the differences/similarities vis-á-vis gender norms and culture, which potentially hinder/support a legitimate merger of the two organizations, in each respective country?

- *Research question 3*: Would joining the two organizations into one in each respective country be a valid and smart choice vis-á-vis legitimacy?

Besides further defining the paper's focus, these three research questions will help structure the analysis, providing a guideline and general frame.

1.3 Thesis relevance

Not much has been written about this angle on actions toward gender equality. The closest study to this one that could be found was by Elkin and Mclean (1976), who investigated different scenarios of cooperation between the YMCA and the YWCA in Canada. They investigated four scenarios of cooperation, one of them being national amalgamation. Initially, ideological support was expressed for this scenario, and commissions were set up to implement it. However, concerns of the YWCA regarding losing their identity, which was "the particular concerns of women in contemporary society" (Elkin & McLean, 1976, p. 23), if the two organizations joined, were expressed. On a local level, some associations joined, but a national amalgamation has yet to be realized. One of the points of the ideological support for amalgamation was the rising trends of men and women existing on increasingly equal terms, which should allow women to participate on equal terms with men in one organization. Much has changed regarding gender equality since 1976. It is, therefore, relevant to investigate the two gender-named organizations from this point of view regarding the potential of joining the two organizations. The researcher only being able to find one slightly similar study to the one of this thesis suggests that there is a research gap within this specific area of study concerning equality through inclusion in NGOs. This thesis attempts to fill this gap by conducting a case study to create a general understanding and conceptualization of the problem. Further academic contribution can be argued as this thesis accounts for some limitations and criticisms of the theories by implementing these in the

analytical framework and mobilizing the theories in less common ways. Furthermore, the general public contributions of this thesis consist of the recommendations for organizations to legitimately alter norms and subsequently foster equality by creating a better understanding of the legitimacy process and relevant considerations in the instance of joining the two organizations.

2. Methodology

The objective of this paper was to investigate the potential reasons why not more national branches have one joint YMCA-YWCA organization in countries where they currently act as two separate organizations. To meet this thesis objective, a general foundation for legitimacy within different cultural contexts was established, as well as the do-ability and desirability of joining the two organizations based on gender equality. Several of the methodological considerations of this study can be traced back to grounded theory. Grounded theory is a systemic yet flexible approach to processing and analyzing data (Charmaz & Bryant, 2008). The aspects tied together with grounded theory used in this study were comparative analysis (Mills, 2008), document analysis (Bowen, 2009), and coding (Benaquisto, 2008). The base of this study was a case study method combined with grounded theory.

2.1 Research Strategy

Since the research of this paper focused on the international partnerships of a national branch of a specific organization, a qualitative case study as a research strategy was appropriate. A case study is an intense study of a particular unit (Devare, 2015, p. 2). More precisely, "a case study identifies the expected, predictable aspects of an event, while ideally it also captures additional but less quantifiable detail, such as the *cultural context*, that potentially asserts a causal role as well" (Johnson, 2011, p. 293, emphasis added). When looking into partnerships with other countries, it is always relevant to consider the cultural context, i.e., a 'less quantifiable detail.' A case study can be conducted in several ways. However, an instrumental case study is the most relevant for this case since it "is the study of a case [e.g., person, specific group, occupation, department, organization] to provide insight into a particular issue, redraw generalizations, or build theory. In instrumental case research, the case facilitates understanding of something else" (Grady, 2010, p. 474). This approach is relevant as the paper seeks to create understanding (insight) on the potential reasons why not more national branches have chosen to join into one organization (a specific case) considering the gender equality debate (a

particular issue). When conducting an instrumental case study, the subject is, in most cases, known before being done, where the design of the case study has been affected by a theory or method established beforehand. This was also the case for this case study. It should be noted that a case study cannot result in statistic-based generalization. It, however, creates a basis for patterns and themes to emerge, which can then be compared to other cases (Grandy, 2010; Devare, 2015).

2.2 Case selection

As described earlier, there are eight countries where the national branches of the YMCA and the YWCA act as one joint organization. For this case, the Danish YMCA-YWCA organization (YMCA-YWCA DK) was chosen as the case country of comparison. This decision was based on multiple grounds. Looking at Denmark's general ranking on the most recent Global Gender Gap Report (World Economic Forum, 2022), it is placed at number 32. Besides Estonia (number 52), Denmark has the lowest ranking out of the eight countries[5]. Since a vast majority of the countries with two separate organizations are ranked lower than the eight ones where they act as one joint organization, the country of comparison with one joint organization should be one of the lowest ranked out of the eight. This means that the country of comparison with one joint organization will be closest vis-á-vis gender equality to most of the countries which have two separate organizations. Based solely on this argument, Estonia would be the most logical choice. However, there are subsequent factors affecting the choice of Denmark. For example, the researcher has first-hand experience with YMCA-YWCA DK through previous research, academic internship as a global intern, and ongoing volunteer work with one of the organization's international partnerships. This means that the researcher had great access to knowledge, data, and guidance within the Danish organization, which would not have been the case with the Estonian YMCA-YWCA.

As mentioned, the YMCA-YWCA DK has multiple international partnerships with YMCAs from various countries. It has official partnerships with YMCA East Jerusalem in Palestine ("Palæstina," n.d.), YMCA South Africa and YMCA Cameroon ("Y-Glocal," n.d.), YMCA Lutsk and YMCA Lviv in Ukraine ("Local2Local," n.d.), and YMCA Myanmar ("Myanmar," n.d. a). In the Global Gender Gap Report (World Economic Forum, 2022), vis-á-vis general gender equality, the partner countries are ranked as follows: Ukraine at number 81, Cameroon at 97, and Myanmar at

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[5] The rankings of the remaining six countries: Iceland nr. 1; Norway nr. 3; Sweden nr. 5; Lithuania nr. 11; Switzerland nr. 13; Latvia nr. 26 (World Economic Forum, 2022).

106 (Palestine is not included in the report). All partner countries mentioned are part of the United Nations except for Palestine. Even though Palestine meets the qualifications of a UN membership and wishes to join, they have yet to become a member (UN Affairs, 2022).
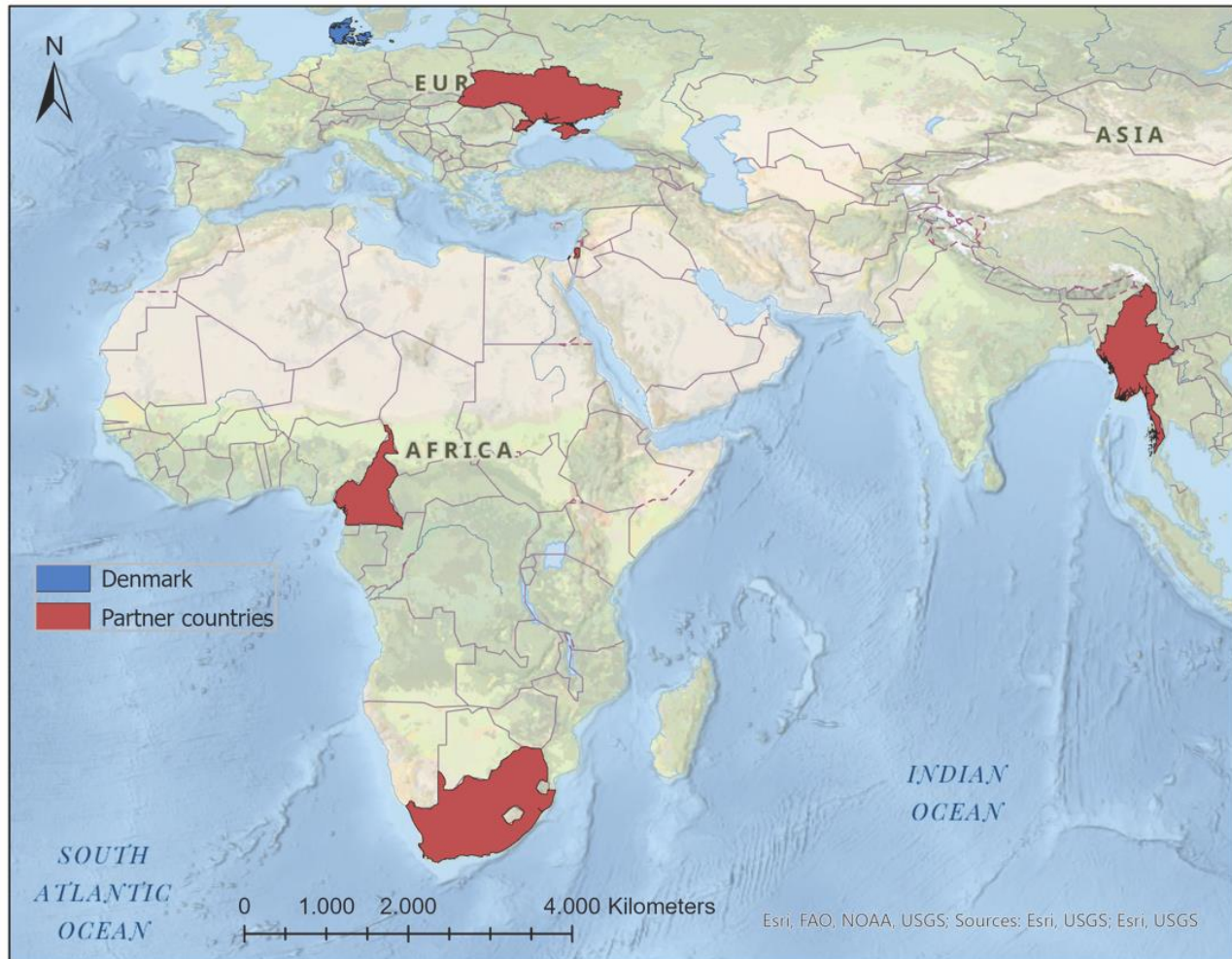
Figure 2.1: Map of the locations of the YMCA-YWCA DK's partnerships.

Considering that gender equality is a UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), it is relevant to consider whether or not the partner countries resonate with these goals. It is also important to mention that the YMCA-YWCA DK only has partnerships with other YMCAs. The reason for this is undocumented. However, it can be speculated that this is because, as mentioned previously, YMCAs create activities for all, whereas the YWCA limits its activities to women and girls. This means that the target group of the work within the partnerships is the broadest for the YMCA-YWCA DK when working with other YMCAs.

As shown in *Figure 2.1,* the YMCA-YWCA DK's partner countries are widely spread globally over three continents: Europe, Asia, and Africa. These countries are very different from

Denmark on many levels, such as culture in general, but for all mentioned countries, also concerning armed conflicts[6]. Furthermore, the countries chosen for this case study already have a connection to YMCA-YWCA DK through their respective partnerships with the organization. Therefore, they had prior knowledge of the Danish organization and thus knew from firsthand experience that one joint organization can work successfully. With this knowledge in mind, it was interesting to investigate the potential reasons not to have one joint organization as opposed to two separate organizations vis-á-vis the gender equality debate.

2.3 Choice of empirical data

The data collected for this study were complementary primary and secondary data which allowed for triangulation and context. The qualitative data was collected through primary approaches, as well as accumulated through secondary sources.

2.3.1   Primary qualitative data

Representatives from YMCA-YWCA DK's partner countries were invited for a networking event, Global Week, in Denmark, as an extension of the Danish organization's biennial National Assembly from the days 11th to the 13th of November 2022 (Landsmøde, n.d.) to experience its way of governance. Unfortunately, not all guests could participate in the Global Week due to visa issues, which meant that no representatives from South Africa could come, and only one from Cameroon. Since South Africa could not attend, this partner country was not included and analyzed in this study because of the lack of access to primary data. An online interview could have been conducted. However, it would not have had the same conditions as an interview in person in relation to participating in the Global Week networking activities and the experience of the National General Assembly. It can be argued that neither of the interviewees was explicitly chosen by the researcher so much as they were accessible and happened to meet the research aims, arguably reducing selection bias (Smith & Noble, 2014).

Interviews. Since the representatives from the partner countries were gathered in Denmark, there was a unique opportunity to interview them. The interviews were semi-structured with

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[6] The Ukraine-Russia conflict; Myanmar under military control; The Palestine-Israel conflict; Cameroon in armed conflict against Boko Haram.

some prepared but open-ended questions (Ayres, 2008). A list of the questions used for the interviews can be found in Appendix A. Conducting a semi-structured interview means that the researcher can get unique, in-depth answers while still determining the topics discussed during the interview (Ayres, 2008). This type of interview also allows for the researcher to clarify the questions asked and ask for the interviewee to clarify their answers (Brinkmann, 2014, p. 286), which is an advantage as a language barrier can be a weakness when conducting a semi-structured interview with non-native English speakers (Kakilla, 2021). The interviewees were interviewed individually to ensure the answers were their own and not colored by others' answers, as can be the risk with a group interview.

The interviewed participants were between the ages 18 and 32, which fits within the target group of the YMCA-YWCA DK (and the YMCA in general) when it comes to goals and activities, which mainly target young people ("About YMCA," n.d.). The participants were a mix of gender, ethnicity, nationality, age, and religious belief. Eight interviews were conducted. The eight interviews were distributed among the partner countries as follows: One interviewee from Cameroon (Jean); one interviewee from Myanmar (Aung); three interviewees from Ukraine (Diana, Alina, and Natacha); and three interviewees from Palestine (Abdel, Aisha, and Yousef). All have been given pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

The eight interviews were transcribed in a simple manner since the focus was on topical content. The transcripts have been edited for clarity by omitting words like 'uhm' and 'like,' as well as word repetitions. The square brackets were used to add clarification and/or context. The transcripts in the appendices were divided by country: Myanmar in Appendix B, Ukraine in Appendix C, Cameroon in Appendix D, and Palestine in Appendix E. Since some countries only had one interviewee, nothing general can be said solely based on the interviews. However, all the interviews were supplemented by additional data collected subsequently.

Field Diary. During the Global Week networking event, the researcher kept a diary for a later prepared evaluation report for an external organization funding the event. In previous studies, the researcher had made observational field notes before, which affected the method by which the diary was kept. The diary contains the thoughts and notes of the researcher, written down at the end of each day based on sporadic notes taken during each day and the recollections of conversations, activities, observations, and situations. According to Blevins (2018), this is the best way to take field notes to recall the situations lived. The researcher was an active participant in all of the activities conducted during Global Week and thus had firsthand impressions and experiences alongside the

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international guests while still having different backgrounds and, thus, different points of departure when interpreting experiences. This can be argued to fit the observer role type defined as the 'active membership' role (Marvasti, 2013). There was a natural difference between the researcher and the international guests, as the researcher worked as an intern at YMCA-YWCA DK and did not share accommodations with the guests during the week. This no doubt affected how the guests acted and spoke around the researcher. However, this was inevitable.

Since the primary purpose of the diary was not research, the field diary had a background role among the collective data sets. The field diary entries can be seen in Appendix F. The notes in the diary were edited afterward for clarity, anonymization, and in some cases, to add emphasis. This process was helpful to recall the experience and added to the basis for accumulating additional data.

2.3.2   Secondary qualitative data

Based on the eight interviews conducted and the experiences of the Global Week networking event, the researcher gained a general idea of some cultural gender norms related to the problem of this thesis. In order to triangulate the interviews and field diary notes, additional qualitative data was collected from secondary sources in the form of documents available online. The documents consisted of reports, indexes, articles, surveys, and journals. The reports and indexes were chosen based on if they sufficiently mentioned all five countries within the topic of interest to achieve the most streamlined source. In a source looking into SDG achievements, Palestine was not represented. However, an appropriately relevant report made in cooperation between the State of Palestine and the UN regarding the SDGs was used instead. Furthermore, additional data on the cultural aspects of norms within each country was retrieved by searching on Google. The researcher used the same search words to achieve the most similar foundation for identifying the sources concerning the respective partner countries: *Gender norms in *country**. Based on these searches, the researcher picked some of the results from the first Google page, which presented examples of gender norms in the respective country, to either support or challenge the claims made in the interviews as well as the data from the reports and indexes on the SDGs. Overall, the purpose of this data was to triangulate the interviews and fieldnotes and provide additional data and context.

