

The Role of Civil Society in Promoting Democracy, Good governance, Peace and National Reconciliation in Myanmar

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ACRONYMS

AA	Arakan Army
ABSDF	All Burma Students' Democratic Front
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AFPFL	Anti-Fascist People Freedom League
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASSK	Aung San Suu Kyi
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BSPP	Burma Socialist Program Party
CNF/A	Chin National Front/Army
CHRO	Chin Human Right Organization
CND	Chin National Day
CNLD	Chin National League for Democracy
SC	Civil Society
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DVB	Democratic Voice of Burma
ENC	Ethnic National Council
ICG	International Crisis Group
INGO	International non-governmental organization
IOC	Organization of Islamic Cooperation
ME	Myanmar Egress
MKN	Min Ko Naing
MPC	Myanmar Peace Center
NBC	Norwegian Burma Committee
NCGUB	National Council Government of the Union of Burma
NDB	Network for Human Rights Documentation Burma
NDF	National Democratic Front
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NLD	National League for Democracy
KNU	Karen National Union
KIO/A	Kachin Independent Organization/Army
RFA	Radio Free Asia
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council
TNLA	Ta'ang National Liberation Army
UNFC	United Nationalities Federal Council
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USDP	Union Solidarity and Development Party
VOA	Voice of America
WB	World Bank
YMBA	Young Men Buddhist Association
ZRO	Zomi Reunification Organization

ABSTRACT

Myanmar¹ was known for decades as one of the most isolated nations on earth, but after 2010 election, the country is rapidly moving forward to be an open, free and integrated part of international community, thereby bringing positive hope and expectation to the Burmese people and democratic nations worldwide. With an accelerating speed of reforms taking place, the government that used to be under the command of one man finds governing the whole reforms process as major challenges. Therefore, the government becomes consciously aware and acknowledges publicly that citizen's participation in all sectors is indispensable to have better governance and peace in multi-ethnic and multi-cultural Myanmar.

The thesis is a qualitative study primarily investigating and analyzing the role of Civil Society (CS hereafter) in promoting democracy, good governance, peace and national reconciliation in Myanmar. The study firstly reviews the traditional concept of CS and re-conceptualizes it to better suit the cultural and political context of Myanmar. The study also identifies different CS actors and groups them into different categories; analyzes challenges, success and constraint in relation to their respective relationship with the people, the state and among themselves. To support my hypothesis, field research was also conducted in March 2012 in Yangon, Myanmar.

The study explores the existence and significance of CS mainly in three different periods in Myanmar modern history; pre-independence (prior to 1948), after independence (1948-2010) and from 2010 election to this date. In the process of exploring, this study identifies different types of CS actors inside Myanmar, across the border and in other countries actively working for democracy, good governance, peace and national reconciliation. The study also investigates the relationship between SC and the people, the state, among different CS actors and also challenges faced under oppressive military regime and prospects under the current political atmosphere.

With a growing interest in the CS role and impact they generated, some even contend that reforms in Myanmar are products of CS active involvement. This study however argues that despite important and significant contribution of CS, their roles were rather limited to social humanitarian goals rather than bringing political changes because of harsh and yet systematic restriction of military regimes. Recent rapid yet systematic shift in political landscape

¹ The country name 'Burma' was changed to 'Myanmar' by previous military regime in 1989, but the United Nation recognized 'Myanmar' as official name.

particularly after the 2010 election has opened wider opportunities for CS to engage more effectively across the country socio economic spectrum. The study also investigates and compares changes in CS role between prior to and after the election in 2010.

Through qualitative combined with empirical analysis, the study confirms that CS plays significant role in promoting democracy, good governance, peace and national reconciliation in Myanmar. The author finds though that CS still lacks capacity and human resource necessary for a more coordinated and collaborative force to generate effective and vibrant impact on reform in the three areas; democracy, good governance and peace or national reconciliation. The thesis concludes with a summary of discussion, findings and suggestions for stakeholders and future researchers in order that the future role of CS is more effective in enhancing the current reforms process.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND DEDICATION

It took me much longer than expected to complete the thesis due to some personal related obstacles. I at times almost give up the writing and start thinking to do something else. However, I understand from the very beginning that my research could contribute something helpful to researchers interested in Myanmar. Another important driving force is that there are friends and relatives who constantly encourage me to have courage to finish the study.

In fact, there are several people whom I owe thanks for their support, guides and kind suggestions. My first thank goes to Professor Stein Kristiansen who has generously given me times to discuss the thesis' contents from the very beginning. His advice, encouragement and guidance are indispensable to how I proceed with this master thesis. Secondly, the Norwegian Burma Committee (NBC) for giving me travels expense that enabled me to travel back to my home country after more than a decades in exile to do field research for the thesis. And my thank also goes to Tluang Lian Hnin and Bawi Tha Thawng who during field research kindly helped organizing meetings with people for interviews and discussions.

I'd also like to acknowledge that this study would not be possible without the support and encouragement of my parents, beloved wife and siblings. They have been always in support of my effort with constant prayer, times and encouragement. And finally I dedicate this thesis to my beloved daughter whom I love so much, the source of my strength and motivation.

CHAPTER ONE

1.1. Introduction

Myanmar used to be one of the most isolated, most oppressive and disconsolately hopeless countries in the world. Just three years ago, everything seemed to be just normal by the standard of a failed state ruled by dictators. People were still heavily restricted, CS movements were systematically scrutinized, thousands of political activists were jailed, economic sanctions largely imposed by the west were still in place, exile Burmese were still in dilemma not knowing what to expect from the upcoming election. In short Myanmar was still a large prison of more than 50 millions prisoners as Aung San Suu Kyi (hereafter ASSK) rightly called (Clements, 1997).

General election in November 2010 was a turning point for all the changes the world has witnessed so far with the subsequently election of Thein Sein² as president. After six decades of isolation, the country has once again emerged as a thriving democracy and now placed itself at the crossroads (Larkin (2012) towards better prospect for prosperity, openness and the last economic frontier of the world as a promising country. With new spaces being opened, CS also finds itself having more voices and impact in the country democratization process. This rapid change certainly surprised the world including even the closest observers and staunchest critics.

This thesis attempts to focus and analyze the role of CS in promoting democracy, good governance, peace and national reconciliation in Myanmar. The primarily focus though will be after the 2010 election. Political and social space opened after 2010 election has placed CS in a very important position to effectively influence the government's decision process and also engage more actively and freely in grassroots level societal reform process. The good news is that the government has not only relaxed restrictions and but even encourages the growth of CS by publicly inviting people's participation and the return of exile Burmese to help build the country social political reform.

The questions everybody wants to know is that why change comes only now after so many decades of military dictatorship, and what are the significant driving forces behind this. Therefore taking CS movement as the starting point the author will argue that recently

² Thein Sein is former Army general and Prime Minister, he is currently serving as president of Myanmar after being elected in 2010 general election

political reform is not only a one sided or a top-down reform but multi faceted involved by thousands of CSOs both inside and outside of Myanmar. With this recent reform there has also been increasing emphasis on the role of CS as forces that fill up the holes that cannot be filled by the government.

This thesis will explore the importance, challenge and prospect of CSOs inside Myanmar in the process of striving for broader space and louder voice in the face of quasi-civilian government that relatively lacks public trust and legitimacy. There is no doubt that democracy in Myanmar is in a nascent stage that requires all-sides involvement towards peace and national reconciliation in multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society. Important question is how CSOs will work together with other political stakeholders including the military to enhance good governance at all levels, peace and reconciliation for all ethnic armed groups and all religious groups. Another crucial question remained is the military role in future political arrangement. Currently military have 25% of seats directly appointed by the military commander-in-chief. In the preceding chapters the author discusses more in details about all the fact mentioned above.

