Conflicts in Myanmar: A systemic approach to conflict analysis and transformation

Abstract

Myanmar is the scene of one of the longest ongoing conflicts in the world. Due to recent efforts at reforms and democratisation, Myanmar has come under the light of the media and the ethnic clashes have attracted more attention than they ever have in the past. This dissertation aims to examine the potential for conflict transformation to provide a solution to this intractable violence. Using a combination of conflict mapping and macro as well as meso level conflict analysis, this study suggests the need for a systemic transformation. By collecting information from second hand sources, this paper provides a hypothetical application of Lederach’s theory to transform the conflict and suggests the need for further study and actions in order to create sustainable peace in Myanmar.

Key words: Myanmar, conflict transformation, complexity theory, systemic analysis, conflict analysis, conflict mapping, peacebuilding

Word Count: 13400
Table of Contents

Chapter 1 – Introduction .................................................................................. 4
  1.1. Background of the Conflict ................................................................. 5
  1.2. Research Question ............................................................................... 7
  1.3. Aim & Objectives ................................................................................ 8
  1.4. Importance of the study ..................................................................... 8
  1.5. Previous research ............................................................................... 8
  1.6. Overview of key concepts ................................................................. 10
  1.7. Limitations and Delimitations ............................................................ 13
  1.8. Thesis structure ................................................................................. 13

Chapter 2 – Theoretical framework ................................................................. 15
  2.1. The complex nature of conflicts ...................................................... 15
  2.2. Conflict transformation .................................................................... 15

Chapter 3 – Methodological approach ............................................................ 20
  3.1. Epistemology and ontology ............................................................... 20
  3.2. Empirical sources ............................................................................. 21
  3.3. Case selection .................................................................................... 22
  3.4. Method of analysis ........................................................................... 22

Chapter 4 – Mapping and transforming the conflict in Myanmar .............. 26
  4.1. Conflict mapping ................................................................................ 26
     4.1.1. Macro-level analysis ................................................................. 26
     4.1.2. Meso-level analysis ................................................................. 32
  4.2. Proposed systemic approach to conflict transformation in Myanmar ... 37
     4.2.1. Strategic planning for systemic transformation ......................... 38
     4.2.2. Mobilisation of agents of peaceful change ............................... 40
     4.2.3. Engagement with key stakeholders .......................................... 45

Chapter 5 – Discussion and Conclusions ....................................................... 48
  5.1. Discussion ......................................................................................... 48
  5.2 Conclusions ......................................................................................... 52

Appendix 1: Map of Myanmar with state borders ....................................... 54
Appendix 2: List of Armed Groups ............................................................... 56

Bibliography .................................................................................................... 57
List of Figures and Tables

Table 4.1: Conflict Actors ........................................................................................................ 28
Table 4.2: Conflict Issues ........................................................................................................ 30
Figure 4.3: Conflict dynamics .................................................................................................. 32

List of Abbreviations

ASEAN: Association of South East Asian Nations
CSO: Civil Society Organisations
KIA: Kachin Independence Army
KIO: Kachin Independence Organisation
NLD: National League for Democracy
SLORC: State Law and Order Restoration Council
WLB: Women’s League of Burma
Chapter 1 – Introduction

The conflict in Myanmar has been going on for over sixty years, making it one of the longest on going conflicts in the world. To date, neither the international community made up of actors such as states, international organisations, NGOs nor internal actors have been able to provide a suitable way towards long-term and sustainable peace. According to Mu’id, efforts to resolve the conflict have failed until now because conflict resolution efforts have largely focused on trying to control the conflict in order to eliminate it. He argues that such an approach is not suited to asymmetric conflict where the state is the problem. Indeed, efforts towards peace in Myanmar have been limited because the issues at the origin of the struggle have been ignored, having been judged intractable and thus impossible to deal with. The majority of the literature that focuses on the issue of ‘conflict resolution’ oversimplifies the complexity of ethnic conflicts and thus fails to provide real solutions to protracted conflict. Mu’id argues that this is due to a general discouragement among peace and conflict scholars and practitioners due to the growing number of questions regarding conflict resolution and the lack of answers to these questions. A direct result of this gap was the emergence of a new strand of conflict studies literature which better addressed the multilevel nature of ethnic conflicts. Based on complexity theory, this strand of literature considered conflicts as complex phenomenon that required a non-linear analysis. Lederach, a prominent scholar of peace studies, coined that theory of conflict transformation, which aims at deep alterations of the conflict parties’ relationships in order to avoid reoccurrence of violence. This approach to facilitating peace focuses less on the immediate outcome, a peace agreement, and more on changing the structural patterns that cause violence. Specifically targeted at protracted conflicts, this method of addressing conflicts seeks to guarantee long-lasting peace. This thesis is interested in seeing how one particular strand of conflict transformation, systemic conflict transformation, inspired by complexity theory, when used as a theoretical...
framework, can give us new insight into a way forward for the conflict as outside actors.

1.1. Background of the Conflict

Myanmar has recently attracted a lot of attention because of the radical democratic reforms the newly elected government has undertaken in order to transform the country. President Thein Sein has undertaken a series of “people centered” political reforms focusing on 10 priority areas that will transform Myanmar into a ‘normal’ country\(^7\), encourage development and improve the quality of life of Burmese citizens. Since the democratisation started, several ceasefires have been broken and the ethnic clashes, a tragic cornerstone of Myanmar’s history, have never been more deadly. Myanmar is indeed characterised by great ethnic diversity which has always caused governance issues\(^8\). It is made up of a Burman majority, seven main ethnic groups and dozens of smaller groups. They are disseminated across the persisting colonial structure composed of seven peripheral states populated by ethnic minorities and seven divisions dedicated to the Burman majority\(^9\). According to the last official census dating back from 1983, ethnic minorities accounted for 41% of the mostly Buddhist population\(^10\).

When Burma achieved independence in 1948, the former British colony possessed all the tools to perpetuate the democratic system implemented by Britain. Indeed, the parliamentary system subsided until General Ne Win’s coup d’état on March 2, 1962\(^11\). From then on isolationism and socialism were the guiding lines of Burma’s new military regime. The state progressively closed off to the world as the military Junta became more and more powerful. Burmese citizens lost their rights to vote, their freedom of expression and many other basic civil liberties. Amid this political

---


\(^9\) Ibid. 118; See Appendix 1 for a map of Myanmar


\(^11\) Ibid. 133
oppression, numerous rebel groups were born, fighting for their basic human rights, but mostly for the survival of their ethnic group.

In 1947, in preparation of independence, the Panglong agreement, viewed as the founding treaty of the present day Union of Burma or Myanmar\textsuperscript{12}, was signed between the post-colonial rulers and the minorities to guarantee the recognition of their people, their autonomy and their right to be included in the democratic process\textsuperscript{13}. Despite the importance of the ethnic communities in Myanmar, the inclusive agreement was quickly forgotten after Aung San, one of its instigators, was assassinated and the military took over the country. The Panglong process was even further threatened by the decision to make Buddhism the state religion of Burma in 1961\textsuperscript{14} because of the presence in Myanmar of a small minority of Muslims, originating from India who felt threatened by this attempt at assimilation.

The Muslim community was not the only minority to feel threatened by the Burmese regime. As the military’s grip over the country tightened, a strong nationalistic sentiment developed as the minorities felt they were forcefully assimilated into the larger community and deprived of their culture, religion and languages\textsuperscript{15}. Over the next few decades, Myanmar was the scene of violent armed conflicts between the ruling party and the ethnic factions. In 1989, the ruling party, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) achieved the highest level of its assimilation policy by changing the name of the country from Burma, which referred to “a post colonial multi ethnic, multi religious and multi culture plural nation state”\textsuperscript{16}, to Myanmar, thus removing any reference to the national plurality of ethnicities. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, popular protests seeking to reinstate democracy and defend minority rights were severely repressed by the government. During that same period, a number of ceasefires were signed between Burma and the armed rebels however there was no disarmament or progress made on ethnic issues. The refusal of the military regime to step down even after the victory of the

\textsuperscript{12} In this dissertation, the terms Burma and Myanmar will be used indiscriminately. This is for stylistic purposes and no political implications should be read in this choice.

\textsuperscript{13} As stated during the Panglong Conference: “right to exercise political authority of administrative, judiciary, and legislative powers in their own autonomous national states and to preserve and protect their language, culture, and religion in exchange for voluntarily joining the Burman in forming a political union and giving their loyalty to a new state” (Silverstein in Sakhong 2012: 4)


\textsuperscript{15} Ibid. 8

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid. 11
National League of Democracy (NLD) during the 1990 elections caused strong discontentment within the nation\textsuperscript{17}. However, in 1992, the SLORC announced its intention to reform the country through a national convention. After 14 years of deliberation, it was agreed that a National Referendum would be held in order to vote on a new constitution, which was adopted in 2008 after a tremendous turn out during the referendum. This then led to the election of a new quasi civilian government that came into power in March 2011. While this was a victory for the NLD, the 2008 constitution still gives a large amount of authority to the military, which has control over the executive power of the state.

Since its appointment, the new government has been making what appear to be radical changes in the governance of Myanmar. On January 19 2013, President Thein Sein unveiled his second wave of reforms to donor countries and organizations. During his declaration, he announced his intention to “transform the country into a modern, developed democracy”\textsuperscript{18}. However, despite the enthusiasm that has shaken the international community, questions have been raised over Myanmar’s opening. Indeed, at the heart of the concept of democracy is the ability to deal with internal diversity through peaceful means, yet renewed civil violence and ethnic strives have reminded the world that democracy or the end of authoritarianism are not a sufficient conditions to create peace.

1.2. Research Question

The purpose of this research is to see if the conflict in Myanmar can be better problematized using conflict transformation and complexity theory as a theoretical tool for understanding the conflict itself, and investigating possible ways forward towards peace. This dissertation will focus on the following question:

How can complexity theory and conflict transformation explain the intractable nature of the conflict in Myanmar and shed light on a potential way towards peace?