In Appendix G, the sources used as data for each respective country are presented, as well as some added context to each source concerning credibility and authenticity; if the provided

information is even/uneven in relation to details included about the subject; as well as comprehensive/selective about the coverage of the subject (Bowen, 2009). Collecting and analyzing data through different methods instead of a single dataset reduces the impact of collection bias (Bowen, 2009; Smith & Noble, 2014).

2.3.3   Data processing method

For this study, the collected datasets were processed as an initial part of the analysis through coding. Coding is a systematic process where the raw data turns into tangible ideas and concepts (O'Reilly, 2009). The codes ascribed to words, sentences, and paragraphs can be based on concepts (concept/theory-driven codes) which is the knowledge of the subject which the researcher already has, or based on data (data-driven codes) which emerges from the data during the coding process (Benaquisto, 2008). The data for this study was coded systematically and repetitively with colors and comment features. The initial coding was based on predetermined theory-driven codes and subsequently with data-driven codes that emerged in the multiple readthroughs. When nothing new or interesting emerged, the next step was initiated. More focused coding was conducted based on the first step of open coding, where patterns, questions, and categories were determined and structured. Also, the researcher started to act more analytically on the questions and ideas which had emerged to start writing the analysis. The codes and themes can be seen in Appendix H.

2.4   Method of analysis

An initial document analysis was made before and during the data processing stage for the secondary data. Document analysis is used to review and evaluate documents systematically (Bowen, 2009; Prior, 2008). Documents can: provide context; foster additional questions and supplementary data; be used to track development and change; and verify data findings from different sources (Bowen, 2009). This method can be efficient because of availability and cost-effectiveness. It is stable and exact as well as provides broad coverage of unaffected (by the research process) information (Bowen, 2009). Document analysis was complementary to the primary data collection and allowed data triangulation. A limitation of this approach is the risk of insufficient detail within documents created for purposed not directly related to the study (Bowen, 2009). However, this limitation became less significant by using documents from several sources combined with primary interviews and field notes.

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Overall, this study's primary and secondary data were analyzed comparatively. A comparative analysis is a frequent approach in qualitative research and case studies (Mills, 2008). The study included different levels of analysis based on different primary and secondary data sources. The data was compared analytically, which helped to, e.g., determine the levels of similarity each partner country has to Denmark based on examples from the data. The main unit of comparison was Denmark, but the findings were also cross-compared. In the case of analysis bias (Smith & Noble, 2014), a certain amount of this was inevitable. However, conscious efforts were made to reduce this throughout the analysis stage of the study.

2.5 Choice of theory

The intersection of social sectors, e.g., economic and cultural, creates the conditions for gender equality change. This study focused on the legitimate foundation for gender equality through inclusion and changing social norms. However, other social sectors no doubt affect the process and should be investigated further in a separate study. As the focus was on two specific organizations and looking into this on various levels of social and cultural aspects, it was relevant to include institutional theory to investigate their way of conduct and foundation for legitimacy within different contexts. Within contemporary institutional theory, there is a connection between the choices and actions of an organization and the signals it sends (David et al., 2019). This made institutional theory relevant for this study, as it looks into external factors when examining and explaining organizational structure and legitimacy (David et al., 2019). Concepts such as *institutionalization*[7] and *isomorphism*[8] have derived from institutional theory research reflecting the effect of external aspects on organizations. Richard W. Scott's (2014) approach to institutional theory, more precisely legitimacy, was chosen for this study as it is based on organizations being conditioned to external rules and norms. Furthermore, Scott's three pillars provided a structured framework for collecting, processing, and analyzing the different data sets.

Since the study investigated why not more national branches of the organizations have changed and joined into one, it was relevant to investigate some of the strategies and considerations made within the legitimacy process in different institutional stages and levels. Investigating the

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[7] Refers to the "increasing acceptance of an element as an appropriate component of well-managed, legitimate organizations" (David et al., 2019).
[8] Refers to the institutional pressure on organizations to conform to structural and procedural cultural rules in order to gain/maintain legitimacy (Scott, 2005).

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legitimacy process from a multilevel allowed the researcher to investigate multiple structures and contexts when evaluating the prospects for legitimacy (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Bitektine et al., 2020). For this study, the multilevel theory of the institutional legitimacy process under different conditions provided by Alex Bitektine and Patrick Haack (2015) was chosen as it investigates both multiple levels of actors and evaluators[9], as well as different states of an institution vis-á-vis the legitimacy process. As with Scott's three pillars, the multilevel theory of the legitimacy process was considered when collecting, processing, and analyzing the data for this study.

3. Theory

Since this paper investigates organizations using institutional theory, it is relevant to introduce the relationship between these two concepts. Douglas North provides a very simplified explanation: "Institutions provide the rules of the game, whereas the organizations act as the players" (as cited in Scott, 2014, p. 18). Organizations can thus be described as a praxis-oriented part of institutions. Institutions can control behavior by defining legal, moral, and cultural boundaries, yet they can also empower actors through support and guidelines (Scott, 2014). Despite their influential status on stability and order, institutions themselves change in "incremental and revolutionary" ways (Scott, 2014, p. 58). This means that neither an institution nor an organization has a set framework, it evolves and changes with time.

3.1 Institutional Theory

How institutions are established, change, and position themselves steadily within society is what institutional theory examines. This family of theoretical approaches describes the actions of both individuals as well as organizations and has been described as 'prominent,' 'popular,' and 'powerful' (Dacin et al., 2002). Scott (2005) defines institutional theory as:

> Institutional theory examines the processes and mechanisms by which structures, schemas, rules, and routines become established as authoritative guidelines for social

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[9] Evaluators are comprised of all people who consume and assess, e.g., the messages or products of organizations. In other words, evaluators are the ones receiving the outputs of, e.g., organizations whereon they assess the value and based their opinion.

behavior. It asks how such systems come into existence, how they diffuse, and what role

they play in supplying stability and meaning to social behavior. It also considers how

such arrangements deteriorate and collapse, and how their remnants shape successor

structures. (p. 409)

In short, institutional theory looks at the processes and structures which establish, emerge, operate, influence, and deteriorate within different contexts of institutions. It is, as mentioned, a family of theoretical approaches collected under the name '*Institutional Theory*' where fluid yet connected ideas interchange and, thus, to some extent, relate (Scott, 2005). It is a very broad theory that touches multiple areas of study, e.g., economy, political science, and sociology (Scott, 2005; Lowndes & Roberts, 2013), and there are several levels of which one can study institutions and their influence through power, cognitive frames, and by shaping preferences (Friel, 2017). Some neo-institutionalist scholars have researched the different types of institutional approaches, whereas others have investigated the levels at which institutions exist in society (Friel, 2017). There have been concerns about neo-institutional theory being too diverse and too focused on stability and order (Scott, 2005). The family of theories generally fails to agree on and give attention to the notion of institutional change and what it entails (Hira & Hira, 2000; Kraatz & Zajac, 1996; Scott, 2005). Furthermore, it has been argued that institutional theory can be limited as the identification of institutional isomorphism within a multinational context is contested (Krajnovic, 2018). However, this case looks at each national situation investigating the foundations for isomorphic joint organizations and factors in institutional change within each national context. To facilitate this, Sociologist Richard W. Scott provides an approach where instead of focusing on greater social processes, the focus is on individual interpretations and intersubjectivity (Friel, 2017; Scott, 2014).

3.1.1   *Scott's three pillars*
Through Scott's three pillars, he introduces an approach consisting of three elements, or pillars, to analyzing institutions and processes by identifying and distinguishing between components, assumptions, and mechanisms (Scott, 2014). These three pillars intertwine. One might take precedence in some contexts, but neither can be separated from the other. When two or all elements work together, it indicates a strong institutional framework (Scott, 2014). Scott describes the general core relevance of the approach as "Institutions exhibit stabilizing and meaning-making proprieties because of the

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processes set in motion by regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive elements. These elements are the central building blocks of institutional structures, providing the elastic fibers that guide behavior and resist change" (Scott, 2014, p. 57). Thus, in Scott's theoretical approach, processes are separated based on three interrelated pillars, which support an institution's entire structure.

The regulative pillar consists mainly of codes and rules, written as well as unwritten, which can be enforced. As mentioned, institutions can influence, regulate, and constrain behavior, which falls under the regulative pillar (Scott, 2014). According to Scott, "Institutions are viewed as governance or rule systems created by individuals seeking to promote or protect their own interests" (Scott, 2005, p. 410). Thus, individuals are both the influencers and influenced in institutional contexts in a search for personal interest maximization. Regulatory processes make and enforce rules and manipulate sanctions to influence and coerce behavior (Lowndes & Roberts, 2013). Moreover, regulative institutions rely on processes related to rules, enforcement, sanctions, surveillance, and conformity (Scott, 2014). Furthermore, "regulatory systems are those that exhibit high values on [obligation, precision, and delegation] dimensions while normative systems … exhibit lower values on them" (Scott, 2014, p. 60).

The normative pillar is based on "shared norms and values that introduce prescriptive, evaluative, and obligatory dimension into social life. Rules are not simply externally enforced, but internalized by actors" (Scott, 2005, p. 411). Norms are the proper way of conduct, according to the majority, to pursue values, which are comparative assessments of the standards desired vis-a´-vis existing structures and/or behaviors (Scott, 2014). Norms and values thus highlight how things *ought* to be done through *legitimizing* measures. Normative rules give the individual a perspective to evaluate and contextualize social life. It provides a social guideline of logic in relation to situations and one's role in these. It makes individuals consider not what is the best action for themselves but what is the appropriate one (Scott, 2014). Normative systems constrain and empower social behavior through action in the forms of privileges, responsibilities, directives, rights, and general social functions. As opposed to violations of rules and laws (as in the regulatory pillar), violations of norms and values can cause social exclusion to some extent, which generally motivates individuals to comply with current norms instead of challenging them (Scott, 2014; Lowndes & Roberts, 2013). Normative institutions have a "stabilizing influence of social belief and norms that are both internalized and imposed by others" (Scott, 2014, p. 66). Social beliefs and norms are constructed, re-constructed, stabilized, and challenged. They evolve with time within their own contexts.

The cultural-cognitive pillar is the last pillar of the three. It reflects how individuals and collective actors perceive and understand their environment through interactions and interpretations on an individual and collective basis, resulting in social constructs (Friel, 2017). This perspective underlines institutions based on shared conceptions explaining social reality (Lowndes & Roberts, 2013). Social reality is created through interpretations and interactions shared on both a micro and macro level (Scott, 2005). These shared conceptions create frames for creating meaning (Scott, 2014). This means that concerning cultural-cognitive elements, it is not only the objective conditions but also the subjective interpretations that are considered (Scott, 2014). The interpretation is internal (cognitive) yet is shaped by external environments and systems (culture). Levels of cultural frameworks interact by shaping and reconfiguring belief systems, which means that culture and logic work towards a cultural middle ground. Cultural conceptions and beliefs are individual; thus, a situation is never the same for everyone experiencing it. This pillar aims to reassure and create confidence to counteract individuals' confusion by constructing a common framework of meanings (Scott, 2014).

3.2 Legitimacy Theory

Legitimacy is a primary factor in global politics and for INGOs (Schmitz, 2020). It is the social perceptions and assumptions on how an actor acts and reacts to external and internal challenges, as well as changes concerning social norms and rules. These norms and rules can be national and international depending on a country's international commitments, e.g., being a member of the UN (Schmitz, 2020). According to Schuman, "*Legitimacy* is a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions" (as cited in Scott 2014, p. 71, emphasis in original). Further, Deephouse et al., defines *organizational legitimacy* as the "perceived appropriateness of an organization to a social system in terms of rules, values, norms, and definitions" which are used as measures for assessing legitimacy (2017, p. 32). What can be derived from these two definitions is that an essential factor in assessing legitimacy is the level of appropriateness leading to legitimacy, which is fundamentally based on norms, values, beliefs, and definitions. Evaluation and judgment of legitimacy can be based on different aspects of an organization, e.g., its goals and how these match current societal norms and values (Scott, 2014). Furthermore, legitimacy is not something an institution can own or trade but a more amorphous, invisible condition that manifests frameworks of social appropriateness (Scott, 2014).

All organizations change with time and thus need to actively maintain legitimacy to not lose it but continue to benefit from it (Deephouse et al. 2017). Dacin et al. describes legitimacy as a requirement in the process of institutional "creation, transformation, and diffusion" (2002, p. 47), and keeping up with the unfolding of the legitimacy process in accordance with time and changes is a never-ending process. To be legitimate is essential for an organization to have access, stakeholders, and resources; a lack of legitimacy makes an organization undesirable to cooperate with (Deephouse et al., 2017). If an organization loses its legitimacy foundation, it will not be able to survive.

There are different, yet similar, takes on the separation and connections of legitimacy. "Legitimacy theorists typically view legitimacy as a dichotomous variable which is determined by "society"" (Deegan, 2019, p. 2318), meaning that legitimacy is either there or it is not; it is separate and does not overlap. Some scholars distinguish legitimacy between multiple sources/categories of legitimacy: e.g., pragmatic, normative/moral, regulatory, cognitive, sociopolitical, and cultural-cognitive, which are equated differently between scholars (Deephouse et al. 2020; Schmitz, 2020). Institutional theorists often subdivide legitimacy by connecting aspects of legitimacy to the three overlapping institutional pillars, simplifying the understanding of legitimacy (Deegan, 2019). This is also the case for this study.

3.2.1   *Scott's three pillars vis-á-vis legitimacy*

Linked to the three pillars of institutions, Scott (2014) describes how legitimacy is established and represented in the regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive pillars. In *the regulative pillar,* the State is the rule maker, and the institution follows these rules and regulations. Regarding organizations, being associated with and approved by the State and essential trade alliances are considered central indicators of legitimacy (Scott, 2014). Furthermore, Scott underlines within this pillar that if organizations are law-abiding in their conduct, they are legitimate. In t*he normative pillar,* legitimacy is based on morals and conformity to social norms. However, situations may arise where norms conflict, creating a legitimacy dilemma when deciding which to conform to, as support for one might undermine the other (Scott, 2014). Compared to regulative legitimacy, normative legitimacy tends to be more abstract and internal, based on individual motivation for conformity. This means that normative legitimacy is more individual-based and thus harder to regulate. Lastly, in *the cultural-cognitive pillar,* legitimacy comes from the extent to which an institution conforms to cultural and social systems, expectations, and a common definition of situations (Scott, 2014). It is conditioned on

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cultural support vis-á-vis organizations acting in society. An organization that is isomorphic and conforms to cultural rules is legitimate. By being legitimate, the organization has greater odds of survival by having access to resources (Scott, 2005).