Political groups from both inside and outside of the country rush to claim credit for the changes, however the author argues there is no single most important group that deserved to be given sole praise for the changes, however this thesis notes that SC actors' involvement is crucial in forming public debates and changing the course of political decision made by the military at the top. The reforms have paved broader way for CS that it is today more important than ever. In this thesis I will discuss in detail how and why the Military began to allow citizen to participate in a broader path toward CS engagement, better governance and more democracy. The questions of what are the roles of CS and how they contribute to better governance and unity among multi ethnic people in the loosely organized society will also be discussed.

1.2. Motivation of my thesis

I was born and grew up in Myanmar a great chunk of my life under the military dictatorship. Like millions other Burmese, due to a restrictive nature of political and social landscape, I fled as refugee to neighboring countries where I lived for years wandering for a better and more secure life. In the end of 2003, the UNHCR in Malaysia arranged my resettlement to my new country, Norway, a country that gives me pride and protection as a dignified human being.

When I came to Norway one of the most encouraging factors that I found as important driving force behind healthy democracy and good governance are thousands of voluntary organizations actively engaging and making impact upon government's decision making process. Organizations of different kinds are virtually at every level of the Norwegian society. The author learnt that there are 10 million memberships in NGOs and 80 % of the Norwegians are members of one or more organization(s) signifying that the healthy democracy in Norway is firmly supported by members of CSOs.

Their roles are seen not only as supplementary but also as counter balancing force that help democracy healthy and vibrant. CS fills the spaces available across the society, and this encourages wider participation of ordinary citizens and active debates/discussion that actively contribute to positive changes in the right direction. The author sees the impact of voluntary organizations involvement as an integral part of democratic good governance.

Moreover, the author has had chance to be part of the founding of a voluntary Chin migrant organization, "The Chin Community in Norway (norwaychin.no, 2013)" which was founded primarily to help Chin refugees in Norway in areas including local integration and self-reliance projects. Through official membership of The Association of NGOs in Norway (Frivillignorge.no, 2012), the largest CS association in Norway representing over 50 000 organizations across Norway, the author understands better about the process of working towards impactful involvement and participation in the process of important decision-making process that has potential impact upon the society.

No doubt that CSOs are important driving forces elsewhere especially in countries working towards democratization including Myanmar. The rapid opening up of political spaces after 2010 in Myanmar has also given me great encouragement to do some helpful contribution to the democratization process. Writing about Myanmar is something that in a way compelled me as a former countryman and still an activist involved in activities aimed for impact for democratization. The author also thinks it's important that more Burmese contribute some thoughts for the country future prospect. CS is the field that so far little research has been done, thus writing the role of CSOs in Myanmar became my choice.

1.3. Research objectives

This research is primarily to find the roles of CS in promoting democracy, good governance, peace and national reconciliation in Myanmar. Through empirical research- fieldwork, and document analysis, this study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. Who are the main CS actors and how do they promote democracy, good governance peace and national reconciliation?
2. How is CS's relationship to the state, the people and among themselves?
3. What are the main success, challenges and constraints faced by CS in promoting democracy, good governance and national peace-building/national reconciliation?
4. What are the most significant changes in the roles of CS before and after the election in 2010?

1.4. Terminology clarification

Talking about Myanmar and its multi-ethnic nationalities always requires terminology clarification because of easy misconception. Therefore I shall present a short clarification of terminologies used in this thesis.

- Myanmar or Burma:

There are two leading explanations on the country's name. The first version of explanation comes from the previous Military government that changed the country English name, 'Burma' into 'Myanmar' in 1989, arguing that Burma refers only to the majority Bama population, whereas 'Myanmar' is more inclusive and therefore more appropriate because it refers to all nationalities of Myanmar.

Another version says that 'Burma' and 'Myanmar' are exactly the same, therefore choosing one does not necessary mean choosing the right name, and it's therefore rather a political choice- the choice between the military dominated current government and the opposition. Democracy icon and opposition leader, ASSK uses 'Burma' as the country name arguing that everyone has the right to call their country name as they deem right and referring also that the name change was not voted by the people who should have a say in such major decision regarding their country they belong.

In this thesis I use ‘Myanmar’ simply because the UN and most of the international communities including Norway have recognized it. Just recently on 20 May, the US president Obama also began to use ‘Myanmar’ during the meeting with President Thein Sein. Furthermore, my choice of using Myanmar doesn’t mean in anyway that I’m siding with any political groups. In fact, when speaking in Burmese language the country name has always been both ‘Myanma’ and ‘Bama’.

- Burmese and Bama

I will use ‘Burmese’ or ‘Myanmar nationalities’ to refer to all ethnic nationalities in Myanmar including the majority ethnic ‘Bama’. ‘Burmese’ will be referred to as the language spoken by the majority ‘Bama’, while other ethnic nationalities have their own native languages.

1.5. Structure of the thesis

The thesis is composed of 6 chapters, with the first chapter introducing the thesis’ core objectives, research questions and reasons and motivation of choosing this particular title. To avoid confusion, misconception and bias, the author also clarifies some terminologies used in this research.

Chapter two introduces the contextual background of the studied country as multicultural and multi-ethnic society. To make a better overview and understanding of the complex nature of the country and the thesis main themes, the chapter also briefs historical and political background, ethnic conflicts and military rule based on a historic founding document of Panglong agreement. In the final part of this chapter is a short introduction of CS movements in two different periods in history namely prior to the country’s independence and after independence.

Chapter three is about theoretical approaches used in further discussing the topics or in answering the questions posed in this research. Key concept of CS, democracy, good governance, peace building and national reconciliation is discussed using references from some of the most quoted literatures in the field. The author also makes attempt to conceptualize the terms such as ‘CS’ to best fit into the context of the studied society as the term means different things for different people causing a great number of ambiguities and confusions. The chapter also discusses the relationship between the state and CS, democracy

and CS and the role of CS with regards to peace building or national reconciliation in conflicted Myanmar.

Chapter four is about the methodology applied in doing research for this thesis. In the first part a brief introduction is given with the methodology explanations followed by research design and how data collection process is organized. Later in this chapter, challenges and limitations including time constraint, cultural barriers and political atmosphere the author underwent throughout the research process is mentioned including ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality and voluntary participation are respectively discussed.

Chapter five is the most important part of the whole thesis and mainly about comprehensive analysis, discussion of research findings and the main research questions and related questions arise throughout the research process. The author begins by making a comparative analysis of CS's roles and activities mainly between the situation under the military regime and after the 2010 election. In doing so the author explores about CS movements in five periods in history: CS in pre-independent history; CS (1948- 1962); CS(1962-1990); CS (1990-2010) and CS (2010-present). Different CS actors are defined and introduced their roles and activities in promoting democracy, good governance, peace building and national reconciliation. The seven identified CO actors are; the NGO, faith-based or religious organizations, political organizations, media groups, student organizations, professional and intellectuals and ad-hoc groups. In concluding the chapter the author discusses the way forward for SCOs in Myanmar and challenges and prospects they face.

Chapter six is the last chapter and summarizes the cores of what has been discussed and found in the thesis. Also some suggestions both to government at the top, CS and ordinary citizens at the bottom and international community as financial supporter are made with some perspective of arguments. At the end of the thesis is reference list and appendix.