\textsuperscript{17} Keling, et al. 2010: 134
1.3. Aim & Objectives

Given the number of protracted conflicts that have resorted back to violence in the past decades\(^{19}\), it appears that the problematisation of conflicts and the conceptualisation of their resolutions can be improved. This study therefore aims to develop a deeper understanding of the conflict using complexity theory and conflict transformation as theoretical guidance. Taking this deeper understanding of the conflict, this study will propose a hypothetical way to start the peacebuilding efforts according to conflict transformation theory, as formulated by Lederach.

1.4. Importance of the study

Peacebuilding practices have focused on immediate cessation of hostilities in the past couple of decades but with varying success when it comes to achieving long term peace. This study suggests that a different framework might be successful to conceptualise and deal with ethnic conflicts. It focuses on providing a suggestion for the application of complexity theory and conflict transformation to a conflict that has been largely ignored by the literature.

The reformation process of Myanmar has only been undertaken mid-2011 which has given little time to scholars to provide constructive solutions to the upsurge of ethnic and religious violence in the country. This dissertation therefore wants to suggest a potential peacebuilding framework that could be applied to Myanmar. The knowledge and suggested conflict transformation process provided in this study could help those engaged in peacebuilding, both on the ground and at the international level, and encourage them to find a way out of the protracted conflict and towards democratic consolidation through constructive transformation.

1.5. Previous research

Lederach and Galtung were the main instigators of the theory of conflict transformation in the 1980s\(^{20}\). The Berghof Foundation has published a large

---


number of reports and articles by various peace and conflict studies scholars regarding best practices and implementation of systemic intervention for conflict transformation\textsuperscript{21}. These highlighted the need to forget about the notion of ‘resolution’ to the profit of a more long term multi level approach that did not emphasise the need for ‘an end’ to the conflict but rather a deeply rooted change. Change could occur at all levels of society and could concern the political, social and economic sectors. It usually implied co-adaptation between the agents of a conflict\textsuperscript{22}.

A sub-field within the conflict transformation literature is ‘conflict mapping’. Conflict mapping is considered an essential step to a better understanding of a conflict and the most appropriate peacebuilding approach to it. The systemic analysis is one way of conceptualising conflict and it has primarily been used to map intractable conflicts for example in the case of Sri Lanka\textsuperscript{23}. However, while the existing literature provides great insight on theoretical approach and methods of conflict analysis and mapping, it is less clear on namely the measures needed to achieve long-term peacebuilding in practice, meaning ways to influence the systems, structures and relationships which have been proven to contribute to the formation and escalation of conflict.

This is a gap that is recognised by Norbert Ropers in his article dedicated to conflict transformation in Sri Lanka\textsuperscript{24}. He states that despite the number of field guides available that promote the core ideas of conflict transformation theory, meaning that conflicts are made up of systems that must be individually address in order to achieve peace, it is rarely applied to case studies and even less implemented in the field\textsuperscript{25}. Ropers is one of the few to attempt to apply Lederach’s theory as a tool for analysing conflict and, in line with conflict transformation theory, provide a

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{24}Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{25}Ibid: 4
\end{itemize}
reflection on making “transformation of internal conflicts more effective” by applying a systemic analysis approach. By applying his critical reflections to the peace process in Sri Lanka, he provides a precedent for the systemic study of conflicts and its application in the field.

This paper will adopt Ropers ‘systemic analysis’ approach for deconstructing the conflict in order to be able to see its various ‘systems’ involved in the conflict. According to conflict transformation theory, this mapping of the conflict is the first step in its transformation process accord to both complex theory and conflict transformation theory. Once the important contributing systems are highlighted, one can go about facilitating change in order to address the conflict from the inside out.

1.6. Overview of key concepts

Conflict: Over the centuries, the term conflict has been the subject of endless debate due to the complexity of its nature. For the purpose of this dissertation, I will use Galtung’s definition that states that conflict is created by the incompatibility of an attitude, a behaviour and a contradiction (A+B+C).

- An attitude is what is embedded in an individual or a society. It is related to culture, the way one perceives themselves and others. An attitude can be distrust or hatred because it has been bread by an “us vs them” way of thinking.
- A behaviour is the reaction of a group or an individual to its environment. Behaviours are usually violent or nonviolent. While attitudes and contradictions are often invisible, behaviours are the visible part of the conflict.
- A contradiction is an issue that appears incompatible with the structure of society. A contradiction usually goes against the ideology or belief system of a group. For example, if a minority group that has always been oppressed

---

26 Ibid : 5
27 ‘System’ is here defined as interdependent self reproducing set of relationships that influence each other and create unpredictable outcomes at the macro level: (Walby, 2003. "Complexity theory, Globalisation and Diversity". Paper presented to conference of the British Sociological Association, University of Leeds
28 Galtung. 1996: : 71
seeks greater human rights, the rest of the society will perceive it as a contradiction because it goes against the way things have always been.

In case there is an inconsistency between the goals of different groups or individuals, a contradiction is born. This further leads to violent behaviour and hatred thus causing conflict. Similarly, if hatred already exists between two groups, due to historical factors, the smallest contradiction can create violence. This constitutes the life cycle of a conflict and can explain the resurgence of violence after long periods of peace.

Protracted conflicts are shaped when the contradiction is addressed thus creating a non-violent behaviour but the attitude is ignored. Despite the peaceful environment, conflict is likely to reappear because the root causes of violence have not been tackled.

It is important to distinguish between conflict and violence. While they often occur together, it is possible to have a conflict without violence if the issue is addressed in an appropriate and timely manner. According to Galtung, violence only occurs when a conflict is not transformed²⁹.

**Protracted conflict**: Like every type of conflict, it is difficult to give a clear cut definition of protracted conflicts. For the purpose of this dissertation, Azar’s definition will be used: protracted social conflict is characterised by “the prolonged and often violent struggle by communal groups for such basic needs as security, recognition and acceptance, fair access to political institutions and economic participation”³⁰.

**Peacebuilding**: “Peacebuilding involves a range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management, and to lay the foundations for sustainable peace and development. Peacebuilding strategies must be coherent and tailored to specific needs of the country concerned, based on national ownership, and should comprise a

²⁹ Ibid. 74
carefully prioritized, sequenced, and therefore relatively narrow set of activities aimed at achieving the above objectives.”

**Conflict resolution:** Conflict resolution refers to a set of methods designed to end a conflict permanently by addressing the problems and interests of each side until they are both satisfied with the outcome. Diamond defines resolution as seeking to "discover, identify and resolve the underlying root causes of the conflict". Conflict resolution therefore focuses on problem solving and negotiations in order to obtain negative peace. Addressing the needs, interests and grievances of two parties is a very difficult task and it would be almost impossible to apply resolution to a multi-party dispute. Resolution does not appear to be suited to deal with highly complex nature of conflicts such as ethnic strives. It appears to be a theory that is more appropriate to study zero sum wars that end with a winner and a loser rather than multilevel social conflicts. Indeed, considering the peacebuilding failures of the 1990s, notably in Rwanda and Bosnia, it appears that conflict resolution is no longer an appropriate framework to address modern conflicts. Additionally, ‘resolution’, as pointed out by Lederach, emphasises the need for an end to the conflict. Such terminology highlights a sense of urgency and therefore encourages superficial quick fixes to the direct causes of conflicts that are actually rooted deeply in society and are caused by complex issues. Conflict resolution implies that a conflict is either solvable or intractable.

**Ethnic group:** In order to study ethnic conflict, a definition of ethnic group is required. The UN defines ethnic groups as “identified by ethnic nationality (i.e., country or area of origin, as distinct from citizenship or country of legal nationality), race, colour, language, religion, customs of dress or eating, tribe or various combinations of these characteristics.”. It is important to mention that membership

---

34 Mu'id. 2003.
35 Lederach. 1995: 200
36 Galtung. 1996: 51
to an ethnic group can also come from a sense of belongingness and common identity, despite the absence of common visible characteristics.

1.7. Limitations and Delimitations

It is important to note that at the time this dissertation is being written, the conflict in Myanmar is on going as violence and deadly clashes occur every day. The situation on the ground is rapidly changing and it is therefore difficult to map the conflict and provide a possible framework for constructive conflict transformation. It is important to remember that this study is conducted in April 2013, merely one year after President Thein Sein’s first wave of reforms, and two years before the first democratic elections in Myanmar.

Second, it should be reminded that conflict analysis is always a subjective activity. There is always more than one narrative to a conflict and the choice of the studied literature reflects the point of view of the researcher and skews the process of conflict analysis. The analysis section of this dissertation relies almost exclusively on news articles and reports from the ground. Therefore, even before the analysis, the information on Myanmar is a reflection of a reality created by the author.

Finally, conflict transformation is a relatively recent field of study. It focuses on long term alterations of conflict. Having been applied to few cases and only fairly recently, it is difficult to judge the adequacy and efficiency of the measures and initiatives suggested in the literature.

1.8. Thesis structure

The first part of the dissertation will provide a theoretical framework centred around the theory of conflict transformation and the methodology which focuses on systemic conflict analysis. They will then serve in the analysis of the case study.

The second part of the thesis will be dedicated to a case study of Myanmar. The study will focus on the period of democratic reforms that have been undertaken by President Thein Sein since 2011. The aim is to analyse the peacebuilding policies in a multi-ethnic state where transition is developing through progressive reform rather than a major democratic revolution and where ethnic strife is still very present. It is divided in two parts, first an in depth analysis of the conflict and
second a systemic approach to a potential transforming intervention. This section seeks to put into practice the systemic approach to conflict transformation outlined in the first part of the dissertation. It seeks to provide methods for democratic consolidation in view of the violent ethnic clashes that are still threatening state and nation building.
Chapter 2 – Theoretical framework

The following section introduces the theoretical framework that will be use in order to analyse the conflict in Myanmar. It first outlines the complexity theory, a sociological approach that envisions conflict as a complex set of inter-related and inter-dependent systems and therefore helps further understand ethnic conflict. Second, the theoretical framework discusses conflict transformation and its potential to induce change in order to transform a conflict towards peace.