One pillar of legitimacy might take precedence depending on the most prominent and privileged elements of an institution (Scott, 2014). Furthermore, Scott (2014) underlines that "The bases of legitimacy associated with the three elements, and hence the types of indicators employed, are decidedly different and may be in conflict" (p. 74). This means, e.g., that regulative legitimacy (based on laws and regulations) can conflict with normative legitimacy (based on morals), which requires organizations to determine which type of legitimacy is the most powerful and important, as well as which stakeholders and evaluators to focus on when developing and redeveloping legitimacy strategies. For this study, the foundation for regulative legitimacy is investigated by looking into the State of each of the five countries and how they have acted on gender equality nationally and internationally through laws, political initiatives, and commitments. The investigation of the foundation for normative legitimacy will focus on social gender norms and values within and outside the home in each of the countries, and the foundation for cultural-cognitive legitimacy will be investigated in relation to social and cultural expectations based on gender.

3.2.2   A multilevel legitimacy process

The different levels, the micro and the macro level, of measurements of organizational legitimacy have been researched separately (see, e.g., López-Balboa et al., 2021; Gau et al., 2012; Bitektine et al., 2020) but also combined as a multilevel perspective (see, e.g., Bitektine et al., 2015; Díez-Martín et al., 2022; Derakhshan et al., 2019). In Bitektine and Haack's (2015) work *The "Macro" and the "Micro" of Legitimacy: Toward a Multilevel Theory of the Legitimacy Process,* the two scholars attempt to bridge the micro-macro/individual-collective divide within the organizational legitimacy processes. Within a multilevel process, the two levels interact, and the micro is embedded in the macro in the sense that the macro-level outcomes can be traced back to micro-level influence. Legitimacy is a process of judgment individuals (micro) and collective actors (macro) (Bitektine & Haack, 2015). Legitimacy is often influenced by the distribution of knowledge by individuals or, e.g., the media (Bitektine & Haack, 2015), as this distribution affects legitimacy evaluation and judgment. On the multilevel Bitektine & Haack (2015) describes legitimacy as

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a fundamentally cross-level construct consisting of two components present at different

levels: individual-level propriety and collective-level validity … propriety is an individ-

ual evaluator's own judgment of social acceptability – whereas validity represents a col-

lective consensus about legitimacy that is present at some higher level, such as the group,

organization, organizational field, or society. (p. 51)

The majority opinion is a primary source of validity, but other important sources influencing judgments are the media, the government, and the judicial system (Bitektine & Haack, 2015). These three sources of influence create validity as they are the foundation of collective validity opinions when individuals have to create personal propriety opinions. The validity basis for the three sources is: for the media, validity based on a shared voice; for the government, validity based on the decisions of regulators and legislators; and for the judicial system, validity based on the legal field. These three *judgment validation institutions* have a significant role in the legitimacy process. The extent and scope of this role are based on the state of the institution. Institutions change over time, old ones decline, and others are created as a result of micro- and macro-level actors and their efforts (Bitektine & Haack, 2015). These different states of an organization affect the legitimacy process. Bitektine and Haack (2015) distinguish between two conditions essential to the legitimacy process: The legitimacy process under conditions of stability and conditions of change.

Under conditions of institutional stability, an organization is legitimate because it is compatible with social norms (propriety), isomorphic, and the effect of validity (institutionalized legitimacy judgments) on the majority's positive evaluation and expression vis-á-vis legitimacy (Bitektine & Haack, 2015). The result of the propriety judgment is based on the norms the individual chose to apply to their perception of the organization. This means that different norms applied can lead to different legitimacy judgment results. When an organization is stable, these norms are mostly obvious and do not require second thoughts for the evaluator. Under conditions of institutional stability, individuals' judgment of legitimacy is affected by social control as certain institutionalized norms are applied to certain types of organizations (Bitektine & Haack, 2015). This means that the legitimacy process, in this state, is a top-down influenced process affecting evaluator perceptions, judgments (and norms used), as well as actions through the judgment validation institutions (the media, the government, and the judicial system). Bitektine and Haack (2015) introduce an idea called *the institutional stability loop,* where they argue that the stable legitimacy process is a loop as the greater the

validity, the more taken-for-granted norms applied in individual propriety judgment (which also works to suppress deviant judgments), in turn creating isomorphic judgments. A majority of isomorphic judgments then lead back to an increased perception of validity. This loop is a passive process to maintain legitimacy with minimal participation from the institution and the evaluator. However, if deviant evaluators' suppressed disagreements are continuously exposed to the loop, it can lead to social destabilization (e.g., revolutions) and, thus, a condition of institutional change.

The institutional order can destabilize if the deviant judgment evaluators establish an active role in judgment formation between individuals or through judgment validation institutions. Therefore, to maintain stability, institutions aim to keep as many evaluators as possible passive., i.e., base their legitimacy judgments on institutionalized validity to effectively suppress deviant judgments and avoid institutional change either by withholding information or through distraction (Bitektine & Haack, 2015). Judgment suppression concerning deviant judgment suppression is treated as a cost-benefit consideration at the individual evaluator (micro) level. Every evaluator with a deviant judgment must consider whether it would be most beneficial, on a personal level, to express the deviant judgment or if it would have an unfavorable outcome. On a macro level, sanctions and incentives influence are means of judgment suppression as well (Bitektine & Haack, 2015). This means that under conditions of institutional stability, diversity is suppressed, which affects the evaluator's judgments by encouraging institutionalized opinions. However, if this suppression tactic fails, an institution can end up in a state of change.

Under conditions of institutional change, the cause for an organization's environment being unstable can be changes in values, social norms, and judgments (Bitektine & Haack, 2015). In a state of institutional change, the institutional stability loop is weakened or suppressed, and the influence of judgment validation institutions is affected by these conditions of change based on disagreements on the validity provided by these institutions. A lack of consensus on a matter from the judgment validation institutions leads to a lack of trust vis-á-vis validity cues provided, which in turn leads to circumstances where individual propriety assessment takes precedence. As opposed to the institutionalized norms applied to the legitimacy judgment process under conditions of stability, in this unstable state, the norms applied are less constrained vis-á-vis selection, which might also lead to norms competing when choosing the ones to use when forming propriety judgments (Bitektine & Haack, 2015). This also means that the applied norms are less collective, which can make legitimacy judgments very different for each evaluator. Still, actors can suggest the set of norms an evaluator should apply when assessing propriety in favor of their self-interest. However, these suggestions are

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not as strong as in a state of institutional stability. Validity is scattered in this state due to competing judgments and the lack of suppression factors. Furthermore, individuals' and collective actors' actions achieve a more prominent role vis-á-vis the legitimacy process (Bitektine & Haack, 2015). Micro-level activities gain an essential role in reshaping the social order. Where the legitimacy process of an institution under conditions of stability is based on a top-down process, under conditions of change, the legitimacy process is bottom-up since the unstable conditions lead to individual expressions of judgments affecting the judgment validation institutions significantly.

An institutional environment in turmoil can be stabilized through the inputs an evaluator receives externally. The more diverse yet correlating inputs (e.g., cues and messages) an evaluator receives, the larger the chances are for the evaluator to assume validity. Also, perceived validity beliefs influence individual propriety judgment rather than the general validity to which evaluators get exposed (Bitektine & Haack, 2015). Therefore, to stabilize the institutional order, institutions might utilize different strategies to influence evaluators' beliefs and judgments vis-á-vis validity and propriety. One of these strategies is by means of *rhetoric*, attempting to persuade the evaluators by focusing on the content of the institution's messages. A way to do this is by using examples of what others have done to reinforce validity beliefs, arguing why this action is the most valid choice available. Furthermore, by appealing to the evaluators' emotions, the normative beliefs and rationale influence propriety judgment by advocating the appropriateness of norms applied. A second strategy is *increasing the credibility of the speaker* by using influential speakers, such as celebrities and people with an authoritative position or high-status in society, to increase the credibility of a message and influence the way evaluators form judgments. Validity is strengthened through messages by influential actors. The third strategy is related to the second strategy, ' *staging' a consensus for the target evaluator*. The targeted influential actor who provides credibility and validity has their independent propriety judgments and thus might need some lobbying work (i.e., persuasion through direct or indirect communicational means) to be most 'useful' representing influencing other evaluators. In this way, a few's organized judgments can herd the majority's unorganized judgments. Lastly, a fourth strategy is *coercion and inducement*. Through means such as publicly reputational attacks through public shaming and media, legal action, and, less frequently, terrorist threats, an institution can use this strategy as a means to silence and suppress their opponents (Bitektine & Haack, 2015).

Nevertheless, an unstable legitimacy process is not infinite. At some point, when majority judgment, or the success of the strategies described, dominates validity, the instability loop will kick back in and work to advance this majority judgment (Bitektine & Haack, 2015). This means an

organization regains legitimacy over time as judgment consensus is reestablished. For this study, the multilevel process of legitimacy will firstly shed light on the collective level validity status of each partner country which influences the current legitimacy process, and secondly, discuss some recommendations concerning the strategical considerations for one joint organization in the case of ending up in a state of institutional change.

3.3 Analytical framework

These theories described will help answer the problem formulation by providing context to the collected data and confirming or challenging this data. *Figure 3.1* illustrates the complete research design with the theories applied.
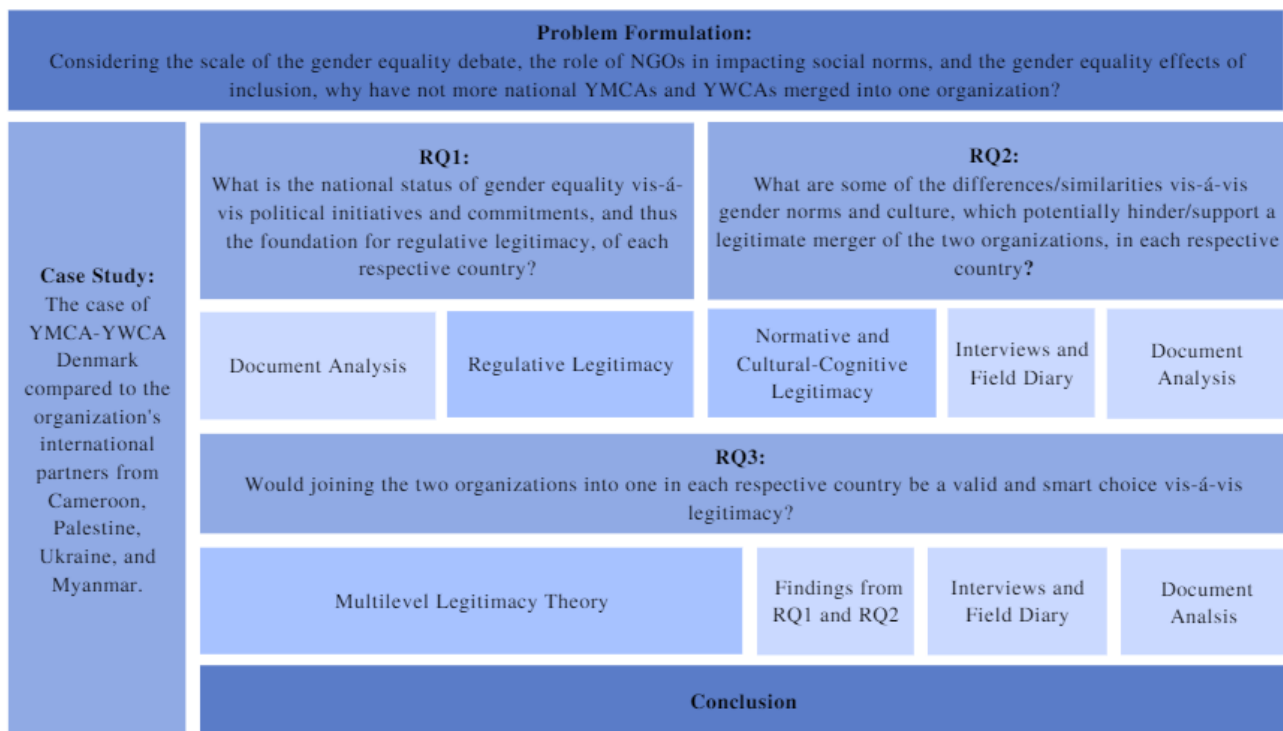
Figure 3.1: Illustration of this study's complete research design.

The analysis has three sections, one for each research question. For RQ1, one pillar of Scott's three pillars, the regulative, vis-á-vis legitimacy, was applied to the secondary data to establish the regulative foundation, or lack thereof, for legitimacy in relation to gender equality. For RQ2, the remaining two pillars, the normative and cultural-cognitive, vis-á-vis legitimacy, were applied to the secondary as well as the primary data to determine the norms similarities/differences which can challenge/support the legitimacy if joining the two organizations. Lastly, for RQ3, Bitektine and Haack's multilevel of legitimacy was applied to the collective data and the findings from RQ1 and RQ2 to determine whether it would be realistic vis-á-vis organizational legitimacy to join the two organizations in each

respective country. Finally, based on the findings for each research question, a conclusion was reached, suggesting why not more than 8 out of 82 countries have chosen to merge their national branches of the YMCA and the YWCA into one joint organization.

4. Analysis

To answer the problem formulation, the analysis chapter is divided into three sections following the three research questions. The first two chapters will analyze the foundations for legitimacy if the YMCA and YWCA are joined in the four partner countries, per Scott's three pillars. Finally, the third and last chapter will discuss and contextualize some considerations and recommendations vis-á-vis legitimacy from a multilevel perspective.

4.1 Regulative legitimacy: The state of the State

This first analysis chapter will investigate RQ1: *What is the national status of gender equality vis-á-vis political initiatives and commitments, and thus the foundation for regulative legitimacy, of each respective country?* Determining the regulative similarities/differences will provide insight into the foundation for joining the YMCA and YWCA in the four partner countries based on regulative legitimacy. In a similarity analysis of Denmark, from the Country Similarity Index ("Denmark: Country Similarity Index," n.d.) developed by architect and geographer Jeff M. Jones, five major aspects (demographics, culture, politics, infrastructure, and geography) are assessed when determining the level of similarity (each weighing 20% in the similarity calculation) between Denmark and 177 other countries. The four partner countries are placed as follows: Out of 177 countries, Myanmar is ranked at number 163, Cameroon at number 146, Palestine at number 119, and Ukraine at number 34. This means that Ukraine is the most similar to Denmark of the four countries and Myanmar the least. However, if we investigate the more regulative aspect of the five major aspects, *politics*, the ranking comes out differently. Focusing on regulative criteria such as *State, regulation, enforcement, and policies,* the political aspect presents Palestine as the least similar State to Denmark and Ukraine as the most similar. The ranking of the partner countries concerning the 'politics' aspect of the similarity index can be seen in *Figure 4.1*.
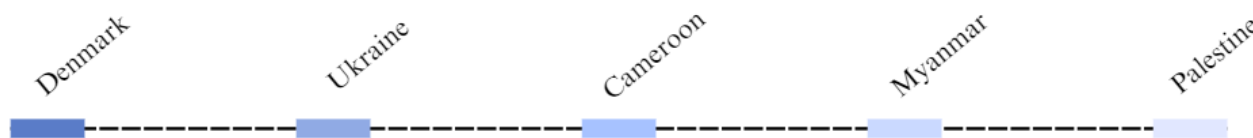
Figure 4.1: Similarity index ranking of the four partner countries compared to Denmark based on the politics aspect.

Does this calculation of similarity comply with this case where gender equality is the focus? And what are some real examples of similarities/differences, vis-á-vis gender equality, which can affect regulative legitimacy in each partner country in the instance of the two organizations becoming one? This first analysis chapter is structured by three general themes derived from the data coding. First, it looks into elements of each country's international political development vis-á-vis gender equality. Secondly, it investigates gender in State governance and decision-making, and lastly, gender equality laws and political initiatives are analyzed.