CHAPTER TWO

2. Contextual background

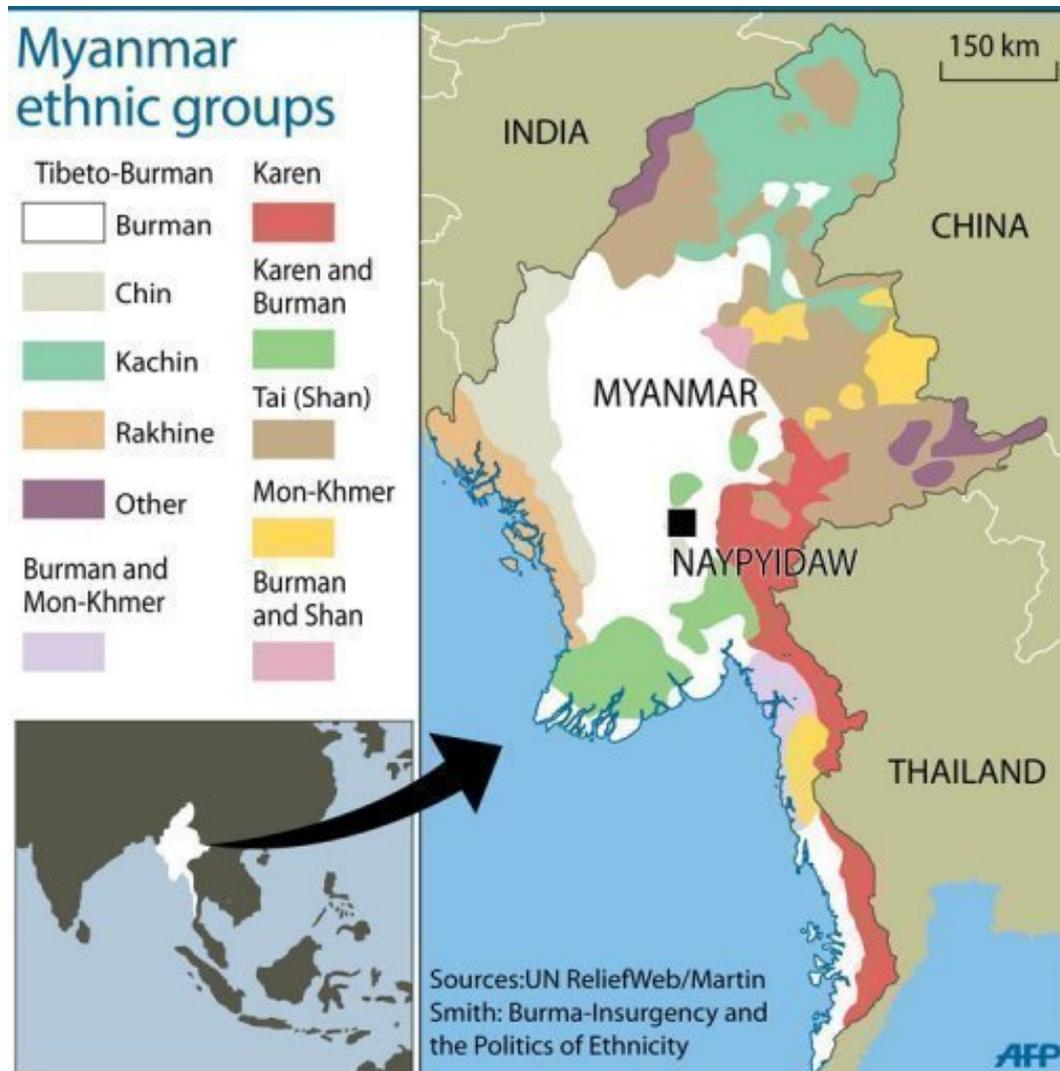


Figure 1. Map of Myanmar³

2.1. Myanmar: multicultural and multi-ethnic societies

Myanmar is known as ethnically and culturally one of the most diverse nation in Asia and is situated in Southeast Asia, and is bordered by China on the northeast, Laos on the east, Thailand on the southeast, Bangladesh on the west, India on the northwest, the Bay of Bengal to the southwest, and the Andaman Sea on the south. The country covers an area of 677,000 square kilometers. The population is estimated at 60 millions (Kaplan, 2012).

³ http://www.investmyanmar.biz/MyanmarInvesting.php?PageId=588#_self

According to official statistic, there are 135 national races having their own distinct languages and cultures. The 8 major ethnic groups with their own land are Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Chin, Bamar, Mon, Rakhine and Shan. The largest ethnic group is Bama comprising approximately 60% of the population occupying 40% of landmass, and the rest belong to other ethnic nationalities. The main religions of the country are Buddhism (89.2%), Christianity (5.0%), Islam (3.8%), Hinduism (0.5%), Spiritualism (1.2%) and others (0.2%). The Chins, Kachins and Karens are predominantly Christians while the majority Bama and other ethnic are mainly Buddhists. Muslims are mainly the Rohinyas who occupied territory in Arakan state in western Myanmar. It is estimated that there are about 2 millions Chinese and Indians combined.

Ethnic, language and cultural diversity also has been another major contribution to the long-haul internal conflicts in the country. Since independence, the country has never been in peace, constantly infested by ethnic violence, cultural clashes and armed conflicts against the state dominated by the majority ethnic Bama. Conflicts also give the military regime an upper hand in claiming that a strong military is needed to safeguard the three national causes: Non-disintegration of the Union, non-disintegration of national solidarity, perpetuation of sovereignty. While the outside world and the people see the military as destroyer of national unity and major contributor of economic stagnation, they see themselves as liberator of the national sovereignty and the union.

2.2. History and political background

Myanmar is a country composed of multi ethnic nationalities that had their own independent countries, prior to their respective decision to form a union in 1947 through a historic panglong agreement, with their distinct languages, cultures and systems of governance. Therefore the British colonizer occupied territories of ethnic nationalities separately as independent countries in different periods of time and applied different administrative systems in accordance with the different constitutions that the colonial power had promulgated for them (Sakhong, 2008).

A greater part of Myanmar predominantly occupied by the majority ethnic Bama, was formed in the 11th century by King Anawratha⁴, who ascended the throne in 1044. Pagan city known

⁴ King Anawrath (1015–1078) was the founder of the Pagan Empire, and considered the father of the Bama nation.

as the city of pagodas and situated in the central part of Myanmar became the first capital of the Bamar Kingdom⁵ that included a greater part of modern Myanmar. Since the 11th century, the Bamar nation was ruled by a numbers of Bamar kings till the British finally succeeded its annexation in 1885.

The British carved up Bama Kingdom in three Anglo-Burmese Wars (1824-1826, 1852-1853 and 1885). England incorporated Myanmar into what was known as British India following the wars that took place between 1824 and 1886. In 1937, Myanmar became independent from India and was granted limited self-rule. During World War II, Myanmar was primarily under Japanese occupation, where it operated under the façade of independence that was actually backed by anti-British puppet masters.

2.2.1. The Panglong agreement⁶ and the union formation

The Union of Myanmar we know today in fact did not exist before ethnic leaders representatives from their respective independent nations agreed to sign a historic Panglong Agreement in February 1947 about a year before the nation got independence from the British Empire on January 4, 1948. General Aung San, father of ASSK and national hero was the one who spearheaded a conference at Panglong village, in southern Shan state where he persuaded ethnic leaders to form a union where multi ethnic nationalities would live together in peace and harmony with equal status. Aung San, as a symbol of equality, famously promised: "If Bamar gets one *kyat* [Myanmar currency], you will also get one *kyat*." Ethnic leaders of the Chin, Shan, Bama and Kachin signed a historic document, which is known today as the founding document of the Union of Myanmar.