2.1. The complex nature of conflicts

According to Boulding, conflicts “operate on the edge of chaos – not completely random but not in equilibrium”\(^{38}\). Indeed, they are made up of many different factors that influence each other, as well as subjected to the uncertain nature of human agency. “Human beings are moved not only by immediate pressures but by distant goals that (…) are susceptible to change (…), as a result of apparently slight changes in current information”\(^{39}\). Therefore the relationships between actors are in constant flux thus modifying the challenges and issues at stake in the conflict. Interaction makes conflict unstable and difficult to predict. As previously mentioned, conflict resolution has failed to establish peace in most recent struggles due to its tendency to over-simply conflicts This paper asserts that conflict resolution therefore possesses limited tools to deal with conflicts that are composed of many actors and relationships, without any official leader to represent these groups, on many different levels of society and engage with other groups.

It must therefore be recognised that a new approach to understanding conflicts is necessary. Walby takes the notion of complexity, which is traditionally found in natural sciences such as biology, physics and chemistry, and conceptualises it from a sociological standpoint in order to analyse globalisation and the many interacting factors present in the phenomenon\(^{40}\). She has been critiqued for attempting to bring into a sociological context, a theory that originated from sciences where the

\(^{39}\) Ibid. : 24
\(^{40}\) Walby. 2003: 6
causality could be mathematically measured as opposed to simply observed. However, Walby’s theory that highlighted the importance of considering social situations as a network of elements and taking into account their inter-causality proved particularly useful in studying social conflicts. Complexity theory sees the world as being made up of sets of social relations such as class, gender, ethnicity or age and each of these sets is a system constituted of many interacting elements that interact and mutually influence each other\textsuperscript{41}. Each element can be part of more than one system forcing all systems to interact. Therefore “slight perturbations could lead to bifurcation with unpredictable results”\textsuperscript{42}.

This is how a conflict is constructed: a multiplicity of systems interacting and creating a conflict when a contradiction exists between any of these systems. While complexity theory cannot predict the outcomes of system interactions, complexity theory can prepare an external observer for the unpredictability of the outcomes created by the system dynamics. Complexity theory also implies the identification of all systems present in the phenomenon studied. In the case of a conflict, it allows to limit the analysis to the systems that are in direct relations with the struggle\textsuperscript{43}. It helps highlight the relationships, issues and priorities in each system and in the conflict as a whole. This ensures that the peacebuilding approach remains focused on the problem at stake. Being aware of the different systems can provide different perspective on the issue. Peacebuilding requires flexibility, creativity and empathy therefore multiple lenses can improve the understanding of the issue and help create a sound strategy to respond to the problem.

Complexity theory is a particularly useful approach when dealing with ethnic conflicts. Indeed ethnic conflicts present specific and even more complex characteristics than other conflicts because the interactions between the many systems involved in the conflict are influenced by non-visible factors such as identity, culture, grievances and mistrust\textsuperscript{44}. The intertwining of ethnic processes and power entrench the conflict further into society, making it harder to understand and

\begin{enumerate}
\item Hendrick. 2009: : 8
\item Boulding. 1962: : 24
\item Hendrick. 2009: 26
\end{enumerate}
analyse\textsuperscript{45}. Complexity theory helps avoid the over simplifying and reductionist approach of a linear analysis. Instead it takes into account dynamics and mutual influence of the conflict parties on each other. Complexity provides a richer and deeper level of analysis to conflict.

The theory of conflict transformation builds on these ideas of interacting systems as being at the root of conflicts. It takes complexity theory one step further by proposing that, despite their complexity, systems and their interactions can be analysed, modelled and influenced in order to induce change and eventually achieve sustainable peace.

\textbf{2.2. Conflict transformation}

Conflict transformation is a term that has been coined in the late 1980s by John Paul Lederach\textsuperscript{46}. It designates a method of conflict resolution that focuses on the transition from violence to non destructive behaviour and on rebuilding relationships between adversaries in the specific context of ethnic conflicts\textsuperscript{47}. Conflict transformation is indeed especially suited to ethnic conflicts, which are complex and systemic conflicts. Seen by some as a nonviolent method of peacebuilding, it intends to deal with protracted or asymmetric conflicts that repeatedly alternate phases of violence and peace\textsuperscript{48}. Conflict transformation suggests that recurring ethnic conflicts are created by an imbalance in power and a break down of social relationships, which can be fixed through transformation and rebuilding of relationships. The objective of the approach is to create sustainable peace by addressing the root causes of the war and by giving power to the people in order to achieve just peace\textsuperscript{49}. Ryan argues that if conflict is merely stopped by intervention without transformation, it is more likely that violence will reoccur\textsuperscript{50}. Conflict transformation does not see conflicts as fundamentally bad because they

\textsuperscript{45} Hendrick. 2009: 34
\textsuperscript{46} Lederach. 2003:
\textsuperscript{48} Miall. 2004. "Conflict Transformation: A Multi-Dimensional Task". Ibid.2 : 3
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid. 21
are in fact agents of change in society however it aims to transform conflict gradually in order to avoid violence. It also aims to implement more than negative peace, the absence of violence; it also seeks positive peace, the end of structural violence for long lasting peace\(^51\).

Conflict transformation is based on the idea that conflicts are complex and their analysis requires multiple lenses, namely a systemic analysis\(^52\). Conflicts must be considered on three different levels. The first level is the immediate situation, the outbreak of violence. The second level is concerned with the immediate problems but takes into consideration the roots causes of the immediate problems and tries to find a deeper meaning to violence. The third level is analysing the framework and context of the issue in order to find long-term solutions. Based on these three levels of analysis, conflict transformation understands that peacebuilding is a gradual process that relies on uniting people and resources within a particular setting\(^53\). In other words, a bottom up approach should be privileged over a top down intervention.

Lederach proposes four main areas that should be considered in conflict transformation\(^54\):

- **Personal change** concerns the emotional and perceptual aspects of the conflict. It usually regards changes actors have to make at the individual level.

- **Relational change** is a change in the interaction of the parties involved the way they perceive and act around each other.

- **Structural change** involves a restructuring of society pattern and decision-making. This could include changes in governance, electoral processes or institutions.

- **Cultural change** involves the modification of cultural pattern to understand and respond to a conflict. It is deemed to be a very important part of conflict transformation since “social conflict emerges and develops on the basis of the meaning and interpretation people involved attach to action and

\[^51\] Galtung. 1996: 68
\[^52\] Lederach. 2003: 7
\[^53\] Lederach. 1995: 5
\[^54\] Lederach. 1997: 31
events...From this starting point, conflict is connected to meaning, meaning to knowledge, and knowledge is rooted in culture”\textsuperscript{55}.

According to Lederach, a comprehensive peace process must be undertaken at several levels in order to create an appropriate strategy within an appropriate time frame that will challenge existing structures and address issues in all systems of the conflict. Both grassroots and elite levels must be involved to create “new cohesive realities”\textsuperscript{56}.

Conflict transformation, because it works over the long term, necessitates the involvement of all actors present in the conflict and more importantly, the empowerment of grassroots organisations such as local NGO as well as citizens. Conflict transformation also necessitates an external approach because it provides a better overview of the conflict as a whole and allows for an appropriate intervention by outside mediators\textsuperscript{57}. This outside perspective of the conflict and its resolution is therefore a core component of the theory and does not necessarily imply that conflict transformation adopts a Western stance on the way towards ending the conflict nor does it mean that Lederach’s theory fails to take into account cultural characteristics of the conflict. Instead, this external view of the conflict offers a more rounded analysis of the situation by being able to visualise all the systems at once and their inter-relationships.

\textsuperscript{55}Lederach. 1995: 8
\textsuperscript{56}Galtung. 1996: 34
\textsuperscript{57}Wils, et al. 2006: 4
Chapter 3 – Methodological approach

3.1. Epistemology and ontology

This study is an exploratory qualitative research based on a single illustrative case study. It adopts a constructivist epistemological perspective of knowledge. When it comes to conflict studies, the plurality of narratives and the inevitable subjectivity of the researcher influence the way knowledge is acquired58. Narratives change according to memories, past experiences, ethics, ideologies and even gender thus a conflict is created by social interactions and relationships. This is particularly relevant to this study since conflict transformation assumes that peace relies on the alteration of relationships. The study of the conflict requires multiple perspectives and the realisation that solutions for some might be issues for others hence the difficulty of establishing a long lasting peace process.

From an ontological point of view, it is important to acknowledge the existence of non-observable phenomenon59. By adopting a social constructivist perspective, it is possible to take into account irrational factors60 in conflict such as hatred, grievances and mistrust that are often present in ethnic strives. Constructivism suggests that social interactions therefore exist independently of perception but are shaped by factors that cannot be fully grasped by scientific reasoning and require external social validity. From a constructivist perspective, it is important to acknowledge that conflict does not have one reality but is constructed by a point of view, a personal and national history, a context and other personal factors. This study can therefore only provide a subjective analysis of the conflict in Myanmar since the account of the conflict has been constructed by discourse analysis, media and a personal view of the situation. Moreover, a full understanding of the conflict in Myanmar would require thorough personal interviews in order to get a better grasp of these unobservable factors.

58 Galtung. 1996: 71
60 Lapid. 1989: 240
3.2. Empirical sources

This dissertation will rely entirely on second hand sources. The theoretical framework has relied on academic articles and books as well as more practical handbooks regarding the potential application of systemic analysis to conflict published by the Berghof Foundation. It is important to point out that concepts discussed throughout this thesis and in the theoretical framework have been developed on the basis of concepts and understandings that are Western-centric. It must be considered that Lederach’s theoretical approach could be invalidated in non-Western environments. He is however aware of cross-cultural differences and acknowledges the necessity to adapt to the conflict at hand in “Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation Across Cultures”\(^\text{61}\). Additionally, while the theoretical framework relies almost exclusively on Western sources, the systemic approach model is borrowed from Ropers’ case study\(^\text{62}\) of Sri Lanka, a non-Western state. The analysis, given the fact that the events in Myanmar are rather recent and have not been studied extensively by scholars, will mostly use non academic subjective literature, namely newspaper articles, practical handbooks and reports from NGOs. Only sources that have been published post 2011 when violence resurged have been examined.