4.1.1   International political commitments

Denmark is reaching beyond its borders regarding gender equality conduct and politics ("Gender Equality," n.d.). From a national perspective, Denmark finds gender equality fundamental, translating into its international work. The official website for Denmark writes that "The Danish government, in cooperation with civil society and private sectors, will continue to work towards creating safe and encouraging spaces for all genders, both in Denmark and elsewhere in the world" ("Gender Equality," n.d.). The government cooperating with civil society sends a strong signal regarding regulative legitimacy for organizations. It leads to many resources (Scott, 2014), which is desirable for an organization to strive for, to survive and succeed in society. The YMCA-YWCA DK's work is legitimized by the conduct of the Danish State and international commitments, which creates opportunities and provides resources. The four partner countries also reach beyond their national borders, each to their own degree, e.g., with their international political commitments. Cameroon has a list of international and regional commitments concerning gender equality and women's rights: "the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for action, [and] the Declaration of Heads of State and Government of the African Union on Equality Between Women and Men" (Njikem, 2017). CEDAW has also been ratified in Myanmar which reflects "its dedication to women's rights" ("The Situation of Women in Myanmar," n.d.), and by Ukraine ("Ukraine," n.d. a; "UN Treaty Body Database," n.d.) which has also committed to the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention on Preventing and combating Violence against Women

("Ukraine," n.d. a). Based on these international commitments, Cameroon, Myanmar, and Ukraine have a general foundation for regulative legitimacy in the instance of joining the two organizations, as one joint organization aims to further and foster gender equality through inclusion in civil society. Common for all the five countries is their commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals. Denmark is at the top of the list when it comes to SDG achievements, ranking number 2 out of 163 in the 2022 Sustainable development Report ("Denmark," 2022). Cameroon is ranked number 134 out of 163 ("Cameroon," 2022), Myanmar number 103 out of 163 ("Myanmar," 2022), and Ukraine number 37 out of 163 ("Ukraine," 2022). The State of Palestine is also committed to the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations Country Team and occupied Palestinian territory Office of the Prime Minister of the State of Palestine, 2020) and are, as mentioned, interested in joining the UN (UN Affairs, 2022). A commitment to the SDGs can be a good source of regulative legitimacy for countries as the YMCA and YWCA work with these goals within their respective organizations. Basing legitimacy on international commitments for international organizations like the YMCA and YWCA is relevant and natural. The two organizations are part of global networks and alliances, which they can only be a part of if they have legitimacy. The Danish organization has even more access since the YMCA-YWCA DK is involved with both global networks. Approval by the State and major global alliances is a great source of regulative legitimacy (Scott, 2014). Thus, joining the two organizations in each partner country, from this point of view, would arguably contribute to the claim of regulative legitimacy.

However, the current achievements on SDG 5 for all the partner countries leave room for questioning the foundation for regulative legitimacy. For SDG 5, the Sustainable Development Report discloses that, in Denmark, for this goal, 'Challenges Remain' ("Denmark," 2022), which is the level right before 'SDG achieved.' This means that Denmark is on track for achieving SDG 5 with "91,7% of legal frameworks that promote, enforce and monitor gender equality under the SDG indicator, with a focus on violence against women, are in place" ("Denmark," n.d.). This level of achievement is not the case for any of the four partner countries. The closest to Denmark is Ukraine, where 'Significant challenges remain' for achieving SDG 5 ("Ukraine" 2022) with 83,3% of legal frameworks in place ("Ukraine," n.d. b). Cameroon is poorly placed both on the general SDG ranking and also concerning SDG 5, where 'Major challenges remain' for achieving this goal ("Cameroon," 2022), with 50% of legal frameworks in place ("Cameroon," n.d.). For Myanmar, 'Significant challenges remain' for achieving SDG 5 ("Myanmar," 2022), and Palestine has 41,7% of frameworks in place for gender equality ("State of Palestine," n.d.). Furthermore, a common issue among all five

countries is a gap in the gender data vis-á-vis indicators to monitor SDGs from a gender perspective which needs to be addressed across all countries as they are "essential for achieving gender related SDG commitments" ("Denmark," n.d.; "State of Palestine," n.d.; "Ukraine," n.d. b; "Myanmar," n.d. b; "Cameroon," n.d.). Depending on how the State in each country is acting on these numbers describing levels of SDG achievement and gender data gaps, determines the course and extent of regulative legitimacy for this case. If nothing is being done on a regulative level to address these issues, it would be challenging to attain regulative legitimacy. There will be a poor foundation for the State to support a desire to use resources and energy to further gender inclusion and equality by joining the two organizations. Furthermore, if what is being done is limited to words and promises instead of actions, regulative legitimacy has a weak foundation, which can be challenged if actions and words are not correlating. The best way to claim regulative legitimacy is by focusing on actions and facts to avoid making risky decisions that might backfire. In Denmark, the high level of legal frameworks achieved on SDG 5 is a good argument for contributing to the claim of regulative legitimacy, despite the less convincing numbers regarding gender data indicators available ("Denmark," n.d.). However, in the case of Cameroon, the numbers are less convincing to base regulative legitimacy on. Nevertheless, it can be redeemed if actions are taken to improve the numbers, which in turn creates a foundation for regulative legitimacy in the instance of joining the two organizations. The same goes for Myanmar and Palestine. The Ukrainian ranking and numbers are closest to Denmark's, indicating the best foundation of the four countries for regulative legitimacy from the SDG 5 point of view. Looking more focused into some national gender equality related aspects, such as women in decision-making positions, gender laws, and political initiatives, will give better insight into each of the four partner countries' foundation for regulative legitimacy in the instance of joining the YMCA and YWCA in the pursuit of gender equality through inclusion.

4.1.2   *State governance and decision making*

When it comes to the positions of power and decision-making, all countries are affected by patriarchal practices and tendencies to a larger or smaller extent. Gender equality is historically a big part of the Danish State and society ("Gender Equality," n.d.). However, the number of women in political decision-making does not reflect this statement. Since Danish women in 1915 achieved the right to vote and run for office in Parliament ("Gender Equality," n.d.), the country has only had two female prime ministers (Mellish, 2021), and in 2021, less than forty percent of the seats in the Danish Parliament were held by women ("Denmark," n.d.; Mellish, 2021). This underlines how Denmark struggles with

gender equality, even within politics. The underrepresentation of women in the Danish Parliament is an issue for gender equality based regulative legitimacy for the YMCA-YWCA DK. However, it can also be used as an argument for contributing to the claim of regulative legitimacy, as other countries are lesser off regarding female representation in positions of power and decision-making. This all depends on the actor and the desired audience. The data of the four partner countries confirm that Denmark is not the only country struggling with female representation within the government and decision-making roles.

In Palestine, as of 2020, only 11,3% of seats in national Parliaments were held by women, and in 2019 only 12,6% of women had leadership positions (United Nations Country Team and occupied Palestinian territory Office of the Prime Minister of the State of Palestine, 2020). The UN and the State of Palestine underline that "The participation of women in national, judicial and civil institutions, at the level of political decision-making and in political and cultural life is a right enshrined in all International instruments and conventions" (2022, p. 21), however being granted a right to something, even based on international commitments, does not automatically translate into social life. Moreover, representation does not automatically equal decision-making power. This is one of the challenges that can hinder the claim of regulative legitimacy in the instance of one joint organization. In Denmark, female participation in the Parliament is high and important, and the fact that the country has had females in the position of prime minister reflects the level at which women participate politically. This suggests a contribution to the claim of regulative legitimacy in relation to the State, for the YMCA-YWCA DK, based on functional representation and the confinement to international commitments.

In Ukraine, the same underrepresentation of women in the Parliament is apparent, with only 20,8% held by women in February 2021 ("Ukraine," n.d. b). Furthermore, Ukraine is currently working under martial law, assigning the Ukrainian military, a continually male-dominated field, authority and decision-making power (Brogan, 2023), adding wood to the patriarchal fire. This condition of martial law in Ukraine could complicate the matter of regulative legitimacy based on gender equality if the two organizations were to merge while this law is still enforced. Even though the Ukrainian government has made decisions to pursue gender equality, a second prominent actor must now be considered; and then which one is most likely to contribute to claiming regulative legitimacy? Both? Or just one? The government provides legitimacy based on its commitment to gender equality. However, the military arguably challenges regulative legitimacy based on its conduct vis-á-vis enforcing gender roles within the military (Brogan, 2023). However, since the status of martial law is

not expected to be permanent, it is arguably legitimate to somewhat disregard this and focus on the State and its gender equality related actions when it comes to foundations for regulative legitimacy in the instance of joining the two organizations. The more specific gender equality related actions, in the shape of laws and political initiatives, are discussed later. Nevertheless, focusing on the State as the source of regulative legitimacy in relation to approval is a strong indicator of regulative legitimacy (Scott, 2014), and thus acting by following the actions of the State is the most ideal if regulative legitimacy is to be achieved.

For Myanmar, despite positive developments, women are severely underrepresented in political decision-making ("The Situation of Women in Myanmar," n.d.), where only 15,3% of seats in Parliament in February 2021 were held by women ("Myanmar," n.d. b). Structural barriers significantly restrict women form securing certain decision-making positions in Myanmar (Gender Inequality in Myanmar, n.d.), and "It is impossible for women to obtain high positions in government, as the highest offices of the country are de jure of de facto reserved for (male) military officers" ("The Situation of Women in Myanmar," n.d.). This restriction limits the ability to claim regulative legitimacy vis-á-vis the State in the case of joining the two organizations, as it does not promote gender equality which is one of the reasons for merging. The State of Myanmar might be committed to gender equality vis-á-vis, e.g., international commitments. However, as previously argued, focusing on actions and not simply words is the best strategy when it comes to the ideal aspects of claiming regulative legitimacy. In Denmark, women are represented at all levels of government, which is a good indicator contributing to the claim of gender equality based regulative legitimacy for the YMCA-YWCA DK. However, if gender equality related regulative legitimacy is to be claimed in the instance of joining the YMCA and YWCA in Myanmar, vis-á-vis the State, this aspect of the State would not be the best angle to focus on because of its apparent restrictions on women. Instead, the gender equality related actions made by the State might provide a better foundation besides the international commitments previously mentioned.

A more positive picture of female representation within governance and decision-making is painted in Cameroon where, in 2020, 33% of seats in the Parliament were held by women (Atanga, 2021), and 33,9% in 2021 ("Cameroon," n.d.). This makes Cameroon the closest of the four countries to Denmark in this aspect. However, despite a recent increase in female participation in the Parliament, because of gender equality development, this increase is argued to be "more descriptive than substantive" (Atanga, 2021). As argued, representation does not equal decision-making power. Suppose Cameroonian women are indeed only represented in the Parliament as a facade. In that case,

it is a risky base for regulative legitimacy claims in the instance of joining the two organizations, as the State might not entirely approve of the purpose of one joint organization (Scott, 2014). Showing the impact of the women in the Cameroonian Parliament, as is being done in Denmark where women are present on all levels of State governance, would solidify the claim of regulative legitimacy and eliminate potential causes for concern. Furthermore, in relation to decision-making, Cameroon is arguably purposefully ignorant regarding including women since "despite proof of women's critical contributions to the peace process in the past, women remain severely underrepresented at the negotiation table" (de Harder, n.d.). Not including women, even when it is the logical thing to do, in decision-making processes highlights the government's opinion of the (limited) extent of gender equality. This opinion on logic could potentially challenge the foundation on which to claim regulative legitimacy in the instance of joining the two organizations in Cameroon, as the State might not view it as a logical thing to do based on the purpose of fostering and furthering gender inclusion and equality within civil society. This suggests that if regulative legitimacy can be claimed in the instance of joining the two organizations, it should probably be based on a less ambiguous and inconsistent angle.

4.1.3   Laws and political initiatives

Gender equality laws and political initiatives are also reliable sources of regulative legitimacy, as an organization can claim legitimacy by being law-abiding (Scott, 2014). In Denmark, there are, e.g., universal and equal education laws for both girls and boys, the aforementioned right to vote and run for office in Parliament, legislation on equal pay, and equal rights for divorcing parents vis-á-vis custody rights ("Gender Equality," n.d.). However, not all these laws and legislations are equally effective. For example, there is still a significant gender pay gap that the government has acknowledged yet has still not managed to alleviate fully ("Gender Equality," n.d.). Nevertheless, the Danish government acknowledges the issue and is working on addressing it. Furthermore, Denmark has changed the parental leave framework based on "A directive from the EU [which] states that as of August 2022, the number of leave weeks must be more equally distributed between parents." ("Gender Equality," n.d.). There have also been political moves towards wage transparency and advancing the promotion of women in leadership positions ("Gender Equality," n.d.). Furthermore, in 2020, the Danish criminal code was revised to include the concept of consent as a central aspect of the rape legislation, making sexual intercourse illegal should one of the parties not express their consent ("Gender Equality," n.d.). The foundation for gender equality related regulative legitimacy within

this aspect contributes well to the claim of YMCA-YWCA DK. However, not all the partner countries have come this far regarding laws and politics.

Child marriage was made illegal in Palestine in 2019, and now a person must be at least 18 years old to consent and enter marriage (Evason, 2020). However, when it comes to gender-based violence (GBV), the laws are described as 'discriminatory' and 'outdated' as there is restricted access for victims to obtain justice and support (United Nations Country Team and occupied Palestinian territory Office of the Prime Minister of the State of Palestine, 2020). Within the data for this research, limited examples of gender equality laws and political initiatives in Palestine emerged. However, based on the sources of the 2020 Atlas of Sustainable Development report (The State of Palestine in cooperation with the UN), which have developed some policy ideas and identified multiple policy priority-areas in individual sectors to improve the State's SDG results, it leaves the impression that the State of Palestine has the desire to improve gender equality, but lack the action to support this (2020). Focusing on SDG 5, the ideas and areas of priority are to amend the electoral law to increase women in elected bodies; protect working women from workplace discrimination through legislative and executive measures; actively increase job opportunities and social security rights for women; and eliminate pay and work conditions for women by creating an enabling environment in productive economic sectors (United Nations Country Team and occupied Palestinian territory Office of the Prime Minister of the State of Palestine, 2020). The issue is about the ability to attain regulative legitimacy based on ideas and if it is necessary to accept and implement the ideas before regulative legitimacy can be argued and achieved. As argued previously, basing regulative legitimacy on the State's rules and regulations, i.e., the accepted and implemented ideas, is a good indicator for regulative legitimacy. E.g., in Denmark, the State is actively looking into the gender pay gap. They have not achieved anything concrete yet; however, they are putting actions behind their words which can contribute to the foundation for regulative legitimacy. Thus, even though the State of Palestine is expressing an interest in implementing more gender-equal laws and policies, in the instance of joining the two organizations in Palestine, it would make more sense to base the claim of regulative legitimacy on actions.

Ukraine has tended to underinvest in gender equality development in the economic sector, as well as governance, peace, and security ("Ukraine," n.d. a). As mentioned, Ukraine is currently working under martial law. During this, women's ability, and opportunities to serve in the military on the front lines, have been restricted and reduced to reflect and enforce conventional gender roles (Brogan, 2023). Allegedly, the Ukrainian military has attempted to introduce more gender-equal

policies without support from Ukrainian society (Brogan, 2023). Brogan emphasizes, "We shouldn't expect men and women's formal equality under law, which is the case in Ukraine, to automatically result in nondiscriminatory policies" (2023). Put in different terms, gender and equality laws, as well as political initiatives, do not automatically change the entire narrative of the culture and norms-based way of conduct. However, it is a step towards change vis-á-vis legitimate actions based on regulative legitimacy. As seen in Denmark, despite its considerable level of gender equality throughout society, challenges remain, but they do not mean there is no foundation for regulative legitimacy. Similarly, challenges to Ukrainian gender equality, vis-á-vis laws, and political initiatives can cause discrepancies about which angle of regulative legitimacy can add to the foundation in the instance of joining the two organizations. However, it does not mean that there is no angle at all.