2.2.2. Ethnic conflicts and military rule

On July 19, 1947, about 5 months after the signing of Panglong Agreement, Aung San and his six of cabinet ministers were assassinated. The agreement signed was annulled when the 1947 constitution written by fifteen Bama (Steinberg, 2010) was finalized without the essences of equal rights enshrined in the agreement. The first drafted constitution approved by AFPFL was changed without the knowledge of the concerned stakeholders (Win, 2012). As a result ethnic groups took arms to revolt the central government dominated by the ethnic

⁵ Myanmar Kingdom didn't include territories now occupied by ethnic people like the Chin, Shan and Kachin ect..

⁶ The agreement is the founding document of the Union of Myanmar signed by leaders of Bama, Shan, Kachin and Chin on 12 February 1947 at panglong village in Shan state.

Bama. The failure to realize Panglong agreement was the primary reason why ethnic conflicts linger to the present day.

Scholars such as (Sakhong, 2008) and Harn Yawngwe acknowledge that Myanmar's political crisis is not merely an ideological confrontation between military dictatorship and democracy, but also a constitutional problem. Failure to fulfill its promise of equitable distribution of resources between the Myanmar's Bama core and ethnically diverse periphery lies at the heart of a violent cycle of conflict that has plagued Myanmar since independence (Pattison, 2012).

From 1948 to 1958 Myanmar practiced a difficult democracy (Charney, 1991, p. 84) in which U Nu was elected as the first prime minister, Sao Shwe Thaik, a Shan, and Smith Dun, a Karen, were appointed as president and army chief-of-staff respectively. General Ne Win who was given role to lead caretaker government from 1958 took power in a coup d'etat in 1962 and arrested U Nu and several other leaders and declared a 'socialist state' run by a 'Revolutionary Council' of senior military officers. He was until 1988, the head of BSPP (Burma Socialist Program Party) which he founded and the only legal party at that time.

In 1988 was a historic bloodshed caused by the dissatisfaction of the government role and its handling of the nation economy. Ten of thousands of universities' student accompanied by monks and ordinary citizens took to the street calling for the end of the socialist regime and demanding multi party democracy system of governance. Ne Win ordered soldiers to shoot demonstrators by saying: "when soldier shoots, it shoots to hit, not up in the air", the statement that was later repeatedly quoted when highlighting the ferocity of the act of his Government. Enthusiastic demonstrators across the country comprised of all walks of life were met by guns leading to the killing of thousands and the genesis of the exile movements against the Military regime.

The Military took power in 1988 claiming that they had responsibility to safeguard national disintegration and promising that multi party election would be held. In 1990 nationwide election was held and the NLD party led by AUNG SAN SUU KYI won by a landslide taking more than 80% of the votes. The military later dissolved the election result and continued to rule the country with iron hand. AUNG SAN SUU KYI was put under house arrest, thousands of political activists and ordinary citizens accused of having connection with anti government groups were arrested and sentenced to long terms imprisonment. No outside interference in any form was allowed during the years of military dictatorship from 1988- 2010.

As a result of systematic oppression by the Military regime, thousands of people find their own way of escapes from arrest and hardship imposed upon them by successive military regime. Burmese refugees can be found in neighboring countries like Thailand, India, China and Malaysia. Estimated numbers of refugees only in Thailand is said to be around 500000 of which nearly half of them are in refugee camps across the border between the two countries and the rest are wandering in different region inside Thailand struggling for their survival.

2.3. Historical background of CS

Defining the concept of CS that appropriately applicable to Myanmar is a challenging task given its broad definition proposed by scholars from different backgrounds. CS means different to different people depending on what society and culture the researchers have in mind. However, in the preceding chapter the author attempts to define the term by applying the most fundamental theories in the subject to best fit the context of the studied society.

According to the definition applied, CS movement in many forms is not only visible but can be said prevalent even in pre-independent Myanmar society. Throughout history both prior to independence and after independence or modern Myanmar society, community based, faith based charities, social and humanitarian groups have been the most important providers of social welfare to the people affected by natural disasters and man-made clashes mainly state sponsored wars against minority ethnic armed groups. In the preceding paragraphs the author explores CS in two different periods namely before and after independent Myanmar.

2.3.1. CS prior to independence

Although it is difficult or almost non-existence of historical overviews of CS in pre-colonial Myanmar, one cannot deny that social formations that contributed a great deal to the society existed in the form of religious or social groupings in pre-colonial history of Myanmar. While the more organized religious organizations took responsibilities in organizing funeral services, fundraising ceremonies for natural disaster affected population, projects to help the sick and the poor, the less organized or ad-hoc voluntary groupings were seen to help organizing public meetings that put plans such as widening roads, building bridges and fortifications. These types of activities in the form of ad-hoc or in a more organized way have been prevalent in pre-colonial Myanmar societies.

To trace back the existence and involvement of CS in social and economical development of society in Myanmar, it's imperative to take a closer look at the culture patterns and way of

life of the people in ancient history. Structure of ancient village ruling system is one example that might be equivalent in its features to modern concept of CS. In ancient time, people with same interest and vision, voluntarily but not spontaneously, established villages or created a ruling system, and they are usually from the same family circle. The primary reason for creating such system is to be able to live independently without outsider's interference and be able to carry out collective welfare and development to their own society.

The concept behind such systems is in many ways similar to those concepts of CS in the western liberal sense. One of that is to counter balance power or influence imposed from outside and another is to fill the gap or hole left by state apparatus' development or social welfare distribution projects. Relatively similar observation is also made by David Steinberg, a distinguish scholar on Myanmar when he noted, "the whole structure of the village headman system, for example, might be construed as an element of CS designed to ward off interference by the state in village affairs" (Steinberg, 1997).

During the colonial period, religious organizations could be established under the Patriotic Act (Desaine, 2011, p. 124). Religious organizations were the most obvious manifestation of people organizing themselves for a common purpose beyond the family life and outside of the state structure. These were informal arrangements, without any official registration or formal membership, with people joining together to organize various religious and social activities in their villages (Kramer, 2011). The arrival of Buddhism believed to be around the same time as Buddha's lifetime in Myanmar brought about a more structured, collective and vibrant society where people collectively organized gatherings and engaged in the social wellbeing of their fellow citizens. One of the most historical significant CSO was formed in 1906, which was called Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA). The association's aims were primarily to protect Buddhism and promote political consciousness of Myanmar young men. It had 50 branches office throughout the country. The organization also worked for the maintenance of traditional national cultures and literatures by attempting to prevent outside or foreign influence- the British colony.

Christianity brought in by the first American Baptist missionary in 1813 also had a considerably impact on organizational life and collective social welfare of the people, especially for the ethnic Kachin and Chin who have the largest Christians population in the country. In 1857 the Kayin Baptist Home Mission Churches Association, which was used as an umbrella by a few organizations, was created. And in 1865 the Baptist churches in

Myanmar organized themselves in the Burma Baptist Convention (BBC). These were the first of NGO of its kind to be set up in Myanmar. One of their main objectives was to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ but what they have been doing since their inception is also humanitarian, social and development work.

Under the British administration CS did exist though the British did not allow overtly political organizations, religion (a primordial loyalty closely associated with nationalism) became a natural focus for organizational activities both for religious good works and patriotic activities (ibid). In the way the British reorganized political power in colonial Myanmar, we can discern some rather clear democratic features. From the 1920s onwards, there existed intermediary institutions, associations, and procedures that allowed societal forces to participate in politics and even to set themselves up in opposition to the state. Those who participated in the open political arena in opposition to British colonial rule from the 1930s onwards were the young Thakins (Yawnghwe, 1997, p. 42).