The news articles come from online media from all over the world and have all been published in English. It can be therefore deducted that they are dedicated to an international public and most likely have been written by foreign reporters who are external to the conflict. This can have an influence on the social reality presented in those articles. For examples, NGOs or international and local media, tend to focus on the humanitarian situation and therefore place ethnic groups in the role of the victim whereas the national news or ally states would be have a discourse that is more supportive of the government. Very little information is available in Burmese due to persisting media censorship. Two sources stand out: The Shan Herald and The Irrawaddy. They are both independent and private organisations located in Thailand and publish reports in English, Burmese and Thai. Their mission is to diffuse impartial news to both the international and Burmese public. Those particular sources were chosen because

\(^{61}\) Lederach. 2003: 3  
\(^{62}\) Ropers. 2008:
they provide an insight into the situation in Myanmar that is different from what the Western media can offer. However, the information provided by such material will be carefully crosschecked with other sources in order to avoid excessive subjectivity. Indeed, The Irrawaddy is a newspaper founded by a group of Burmese journalists living in exile in Thailand which could make their point of view overly and unjustifiably critical of the government.

3.3. Case selection

The case study of Myanmar is an interpretative single case study. This allows a more in depth analysis than a large N study.63 The case of Myanmar has been chosen because of its increasing presence in the media, the intractable nature of the conflict and the urgency of the situation on the ground. Moreover, it is a conflict that has been largely neglected in the literature due to Myanmar being an extremely closed off State until recently. This study does not seek to provide a case for generalisation but rather to use the theory to shed light on the case and fill a gap in the literature that could be used for future reference.

3.4. Method of analysis

As previously mentioned, conflicts are complex systems made out of actors, events, relationships and influencing factors such as economy, geography or history therefore the systemic analysis approach is made up of two parts; one being the conflict mapping, or the analysis of the conflict itself, and the second is using this analysis to draw up a transformation process strategy. A better understanding of the conflict requires an in-depth analysis in order to embrace the complexity of a protracted conflict. Dr Ropers, program director at the Berghof Foundation, points out that a specific characteristic of a system is that the whole is more than the sum of its parts.64 This means that the different parts put together produce a different effect than the part would do on its own because of the way they interact. Galtung

64 Ropers. 2008: : 2
adds that conflicts are “something ever-changing, ever dynamic”\textsuperscript{65}. They therefore require a systemic analysis, a method that emphasises the importance of relationships and effects each party have on each other in all the different subsystems.

This study therefore suggests the use of a system analysis approach to conflict transformation. Systemic thinking looks at mapping patterns of change and interdependence and puts a particular emphasis on human agency in determining conflict dynamics and development\textsuperscript{66}. Because of the importance it gives to relationships, systemic conflict analysis is able to partially understand “irrational” factors in conflict such as hatred and mistrust. Once the relationships, dynamics, issues and drivers and obstacles to change have been identified, an inclusive and comprehensive process of social change can be drawn up.

This approach asserts that conflict transformation must include the following elements\textsuperscript{67}:

- A systemic conflict analysis and conflict monitoring through observation. This should look at intra and inter group relationships and interdependence.

- Strategic planning for interventions that mobilise and engage all the different stakeholders of the conflict. This involves working within the system and therefore needs the commitment of local institutions, NGOs, grassroots organisations and other civil society actors present on the ground.

- Assistance for sustainable peace measures such as reconciliation, good governance and peace agreements.

There are four main advantages of approaching the conflict in a systemic manner\textsuperscript{68}:

- Both internal and external actors are able to visualise the conflict better. A systemic approach highlights the boundaries of a conflict as well as the dynamics within it. It provides a new insight on conflict by taking into consideration dynamics and other invisible factors such as needs, grievances, interests and roles of all actors involved. It thus identifies the fundamental structure of the conflict, making it more transparent and less complex to understand.

\textsuperscript{65} Galtung. 1996: 89
\textsuperscript{66} Ropers. 2008: 2
\textsuperscript{67} Wils, et al. 2006: 5
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid. 52
- A systemic understanding of the conflict renders intervention easier. It shows each actor its role, contributions and potential of action in peacebuilding. The peace process is therefore more flexible due to better communication.
- It provides a good framework to setting up effective interventions.
- Systemic approach allows inclusivity of all parties of the conflict, thus limiting unfair conflict transformation. It also encourages a networking and a multilevel approach to conflict resolution making the peace process support structures stronger.

This study’s conflict analysis method will be conducted at two levels: the macro and meso level. This two-tiered analysis make it possible to give a clearer and more comprehensive account of the conflict in order to properly implement the systemic approach to conflict intervention.

The conflict will be analysed on two different levels:

- The **macro level analysis** is designed to get a general view of the conflict at the state or international level, depending on whether the conflict is civil or international. A macro analysis of a conflict requires the understanding of five overarching aspects, which are conflict history, conflict actors, conflict context, conflict issues and conflict dynamics. An effective mapping of a conflict at the macro level involves a qualitative analysis of the relationship, agency and structures between these five aspects through information gathering. According to Wehr, a deeper analysis of the values, needs and interests of the conflict parties can simplify the complex nature of conflicts for practitioners.

- The **meso level** focuses on divisions of the state. It aims to assess the needs of the population in a specific geographic area, where are the most marginalised groups and where conflict transformation and intervention is most needed. This requires the identification of the archetype of the conflict. This is particularly useful for NGOs who work at a smaller scale. The analysis uses the same method as the macro level one and again, an analysis

---

69 Paffenholz. 2004: 4
71 Ibid.
of structure and agency between actors is necessary. Both complexity theory and conflict transformation theory focuses on relationships between agents. Conflict transformation theory highlights constructive and destructive agents of change, namely the global, regional, state, conflict parties and elite or individual levels.\textsuperscript{72}

After the conflict has been analysed, the systemic transformation plan must be designed. That intervention will seek to come up with creative, achievable and innovative sustainable solutions to the conflict through multi-level actions by all parties involved. The systemic strategic intervention in Myanmar will be inspired by Wils et al. who, in an extensive study of systemic conflict transformation\textsuperscript{73}, outline three main steps to be undertaken in order to transform a conflict: (1) strategic planning of the intervention, (2) mobilisation of agents of peaceful change (3) the engagement of the stakeholders. The following table explains what each steps entails:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Step 1 | - Identify and adapt to the archetype of the conflict because it determines the dynamics and relationships between the parties and their potential reactions to peacebuilding measures (resistance or acceptance)  
- Identifying the immediate causes of violence in order to cease hostilities for issue transformation  
- Identifying the main issues to implement long term changes and structural transformation  
- Identifying the entry points for intervention, namely the appropriate timeframe and channels |
| Step 2 | - Identifying the essential actors of the conflict and their potential leverage (drivers of change or spoilers that could prevent transformation). This allows to envision the intervention on multiple levels |
| Step 3 | - Logistics of the intervention: identifying the appropriate personnel, funds and follow up and monitoring mechanisms |

\textsuperscript{72} Dudouet, 2006: 24  
\textsuperscript{73} Wils, et al. 2006: 55
Chapter 4 – Mapping and transforming the conflict in Myanmar

This analysis attempts to deconstruct the conflict using the systemic conflict analysis approach. Already mentioned above the systemic analysis approach is made up of two parts; one being the conflict mapping, or the analysis of the conflict itself, and the second part is using this analysis to draw up suggestions for action to transform the conflict. The first part will provide a two-tiered analysis designed to lay down the important components of the macro and meso levels of the conflict in Myanmar. The second part will propose a systemic transformation process.

4.1. Conflict mapping

4.1.1. Macro-level analysis

This macro level mapping includes the following five elements: conflict history, conflict actors, conflict context, conflict issues and conflict dynamics. The macro level analysis seeks to provide the important features of the conflict to then plan out an intervention strategy.

• Conflict history

The civil conflict in Myanmar is one of the longest on-going conflicts in the world. The ‘divide and rule’ policy applied under British rule divided Burma in two parts: Burma Proper and the periphery, which encompassed, among others, the Shan state. The former was ruled by the British and the latter were allowed to have local rulers to control the area. This is said to have raised ethnic awareness in a territory that was previously diverse but united74. From Ne Win’s coup d’état in 1962, the situation only worsened as the new regime attempted to create a homogenous nation through a process of assimilation. Discriminatory national policies and a harsh

military rule were put into place. Since then, rebel armed groups have fought to change the overarching structure of Burma and obtain rights and freedoms. Analysing the conflict history is particularly useful in understanding irrational behaviours and attitudes, predicting the actions and reactions of the actors involved as a well as avoiding repeating mistakes from the past.\textsuperscript{75}

- **Conflict actors (as seen in Table 4.1)**

The conflict being of an internal nature, the main conflict actors are mostly ethnic armed groups. While there are dozens of these armed groups\textsuperscript{76} (See Appendix 2), the most recent clashes are occurring between the government forces called the Tatmadaw, and the rebel groups present mostly in the Kachin state, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) that operates for the KIO. Additionally, the persecutions against the Rohingya minority present in the northern state of Rakhine have intensified since 2011. The struggle has two fronts: the Rohingyas are opposed to both the Buddhist population in the Rakhine state and to the Tatmadaw.

Like all conflicts, especially civil, there are also secondary and tertiary parties that are involved in the different conflict subsystems in a less obvious way. Tertiary parties can act as facilitators of change, mediators and observers.

- **Conflict context and structure**

Despite the democratic reforms undertaken by President Thein Sein, the Burmese society remains stratified. Power is still held by the elites, mostly former military leaders and discrimination, violence and persecution are still common practice\textsuperscript{77}. Identity politics are creating a divided social context, unfavourable to peacebuilding and conflict transformation.