The gender laws and political initiatives of Myanmar extend to gender equality within education, equal rights in the case of divorce vis-á-vis inheritance law property rights, and in 2013 a National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women was approved by the government ("The Situation of Women in Myanmar," n.d.). These are very similar to some of the gender equality laws and initiatives in Denmark. However, some fundamental discrepancies within the 2008 Constitution arguably limit the impact of the abovementioned equality laws. The 2008 Constitution "state 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," section 352 counteracts this initial non-discrimination clause by stating that "*nothing…shall prevent the appointment of men to the positions that are suitable for men only*" ("Gender Inequality in Myanmar," n.d., emphasis in original). Claiming regulative legitimacy based on the 2008 Constitution concerning gender equality would thus arguably be ineffective in the case of joining the two organizations in Myanmar. However, based on the equality laws and political initiatives presented, claims of regulative legitimacy can add to the foundation in the instance of one joint organization since the government is working on developing gender equality practices and laws, despite disregarding the matter of women in decision-making positions. Similarly, In Demark, there is also an issue with women being underrepresented in decision-making positions (thought to a significantly lesser extent) which is something the Danish government is set on addressing ("Denmark," n.d.). Actively working on addressing a gender equality issue with actions creates a basis for attaining regulative legitimacy through recognition by the State. Thus, despite the Constitutional discrepancies, in the instance of the two organizations in Myanmar joining, the foundation for claiming regulative legitimacy can be added to based on specific actions of the State.

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Discrepancies are also seen in the equality laws and political initiatives in Cameroon. Cameroon is significantly affected by the patriarchal dimensions of culture, which conflicts with the commitment to developing and protecting gender equality laid out in the preamble of the Cameroonian Constitution (de Harder, n.d.; Njikem, 2017). This issue translates into several attempts to implement gender equality laws and political initiatives. Besides the mentioned modified electoral code, potentially "more descriptive than substantial" (Atanga, 2021), the Penal Code was updated to allow equal rights for men and women to sue for divorce (Njikem, 2017). However, because men dominate the courts, women risk being subjected to lengthy and expensive legal processes (Njikem, 2017). Furthermore, forced child marriage is now also illegal, and voluntary consent is a condition for marriage, yet there are loopholes to this law if one can obtain a waiver from the President of the Republic (Njikem, 2017). Additionally, if a family is financially able to put their children through school but chooses not to, they are supposedly penalized, yet, measures to monitor the educational enrollment of girls are nonexistent (Njikem, 2017). The conflicting legal frameworks, which allow for loopholes, provide an uncertain foundation for regulative legitimacy as confiding to the vague rules made by the State can be both uncomplicated and complicated simultaneously. The gender equality laws and political initiatives in Denmark are particular and leave little room for interpretation and discussion, which makes it transparent what is acceptable and what is not. For Cameroon, in the instance of joining the two organizations, there is technically a legal and political framework to follow and base regulative legitimacy on. Arguably, the loopholes provide greater argumentation for being law-abiding and thus add to the claim of regulative legitimacy for one joint organization. Furthermore, the Cameroonian State has made several laws and initiatives with gender equality in mind, suggesting that regulative legitimacy could be attained through recognition and support from the State in the instance of joining the two organizations. The question then is of the impact of this regulative legitimacy vis-á-vis Cameroonian society.

4.1.4 Findings summarized

In Denmark, gender-focused political initiatives and laws are becoming very specific, which is a testimony to the level of gender equality in Denmark. Gender equality in Denmark is significant, yet considerable challenges remain in several important areas. As can be seen in *Figure 4.2,* the country rankings have shifted a little from the initial one presented based on the Country Similarity Index ("Denmark: Country Similarity Index," n.d.) after focusing on gender equality from a regulative perspective.

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Figure 4.2: Similarity ranking of the four partner countries after looking into the state of gender equality from a regulative point of view.

Cameroon has switched places with Ukraine compared to the initial figure (*Figure 4.1),* as the data indicates that Cameroon has several more international and regional commitments towards improving gender equality. Additionally, the data indicate that Cameroon has numerous national laws and political initiatives, as well as the Cameroonian Parliament, has more elected women in percentage compared to Ukraine. Even though it is suggested that these gender equality measures in Cameroon are more of a facade than actual equality, there is theoretically a foundation for regulative legitimacy in the case of the two organizations joining based on the initiatives and laws. Ukraine has committed to various international agreements and responsibilities, yet the current situation of martial law in the country complicates matters of gender equality. However, if angled correctly and based on the actions and decisions of the State, there are grounds for regulative legitimacy for one joint organization. For Myanmar, there are several political initiatives and laws resembling the ones in Denmark, which can, despite the challenges for women in decision-making and the Constitutional discrepancies, provide a foundation for regulative legitimacy on the grounds of the actions taken by the State towards gender equality. Lastly, Palestine, the country least similar to Denmark from this perspective, has eager intentions regarding gender equality as the State is expressing a desire to improve. However, actions behind these words are less explicit based on the data. It should be noted that the State of Palestine is mobilizing the SDGs despite not being 'required' to, which is the case for the other partner countries and Denmark as members of the UN.

As seen in Denmark, and the four partner countries, a political commitment to equality, does not necessarily result in gender-equal practices. Nevertheless, having some representation is often better than none. In relation to regulative legitimacy, one can focus the foundation for this legitimacy on the progressing female representation since the overall governments of the four partner countries, as well as Denmark, have committed to achieving gender equality. In the instance of joining the YMCA and YWCA in the four partner countries, gender equality related regulative legitimacy can be based on the commitment each of the organizations has made to working focused with the SDGs, which correlates with the commitments made by each of the governments. This would be a logical point of departure to angle towards and base regulative legitimacy on in the instance of the

two organizations joining in each of the four partner countries. But is this enough for the joint organization to survive in society? As pointed out by Njikem, and is especially the case for Cameroon, "though these international and regional commitments take precedence over … national laws, customs, and traditions" (2017), there might be a tendency to favor customary laws and norms. This, in turn, requires a look at legitimacy priority vis-á-vis the three pillars since one can take precedence (Scott, 2014), and the three pillars do not necessarily work in synergy in the legitimacy process. However, in an optimal scenario, at least two, or preferably all three, pillars work together and thus represent a strong institutional framework (Scott, 2014). Determining which pillar to focus the energy on if two pillars conflict, vis-á´-vis legitimacy, depends on the desired outcome. Therefore, it is relevant also to investigate the foundation for legitimacy within the remaining two pillars to determine if legitimacy within two or all three pillars can be achieved if the YMCA and YWCA are joined in the four countries. If not, then which pillars are most important to rely on in relation to maintaining and gaining legitimacy based on the goal of one joint organization furthering gender inclusion and equality in civil society?

4.2 Normative and cultural-cognitive legitimacy: Gender in society

This second analysis chapter concerns RQ2: *What are some of the differences/similarities vis-á-vis gender norms and culture, which potentially hinder/support a legitimate merger of the two organizations, in each respective country?* Investigating the normative and cultural-cognitive similarities and differences between Denmark and each partner country will create further insight into the prospects of joining the YMCA and YWCA in the four partner countries based on legitimacy concerning norms, values, culture, and expectations. Based on the '*culture*' aspect of the similarity analysis of Denmark, from the Country Similarity Index ("Denmark: Country Similarity Index," n.d.), neither of the four partner countries is convincingly similar to Denmark based on criteria of *tradition, religion,* and *behavior.* However, Ukraine remains the most similar partner country in this aspect, and Myanmar the least. The rankings of the four partner countries vis-á-vis cultural similarity to Denmark can be seen in *Figure 4.3.*
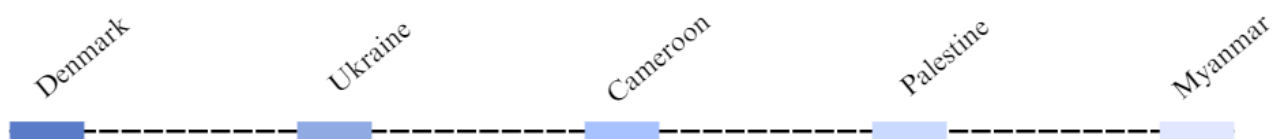

Figure 4.3: Similarity ranking of the four partner countries to Denmark based on the culture aspect of the Similarity Index.

However, what happens when the focus is on gender equality? And what are some examples of similarities/differences, vis-á-vis gender equality, which can affect normative and cultural-cognitive legitimacy in each partner country in the instance of the two organizations becoming one? This second analysis chapter is also structured by three general themes derived from the data coding process. Initially, it examines gender norms within the home. Subsequently, gender norms outside the home are investigated, and lastly, social and cultural expectations vis-á-vis gender are analyzed.

4.2.1   *Gender within the home*

In Denmark, gender norms and values related to the home and private life are very liberal. Concerning family life, Danish parents work full-time jobs made possible by the opportunity of government-run daycare (Mellish, 2021). When it comes to housework, Danish men are very good at contributing their part to cleaning, cooking, as well as childcare and are some of the highest contributors in Europe (Mellish, 2021). However, women still do more domestic chores. According to the UN Women: Women Count data, "women and girls age 20+ spend 15,6% of their time in unpaid care and domestic work, compared to 11,3% spent by men" ("Denmark," n.d.). Even though men spend a relatively high percentage of time on unpaid care and domestic work, women still do more of the 'typically' female-gendered tasks. When it comes to marriage and dating, Mellish claims that "the blurring of traditional gender roles in Denmark has also eliminated traditional chivalry … A Danish man knows you can stand on your own two feet" (Mellish, 2021). Danish women and men are independent and liberally minded, meaning more liberal norms and values within society, which helps eliminate discrimination and stigmatization. Regarding normative legitimacy, the YMCA-YWCA DK can claim a good amount of this, as the two organizations being joint, from a gender equality and inclusion perspective, conforms to the social norms of Danish society.

For Palestine, gender norms and values concerning the home and private life are more complicated than in Denmark. There is generally a conservative view on marriage and dating based on religious values in Palestine, and they are very protective of the women in the family (Evason, 2020). Unlike in Denmark, casual dating in Palestine is strongly disapproved of in society (Evason, 2020). The eldest male, the father or eldest son, is the head of the family and holds the most authority, and is usually the breadwinner, whereas the mother takes care of the domestic duties and care for the children (Evason, 2020). This distribution of responsibility reflects more traditional gender roles. However, this status might be shifting as it is suggested that men contribute more vis-á-vis

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housework, and they do not always act as the sole breadwinner of the family (Evenson, 2020), indicating the structure of the home shifting towards something more similar to the one in Denmark. Furthermore, Palestinian grandparents often take part in raising their grandchildren, which gives mothers more mobility to have a paying job and do things outside of the home (Evason, 2020). The role of grandparents is not nearly as vital for a family to function in Denmark because of the childcare offered by the government. This creates a milieu for more independence and freedom from social rules and expectations in Danish society. Something is indicatively happening when it comes to dissolving gender roles within the home in Palestine. Nevertheless, some people still see men doing housework "as a sign of weakness or lack of manhood" (Evason, 2020), reflecting an opinion on women's position in the home and society as inferior to men. This position on gender roles in relation to domestic chores and unpaid care is arguably reflected in the amount of time spent by women versus men as "women and girls aged 15+ spend 20,1% of their time on unpaid care and domestic work, compared to 3% spent by men" ("State of Palestine," n.d.) which is a stark difference in numbers compared to Denmark. In Palestinian life, family is at the center of the equation. Families are close-knit, reaching far into the community well beyond the nuclear circle (Evason, 2020). This close community is, according to one of the interviewees, Aisha from Palestine, an asset vis-á-vis the prospects of joining the YMCA and YWCA in Palestine, as it will, according to Aisha, make the process easier (Appx. E). In the instance of joining the two organizations, there are areas of life within the home which can add to claims of normative legitimacy based on the suggested progressions of distribution of domestic chores, the access and conduct for women outside the home, and the role of the family in everyday Palestinian life. The suggested progression of gender norms vis-á-vis the distribution of domestic work correlates with Scott's (2014) claim that norms evolve depending on context. Joining the two organizations in Palestine would change and challenge the context of norms based on the purpose of the act. However, straying too far away from the current social norms can result in the joint organization being unable to draw parallels to current norms and thus claiming to conform to these. Additionally, family is a matter of pride in Palestine, specifically focusing on maintaining its reputation and honor (Evason, 2020). Young people, especially women, are highly influenced by their parents when it comes to decision-making, and the senior male even has the authority to make decisions for the female members of the family (Evason, 2020). In the instance of joining the two organizations based on furthering gender equality through inclusion, the way the merge is advertised might be essential when obtaining normative legitimacy as it will be highly dependent on the older generations of society. In Denmark, gender roles are less fixed in society, and changes concerning gender

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equality and inclusion are arguably becoming a norm. For Palestine, attempting to implement more gender equality through organizational inclusion must be framed strategically to add to the claim of normative legitimacy as "norms are internalized and imposed by others" (Scott, 2014, p. 66) and could be possible from this angle with the proper context provided.

In Cameroon, men are usually the primary breadwinner. However, the loss of employment due to COVID-19 has increasingly altered this responsibility to fall on women in addition to domestic chores, yet "men do not aid women with housework … as housework is culturally not perceived as a task for men" (de Harder, n.d.). This perception results in a distribution where "women and girls aged 10+ spend 14,6% of their time on unpaid care and domestic work, compared to 4,7% spent by men" ("Cameroon," n.d.). Jean, the interviewee from Cameroon, supported the claim of these rigid gender roles when it was disclosed to him that he was expected to prepare a Cameroonian dish for a potluck by the end of Global Week. As a response, "He looked at me and asked me if he looked like someone who cooked. He mentioned that he would have to contact some of the women in his life, his mother or wife for help" (Appx. F). This response reinforces how women in Cameroon are still relied on for gendered domestic work. Also, the expression indicated that cooking was beneath him. Jean works and volunteers in a global organization dedicated to the SDGs, including gender equality. However, the response suggests that the YMCA ideologies do not necessarily reflect the individual's opinion on gender roles and norms. In the instance of joining the YMCA and YWCA in Cameroon, emphasizing gender equality and inclusion as a goal of this can be tricky if the joint organization is to be able to claim normative legitimacy, as it still needs to conform to the current social norms while attempting to alter them. Suppose Cameroonian women are as restricted vis-á-vis traditional patriarchal gender roles within the home, with limited to no access to assets, as the data suggests. In that case, it can be challenging to claim normative legitimacy based on the goals and preferred outcomes of one joint organization. Even though the context has changed for some of the social norms in Cameroon, it does not mean that this change has been in favor of the norms required to claim normative legitimacy with one joint organization.

For Ukraine, the patriarchy defines the narrow gender norms and values where women are limited to roles of a domestic character, reinforcing stereotypical gender roles which limit women in and outside the home (Brogan, 2023). Furthermore, these roles "fail to distribute family responsibility equally" (Brogan, 2023). This tendency can also be seen in Denmark, suggesting that norms attached to gender roles in Denmark are similar yet less rigid than in Ukraine. The patriarchal views on gender roles are reinforced by the media and even in school programs (Brogan, 2023). Norms

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distributed by these sources are a way to impose norms on others, which can be a helpful strategy for this case of challenging and re-constructing norms. However, as normative legitimacy is based on individuals, there is no guarantee that using this strategy will pan out as desired. This will be discussed further in the third analysis chapter. Furthermore, the current military conflict is only reinforcing gender roles in society. Achieving and claiming normative legitimacy with a goal of inclusion and increased gender equality in the instance of the two organizations joining, based on these norms and values, is challenging as the basis of normative legitimacy vis-á-vis gender equality and inclusion is sparse, seen from this data set. Furthermore, to claim normative legitimacy, the joint organization still needs to conform to current social norms, which the goal of one joint organization does not necessarily do from this angle.