2.3.2. CS after independence- under the military rule

Myanmar became an independent union in 1948 after a historic Panglong agreement reached among ethnic Bama, Shan, Kachin and Chin. British colonial rule permitted independent organizations, and in the post-independence period, a rich CS continued to develop in the cities and some towns, though not in the countryside (ICG, 2001). SC active under the British continued to play pivotal roles as provider of social welfare and developmental services, but in a much less focus on agendas previously imperative, which was to counter balance the influence of the western culture imposed on them.

Myanmar practiced democratic government from 1948-58 and from 1960-62. A military caretaker government led by Ne Win briefly held power from 1958 to 1960 following a fatal split in the ruling AFPFL (Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League). His caretaker government closed many presses, imprisoned several journalists and writers on Coco Island, and reinforced restrictive colonial press laws. After Prime Minister U Nu was voted back into office in 1960, the groups that had suffered under Ne Win fought to restore their rights, but before they could make any significant progress, Ne Win seized power again (Ibid, p.4). In 1961, U Nu's government passed the State Religion Bill in a joint session of parliament, making Buddhism the state religion. This made other religious organizations difficult to function in their charity and other welfare activities that had been vital to their own

population. CS that continued to develop under democratic government died under the Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP); perhaps, more accurately, it was murdered (Steinberg, 1997).

On March 2, 1962, Ne Win staged a coup and banned all institutions that promoted the rule of law, including All Burma Federation of Students Unions (ABFSU) and other CS movements and proceeded by setting a military socialist state. Within three weeks, the Parliament and Supreme Court had been dissolved, the Constitution abrogated, and Ne Win invested with full executive, legislative and judicial authority. Independent organizations, such as the Burma Writers Association and the Burma Journalists Association, were replaced with a government-controlled association while others such as the National Workers Association and Peasants Association were put under the leadership of military men (ICG, 2011). Ever since, soldiers have run the affairs of state in Myanmar.

The BSPP (Burma Socialist Program Party) chaired by Ne Win was the sole political party that legally exit from 1962 to 1988. In 1963 and 1964, the RC (Revolutionary Council) nationalized all industry, large businesses, and most stores. As a consequence, business associations collapsed. Private schools, missionary hospitals, and cinemas were also nationalized, library associations were shut down, and public debates ended. The regime established a press scrutiny agency to check all publications, including cover designs for magazines and calendars. By 1969, all private newspapers had either been nationalized or replaced with government-controlled publications.

In 1972, the Revolutionary Council held a referendum on a new constitution, which mandated a single party socialist state, which went into effect in 1974. From 1974 to 1988, Myanmar was under one-party rule, led by Ne Win and backed by retired and serving military officers. In the mid-1970s, underground student groups and state enterprise workers, frustrated with their declining standard of living, organized small-scale protests. The government used troops to quickly crush these public manifestations of discontent. The State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) seized power on 18 September 1988, and emptied the streets by shooting demonstrators who refused to disperse. An estimated 3000 people were killed as a result of this and subsequent crackdowns by the end of 1988. Although the SLORC in 1988 allowed many types of nongovernmental organizations, advocacy groups that they could not control or were deemed a potential threat were not allowed or severely oppressed.

CHAPTER THREE

Theoretical approaches

3.1. Defining key concepts of CS

Over the past decade the world has witnessed a dramatic expansion in the size, scope, and capacity of CS. The expansion of CS is aided by the process of globalization, a growing of democratic governance, telecommunications and economic integration. Together with this, interest in the role of CS also has been growing in recent years. Despite of all the increasing interests of the role of CS, the very concept of CS is seen as complex and difficult to define. The task of defining the concept, identifying CS's essential features and designing a strategy to assess its state is, in itself, a complex and potentially controversial process (Fioramonti & Heinrich, 2007, p. 57). CS can mean different to different people depending on what kind of democracy and society one have in mind. Used in a primarily analytical way, any definition of CS has to take into account the specific political and cultural context in which it operates.

Research into CS developments in authoritarian Myanmar requires a particularly sound theoretical conceptualization (Lorch, 2007, pp. 55-88). After the 2010 general election, Myanmar has proved herself to be a new and an emerging democratic country. A series of reforms undertaken by President Thein Sein has merited trust and praises both locally and internationally, including countries that used to be staunch critics of the previous Military regime. However I still find relevant to look Myanmar as a nascent democracy where CS still find itself in challenging situation. Given the complex nature of political and socio-economical landscape, the study of society in Myanmar will no doubt requires careful approach and sound conceptualization.

For the purpose of my research, I shall extract definitions of CS that I find most relevant for my research from keys definitions put forward by the selected well known scholars and researchers in the field. Of course doing so requires some conceptual surgery: my received concepts of CS include quite a bit of baggage not suited to the issues at hand. However my definition will not run away entirely from the main theory and concept of CS from ancient history.

White (1996) defined CS as an intermediate associational realm between the state and individuals, populated by organizations and groups that are separate from the state, enjoy

autonomy in relation to the state, and are formed voluntarily by members of society to protect or advance their interests or values (White, 1994). This definition identifies CS by contrasting it to domains organized by the state or by the market, and operating above the threshold in which biology and intimacy are predominant (as in the family and close friendships). Several features of this definition require elaboration.

According to (Robert D. Putnam, 2000), CS is sphere of associational life that, intentionally or unintentionally, promotes democratic values and increases social capital. His argument is supported by neo-Toquevillian position that democracy is strengthened, not weakened, when it faces a vigorous CS (R.D. Putnam, Leonardi, & Nanetti, 1994). Successful transitions to democracy are possible only if CS or ‘something like it’ either predates the transition or is established in the course of a transition from authoritarian rule (Perez-Diaz & Vitctor, 1993, p. 40). Some other scholars (Berman, 1997; Bermeo & Nord, 2000) and (Berman, 1997) argue however that CS not necessarily promotes democratic value but sometime promote internal conflicts and cleavage.

Linz and Stepan (1996) explained that in academic literature the term CS has been used as a catchall expression that might include all organized forces of society, from political parties to business enterprises, or even coincide with the array of people that, from time to time, turn up on the streets to voice their concerns against abusive regimes (Stepan, 1996). CSO is a driving force towards liberal democracy and positive elements in the consolidation of transitional democracies throughout the world. Although there are specific and contingent reasons that motivated such a renewed interest in the strength of CS, little empirical research has actually been conducted on the relationship between CS and democratization (T. M. Carothers, 2000).

Unlike overtly political organizations such as political parties, CSOs were thought to pursue political objectives that were not partisan and, more importantly, they were thought to promote political change without seeking office (Cohen & Arato, 1994). However, under dictatorship, no dissenting voice or opposition force is tolerated, thereby even political parties that want to seek office or dismantle corrupt power chose to keep low profile and work underground. Therefore it’s uneasy task to make a clear distinction between CS seeking political offices and not seeking political offices. It’s often easiest and also most relevant at

times to see dictatorship as the state and every opposing force against the state as CS actors if one is to look particularly at the CS role in promoting democracy and good governance.

The relationship between the state and CS can have differing modalities and give birth to different regimes: for instance, in some cases the state abdicates a large sector of social policies to the action of CSOs; in other regimes, the state interacts with CSOs on the grounds of a corporatist agreement in which the scopes and the resources of the latter are established and identified by the former; in other cases the state reclaims its social responsibility and retains control of most social activities; and finally, in some cases, the state simply neglects the social responsibility associated with its role (Salamon & Anheier, 1998, pp. 213-247).