\textsuperscript{75} Wehr. 1979: 27

\textsuperscript{76} See Appendix 2

Table 4.1: Conflict actors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Primary actors</th>
<th>Secondary Actors</th>
<th>Tertiary Actors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Military conflict</strong></td>
<td>- Tatmadaw</td>
<td>- Affected populations</td>
<td>- International community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- KIA factions</td>
<td>- States and organisations providing weapons militias</td>
<td>- Media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Drug cartels abroad</td>
<td>- Refugee hosting states</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethno-political conflict</strong></td>
<td>- Tatmadaw</td>
<td>- Affected populations</td>
<td>- International community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- KIA factions mainly and other ethnic groups</td>
<td>- States and organisations providing weapons militias</td>
<td>- Media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Rohingya</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Neighbouring countries (Thailand, China…).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethno-societal conflict</strong></td>
<td>- Rohingya muslims</td>
<td>- Affected populations</td>
<td>- International community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Buddhist ethnic groups</td>
<td>- Religious institutions</td>
<td>- Media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Burmese government</td>
<td>- UN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Educational institutions</td>
<td>- INGOs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Malaysia and Thailand, Bangladesh, China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Media</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lauren Durand

Page 28 of 63
Additionally, foreign correspondent Hannah Beech mentions that to the Burmese elite democratization appears to be intimately linked with economic growth. In 1948, Myanmar was the world’s largest rice exporter and teak producer but its isolationist policies have caused its once flourishing economy to crumble. Reforms have led to the lifting of foreign sanctions and the new Burmese government hopes to increase its participation in international trade, especially with the United States and the European Union. Myanmar fears being over reliant on China, its privileged partner. Foreign observers are worried that the recent attempts at peacemaking are merely a smokescreen and economic growth and development are the real motivation of the Burmese turn around.

At the regional and international level, the reactions are mixed. ASEAN Secretary General Surin Pitsuwan announced in November 2012 that it was not the role of the regional organization to force the Burmese government into resolving its issues, especially the Rohingya citizenship. He stressed that ASEAN would stick to its usual non-interventionist policy. However, member states of the association are increasingly worried about the situation in Burma.

As for members of the international community, they are concerned over the humanitarian situation in Myanmar. Yet, the European Union has recently announced it would lift all remaining economic sanctions as the rest of the Western World congratulated Burma on its democratic progress.

It appears that neither the international community nor the region will be major drivers of change in Myanmar, unless their economic interests are seriously threatened.

• **Conflict issues**

80 Ibid.
The source of the protracted ethno-political conflict is the lack of recognition of ethnic groups in the majoritarian Burman\textsuperscript{83} state of Myanmar. Burma is constituted of 60% of non Burman minorities who feel they are not being given sufficient rights and access to power. The oppressive and discriminatory military regime that has been ruling the country since the independence from the British has been responsible for the lack of basic freedoms\textsuperscript{84}. The conflict lies on the fundamental incompatibility of identities in Myanmar.

\begin{table}
\caption{Conflict Issues}
\begin{tabular}{|l|l|l|l|l|l|}
\hline
Parties & Interests & Needs & Issues & Means of Influence & Willingness to Negotiate \\
\hline
\textbf{Burmese government} & Economic power \hspace{1cm} Political power \hspace{1cm} National unity - keep the peace \hspace{1cm} Approval from international community & Assert its power by not budging & Threat from armed groups & Military Political & Agrees to negotiate but does not seem willing to make compromises / sacrifices \\
\hline
\textbf{Armed groups} & Regional autonomy & Freedom from fear & Lack of recognition & Negotiation Military factions & Yes \\
\hline
\textbf{Kachin Independence Army} & Regional autonomy & Freedom from fear & Lack of recognition Violence & Control over resources Military factions & No \\
\hline
\textbf{The Rohingya} & Citizenship Equal rights \hspace{1cm} Land grabbing for economic exploitation & Freedom from fear \hspace{1cm} Survival of their ethnicity Food, shelter, water & Persecution Lack of rights Statelessnes s & Support from the international community & Yes \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{83} Keling, et al. 2010: 33
\textsuperscript{84} Beech. 2013.
However, where there is conflict, there are always two sides of the story. For the Burmese government, ethnic armed groups are disturbing the development process of Myanmar. The government sees an economic interest in keeping the Kachin and provinces under its command because of the large amount of natural resources present there and because, being bordering states, they are important to Myanmar’s strategic interests and commercial relations with China.\(^8^5\)

---

**Conflict dynamics**

In the case of Myanmar, at this stage of the conflict, all parties are competing against each other. None of them is willing to compromise as proves the ongoing fighting. Human Rights research Matthew Smith gives a good summary of the current situation in Burma: “I would imagine that there are people in the Burmese military who anticipate sitting down eventually with the Kachin, so the more ground they can take over before that point, the better their negotiating position will be”\(^8^6\).

An attempt was made by President Thein Sein to avoid the conflict and change its dynamics by declaring a unilateral ceasefire with KIA in January 2013. This clearly represents a “win-lose” situation for ethnic armed groups who do not see any advantage to a ceasefire agreement that would force them to disarm and remain vulnerable to violent military incursions from the government.\(^8^7\) Despite the ceasefire and the claims by President Thein Sein that hostilities have ceased, KIA asserts that they are still suffering from violence and human rights abuses.\(^8^8\) This attempt to transform the issue was a failure due to a lack of trust between parties and a lack of political and military commitment. This can be explained by a long history of conflict and mistrust between ethnic groups and the ruling party.

The Myanmar conflict follows a retaliatory conflict spiral model. This model proposed by Pruitt, Rubin and Kim\(^8^9\) suggests that the escalation of the conflict follows a spiral model in which each party responds to the opponents’ immediate or past behaviour. The accumulated or recent feelings of anger dictate the reaction of each party leading to conflict escalation. This appears difficult to stop because the

---

\(^8^5\) Ibid.
\(^8^6\) Ibid.
\(^8^7\) Kivimaki and Pasch. 2009. The Dynamics of Conflict in the Multiethnic Union of Myanmar: PCIA - Country Conflict-Analysis Study. Berlin, Germany: 8
\(^8^8\) Beech. 2013.
negative feelings towards the other and possible misperception of their behaviour prevent any conciliatory actions such as cessation of hostilities, mediation or negotiations.

**Figure 4.3: Conflict Dynamics**

![Conflict Dynamics Diagram](image)

4.1.2. **Meso level analysis**

The meso level analysis looks more specifically at the ethnic armed groups that are at the heart of the conflict. It aims to assess their specific needs, interests and
positions. The meso level provides a better insight into what measures could be taken at a local level in order to transform the conflict.

- **The Kachin conflict**

The KIA is one of the many armed groups present in Myanmar and one of the fiercest opponent to the regime. Formed in 1961 as a result of the coup d’État, the KIA was inactive between 1994 and 2011 because the KIO has signed a ceasefire with the Burmese government. In 2011, the ceasefire was broken and clashes between the Tatmadaw and KIA forces have not ceased since then. The violence is a result of a call by the KIO for autonomy and ethnic rights in the face of increased economic and strategic interests for the Kachin lands and decreased interests for the population.

That is a consequence of decades of failed nation building in a state that is characterised by tremendous ethnic diversity. Holliday blames the colonial history for the lack of organic state building and the emergence of such a large number of ethnic coalitions. The arbitrary division of the state into the metropolis and the periphery created a patchwork of ruling and social structures, which caused a number of ethnic tensions to explode as soon as the country gained its independence. The ‘Burmanisation’ policies undertaken by the authoritarian regime further entrenched the resentment of ethnic minorities against the majority. Today, key political forces are divided on the policy to adopt in order to deal with diversity. While ethnic armed groups are in favour of ethnic enclaves characterised by allocated territory and special rights, the Myanmar government keeps on pushing for assimilation, fuelling armed struggle and deadly clashes. This is creates an escalation archetype of conflict where both parties are trying to impose their will and balance the power of the other thus causing a vicious circle of escalation.

At the meso-level of the conflict, there appears to be two different ideologies to conflict resolution and peacebuilding: hard liners and pragmatic leaders. The latter

---

91 Ibid. 4
92 Holliday. 2010: 116
93 Ibid. 121
94 Ibid. 121
believes that peace talks are necessary to achieve long lasting political settlements while the former argues that political settlement must be reached before the conflict can end. Hardliners are often leaders that fear losing the support of their group if they are willing to negotiate their demands or leaders that find interests in continuing the conflict. Some ethnic groups do have genuine political aspirations, however others are driven by a deep-rooted economic agenda. For example, the leaders of UWSA, the largest non-state militia, have major economic interests, including drug trade profits, in obtaining economic autonomy. It is therefore necessary that non-state armed groups prove their political legitimacy and credibility in order to be able to represent their community during potential negotiations. Potential spoilers and destructive agents of change such as warlords must be removed from power.

Radically opposed to hardliners, the pragmatic approach fits in with a gradual build up to peace that includes trust building and an acceptance of the conflict with a rejection of violence. This approach is risky because as trust builds between opposing groups, it is likely that each party will lose the support of their co-constituencies. According to South, this can be remedied through strong leadership, a consultative process, transparency and patience.

Monitoring is necessary to bring transparency to the peace process. Indeed, David Mathieson, Human Rights Watch’s senior researcher on Burma argues that “No one knows what's happening within the [Burmese] military. The only thing we can discern is that they are as abusive as ever”. This was a feeling reiterated in August 2012 by KIO Deputy Secretary La Nan who declared that Thein Sein’s statements over the importance of solving ethnic conflicts were “just for international consumption” but the situation on the ground was not improving. Moreover, since July 2012, violent and deadly clashes have come to break some well-established ceasefires, threatening the credibility of the Thein Sein government and endangering

---

97 Ibid. 19
98 Ibid. 20
The international scrutiny is pushing the President to look for a quick fix. KIA’s head negotiator Sumlut Gam says the Burmese government has been pressing hard for a ceasefire agreement brushing off propositions of political dialogue and long term peace agreements. Ethnic minorities seek to obtain a better distribution of power between the state and local authorities but a mutual distrust as well as the absence of third party organizations makes cooperation and dialogue difficult.