In Myanmar, families are very important and close. Family authority is assigned to the oldest male, who also acts as an income earner (Evason, 2017). Women are responsible for domestic work and childcare, as well as being income earners (Evason, 2017). Men's limited contribution to domestic chores, at least cooking, is reflected in Aung's response to the request of preparing a traditional Burmese dish for the Global Week potluck which was "that he only knew how to cook rice, and thus had to reach out to his mother for instructions, or rely on the other guests from his country (also male, significantly older though) to be able to contribute something more than just plain rice" (Appx. F). Compared to the geographical region of countries, Myanmar generally provides women "a high social and economic status," and it is encouraged that married couples have a sense of equality between them (Evason, 2017). This encouragement of equality between husband and wife was exemplified by one of the older Global Week guests from Myanmar during a dinner with a local Danish family as he shared "that a typical day for him starts out with him and his wife waking up, having some tea/coffee and then help each other with some housework before starting the rest of the daily routines" (Appx. F). This equality between spouses is similar to the Danish relation where both men and women participate in doing housework. However, Aung's response suggests that in some areas of domestic work, e.g., cooking, there is still a sense of separated gender roles. The data is contradicting. However, equality between spouses being externally encouraged and women having "a high social and economic status" suggest that in the instance of joining the YMCA and YWCA in Myanmar, normative legitimacy has a base, despite gender roles tending to lean to the more traditional side. The joint organization could have a foundation on which to claim normative legitimacy since the goal of inclusion to promote gender equality would conform with the current social norms of women and men being somewhat equal from this angle.

4.2.2   Gender outside the home

When it comes to gender norms and values in work life and general society, Denmark has one of the world's highest percentages of women working outside the home, yet "one of the world's most segregated labour markets" and a significant gender pay gap ("Gender Equality," n.d.; Mellish, 2021). Even though most women work, they do not have equal access and opportunities. The positions women are most likely to hold are within the public sector and care positions as opposed to men who are more present in the private sector and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) based positions ("Gender Equality," n.d.). Danish women are at the lower end in relation to participation rates in management in Europe and only hold 26,9% of managerial positions in Denmark (Mellish, 2021). This is one of the examples of Denmark being far concerning gender equality, yet in several important areas, there are still considerable challenges to address and changes to be made. These limitations exist despite the claim that "Danish society values equal opportunities for women and girls highly" ("Gender Equality," n.d.). The fact that Denmark is still in the process of achieving gender equality outside the home bodes well for the normative legitimacy prospects of the four partner countries being compared to Denmark as norms evolve and change within their context. This ongoing process in Denmark indicates that societies can be open to changes based on gender equality and inclusion and thus provide a base for normative legitimacy despite gender equality not being complete.

Outside of the home in Palestine, female labor participation rates are a stark contrast compared to Denmark. Despite having impressive educational enrollment numbers, the women in Palestine have one of the world's lowest participation rates within the labor force (United Nations Country Team and occupied Palestinian territory Office of the Prime Minister of the State of Palestine, 2020). Even though highly educated Palestinian women and girls would theoretically have more opportunities, they more often end up unemployed, demonstrating "the continued incompatibility between the skill sets of educated women and labour market demands" (Evason, 2020). This makes one wonder if Palestine's high and impressive enrollment rate is a significant yet insufficient move toward gender equality, as gender equality is an intricate and intertwined process of change in society. Not one sector can succeed without change in other ones. For example, Palestinian women have access to education but less to the job market. They remain limited by cultural expectations and norms, such as women being preferred to stay at home (Evason, 2020). Achieving gender equality requires a collective effort across all sectors, as is the case for every country worldwide. In the instance of joining the two organizations in Palestine, since women are working and being educated adds to the

claim of normative legitimacy based on norms outside the home. A norm of women being highly educated is favorable for claiming normative legitimacy if the organizations are joined. However, the norm of women having limited access to the labor market is a counterproductive base for normative legitimacy. Nevertheless, one joint organization would still be considered to conform to the current social norms and beliefs of women having options outside the home and thus be able to claim normative legitimacy. Additionally, as in Denmark, the labor market in Palestine is highly segregated, and women are primarily employed in the "service sector of the economy" and are less likely to work in "construction, transportation, and communal sectors," i.e., typically more male-dominated fields (United Nations Country Team and occupied Palestinian territory Office of the Prime Minister of the State of Palestine, 2020, p. 23) which indicates the unequal access in the Palestinian labor market for women. Furthermore, as in Denmark, women are less present in decision-making, and their voices, concerns, and influences are highly marginalized and ignored (United Nations Country Team and occupied Palestinian territory Office of the Prime Minister of the State of Palestine, 2020). Nevertheless, women in Palestine actively participate in political activities regarding the conflict and Israeli occupation (Evason, 2020), expressing their voices. Since this aspect of gender norms outside the home is so similar in Palestine and Denmark, in theory, normative legitimacy should be attainable in the instance of joining the two organizations in Palestine. However, theory does not always play out in praxis. Thus, to claim normative legitimacy as one joint organization on gender norms outside the home in Palestine, other relevant norms and aspects must supplement this one, as it must conform to more than one social belief and norm to have a stable foundation for this type of legitimacy. Since norms evolve and change, not always in organizations' favor, basing legitimacy on one norm is a risky strategy.

Gender ideologies in Cameroon "ascribe dominance and powerful positions to men and subservient social positions to women" (Atanga, 2021), where girls and women are treated as inferiors daily (de Harder, n.d.). The lack of women in powerful positions can also be seen in Denmark; however, the treatment of women in society is very different. If women being inferior to men is a norm in Cameroon, as the data suggest, claiming normative legitimacy in the instance of joining the YMCA and YWCA in Cameroon can be tricky. Men supposedly have the final say, and if the goal of promoting gender equality through organizational inclusion does not correlate with their interpretation of norms, the base for claiming normative legitimacy is sparse and fragile. Despite the Preamble Constitution of Cameroon, which contains provisions related to protecting gender equality, many issues and questions about ending gender inequalities remain (Njikem, 2017). A society with major

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gender issues and inequalities is a norm in Cameroon, where child marriage, girls not attending education for lack of access, gender-based violence, and female unemployment are not uncommon (de Harder, n.d.; Njikem, 2017). It can be argued that sexual and domestic violence is a social norm being as common as it is. However, society and the government do not acknowledge it as an issue that needs to be legally addressed (de Harder, n.d.). Society looks disapprovingly at GBV victims (de Harder, n.d.), yet, it is taboo and not socially acknowledged as a problem that needs to be solved. This is a prominent juxtaposition. Women being unacknowledged victims as a norm does not bode well for normative legitimacy based on gender equality. In Denmark, gender equality is highly valued in society. However, this does not seem to be the case in Cameroon. In the instance of the two organizations joining in Cameroon, claiming normative legitimacy based on gender norms outside the home seem to be highly unlikely as one joint organization would not conform to the current social norms and values in Cameroon, seeing that the goal of the merger is to promote gender equality through inclusion.

In Ukraine, women are primarily employed in "traditional 'female' occupational areas" concerning social services, care, domestic work, as well as public administration and support, which are low-paying positions with limited responsibilities and management of, e.g., asset and financial resources ("Ukraine," n.d. a). This is similar to the segregated labor market in Denmark. As argued previously, this similarity should not have a notable impact on the prospects of claiming normative legitimacy in the instance of joining the YMCA and YWCA in Ukraine, as women in the labor market are a norm despite it being segregated. However, there is a general gender stereotype that views Ukrainian "men as protectors and women as caring supports" ("Ukraine," n.d. a), which is reflected both in the distribution of the labor market, but also when it comes to the current conflict. The current conflict in Ukraine reinforces gender stereotypes and biases vis-á-vis military participation, where women are kept from the front lines and appointed more 'female appropriate' tasks such as cooking or office administration (Brogan, 2023). Additionally, the participation of women in the Ukrainian military is not valued in the same way because of this distribution of tasks which results in women being both underrepresented and underappreciated in a sector where technically all roles are open for women but powers beyond individual reach are deciding people's level of contribution based on gender (Brogan, 2023). When the military attempted to adopt more gender-equal policies, they faced pushback from society, which is deeply committed to 'traditional' gender norms and common values of the borders of gender in the military (Brogan, 2023). Both being included in the labor market and the military, but at the same time excluded from certain aspects based on gender norms provides a

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tricky basis for claiming normative legitimacy in the instance of joining the two organizations, as in one way, it will conform to current social norms, but at the same time deviate from them. Furthermore, the pushback from society about implementing more gender-equal policies within the Ukrainian military based on gender norms can be viewed as a potential forecast of the reaction of society to the YMCA and YWCA joining to re-construct and change social norms through inclusion in favor of gender equality.

In Myanmar, female participation in the labor market is significantly lower than in Denmark. Only 63,1% of women work outside the home, compared to 85,1% of men ("The Situation of Women in Myanmar," n.d.). Like in Denmark, women are also limited in career development and opportunities compared to men, reflected in the lack of women as leaders and decision-makers in Myanmar ("The Situation of Women in Myanmar," n.d.). The data does not provide much evidence within this area of gender norms outside the home in Myanmar. It is thus hard to argue for or against the foundation for normative legitimacy. Nevertheless, women in the labor market being less present than men in Myanmar can potentially be a roadblock to claiming normative legitimacy in the instance of joining the two organizations because of the norms tied to the place, purpose, and power of women in society. However, women working, arguably being a norm, could contribute to a base of normative legitimacy, conditioned that there is more than this one norm to base this type of legitimacy on, as the joint organization then can claim to conform to the current social norms in Myanmar.

4.2.3 Social and cultural expectations based on gender

Gender equality has been culturally embedded in Danish society for over a century ("Gender Equality," n.d.). However, this does not mean that there is equality regarding social and cultural expectations based on gender. Gender-based social and cultural expectations in Denmark can result in challenges and limitations. For example, when young Danish people must choose their career path for the future, social and cultural expectations limit their choices which often results in men and women following 'gender related' occupations, as can be seen, for example, as "very few men choose to become nurses as it is seen as a women's profession alongside other care tasks" ("Gender Equality," n.d.). In addition, there are gender-related social and cultural limitations when choosing a career. In the instance of building a family, "both parents are expected to hold down jobs, and both parents are expected to help around the house" (Mellish, 2021). However, expectations do not always equal reality, as seen in the distribution of domestic chores discussed at the beginning of this second analysis

chapter. Furthermore, mothers in the labor market, with highly demanding jobs, who have young children are socially and culturally expected to provide the same amount and quality of care as if they were stay-at-home mothers, which often results in some mothers developing stress and being forced to take sick leave because of this (Mellish, 2021). Culture shapes the interpretation and perception of organizations, and thus, culture can impact individual reactions toward institutions (Scott, 2014). In Denmark, the YMCA-YWCA DK can claim cultural-cognitive legitimacy in relation to gender equality as it is embedded in Danish culture, despite its challenges and limitations. In turn, this also means that the YMCA-YWCA DK is isomorphic and acts in accordance with general gender equality related cultural beliefs.

Palestinian culture determines that the elders are to be respected and obeyed by younger generations, which also applies to the family identity and heritage (Evason, 2020). Despite the conflict in the State, for generations, the powerful cultural features of family solidarity and respect have persisted (Evason, 2020). In turn, there are underlying gender expectations, social and cultural, which have also survived the effects of conflict. Women must show modesty and respectfully represent their families, avoiding "immodest or immoral behaviour" (Evason, 2020). Furthermore, women are viewed as the backbone of the family and are culturally and socially expected to comply with certain expectations, more so that men (Evason, 2020). There exists a cultural preference for mothers and wives to stay in and take care of the home and family. This cultural preference and expectation are offset by the role of grandparents as they give mobility and freedom to women, similar to the one created by the Danish daycare system, to work and move outside the home. How do these two statements go together? These two statements suggest a shift in the common definition of the cultural expectations of women. Suppose a new common definition is being formed. In that case, one joint organization might be able to attain cultural-cognitive legitimacy based on this as this one organization conforms to the cultural change of perception that is potentially being made. This could be a move towards more liberal views on women. The level of liberal views depends on the area (urban versus rural) (Evason, 2020), and younger people in urban areas are increasingly liberal regarding, e.g., dating/marriage and women with decision-making power. Aisha, from Palestine, indicates a more liberal thinking on gender when explaining:

I have never understood the idea behind young men and young women, why is it named

like that, but I think its purpose are one but the name is different. That is how I would like

> to believe that only the names are wrong or different. … I think in our generation I have
>
> to believe that the names are different, but it has the same purpose. (Appx. E)

Aisha suggests that the two organizations in Palestine are similar in most aspects, and only the names differ. Then, if the names are the only thing different, and the purpose is the same, why are they not joined? Aisha further suggests that younger generations are more open to gender inclusion and equality. This evolution vis-á-vis inequality is also implied by Yousef from Palestine by saying:

> I think back in the day there was a lot of inequality so that is why they call it young men,
>
> and they were focused on young men. But now all of our work in the YMCA is focused
>
> on both genders, and even in some communities where it is not possible to reach out about
>
> women, we focus more on women to reach more women and to have always all genders
>
> represented. (Appx. E)

Based on Yousef's answer in the interview, it is implied that gender inequality has evolved to the extent that some local YMCAs supplement the YWCA in Palestine by providing increased focus on women in areas that needs it. In the instance of the two organizations joining, the answers from Aisha and Yousef indicate that Palestinian culture could consider this act isomorphic based on the cultural context of gender equality in Palestine and thus add to the foundation of cultural-cognitive legitimacy for one joint organization.

Cameroonian culture and customs dictate that women, regardless of their level of empowerment, do not possess the agency and cultural capital required for significant change because of specific gender frameworks (Atanga, 2021). Misogynistic cultural beliefs and expectations exclude women from decision-making as they "are not competent to head families, political organizations, or businesses" despite the opposite being proven on lower non-formal levels (Atanga, 2021). Institutional and structural barriers reinforce the cultural expectations of women being powerless. Despite obtaining empowerment through, e.g., financial means, education, and capabilities, embedded misogynist practices and thinking "sustain women's effective powerlessness," nullifying any empowerment and rendering it nearly useless (Atanga, 2021). As covered in the first analysis chapter on regulative legitimacy, The State of Cameroon has made several international and regional commitments toward gender equality. However, these are supposedly being undermined by customary laws and

cultural expectations (Njikem, 2017). This suggests that some cultural forms are so embedded that they precede regulative measures, which can challenge gender equality. Culturally gender equality is very different in Cameroon compared to Denmark, as Danish society values gender equality highly ("Gender Equality," n.d.). It might be initiated at the national level in Cameroon through political commitments and initiatives by the State; however, the reception and acceptance of these in society are not guaranteed. Gender inequality is deeply embedded in the culture in Cameroon and thus requires a meticulous strategy for progress and change to rewrite the narrative of the cultural expectations of women in Cameroon. In the instance of joining the YMCA and YWCA, the lack of fundamental gender equality from a cultural perspective in Cameroon will make it hard to claim cultural-cognitive legitimacy. The goal of one joint organization, to promote gender equality through inclusion, is not isomorphic with the current cultural and social system and common definition vis-á-vis women's place in Cameroonian society. Thus the foundation for this legitimacy is fragile. A reoccurring theme, patriarchy, plays a significant role in regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive dimensions of legitimacy. Patriarchal dimensions of culture in Cameroon hinder women's and girls' prospects for equality within all sectors and aspects of life (de Harder, n.d.). Furthermore, religion and culture dictate women's expectations and rights (or lack thereof), not the government (de Harder, n.d.). The secondary data indicate a solid commitment to cultural and customary gender expectations and what women can and cannot do. However, an interview answer by Jean from Cameroon on the opinion of the two organizations being divided based on gender indicates that women are not as limited as the secondary data shows:

> Normally the two organizations are supposed to be one organization. Because the main difference between the two is the gender. … But normally it is supposed to be together because now women can make men things and men can make women things. We are together, we are unique, we are the same. … For me it is a bad thing [to be divided based on gender]. (Appx. D)

By this notion, Jean suggests that since women and men have the same opportunities, it is only the gender aspect that separates the two organizations. However, the secondary data suggest that women and men do not have the same opportunities based on cultural and social expectations. Nevertheless, since all the secondary data sources on Cameroon indicate a significant cultural gender inequality,

there is greater rationale to argue that the foundation for cultural-cognitive legitimacy for one joint organization is sparse and only suggested indirectly by Jean.