According to Myanmar expert David Steinberg, CSO in Myanmar is a composed of those non-ephemeral organizations of individuals banded together for a common purpose or purposes to pursue those interests through group activities and by peaceful means. These are generally non-profit organizations, and may be local or national, advocacy or supportive, religious, cultural, social, professional, educational, or even organizations that, while not for profit, support the business sector, such as chambers of commerce, trade associations, etc.

This is particularly true in the context of Myanmar, which recently underwent rapid transformation from dictatorship to multi party democracy or from a one-man rule to multi people rule.

Though vaguely understood the meaning of this concept, it concept is still a matter of debate. The debate tends to be endless if the users do not take our own conclusion by drawing narrower definitions from literatures. Therefore, the author defines CS in Myanmar for this thesis as below: an intermediate realm situated between state and household, populated by organized groups or associations, which are separate from the state, enjoy some autonomy in relations with the state, and are formed voluntarily by members of society to protect or extend their interests. This definition includes political organizations both inside and outside of the country.

3.2. CS and democracy

Democracy: is a system of government, which includes the people in its governing mechanism; enabling people of the society need to participate in their politics (Eken, 2008, p.

71). Democracy is opposed to dictatorship where people's participation in the political decision making process is heavily restricted or at worst absent. Therefore the idea of CS or civilian participation in decision-making process has been central to any discussion of democratization. CS and democracy are so closely linked and inseparably intertwined, thus one alone without the other cannot function properly. CS is seen as a sociological counterpart of democracy in political sphere or even a subset of democracy (Calvert & Burnell, 2004, p. 279).

While the role of CS as a conducive, compensatory and supplementary to democracy is virtually entirely focused, the dysfunctional roles CS can play seem less taken into account. CS is either seen as force that could bring about democracy where it is absent and strengthening it where it is already in place or a negative force that might also dysfunction democracy. Therefore, it is imperative that one is to give equal consideration to the virtues and vices of the role of CS in democracy.

Types of CSOs that seem to play dysfunctional role are organizations that represent views and goals, which directly interfere with democracy and human rights. Such organizations have been formed to promote racism and fundamentalism, which are directly threatening social pluralism and democracy. Such absolute and uncompromising goals are not conducive to a democracy. Non-democratic procedures, goals and strategies of organizations prevent CS from being an effective agency of political socialization to democracy at best, and they may generate, perpetuate and aggravate openly non-democratic views and forms of conduct at worst.

The balance between the two realms, CS and the state, necessitates arrangements that both guarantee their separation and regulate their interaction. The goals pursued by CS organizations must be strictly commensurate with the credentials of democracy, pluralism and human rights. It is only through democratic organizational behavior that CS contributes to a political socialization favorable for democracy. Non-democratic goals, procedures and/or strategies, in turn, curb if not pervert CS's capacity to generate democratic patterns of behavior and attitudes. An active, diverse CS often does play a valuable role in helping advance democracy. It can discipline the state, ensure that citizens' interests are taken seriously, and foster greater civic and political participation (T. Carothers, 1999-2000, p. 29).

Therefore, CS promotes democracy by contributing pluralism, civic and political participation. However, effective, healthy and meaningful promotion of democracy can only occur when freedom of movement and expression are guaranteed by the state. Here it is important that there is mutually respected and balanced relation between the state and CS is crucial.

3.3. CS and good governance

The concept of "governance" is not new. It is as old as human civilization. It is being increasingly used in development and democratization literature. A simple definition of governance is; the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented). While good governance is regarded as the main driving force behind healthy development and prosperity, bad governance in contrary is seen as the root causes of all evil in one's society (www.unescap.org, 2013).

As the world has become more complex and connected and thereby interdependent in many levels as the IT revolution is an increasingly revolting process, governance has never been so challenging as today.

Good governance is no longer seen as the sole responsibility of the government but every citizens of the world including CSOs are responsible for that. CS has also very important role in promoting good governance through many ways. The following eight characteristics are critical when dealing with the term and its effectiveness played by CSOs. Good governance, on the other hand, is (usually) understood as including some form of democratic government. Governance will have to include a minimum level of democracy to be 'good'.

Good governance has 8 major characteristics. It is participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law. It assures that corruption is minimized, the views of minorities are taken into account and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making. It is also responsive to the present and future needs of society (Ibid.)



Figure 2. Characteristics of good governance (Ibid.)

Good governance thus requires the existence of checks and balances (horizontal accountability), participation and elections (vertical accountability), and respect for basic human rights (which include political rights). In what form and to what degree these criteria will have to be satisfied for a system of governance to be ‘good’ is a moot point. It is for instance possible that authoritarian governments can pursue sound development policies, especially when defined as economic growth (with China being the prime example), and foreign policy makers and donors can sometimes play down the issue of democratization for political reasons.

Although good governance is a broad concept with unclear boundaries and a loosely defined normative content, there is strong consensus among donor agencies and researchers alike that governance is important to development, and that governance is likely to have an impact on how well and effectively aid is being used (Amundsen, 2010, p. 71). In a 2004 document, Norad explains, “good governance means the sound administration of financial resources, a responsible economic policy and active efforts to combat corruption.” Moreover, the document points out that good governance is also a vital prerequisite for good effective development cooperation. A good system of government is characterized by a well-functioning constitutional state and an economic policy that aims at reducing poverty (Bauck, Strand, & Gul, 2011).

The ways in which CS can contribute to good governance include the following (Jones & Tembo, 2008, p. 15):

1. Building state capability such as; participatory policy and budget formulation, delivering basic services, providing training to public service providers such as health workers, delivering civic education and raising citizens' awareness about national policies, and their rights and responsibilities (e.g. voting rights, democratic freedoms), safety, security and access to justice: CSOs can raise citizens' awareness about rights and services so that official security and justice institutions are more accessible and effective.

2. Building state accountability; influencing standard setting (e.g. lobbying for legislation on transparency, adherence to international commitments on human rights), carrying out investigation (e.g. monitoring and evaluating government programs through social audits, citizen report cards or participatory expenditure tracking systems), demanding answers from the state (e.g. questioning state institutions about progress, parliamentary public hearings), applying sanctions where the state is found to be lacking (e.g. protests, boycotts, strikes or negative publicity)

3. Building state responsiveness; identifying and voicing the needs of citizens, including the poor, pursuing social inclusion through strategies including advocacy (e.g. lobbying reformers within government or the international community), feeding back research results and informing debates (e.g. inequality assessments and poverty and social impact analysis) and social mobilization (e.g. campaigns).

3.4. CS and peace/national reconciliation

Reconciliation is "the action of restoring broken relations". It can also be defined as a profound process of dialogue between conflicting parties, leading to the recognition of the "other", and respect for his or her differences, interests and values. Reconciliation is also..."the acknowledgment of the dignity of victims for long ignored. It restores the individual's capacity to take hold of herself and to manage the future and herself in that future. It restores the capacity to live with or alongside the other. It allows us, while remembering, to bring closure to a chapter in our past. It enables us to live in the present, making our life as a nation and our lives as individuals in a shared future. It always remains a never-ending process" (Lerche, 2000).

Reconciliation generally takes place through a long-term process aided by public policies and actions that confront the conflict between persons, institutions, or communities head-on and take an honest look at the conditions under which reconciliation can take place (Méndez, 2001, pp. 25-44). Therefore it is essential to the construction of sustainable peace. A “spirit of reconciliation” or a “culture of reconciliation” cannot be created over night. It is a long-run process to learn how to rebuild broken relationship, which requires a resolute determination and strong willingness to learn about others.