- The Rohingya minority

While their settlement in the Burmese state of Rakhine dates back from the 15th Century, the Rohingyas’ right to acquire citizenship had always been denied and is still denied to this day. The refusal of any state, including Myanmar, to recognize them as its own citizens has progressively created frustration and anger among the Muslim community. In the 1950s, the minority therefore redefined its identity as the Rohingya, a community that was both Muslim and, according to them, belonged to Myanmar, an area they had been occupying for centuries. More than an ethnic group, the term Rohingya was then used to designate a political movement, nowadays present all around the world due to the large number of exiles that have fled the country to avoid discrimination and violence. Grounded in history, the recent clashes in the Rakhine province have a more immediate cause: the rape and murder of a Buddhist woman by four Muslim men on May 28th, 2012. Since then, the Rohingyas have been heavily persecuted by the Buddhist population of the region who accuses them of having stolen their lands. The persecution has taken the form of violence, discrimination, blockades and boycotts. Worse, the anti-Rohingya movement is led by the Buddhist monks in the region who have encouraged the ultra nationalist events. Moreover, Aung San Suu Kyi recently

---

102 Ibid.
104 Leider. 2013. "Des Musulmans d'Arakan aux Rohingyas de Birmanie: Origines historiques et mouvement politique". Diplomatie 60 : 70
105 International Crisis Group. 2012: : 1
106 Ibid. 2
107 Ibid. 2
stated that she would not be taking sides in this ‘international tragedy’. The marginalized minority does not seem to have any advocate, which could explain the lack of efforts to find a solution to this protracted conflict.

The Tadmadaw has also participated in the violence through armed incursion. While a number of ceasefires have been instated in order to stop violence between Muslims, Buddhists and the Government, the Muslim minority has been ignored and the conflict is still escalating. This has caused massive movements of refugees towards other provinces and other countries, mostly Malaysia, Bangladesh and Thailand. The problem has therefore taken an international dimension, raising the concern of the international community and human rights NGOs. Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard has even expressed concerns over “ethnic cleansing” in Northern Myanmar. Bangladesh is concerned about the increasing influx of refugees and asylum seekers incoming from Myanmar and has started systematically pushing back incoming boats.

Thailand has recently expressed similar concerns, explaining that the flow of refugees had become too large and boat people would from now on be intercepted and detained before being sent back to Myanmar.

The international credibility of Myanmar is highly threatened by this issue and the international community has been asked to uphold its responsibility to protect as the number of casualties, refugees and asylum seekers grows every day. They are worried about the humanitarian situation on the ground which is said to be ‘horrible” as many UN agencies and NGOs call for urgent action. NGO workers report that the priorities should be sanitation, the provision of drinking water and the

109 International Crisis Group. 2012: 3
112 Ibid.
prevention of disease as personal hygiene conditions worsen and the rainy season approaches\textsuperscript{115}.

While the issue has only taken its importance in the media recently, it is a problem that has been going on for decades. The ethnic group is considered by the United Nations as the most persecuted in the world, both by Myanmar and by neighbouring countries\textsuperscript{116}. The essence of the problem comes from the refusal of granting the Rohingya citizenship. According to the 1982 Citizenship Law, people born of descendants that were in the Myanmar before 1948 should become citizens within three generations. This means that most Rohingyas should be citizens by now. In practice, because of active discrimination against their ethnicity, they are almost all stateless. While Thein Sein is willing to make compromises with Burmese ethnic minorities, he declared that the 800,000 Rohingyas that are living in Rakhine state were illegal immigrants and therefore their protection should not the responsibility of Myanmar\textsuperscript{117}. The Rohingya issue therefore follows an exclusion archetype of conflict\textsuperscript{118}.

4.2. Proposed systemic approach to conflict transformation in Myanmar

The conflict analysis has provided a clearer idea of the different stakeholders of the conflict system as well as the context in which violence is developing. This section aims to propose a possible application of conflict transformation strategies given the features of the conflict articulated previously.

Following Wils et al. three steps for designing an effective strategy for intervention\textsuperscript{119}, the proposed transformation process will unfold as follows: an assessment of what should be changed in the system in order to propose creative solutions for sustainable peace, issue transformation and structural change, an

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{116} International Crisis Group. 2012: 3
\textsuperscript{118} Ricigliano and Chigas. 2011: 16
\textsuperscript{119} Wils, et al. 2006: 55
evaluation of the tools necessary to implement the changes and transform the rules and culture and finally a suggestion of the resources to be allocated and the way for them to reach the conflict parties.

4.2.1. Strategic planning for systemic conflict transformation

The conflict in Myanmar is characterized by a fragile balance of power between two or more groups that feel threatened by each other, a typical trait of exclusion and escalation archetypes of conflicts\textsuperscript{120}. It is therefore in the hands of the third party intervener to come up with creative and inclusive solutions that are relevant to the issue and acceptable for all parties involved in order to deescalate the conflict. Rupsinghe suggests the use of a multi-track intervention, a mix of grassroots action, alliances of civil society actors and international expertise\textsuperscript{121}.

The main issue in the conflict appears to be unsuitable governance. With the military still holding a great amount of power over political, judiciary and military decision-making, ethnic groups cannot feel safe. While parliamentarism based on multi party elections has been in place since January 2011, the “change in, but not of, ruling regime”, meaning the overwhelming presence of former members of the Junta among leaders, renders most observers sceptic of the actual progress made in governance in Myanmar\textsuperscript{122}.

Deep, transparent and honest constitutional reforms are therefore essential to reduce the grip of the military, strengthen institutions as well as the rule of law and implement a bottom up decision making process to ensure equal and fair decision making at the local level. According to Grofman and Stockwell\textsuperscript{123}, power sharing institutions and federalism are the solution. This would indeed, satisfy the demands of increased autonomy from ethnic groups while allowing the Burmese government a certain amount of scrutiny into the provinces. The implementation of liaison


offices in all semi-autonomous provinces would enhance communication with the central government. Local authorities would be better equipped to deal with land rights issues and other matters that relate to ethnic groups. Additionally, the creation of local governance creates confidence in smaller communities and gives them a sense of recognition that participates in changing behaviours, perceptions and attitudes.

Problematic governance is not easy to transform because of existing obstacles to change. Resistance occurs when conflict parties are reluctant to processes of change, out of fear of the unknown, fear of losing power, security or identity. It participates in closing the boundaries of the system and thus prevents external ‘threats’ from getting in making the process of change that much more difficult. The largest resistance to systemic intervention in Myanmar is the party who has the most to lose if the asymmetry of the conflict is balanced out. The Tatmadaw and its allies, who favour a military solution to the ethnic rebellions, are threatened by the possibility of third party interveners entering negotiations as mediators and observers. The participation of China, a major economic investor in mineral exploration in Northern Myanmar, could be a game changer. China has often signified its displeasure with Myanmar’s rapprochement with the West and the sincerity of its interest in ending the conflict is questioned. These claims have been rejected by China who declares being strictly interests in the peaceful coexistence of Burmese populations.

Even considering the reluctance of Myanmar, China and ASEAN to have external actors interfere in Burmese national affairs, there are several entry points to third party systemic intervention given that reforms have already been undertaken:

- Civil society entry point: Creating networks of grassroots organisations that would be linked and possibly financed by larger international organisations could provide a solid and transparent entry point into the country. Because all the measures would be taken and implemented from a local level, there is no concern over imperialistic claims. Mechanisms should however be put

---

124 Wils, et al. 2006: 41
into place so that there is no abuse from larger organisations. Civil society can have a crucial role in supporting the end of hostilities: it is an immediate entry point.

- Political entry point: the elections that are planned to be held in 2015 represent a potential entry point for third party intervention. It would provide an opportunity for the implementation of good governance policies in the presence of international observers and media. It also provides an opportunity to reform the judiciary system completely in order to implement an adequate rule of law. The political entry point is inscribed both in the short and long term strategy.

- Economic entry point: Riefel and Gilpin suggested in 2010 that economic reforms could provide an opportunity for transformation and development in Myanmar. This included effective capacity building, policy reforms aiming at fiscal empowerment, increase employments rate, reducing corruption and prudent management of resources. Further investments, especially by foreign companies and states, in the conflict zones should be restrained until violence has cease or an inclusive peace agreement has been signed. Economic entry points should therefore only be used in the future once disarmament is effective and Myanmar’s institutions are strong enough that economic development can be considered.

4.2.2. Mobilisation of agents of peaceful change

Now that the opportunities for issue transformation, entry points and resistance have been identified, agents of change must be mobilised in order to implement the strategy. Agents of peaceful change can be found at many levels: global, regional, state, conflict parties and elite or individual. Often perceived as insignificant or non-influential groups, conflict transformation emphasises the importance of their supportive role. They can act as partners, intensifiers or mediators in the process of non-violent change, peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Agents of peaceful

---

126 Rieffel and Gilpin. 2010. "Can Economic Reform open a Peaceful Path to Ending Burma's Isolation". United States Institute of Peace 14 :1
change, if they are not influential personalities, need to represent a certain political or social weight, the ‘critical yeast’\(^{127}\).