In Ukraine, there is a cultural expectation that "women take care of all household, education, child-rearing and elder-care activities" (Brogan, 2023), i.e., care tasks, an expectation which can be seen in the Danish labor market as well, but not so much in private life in Denmark. Society expects men to be the protectors and decision-makers and women to be the caretakers ("Ukraine," n.d. b), which is apparent in everyday life in Ukraine. Cultural and social expectations of women limit their prospects in the labor market which is apparent in the lack of women being promoted and having decision-making power ("Ukraine," n.d. b). These cultural expectations within and outside the home are similar to the ones in Denmark, although the data suggest that Ukrainian cultural expectations are more embedded than in Denmark. When Natacha from Ukraine was asked if she believed a potential merger between the YMCA and YWCA in Ukraine would be possible, she responded that it would be possible as in the YMCA UA's "national board we have only females" (Appx. C). This answer shows that there are, in fact, women in decision-making positions, at least on lower levels. However, if this is not culturally accepted and valued, as the secondary data suggest, then this is not a foundation for cultural-cognitive legitimacy. Furthermore, neither of the three Ukrainian interviewees knew about the existence of the YWCA in Ukraine prior to their interviews, yet, all three still believed that it could be possible to merge, regardless of lack of knowledge besides their own experiences (Appx. C). This optimism, expressed by the three Ukrainian interviewees, suggests that cultural and social expectations might not hinder cultural-cognitive legitimacy in the instance of joining the two organizations. If these three Ukrainians do not immediately view cultural beliefs on gender equality as a potential challenge to joining the two organizations, it can be speculated if the beliefs and values are not as impactful vis-á-vis limiting cultural-cognitive legitimacy as the secondary data indicates.

Some cultural expectations regarding gender in Myanmar are that women are expected, and socially obliged, to take care of domestic and care tasks and responsibilities in addition to any potential paying job they might have (Evason, 2017; "Gender Inequality in Myanmar," n.d.). Furthermore, there is an embedded expectation of men being dedicated leaders and women being supportive and acting modest and reserved as they are mainly 'decorative' (Evason, 2017; "Gender Inequality in Myanmar," n.d.). Cultural expectations influence the attitudes of women being subordinate and unfit for leadership roles ("Gender Inequalities in Myanmar," n.d.), reinforced by the Buddhist religion, which assigns men certain statuses and potentials unobtainable for women (Evason, 2017). Cultural and religious beliefs constrict the foundation for cultural-cognitive legitimacy in the instance of

joining the two organizations, as it is hard to argue that one joint organization conforms to these beliefs when the goal of joining is to alter them significantly. Gender culture and the thereto-related expectations in Myanmar differ significantly from the status in Denmark. This is also expressed when Aung from Myanmar was asked about the potential of joining the YMCA and YWCA in Myanmar:

> I just think three can be *cultural differences* because that it can be [one organization] in sometime in the future but I guess just think it is not a quick time because of *the cultural difference is very high.* The *cultural differences* from Europe to Asia. Because in *Asia men and women's things are very different* so we still have some kind of like *stereotypically differences* inside the organization. (Appx. B, emphasis added)

This answer suggests that the cultural differences between Europe and Asia might be too impactful to do what has been done in Denmark (and in other European countries) in Myanmar. Different cultures provide different perceptions of cultural-cognitive legitimacy. Thus, Aung's argument that there might be too big of a cultural difference between Denmark and Myanmar, vis-á-vis gender equality, might prove to be a challenge for one joint organization in Myanmar to be considered legitimate based on this pillar.

4.2.4   Findings summarized

Denmark is not 100% gender equal, which translates into the norms and values of society. Within the home, men and women are supposed to share responsibility and tasks, yet it is not always the case. Outside the home, the reality is a highly segregated labor market and women being underrepresented in leadership positions. Even though considerable challenges remain for gender equality in Danish society still values it highly and thus (still) has a foundation for normative legitimacy for the YMCA-YWCA DK to benefit from as the organization's purpose and conduct confines to social norms and values. When it comes to cultural and social expectations, mothers are expected to work and still be there in specific ways for the children, which can be stressful. Furthermore, there are certain cultural expectations vis-á-vis career choice for the binary genders. Even though it is not always the case, cultural expectations of domestic chores are equally distributed between women and men. Nevertheless, gender equality values are a big part of Danish culture, which ascribes cultural-cognitive

legitimacy to the YMCA-YWCA DK as it is isomorphic vis-á-vis their gender equality ideals and the cultural expectations of society.

At the beginning of this analysis chapter, it was established from the Country Similarity Index ("Denmark: Country Similarity Index," n.d.) that when it comes to the 'culture' aspect, Ukraine was the most similar to Denmark and Myanmar the least out of the four partner countries as illustrated in *Figure 4.3*. After looking at this with a focus on gender equality, this ranking has shifted. Based on the data from the chosen sources, it can be argued that gender equality related culture in Cameroon is the least similar to Denmark, and Ukraine remains the most similar based on, overall, having the most similar issues with gender equality compared to Denmark, just to a more considerable extent. The new ranking can be seen in *Figure 4.4*.
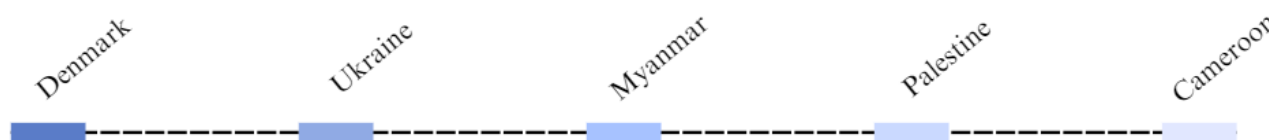

Figure 4.4: The ranking of the partner four partner countries in similarity to Denmark based on gender equality norms, values, and cultural expectations.

Based on the data extracted from the secondary and primary data, it has been established that in Ukraine, there are more narrow gender norms within the home compared to Denmark. The labor market is highly segregated based on gender, and the current military conflict reinforces stereotypical gender roles. Reactions from Ukrainian society to specific gender equality initiatives indicate that more 'traditional' gender roles are preferred vis-á-vis the military, which can also be seen in the segregated labor market and the gender norms within the home. These norms suggest that normative legitimacy might be tricky to claim in the instance of joining the two organizations, though not impossible. Culturally, Ukrainian women are expected to handle all care and domestic chores, which limits the professional prospects of women. However, this is not immediately viewed as a barrier in the case of joining the two organizations, which suggests there can be a foundation for cultural-cognitive legitimacy. Nevertheless, each type of legitimacy can be strengthened by providing the correct context, e.g., using Denmark as an example as they deal with similar issues, yet, the YMCA-YWCA DK still manages to survive and thrive.

In Myanmar, equality between man and wife is encouraged; however, gender norms remain within the home. Regarding gender norms outside the home, there was limited data to be extracted from the selected sources from this angle. Nevertheless, women working is a norm despite their challenges in the labor market. Even though gender norms in Myanmar tend to lean towards

more traditional ones, there can be a foundation for normative legitimacy in the instance of joining the two organizations from the right angle. Women are culturally expected to do the housework besides working a paying job. Men are culturally viewed as leaders, whereas women are supportive and subordinate. Culture and religion dictate women's opportunities in society, and it is pointed out that the gender culture of Myanmar is very different from Denmark, which suggests that there is a limited foundation for cultural-cognitive legitimacy in the instance of joining the two organizations.

Palestine is supposedly experiencing a shifting structure of housework to being increasingly more equally distributed and thus becoming more similar to Denmark. Young people and especially women, are influenced by their parents' vis-á-vis decision-making but are also some of the ones with the more liberal mindsets in urban areas when it comes to gender equality. There is low labor participation but high education enrollment for women, and as in Denmark, the labor market is highly segregated. Separately the foundations for normative legitimacy (inside and outside the home) would arguably not be enough to argue a stable and convincing foundation for normative legitimacy for one joint organization. However, focusing on aspects from inside and outside the home that support and supplement the goal and purpose could work and add to the claim of normative legitimacy. Culturally, young people are expected to obey and respect their elders. There are more rigid social and cultural expectations of women than men, and women are culturally preferred to stay home. Nevertheless, there is arguably a shift happening concerning the common definition of cultural expectations of women, which can potentially provide a basis for cultural-cognitive legitimacy in the instance of joining the two organizations.

In Cameroon, men do not do domestic chores, and women have limited assets. Women are treated inferior to men in everyday life, and men have the final say inside and outside the home. These norms and values provide little to no foundation for normative legitimacy in the instance of joining the two organizations as it does not conform with the purpose and goal of the merging. Furthermore, culturally women are viewed as not being fit to have and handle power. Culture and religion are so embedded in everyday life that gender equality measures from the State are struggling to be accepted by society and thus have an actual effect. Therefore, cultural-cognitive legitimacy also has little to no foundation in the instance of joining the two organizations.

The normative and cultural-cognitive pillars are the most complicated vis-á-vis measuring legitimacy because of the emphasis on individuals and lesser set factors. Thus, applying these established examples of the two types (as well as the regulative) of foundations for legitimacy, or

lack thereof, to a secondary measurer of institutional legitimacy will help determine whether or not joining will make sense in each of the four partner countries by applying more nuance to the legitimacy process.

4.3 The multilevel legitimacy process of organizational innovation

Based on the findings of RQ1 and RQ2, it is now possible to look into RQ3 in this final analysis chapter: *Would joining the two organizations into one in each respective country be a valid and smart choice vis-á-vis legitimacy?* In any of the cases of each of the four partner countries choosing to join the two organizations into one, it would, in the current reality, be a deliberate move to go from a state of institutional stability to a potential state of institutional change as the act would be intentional and not externally imposed. This, in turn, can give the joint organization an advantage when it comes to affecting the legitimacy process, yet, since a potential state of change is more bottom-up influenced, the joining might not pan out as desired based on individual propriety judgment leading to validity (Bitektine & Haack, 2015). Looking into this from a multilevel perspective can help establish whether or not joining the two organizations is smart when it comes to maintaining and possibly re-gaining legitimacy within the process. This part of the analysis provides certain considerations and recommendations for this unique legitimacy process. It first considers the current status of institutional stability and the foundation to keep or regain this in the instance of a state of change occurring as a result of a merger. Secondly, it provides insight and recommendations vis-á-vis certain strategies to utilize in order to regain a state of institutional stability.

4.3.1 From stability to change

In the current reality, both organizations in the four partner countries enjoy a state of institutional stability. When an organization is stable, it enjoys a passive legitimacy process from the institutional stability loop, where the judgment validation institutions (the media, the government, and the judicial system) play a crucial role (Bitektine & Haack, 2015). The judgment validation institutions in each country reinforce the norms that individuals apply in their propriety judgment based on collective validity, i.e., majority opinion. Within this multilevel theory of legitimacy, it can be argued that the government and the judicial system correlate with the elements of Scott's (2014) regulative pillar when it comes to influencing and reinforcing norms based on these institutions' actions and decisions. Furthermore, it can be argued that the media reflects elements of all three pillars in the sense that it

influences its consumers and culture in general by reinforcing and influencing norms and regulative actions which can favor or challenge certain grounds for legitimacy. The focus here is on the norms related to gender equality. In Denmark, the government reinforces the norms applied through the decisions made and actions taken on a regulative level, which have been established, e.g., the law of equal education for all children, the adjustment of the parental leave framework, and the revision of the criminal code vis-á-vis no-consensual intercourse. These regulations translate into the conduct of the judicial system, where the laws are enforced. Lastly, the media reports on both of these conducts, but also on, e.g., the acts of civil society and the importance of public institutions when it comes to promoting gender equality in Denmark ("Gender Equality," n.d.). On the macro level, these institutions implement norms based on validity, which individuals on the micro level use to assess propriety judgment. The YMCA-YWCA DK enjoys passive legitimacy from these applied norms as they correlate with the organization's purpose.

In Ukraine, the government reinforces norms through its political initiatives, e.g., by transferring narrow gender norms to school curriculums ("Ukraine," n.d.). Based on the data, the judicial system reinforces norms similar to Denmark through the framework laid out by the government. The Ukrainian media reinforces gender norms by, e.g., reporting headlines that deviate from reality and presenting women a certain way as "pretty young women in fatigues," influencing people's understanding of gender norms in certain situations (Brogan, 2023).

The Cameroonian government and judicial systems reinforce gender norms and inequality by, e.g., not providing law descriptions in the language spoken by the ones affected the most by the cause of the law (Njikem, 2017). Furthermore, women have the right to sue for divorce, but the judicial system, made up of men, can make the process harder and longer than necessary (Njikem, 2017). These judgment validation institutions reinforce gender norms that are not favorable for legitimately joining the two organizations in Cameroon.

How the judgment validation institutions currently reinforce and 'appoint' gender norms in Palestine and Myanmar is less disclosed in the selected data. However, in Palestine, it can be argued that the government is reinforcing gender equality norms through initiatives towards achieving the SDGs despite not being 'required' to do so (United Nations Country Team and occupied Palestinian territory Office of the Prime Minister of the State of Palestine, 2020). The ideas and measures to be taken identified in the *Atlas of Sustainable Development* reinforce certain desired norms, which can affect current norms based on the influence of the judgment validation institutions.

For Myanmar, gender norms and biases are reinforced by the media, which affects "public perception regarding women" within different contexts ("Gender Inequality in Myanmar," n.d.), i.e., affecting individual propriety judgment based on collective validity (Bitektine & Haack, 2015).

Arguably, the judgment validation institutions will not be as 'invalidated' in the stability loop in the potential state of institutional change for one joint organization, as the change is internally initiated instead of externally imposed. Then what does this mean for maintaining or reestablishing legitimacy? Can this harm the validity process? And could this be used as an advantage? Suppose there is no foundation for each of the three pillars of institutional legitimacy. In that case, there is no foundation for relying on validity when it comes to the judgment validation institutions affecting individual propriety judgment in the instance of joining the two organizations in each country. The question is then if there is *enough* general support for gender equality, from a micro and macro point of view in each country based on the three pillars, to initiate a potential state of institutional change with favorable prospects for legitimacy.