The process of reconciliation in the context of Myanmar primarily brings us focus on the conflicting sides; well known conflicting parties are the military government and the oppositional forces including ethnic armed groups and another is less focused but deep-rooted conflict between the majority ethnic Bama and non-Bama ethnic groups. Recent conflict communal violence between the Buddhists and Muslims is also another animosity exists among different religious groups. Even among oppositional groups there exist fundamental differences when it comes to solving the country’s decades old crisis and thereby there is communication and cooperation problem.

Therefore a better word combination in the context of Myanmar is ‘national reconciliation’ and not just ‘reconciliation’. It is impossible to have peace or peace building process without national reconciliation in Myanmar. Series of peace talks going on recently are on the right track of national reconciliation planning. The process must firstly include an acknowledgement of the wrong doings by the victimizers and the next step is contrition, which is to take responsibility for the past actions, to express regret and to directly request forgiveness. The last or key to success in national reconciliation is to get forgiveness from the victims, which include psychological healing which understandably would take time and lot of hard working from all stakeholders involved.

In fact, reconciliation and peace are closely related and one cannot exist alone without the other. The traditional definitions of peace concern the absence of war. Modern concepts are broader and include creating situations that guarantee positive human conditions – as positive peace ultimately needs to be obtained by changing the very societal structures that are responsible for the suffering and conflict (Jeong, 2000, p. 23) . This is very different from the traditional definition of peace, in which the absence of direct, overt violence (such as war) is sufficient. Derivatives of security theory have led to a growing understanding of ‘new

security' definitions where non-military issues are given similar weight to their military counterparts (Henderson & Watson, 2005, p. 4). Traditional Realist arguments would posit that peace building is unrealistic and heavily bound by some preconceived but murky notions of what constitutes a peaceful or ideal society (Jeong, 2000, p. 26).

In many developing countries and in Myanmar CS is seen as important player in promoting peace and national reconciliation. Conflicts among multi ethnicities or between the ruling government and oppositional groups especially armed groups are good example of where CS is expected or invited to engage as mediator or dialogue facilitator. As CS is widely seen as a neutral part in conflict resolution, representatives from such neutral organizations are often tend to get invitation to help solve the long lasting and often complicated conflicts. What CS can do regarding any particular conflict varies a lot depending on type of CS and their objectives. For example while international donor organizations may sponsor talks or conference, other CSOs such as religious organizations may be helpful in trying mediate using their symbolic influence.

Religious leaders and 88-student generation's leaders have been seen as very important peace negotiator throughout peace process in Myanmar. For example when the CNF was approached for talk by the Military regime, religious leaders were firstly approached and sent to further discuss the prospect of possible peace talk between the two groups. The regime understands that different approach is necessary when working for national reconciliation with the Chins and Kachins who are predominantly Christians. And in other areas where students and exile groups are dominated, the government chooses previously political prisoners including the 88-student leaders to negotiate for peace and national reconciliation.

Even under heavy restriction, CSOs in various guises manage to have some impact on this area. Through media, which is known as the fourth estate of power, especially exile medias, CS of various types either groups working across border between Thailand and Myanmar and groups inside the country under various names, can create immense impact on important issue the country is facing. I will discuss more on this on the discussion chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

Methodology

4.1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe and explain the methodology deployed in this study. The first part of the chapter provides an overview of the research approach and the design chosen, explaining the rationale for those. Later two leading approaches, quantitative and qualitative approaches will be briefly introduced and explored more on the selected approach. The second part will explore the selected research design, which is a case study design and explain why. The chapter will also present a step-by-step process of data collection and its interpretation, and challenges and limitation during the time of fieldwork. As doing research is related to human being, the author finds it important as well to include what kinds of ethical consideration are taken in this chapter.

4.2. Methodology

Methodology is defined as a series of choices: choices about what information and data to gather, choices about how to analyze the information and data that you gather and other methodological choices. It is also defined as a systematic way to solve a problem. It is a 'science' of studying how research is to be carried out. Essentially, the procedures by which researchers go about their work of describing, explaining and predicting phenomena are called research methodology (Kothari, 2012). The research strategy used in a conducted study is usually shaped by the research method. The research method is generally chosen with the research aims and objectives in mind.

There are two well-known methods within the field of research; quantitative and qualitative research. A more detail explanation of the selected method or approach – qualitative one combined with case study design- will be explored under its own title. Writers of methodology tend to distinguish between the research methods mentioned above, although there are those that state that differences between quantitative and qualitative research are no longer relevant (Bryman, 2008a).

As far as document analysis is concern, the author depends almost entirely on documents outside the studied country. The author spent times as well to attend related seminars and workshops. Hours and hours of sitting in front of computer browsing Internet pages checking

updated information from news and commentaries is another important part of this research process.

As related document availability is also limited, the author chose to conduct field research, which included interviews, attending workshops and seminars and group discussions. There were also challenges and limitation involved throughout the research particularly during the field trip. One of those was the political atmosphere seen as ‘uncertainty’ at the time- March 2012- of the field research. People were still skeptical about the motive behind the reforms driven by former military generals who basically lack the legitimacy and public trust.

Another step included in this research process is taking times to talk with many people from different backgrounds including ethnical, political and intellectual backgrounds.

4.3. Qualitative VS quantitative research design

The fundamental differences between quantitative and qualitative research methods involve the principal orientation with regards to the role of theory in relation to the research being conducted. While quantitative research has a deductive orientation where theories are tested through the research conducted, qualitative research has an inductive nature and theory is generated through the research conducted. The epistemological orientation of quantitative research is a natural science model, in particular positivism, advocating the application of the methods of the natural sciences to the study of social reality and beyond (Ibid.)

Qualitative research has an epistemological orientation whereby ‘a strategy that respects the differences between people and the objects of the natural sciences is required, thus requiring the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action’. Ontology is ‘a theory of the nature of social entities’, where the central point of orientation social entities ought to be considered as objective entities or whether they are built up of perceptions and actions of social actors (ibid.) Whereas quantitative research has an objective ontological orientation, qualitative research entails a constructionist orientation whereby social phenomena are constantly being revised.

However, although quantitative and qualitative research represent different sets of research methods and strategies, it is not rare that one form of research may entail characteristics of the other type. Although each method ‘carries with it striking differences in terms of the role of theory, epistemological issues, and ontological concerns, the two can be combine within an overall research project’ (Ibid.).

With the research aim and objectives in mind, the research method deemed most appropriate for the purpose of this study was that of qualitative research. The qualitative approach chosen is also well suited to answer the questions of —what, how and —why CSOs are important players in the process of democratization and national reconciliation. In having an inductive nature, the qualitative research method would allow the researcher to collect data in order to address the research questions at hand. Qualitative research in its most basic form involves the analysis of any unstructured data, including: open-ended survey responses, literature reviews, audio recordings, pictures and web pages. That is exactly what the author is doing in this research.

4.4. Research design- Case study

Using case studies for research purpose remains one of the most challenging of all social science endeavors (Yin, 2009, p. 3). As a research method, the case study is used in many situations, to contribute to our knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena. A research strategy is influenced by how reality is being perceived (Ryen, 2000). To choose the right kind of research methods is important when one is to come up with unbiased and objective result of the research. Therefore after careful consideration I choose the research design of case study where a qualitative methodology is employed for the collection of data.