**Civil Society**

At the global level, the call of international organisations, NGOs and the international community has until now failed to stop the violence in Myanmar. Track I diplomacy having failed, the more informal tracks II and III, namely local NGOs and grassroots organisations, must be considered. Barnes suggests the use of local civil society organisations (CSOs) to build long lasting peace\(^{128}\). She argues that CSOs have the capacity to support changes, direct attention to the root causes of conflicts and raise awareness on the costs of continued violence as well as the benefits of constructive dialogue between parties\(^{129}\). They are also on the ground to evaluate policy gaps. The main aim of CSOs is to shift attitudes and perceptions in order to encourage the population to envision a better and more inclusive future. Civil society has the power to put forward a peacebuilding agenda through public opinion leverage. By representing the population, CSOs are able generate political changes and thus transform dynamics of the conflict. The presence of grassroots organisations and local NGOs ensures that the interests of ethnic communities are served and that the government does not use its military power to intimidate armed groups into folding to their demands. The scrutiny of NGOs in Myanmar could help cease hostilities and force the parties to engage in dialogue. They could also provide a local platform for international NGOs who wish to provide financial and other kinds of aid but do not have the means to do it. Local CSOs would then be able to benefit from the input and expertise from large more experiences international organisations through multilateral alliances. Without having an explicit presence, alliances still signifies to the Tatmadaw and ethnic rebels that the world is watching. Grassroots organisations also have the possibility, unlike international NGOs, to put into place cultural and spiritual initiatives that will appeal to certain communities such as artistic projects, memorials, rituals and other symbolic measures that grant

\(^{127}\) Lederach. 2003: 64


\(^{129}\) Ibid. 8
recognition to the local community. The weight of symbolic measures should not be underestimated. Measures to encourage people-to-people dialogue and foster peace could also take the forms of workshops, public debate on developing a vision for the future, citizen enquiries on policy making and other large scale constructive and inclusive gatherings that encourage reconciliation. According to Dudouet, reconciliation involves recognising the wrongs of the past, giving a voice to those who were not allowed to talk and overcoming those issues. Taking example on South Africa, truth and reconciliation commissions could be put into place. The perpetrators of violence would have the chance to confess their experiences in public hearings. Experience in South Africa, Chile and Argentina show that this helps provide closure to ethnic groups and acts as symbolic and partial repair.

**Diaspora groups**

Having been excluded from the own nation, often for political reasons, diaspora groups often form an informal transnational network of people and institutions. They have more than a power to expose, they have a power to change. Since President Thein Sein has declared former exiles would be allowed back in the country, the role of diaspora groups could endorse has only become more important. Having lived overseas, received a foreign education and holding a passport from another state gives them more leverage than populations on the ground. They can both endorse an advisory role to counsel or pressure the international community into taking appropriate measures to end violence or do fieldwork. In conjunction with grassroots organisations and local NGOs, returning exiles could bring the focus where it is needed, propose realistic solutions, encourage dialogue and relationship

---

131 Dudouet. 2006: 71
building, attract aid, attract media attention and thus increase transparency on the ground\textsuperscript{134}. They can also merely signify their solidarity. For example, in January 2013, when KIA was under fierce attack by the Tatmadaw, thousands of ethnic Kachin Chinese crossed the border to show solidarity\textsuperscript{135}.

**Women groups**

The Women’s League of Burma (WLB), an organisation founded in 1999 that encompasses 11 grassroots women groups, is already involved in the process of national reconciliation\textsuperscript{136}. The peace programmes developed by WLB include peace exchanges to discuss peacebuilding strategies, a workshop with a Kachin ceasefire group, a number of trainings and activities promoting reconciliation and publications calling for the end of conflict and violence\textsuperscript{137}.

The use of rape as a weapon of war is raising fear among minority women who are then less likely to want to participate in peace talks, workshops and training with the government\textsuperscript{138}. Impartial security forces must be implemented in order to protect women and crimes must be punished. The judiciary reforms undertaken by the Thein Sein government must include ending impunity for the Tatmadaw and educating soldiers. While the use of a UN force might be inappropriate considering the reluctance of both parties to let in external actors, another possibility would be to have special local forces trained by the UN or a by a coalition of states pre-approved by conflict parties.

An interesting initiative has been the “mock trial” held in March 2010 by the WLB and the Nobel Women’s Initiative. It brought together, victims, international lawyers and other important stakeholders to provide women an opportunity to share their stories\textsuperscript{139}, in a similar manner to the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions.

In order to give the opportunity to women to be agents of change in the conflict, they must get access to higher political positions and gain leverage. This requires

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{134}Barnes. 2006: 39
\textsuperscript{135}Lintner. 2013.
\textsuperscript{137}Ibid.
\end{flushright}
better education, in a country where the illiteracy rate among women is almost 80%\(^{140}\). Campaigns for access to education are necessary. International donors and NGOs could provide the necessary aid and tools for improved education and leadership trainings, in coordination with local actors such as the WLB. Such campaigns could also change the mentality of men who regard women as inferior or unworthy of leadership positions. The most important component of any measure to increase the role of women as agents of change is empowerment, leading them to the realisation that they can make a difference.

**Religious institutions**

In the case of the Rohingya conflict, religious institutions could be major agents of peaceful change. While it has been observed that, in Myanmar, Buddhist monks are heavily involved in the persecutions of the Muslim community, religious networks could have an influence where name and shame policies from foreign NGOs and international organisations have failed. Religious institutions have an educational capacity and wide spread influence, which could be used to transform attitudes and values and build dialogue in the Rakhine state. Educative campaigns, personal communication and open public dialogue in the presence of Buddhists and Muslims could be supervised by religious institutions.

**Aung San Suu Kyi**

Finally, it would be difficult to study change in Myanmar without mentioning the Burmese icon: Aung San Suu Kyi, the chairperson of the NLD and main figure of the opposition. Having long stayed silent on ethnic issues, Suu Kiy offered in February 2013 to mediate the peace talks between the government and the KIA. This offer was rejected by the Kachin rebels who accused her of being President Thein Sein’s tool to attract sympathy from the outside world, the US in particular\(^{141}\). Additionally, critiques claim that she is only focussing on becoming President of Myanmar in 2015 and being willing to do whatever it takes to achieve this goal,

\(^{140}\) Ibid.

including abandoning her party and her nation\textsuperscript{142}. Given the lack of trust coming from the KIA and the Muslim Rohingya, it appears preferable that, for now, Aung San Suu Kyi stays out of the negotiations for change.

4.2.3. Engagement with key stakeholders

As previously mentioned, conflict transformation aims at deep rooted and sustainable change which requires commitment and involvement from the inside. The best way to engage with stakeholders is inclusive multiparty negotiations. This process has recently been undertaken in Myanmar. Two meetings have been held on February 4 and March 10 between the KIO and the Burmese government\textsuperscript{143}. A third meeting is planned to be held in late April for further negotiations. Clashes between KIA and government troops in March 25 proved that despite the ongoing negotiations, the conflict would remain violent, hence the refusal of KIA to disarm\textsuperscript{144}.

In an attempt to diffuse the tensions and help the negotiations, both Japan and China have gotten involved as neutral observers. The ancient rivalry between the two powers is likely to endanger the peace process, as reports Khuensai Jaiyen, editor in chief of the Shan Herald Agency for News\textsuperscript{145}. In addition, China is attempting to block the participation of Western observers and NGOs to help with humanitarian assistance and ceasefire monitoring. The UK has recently pledged its commitment to help Myanmar in its negotiations\textsuperscript{146}. Aung Min, the Burmese government’s top negotiator for ethnic conflict, welcomed this initiative but warned that the European Union, the United Nations and the United States, while welcome to act as observers, would not be allowed to engage in discussions\textsuperscript{147}.

To deal with the Rohingya issue, the government has appointed a commission that has made the decision, on April 29 2013, to send additional security forces to the

\textsuperscript{144} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid.
Rakhine state and proposed a family planning program to limit Muslim population growth. The commission also emphasised the need to crackdown on hate speeches.

While these measures show positive engagement, many more can be undertaken to reach out to conflict parties:

- Engagement with the different stakeholders requires constructive dialogue that leads to trust building. This requires third party interveners to have no hidden agenda and be neutral. It is therefore necessary that China does not get involved in the peace process due to their economic interests in the matter. The provision of funds and other resources from third party actors is necessary. The risk of corruption is great in Myanmar, donors should therefore rely on grassroots organisations and other track II and III channels to distribute and use the funds. A careful monitoring and evaluation should be done in order to track the use of financial aid.

- It is important to take the focus off the immediate peace process and focus on long-term changes. It is essential to rebuild relationships between the protagonists of the conflict. Relationships depends on people, not organisations hence the need to work on building personal capacity for problem solving. Empowerment can be done through workshops and necessitates external help. Fruitful discussions require both parties to start out on the same playing field therefore pre-negotiations capacity building measures should be directed to actors according to their needs. The involvement of women and other marginalised groups is essential. The provision of international mediators could be considered.

- Engagement of stakeholders could be bettered through the formation of alliances with national and international institutions. This would allow the exchange of information, strategies and resources in the long term.

---

149 Dudouet. 2006: 29
150 Wils, et al. 2006: 68
- The media, both local and international, represent a good resource for change. By raising awareness on issues, tracking changes in the country and providing scrutiny, the media forces key stakeholders to commit to their task and engage in the transformation process. The formation of citizen journalists should be considered in order to obtain reports from workshops and other transformative measure undertaken.
Chapter 5 – Discussion and Conclusions

5.1. Discussion

Having thoroughly analysed the different systems conflict and their dynamics as well as proposed a systemic transformation strategy, this final aim of this study is to highlight and discuss four key areas of change that require attention in order to induce change within the systems and transform the conflict towards peace. The four areas of focus are individual, interpersonal, structural and societal transformations.

Individual transformation

Conflict transformation is going to require for both sides to make compromises, goals must be transformed through bargaining techniques that take into account ideologies, religion, past, myths and other essential characteristics of conflict parties. To achieve this, individual transformation is necessary. Dudouet mentions the need to ‘decommit’, leave the past behind and let go of anger and mistrust. According to her, this can be done through empowerment and recognition as well as multi-level multi track dialogue.

This can mainly be done through people-to-people dialogue workshops, in the presence of a neutral mediator approved by the participant. The aim is to improve the responsiveness, mutual empathy and understanding of all parties involved. Those dialogue workshops act as tools of personal reconciliation and growth.