In the instance of the YMCA and YWCA in Palestine merging into one organization, there is little foundation for regulative legitimacy, but more so for normative and cultural-cognitive legitimacy as norms are supposedly slowly shifting, e.g., men doing domestic tasks and young people being more liberal in their thinking about gender, as pointed out by Aisha (Appx. E) and Evason (2020). Since young people are a target group for activities in the YMCA and YWCA, it makes sense to emphasize this claim. The individual propriety judgment, influenced by the current collective validity of the Palestinian interviewees' opinion of the prospects of joining the two organizations, differs slightly. Aisha has a positive view of the prospects of joining the two organizations and states that "I think it would be amazing actually. I think it would [be possible] yeah. We are a very close community and it can easily be joined" (Appx. E). The two other interviewees from Palestine have more skeptical views. Abdel states that "I am not sure if that is possible. It has been like this for a very long time. But hopefully we [the YMCA and YWCA in Palestine] start doing some work together then hopefully merge the two organizations. But I think that is going to be a long time from now" (Appx. E). Similarly, Yousef states that it might be possible, "but it is going to be a long process I think … it is a bit complicated because of the situation" (Appx. E) the situation being the geographical challenges caused by the occupation which means there is technically no national branch of the YMCA in Palestine, only local. Based on these individual judgments, the close community is an asset when joining the two organizations, yet, several cultural and structural challenges must be considered and potentially managed strategically.

For Ukraine, there is a basis for regulative legitimacy vis-á-vis their international commitments and other measures taken by the State. However, there is a tricky foundation for normative legitimacy because of more traditional beliefs, yet, it is not impossible to angle. There is a suggested foundation for cultural-cognitive legitimacy based on non-essential (for this case) cultural gender expectations in Ukraine. Despite examples of societal pushback regarding individual judgments on more gender-equal policies, the interviewees from Ukraine have an optimistic view of the potential of joining the two organizations. Diana expressed that "I think it is a good idea. I think it is possible and I will try to do something for this when I will be back home" (Appx. C). Alina and Natacha were also less familiar with the existence of a YWCA in Ukraine yet stated that it would be "smart" (Appx. C, Alina) for the two organizations to work together and that joining the volunteers under one cause will "be no problem" (Appx. C, Natacha). On a macro level, some challenges must be managed strategically to benefit from validity. However, on the micro level, joining the two organizations can correlate with some people's propriety judgment, which shows positive prospects for multilevel legitimacy.

In Myanmar, there is a basis for regulative legitimacy based on international political commitments, as well as the equality laws and initiatives made by the State. Furthermore, there is a foundation for normative legitimacy, despite leaning towards traditional norms within and outside the home. However, there is a limited foundation for cultural-cognitive legitimacy based on cultural gender expectations. Aung from Myanmar believes that one joint organization can be possible "sometime in the future" (Appx. B) and emphasizes culture as a challenge for joining the YMCA and YWCA in Myanmar at the current time. Nevertheless, the legitimacy foundations suggested in the secondary data imply that one joint organization would be possible if angled strategically and appropriately.

A different picture has been painted in Cameroon. Despite Jean being optimistic about joining the two organizations if their purposes match, it is emphasized that in Cameroon, it might be "a bit difficult" (Appx. D). Even though there is a foundation for regulative legitimacy, there is little to none for normative and cultural-cognitive legitimacy. Furthermore, the regulative measures taken by the State are suggested to not transfer successfully into society. If the joint organization can only attain legitimacy from the State but not from its target group and primary audience, it will not survive. Arguably, there needs to be a more collective change in society for the two organizations to join and contribute sustainably and effectively to the gender equality change. Thus, at the current state, it might be better for two separate organizations to remain to continue to provide a safe space for women and

girls, focusing on them and their development of competencies. One joint organization in Cameroon might succumb to the social reality of a patriarchal society where men will take the lead and leave the women in their current position as subordinates instead of lifting them to achieve gender equality.

It should be noted that individual judgment differs, and the answers in the interviews do not reflect every individual propriety judgment but provide some insight into some examples of judgment expressions. Norms applied by individuals in their judgment are a crucial part of the multilevel legitimacy process. Moreover, since it has been established that there is little to no basis for normative legitimacy for one joint organization in Cameroon, discussing the micro and macro level of legitimacy in an internally initiated state of institutional change would be redundant as one joint organization would not be able to survive because of limited sources of legitimacy.

4.3.2   From change to stability

The legitimacy process under conditions of institutional change is bottom-up influences where validity is scattered, and micro-level activities and judgments can reshape the social order. In the case of one joint organization ending up in a state of institutional change, as will probably be the case for the remaining three partner countries, being the ones initiating the change will give the organization a unique head-start when it comes to stabilizing the institutional state.

Strategy	Purpose	Measures
Rhetoric	Convincing the judging individual why joining the two organizations is the most valid choice.	Advocating the appropriate norms to apply to individual propriety judgment by appealing to emotions, normative beliefs, and rationale influence.
Increasing credibility of the speaker	Strengthen collective level validity and create a consensus about the legitimacy of the joint organization, through credible messengers and messages.	Utilizing influential speakers with the relevant authority.
Staging consensus	Presenting organized propriety judgment of a few to herd the unorganized judgment of the majority and thus influence validity.	Lobbying to streamline propriety judgement between the speaker and the organization.
Coercion and inducement	Oppressing opponents who criticize and attempt to undermine the legitimacy of the joint organization.	Through reputational attacks such as public shaming, the media, and legal actions.

Figure 4.5: The purpose and measures of the four strategies to influence the applied norms in the individual propriety judgment process to enhance the chances of legitimacy based on collective validity (Bitektine & Haack, 2015).

This advantage lets each partner country review and strategize its approach to influencing the applied norms in the propriety judgment process prior to initiating a state of change. Bitektine and Haack (2015) suggest four strategies to influence evaluators' beliefs and judgments vis-á-vis validity and propriety judgment, which, if successful, can help stabilize the institutional state. A summary of the purpose and measures of these four strategies can be seen in *Figure 4.5*. Based on the findings so far and some additional examples from the interviews, there can be made some recommendations to the measures to focus on, in each strategy, as one joint organization in the state of change, and how to influence the norms applied by individual evaluators.

Rhetoric, out of the four strategies is, for this case, the most relevant one to emphasize since if no approach to this one seems to be successful, then there is no basis for using and lobbying an effective, credible speaker or a foundation for backing up coercion and inducement measures. For this case, one joint organization in Myanmar can appeal to the norms and emotions connected to the encouragement of equality within the home and women's role in the labor market and, thus, participation in as well as contribution to the economy. Furthermore, there can be an appeal to rationale by focusing on the message of one joint organization to society; as Aung emphasizes

> The most common question I get is why they are still two different things. Most of the
>
> people are asking because, as I said, men and women is not that different in most of the
>
> organizations. So there is still being a [gender] stereotype in the twenty-first century so
>
> these are the messages [that two separate organizations send]. (Appx. B)

Inclusion would eliminate confusion, and if women and men can do the same, it would also promote gender equality at the same time. Another approach is to simultaneously appeal to emotions and rationale by focusing on the synergies and opportunities for understanding each other better in an inclusive environment by sharing experiences and concerns. Aung points out that "It would be very great to be a joint organization because there can be things to learn each other from women to men is not actually that different. We can combine, we can merge, and we can go together" (Appx. B). Emphasizing the changing times and slowly changing norms can help argue that one should avoid becoming stuck in the past and relying too much on traditions when discussing gender equality and forming individual propriety judgments.

For Palestine, one joint organization can strategically appeal to norms and emotions by emphasizing the slowly shifting structure within the home and the fact that women are doing more outside the home and becoming highly educated. Yousef (Appx. E) points out that the separation and names of the organizations might not be as relevant anymore as gender inequality has decreased since the two organizations were created. Now the purpose of the two, "which is the benefit of the young people" are the same (Appx. E). This can also be seen in the changing gender norms and thus is a valid and legitimate argument for joining the organizations as their purpose would also be to further this gender equality progress through inclusion. Aisha's and Abdel's opinions are based more on emotions as they believe that one joint organization sends a message of a purpose "to help young people to find themselves and to realize that they are different, not less than anybody else" (Appx. E, Aisha) and "that we are stronger when we are joint, we are stronger when we are a team" (Appx. E, Abdel). Furthermore, Aisha expresses that the message of two separate organizations is counterproductive by stating, "I would like to believe that separation leads to chaos, separation things and making more sections to anything creates chaos" (Appx. E, Aisha) suggesting that the best way to achieve the purpose of both the YMCA and the YWCA in Palestine is to be together and to be inclusive (Appx. E). Less separation and more inclusion can be relevant and powerful points to make when joining the two organizations considering the current occupation in Palestine. One joint organization in Palestine can also choose to appeal to rationale as well as an emotional influence by emphasizing the impact of the message two separate organizations sends, as opposed to one joint organization. However, because of the family structure, when it comes to applying norms and reaching legitimacy, it is important to target the elders because of their impact and position in families and the community. One way of doing this is by appealing to their emotions by underlining how one joint organization, as Aisha suggests;

> can create a stable roof and people can help more, more people can join, more people can
>
> feel comfortable without separating and choosing which way to go. … so people can feel
>
> more cozy in just one place and feel safe and can really feel like they help without feeling
>
> the need to choose. (Appx. E)

The joint organization can also choose to appeal to rationale emphasizing the prospects of an increased reach in the community, an increased number of resources to mobilize, and overall prospects for a more significant impact, thereby strengthening the community as a whole, as pointed out by

Abdel, Aisha, and Yousef (Appx. E). Furthermore, Yousef points out that the different messages sent based on one and two organizations create confusion, and thus one joint organization

> would take out the question do we work on men and women. This would show the world
>
> that no, and this would be very visible that we work for both genders. And people would
>
> not question it when they say young men and young women they would know that we
>
> work for young people. It would be more visible for people, more obvious. (Appx. E)

Focusing on the perception of the name of the two separate organizations and what confusion and feelings of exclusion it can lead to is a valid and rational point to make in favor of legitimacy for one joint organization.

As for one joint organization in Ukraine, the norms to focus on is women being an essential part of society and contributing to the economy, which provides rational reasoning for furthering this participation. Furthermore, a rationale influence emphasis could be on the increased impact of one joint organization, as noted by Diana, and the expansion of organizational agency and opportunities, as pointed out by Natacha (Appx. C). Alina believes that one joint organization in Ukraine will allow for more perspectives and values from both binary genders to be heard and acknowledged by the organization as a result of inclusion (Appx. C). This type of environment can potentially foster a change in perception and individual judgment and is thus a smart and rational angle on which to base the advocating for one joint organization, especially for attaining multilevel legitimacy but also to achieve the goal of promoting gender equality through inclusion. Furthermore, Natacha points out some confusion tied to the names of the two organizations, stating, "Sometimes when I am just thinking about the organization and to what the words mean so sometimes I am asking why men because I am woman" (Appx. C). This issue with interpretation and understanding of the names of the organizations can be alleviated by joining the two organizations and is thus essential to factor in when considering the rhetoric strategy.

Increasing the credibility of the speaker can be done strategically from several angles depending on the desired outcome of the strategy. For one joint organization in Palestine, it would make sense to use a speaker who represents the government because of the work with the SDGs and, at the same time, someone who appeals to the older generations because of their influential role in society. The younger generations are influenced by their elders. However, they also tend to be more

liberal, so it should be more straightforward to influence their individual propriety judgment vis-á-vis one joint organization and its goal. As for Myanmar, a credible speaker could be a member of the State, based on the gender equality laws and initiatives taken by it, or another public figure openly supporting gender equality in Myanmar. In Ukraine, the joint organization should focus on the State, based on the regulative measures taken towards gender equality, and use public figures with authority who are actively endorsing and advocating for gender equality before joining the organizations and initiating potential lobbying work for achieving consensus.

Staging consensus can be done well in advance in all three partner countries because of the lack of the element of surprise for the initiation of the change. This provides an opportunity for more meticulous, less stress-induced selection and lobbying of public speakers to provide credibility and foster legitimacy by organizing the judgments of the majority. This advantage, in turn, can provide a better chance of the desired outcome of the speaker strategy as there is external pressure to react in a self-induced state of institutional change.

Coercion and inducement are arguably the most aggressive and outward reaching out of the four strategies, which might not necessarily be the initial strategy to focus energy on as one joint organization in either of the three partner countries. It is a reactive strategy, and there is no need to initiate measures prematurely if there is a lack of opponents. Doing so might backfire and put the joint organization in the wrong lighting if it starts targeting others when its goal is gender equality through inclusion.

In time majority judgment will again dominate validity, and the instability loop will kick back in and work to advance majority judgment. If the strategies are successful, then the stability loop will, in time, benefit the joint organization with passive legitimacy, and the strategical measures will be lesser and lesser needed to advocate for institutionalized norms to apply in the propriety judgment process.

5. Conclusion

Now returning to this thesis' problem of why not national YMCAs and YWCAs have merged into one organization considering the scale of the gender equality debate, the role of organizations in impacting social norms, and the gender equality effects of inclusion. There are multiple angles from which to approach this problem. However, a foundation for legitimacy arguably is one of the initial

aspects to investigate. Undoubtedly factors vis-á-vis, e.g., structural, geographical, and economic matters when joining the YMCA and YWCA, must also be considered. However, using energy and resources on these matters is pointless if the foundation for legitimacy is non-existent. Practical technicalities are subsequent to being able to survive in society. For YMCA and YWCA in Cameroon, it would not make sense to join the two organizations based on a gender equality related legitimacy foundation. Furthermore, as Elkin and McLean (1976) found, there could be concerns from the YWCAs side vis-á-vis patriarchal tendencies dominating the joint organization by potentially undermining and overshadowing the contributing aspects of the YWCA. The level of patriarchal and traditional norms in Cameroon could indeed present themselves this way in the instance of joining the two organizations. This supports the suggestion that the two organizations should remain separate as the best move towards fostering gender equality to a point in the future where it might be possible, from a legitimacy perspective, to join the two organizations.

There will never be a point in time when some political, cultural, or economic barrier will not be present in society. Thus, there will never be *perfect* conditions for organizational innovation. Therefore, these conditions should also be weighed when legitimacy foundations and strategies are determined. The YMCA and YWCA in Ukraine, based on the data and findings of this thesis, can be joined based on legitimacy if done so strategically. The main focus should be on the sources of regulative legitimacy and, subsequently, on specific angles for normative and cultural-cognitive legitimacy by advocating rationale reasons for the merger. However, the data sets for Ukraine, both primary and secondary, presented many vague examples on which to determine a potential legitimacy foundation in the instance of joining the two organizations. To more confidently assess the potential legitimacy-related reasons why a merge has not already happened, more explicit data was needed. However, bringing in additional data would have required the researcher to deviate from the streamlined data collection strategy.

Scott (2014) argues that if an organization can claim legitimacy based on more than one pillar, it signifies a strong organization. For the case of Myanmar, the findings suggest that cultural obstacles are the main reason the two organizations have yet to become one from an inclusion and gender equality perspective. However, based on the findings, there is a foundation for regulative and normative legitimacy. The impact of the joint organization on norms and society could lead to a foundation for cultural-cognitive legitimacy with time.

Lastly, for Palestine, the foundation for legitimacy from the three pillars is sporadic and sometimes sparse, which could be part of why a merger has not happened yet concerning inclusion and gender equality. It is simply too big of a strategic puzzle at this point. Furthermore, because of the geographical issues with the YMCA not having an official national branch, fundamental issues make one joint organization on a national level impossible. Nevertheless, an approach could be to merge certain local associations until a national YMCA can be established and the two joined nationally. This, in turn, allows local associations to test out the change in their communities. This could be a productive and rational alternative based on the decentralized structure of the YMCA and YWCA, which allows local associations to tailor their implementation and mobilization of inclusion to their community's needs and make rapid changes and responses dependent on context (Elkin & McLean, 1976). Local cooperation and amalgamation could create gradual change, preparing a solid foundation for a joint national branch in the future.

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