Women should be particularly involved in that process. According to the UNDP, by being wives, mothers, sisters, caregivers, heads of households, they have influence, persuasive power and a soothing presence. They often live the conflict in a different way than men do and yet, so often, they are excluded from reconstruction, reconciliation and other conflict resolution measures.

152 Dudouet. 2006: 32
Religious actors must also participate in dialogue workshops, especially in the framework of the Rohingya conflict. Buddhists and Muslims must come together to listen to each other and gain a mutual understanding of issues. In this case, the mediator should not be from either religion to ensure neutrality.

**Interpersonal transformation**

Lederach emphasises the importance of relationships in conflict transformation and proposes interpersonal capacity building measures in collaboration with other stakeholders\(^{154}\). This study suggests the use of truth and reconciliation commissions in cooperation with local and international civil society based on the examples of South Africa, Argentina and Chile. According to Curle, reconciliation helps the transition from ‘unpeaceful’ to peaceful relationships\(^{155}\). It encourages forgiving and forgetting and removes relations of domination and imposition. Reconciliation participates in social and psychological healing thus breaking the cycle of violence and mistrust\(^{156}\). The commissions would require the presence of representative figures of all parties involves, namely the government, ethnic groups and the marginalised Rohingyas. Past experiences however show that an efficient follow up mechanism must be used so that the promised financial repairs are given to the victims, marginalization of testifiers and witnesses is avoided, further investigation on crimes mentioned are carried out and true reconciliation can ensue\(^{157}\).

Second, in addition to the reconciliation process between communities, more formal negotiations must be undertaken between conflict stakeholders to identify the main issues and potential solutions. This is the basis of the future peace accord. However, it is the process of engaging in discussion that matters, not the outcome\(^{158}\). The key is for the negotiations to instate equality, respect, participation and mutual enrichment\(^{159}\).

\(^{154}\) Lederach. 1997: 109
\(^{157}\) Irin News. 2006:
\(^{158}\) Lederach. 1997: 114
The third step, once a sufficient level of trust exists, would be **demobilisation, disarmament and rehabilitation (DDR)** of combatants. DDR rests on the restructuring of relationships between opposing forces and it should be a process that is mutually agreed rather than unilaterally imposed\(^{160}\). Successful DDR could be achieved through the creation of additional employment opportunities and exchange of arms against vouchers for food, water, clothing and basic necessities that could improve human security in former conflict zones. They must liberate themselves from the fear of the other. While this study is reluctant to suggest the presence of external actors on the ground, DDR could be facilitated by the allocation of UN contingents of peacekeepers and observers. Changes must be made at the community and state level. The international community should merely act as drivers of change and facilitators.

**Structural transformation**

“All the problems in this country could be fixed if the political system were fixed”\(^{161}\). The structural transformation must therefore focus on changes in governance. Long term stability could be obtained by implementing a **federal system of governance with power sharing institutions** where rule of law and military structures depend on regional offices that report to the central government. This would allow ethnic groups to keep a level of independence as well as some security forces of their own. A federal system would also be better suited with ethnic issues and land rights thus preventing outbreaks of violence. Moreover, it would allow IDPs and refugees to return to their homeland and have their lands given back to them. Natural resources could be managed at the regional level with an equitable sharing of profits between the local and central governments. A free market system must be implemented however foreign investments should be restricted at first to prevent the repolarization of society and another outbreak of violence.

Federalism must be controlled so that only states that are politically and economically viable are allowed to obtain partial autonomy. To appease the fear of secessionism and rebellion from the central government, this transition to a federal

\(^{160}\) Dudouet. 2006: 18

\(^{161}\) KIO’s deputy army chief General Gun Maw, cited in BCN (Burma Centrum Nederland). 2013: 12
system must be undertaken progressively and only once the central institutions of governance are functioning and fully democratic. Efficient mechanisms of communication and interdependence have to be set up to avoid local leaders becoming overly powerful and the national hierarchy breaking down. Constitutional reforms must also be undertaken. Proportional parliamentarism based on consocionalism should be a priority to provide adequate representation to all ethnic groups present in Myanmar. The power of military must be limited to increase the confidence of the citizens in their newly democratic government. The rule of law must be implemented equally everywhere and the citizenship law must be revised in order to grant citizenship to the Rohingyas who have lived in Myanmar for a sufficient amount of time.

**Societal transformation**

The need for cultural transformation is often underestimated. It is however essential in ethnic conflicts in order to create a sense of common identity. This study suggests the creation of nation wide education programs designed to teach children about their nation and the equity between ethnicities. Language policies must also be put into place to ensure the respect of all dialects. Symbolic measures such as the acknowledgment of the differences between ethnic groups and the respect of those differences create a significant change in attitudes. The development of cultural activities that group different ethnic groups is also necessary to create a sense of stateness among groups. Involvement in such activities can help participants perceive each other beyond their ethnicity. These activities could be music, theatre, sports, games for children painting, classes, book clubs and other cultural associations. For example, setting up a football tournament between Buddhists and Muslims with mixed teams can help both groups see each other in different situations, as different actors, as team mates or opponents instead of as enemies.

---

5.2 Conclusions

This study has provided an analysis of the multiple systems of conflict in Myanmar through the lens of conflict transformation and complexity theory. The aim of this dissertation was not to critique the theory but rather to examine its applicability in a transitioning state marred by protracted ethnic and religious conflicts. Complexity theory has provided insight into the complex nature of this intractable conflict while conflict transformation theory helped suggest a new angle to approach the conflict. Findings show that conflict transformation can bring the country forward, towards democracy, development and peace. It will require careful implementation and systematic monitoring as well as commitment from all stakeholders of the conflict and potentially external help. Conflict transformation, including reconciliation, governance changes, transformation of attitudes and behaviours and trust building, is a process that unravels over years, even decades and one should not expect immediate results.

There are indeed a number of shortcomings in the application of conflict transformation. One of the main points of contention is the willingness and need to involve the international community through international organisations and foreign CSOs. Both ASEAN and Myanmar have expressed their reluctance to have anyone, especially the Western world, interfere in their internal affairs, nonetheless the presence of neutral mediators, observers and trainers appears essential to the transformation of the situation in Myanmar. The multiplicity of narratives held by the different conflict parties and the variation of contending issues among the different systems make it difficult to envision the appropriate measures to be taken without appearing to be favouring any of the conflict actors. There is therefore a contradiction between the bottom up approach suggested by Lederach and the necessity of external intervention. Secondly, scepticism has been expressed regarding the possibility of not only engaging a process of change, but more importantly controlling it considering the importance the theory places on volatile factors such as relationships and individuals. Complexity theory has highlighted the unpredictability of outcomes due micro level changes inside the system induces major macro levels change. Additionally, conflict transformation requires deep and

\[163\] Wils, et al. 2006: 85
long term commitment from a diverse range of parties who might not be able to dedicate the adequate resources, funds, time, monitoring mechanisms, negotiating space and support necessary to a full resolution of the conflict. Moreover, considering the number of actors involved in the transformation, communication, flexibility and mutual understanding is essential. This requires cultural adaptation. Finally, the consequences, intended or unintended, beneficial or harmful, of systemic conflict transformation will only be observable over the next few decades making it difficult to evaluate the validity of Lederach’s approach.

Constant monitoring of the situation as well as further research as the situation on the ground progresses is therefore necessary. Indeed, this study only offers introductory insight into the potential for conflict transformation in Myanmar.
Appendix 1: Map of Myanmar with state borders

From: United Nations. 2013. Cartographic Section, Map of Myanmar. Available at:
### Appendix 2: List of armed groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CNF</td>
<td>Chin National Front (has agreed to sign a ceasefire in January 2012) Communist Party of Burma (now defunct as an armed group)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPB</td>
<td>Democratic Kayin Buddhist Army (agreed ceasefire in 1995, now Border Guard Forces nos. 1011–22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DKBA</td>
<td>Split from DKBA. Now known as ‘Kloh Htoo Baw’ (Golden Drum), it signed a ceasefire agreement in November 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KIO</td>
<td>Kachin Independence Organisation (1994 ceasefire broke down June 2011; currently in discussions with the government)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KNLP</td>
<td>Kayan New Land Party (agreed ceasefire in 1994; rejected Border Guard Force scheme)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KNPP</td>
<td>Karenni National Progressive Party (1994 ceasefire broke down after a few months; in November 2011, agreed to enter peace talks with the Kayah State Government)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KNU</td>
<td>Karen National Union (agreed an “in principle” verbal ceasefire in November 2011, subject to ratification by its central committee, due to meet end-November)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MNDA</td>
<td>Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (1989 ceasefire ended after attack by Myanmar army in 2009, now Border Guard Force no. 1006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDAA</td>
<td>National Democratic Alliance Army (agreed ceasefire in 1989; rejected Border Guard Force scheme; signed new ceasefire September 2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NMSP</td>
<td>New Mon State Party (agreed ceasefire in 1995; rejected Border Guard Force scheme)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSLP</td>
<td>Palaung State Liberation Party (agreed ceasefire in 1991, became government-backed militia)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SSA-N  Shan State Army-North (agreed ceasefire in 1991, rejected Border Guard Force scheme and resuscitated its political wing, the Shan State Progress Party in 2011; currently in discussions with the government)

SSA-S  Shan State Army-South (has agreed to sign ceasefire in December 2011)

UWSA  United Wa State Army (agreed ceasefire in 1989; rejected Border Guard Force scheme; signed new ceasefire in September 2011)

Alliances

CEFU  Committee for the Emergence of a Federal Union (formed in November 2010 by NMSP, KIO, SSA-N, KNU, KNPP, CNF; later transformed into UNFC, with the addition of further members)

NCUB  National Council of the Union of Burma (formed in 1992 with membership including ethnic nationalist organisations and Burman pro-democracy organisations)

NDF  National Democratic Front (formed in 1976 by a number of ethnic armed groups)

UNFC  United Nationalities Federal Council (formed in February 2012 as a successor to the CEFU, with six CEFU members together with five smaller “associate” members)
Bibliography


Lauren Durand

Page 62 of 63