Researchers collect data about participants using participant and direct observations, interviews, protocols, tests, examinations of records, and collections of writing samples. Qualitative interviews, focus groups discussion have been the main methods, along with critical document analysis. Personal observations in addition during my visit that lasted for 2 weeks have been used as a reference when seeking new and additional information.

To specify my question more clearly, it is important to begin by simplifying that how the CSOs in Myanmar attempt to influence or promote democracy values and why CSOs are engaged in this, what are the most important factors behind this endeavor. As my research seeks to understand what are the roles of CS and how CSOs play role in promoting democracy, good governance and national reconciliation or peace building, several leading CSOs inside Myanmar are approached.

Some of the leading CSOs the author approached included ME (Myanmaregress.org), Free Funeral Service (FFS), which are the two leading CSOs with the former providing social

services and the latter providing expertise much needed in a poor society and yet a newly established democracy.

4.5. Data collection

Data Collection is an important aspect of any type of research study. Data collection can be derived from a number of methods, which include interviews, focus groups, surveys, telephone interviews, field notes, taped social interaction or questionnaires and finding and analyzing of relevant documents (Heaton, 2004).

Data collection for this master thesis was primarily done during my field research visit to Myanmar, which lasted about 2 week in March 2012. During field research, the researcher interviewed persons both individually and in groups as recommended by individuals who not only engaged but also understand the contemporary political atmosphere. The researcher also has collected data from other sources such as online documents; reports and master thesis of related topics and news websites. Doing research on Myanmar is challenging and time consuming, as concern for restrictions from government also applied.

4.5.1. Interviews

Interviews are a systematic way of talking and listening to people and are another way to collect data from individuals through conversations (Kajornboon, 2005). According to (Kajornboon, 2005) there are many types of interviews, which include: structured and semi-structured interviews, unstructured interviews, non-directive interview. Yin (2007, p.107) also defined three types of case study interviews, which are; in-depth interview, focus interview and structured interview. For the purpose of clarity, the authors will only use two types namely, structured and unstructured interview.

In structured interviews, respondents are asked the same questions with the same wording and in the same sequence. And therefore this type of interview introduces some rigidity to the interview (ibid). When it comes to unstructured interviews, the interviewer does not have to follow a detail interview guide. The interview is rather like a free discussion or conversation on one or more related broad topics. The depth of discussion on the topics is also driven by the motivation and interest of the subjects and people concern.

Both interview types have their own advantages and weaknesses. For this research all interview types above except structured interviews have been followed. The researcher thinks

that structured interview type is not beneficial given the research method-case study- chosen and also the cultural and political context of Myanmar. Questions in a case study interviews is likely to be fluid rather than rigid (J.Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Considering cultural and political context of Myanmar with regards to people to people contact it is a challenge to conduct a systematically structured or rigid interview because it is often regarded as official or government related activities and thereby contribute to non-cooperation or even hostile reaction from the respondents. Most respondents claimed to have preferred informal conversation, which usually took place at informal places such as inside teashops, pubs and restaurants outside of their office hour. There are other times when the interviewer saw the situation as insecure to raise particular questions that might jeopardize the livelihood of the respondents.

4.5.2. Document analysis

Collection and analysis of documents has been the most important part of my research process. Although I already have extensive prior knowledge on the subject studied, this research has given me broader understanding particularly of the selected research questions, especially in regards to contextual factors relevant for CSOs in Myanmar. Most of the data used for this analysis is documents derived from Internet sources. As pointed out by Bryman, such information can be very important for researchers conducting case studies of organizations and using methods such as participant observation or qualitative interviews (Bryman, 2008,p.522). Analyzed documents include reports, research papers, master thesis and news documents from Internet.

4.5.3. Participant observation

Participant observation is a qualitative method which objective is to help researchers learn the perspectives held by study populations (Mack & Woodsong, 2005). Bryman describes participant observation as a way of seeing through other's eyes, equipping the researcher to —see as other sees (Bryman, 2008b, p. 465). To do participant observation, the researcher visited classroom lectures at the ME in Yangon where students from different ethnic nationalities were trained to further their knowledge on politics and public administration.

The method is distinctive because the author approaches participants in their own environment rather than having the participants come to the researcher. And the method also enables researchers to develop a familiarity with the cultural milieu that will prove invaluable

throughout the project. Observing and participating are integral to understanding the breadth and complexities of the human experience. Through participant observation, researchers can also uncover factors important for a thorough understanding of the research problem but that were unknown when the study was designed. The nature of participant observation allows flexibility to encounter unexpected issues (Ibid, p.466).

4.5.4. Focus group

Focus group is a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the research (Powell & Single, 1996). Normally, when it is said a group, there should be more than three people involved, in this case a discussion with at least three people. One definition even goes further in saying that the group needs to be large enough to generate rich discussion but not so large that some participants are left out (Eliot, 2005). This is a form of interviewing but the difference is number of people involved in answering the questions posed. The result of such focus group discussion is very much depended on the skill of a moderator or a researcher who organized a meeting.

The author uses this technique because, through such interactive communication between participants, one could expect more friendly relation and openness, which are culturally very important in the studied society, thus create greater opportunity to conduct deeper interviews with other people in the participant's network. The author also choses the location of such discussion would be safe because at the time of field trip, the atmosphere was such that people were still skeptical about the motive behind the reforms.

Some people the author interviewed answered that they could not trust the military turn quasi-civilian regime because they contend that the people in top position are the same people only with different clothes. As social trust is important in the context of Myanmar, the author spent lengthier time than preplanned in the process of preparing meeting, talking and arranging meeting places.

4.5.5. Sampling

The two most well known sampling are; probability sampling (representative samples) and non-probability sampling (non-representative samples). Because of limited resources, time and people in contact, the author partly used snowballing technique that is a non-probability sampling technique and a subset of purposive sampling. Snowballing is also called chain

referral sampling. The sample is achieved by asking a participant to suggest someone else who might be willing or appropriate for the study (Ucdavis.edu). The author in early phase depended on few people who helped get contact with other potential people within their network who were willing to meet and contribute to the study. Through this technique, the author got chance to widen sample to a more representative samples- the people from different backgrounds including social, ethnical, political and intellectual backgrounds.

4.6. Challenge and limitations

Conducting research in a familiar context presented special challenges in terms of obtaining objectivity. Balancing previous experiences with new information required me to take a "distant" view on anti-military and my former rule with exile Burmese community. It is impossible to be totally objective because of the research background primarily selected is related to opposition force- the CS forces the forces that the author represented as exile democracy movement. Therefore it is important to create distance and validity for the reader when considering the research results and analysis of this study.

The country was newly opened and thus people continue to be more or less skeptical about the motive behind such a rapid reform. Space are made wider, however people still felt that fear continued to play huge role in everyday life. Therefore arranging meetings with strangers and asking questions related to politics are always a challenge in Myanmar for many decades and still the case when doing this research in nascent democratic transition period. In the context of Myanmar, a country deeply infested by corruption in every level of society, cash incentives or bribery in the form of donation, has always been involved in meeting with people in the offices. These practices often bring hesitation and confusion for the author after being many years in Norway where such practices are not tolerated in the society.

At least inside Myanmar, no telephone interview was made firstly because doing such interview was not suggested, saying that without seeing face, people appeared to be afraid. One interview arrangement could take up to half or a day because of transportation difficulties and time constraint of the interviewees. A face-to-face meeting usually takes place in the evening outside the office hour and at night bars or teashops. This obviously required money and lengthy time thus time constraint is another limitation during this research study.

4.7. Ethical consideration

Ethics has become a cornerstone for conducting effective and meaningful research. As such, the ethical behavior of individual researchers is under unprecedented scrutiny (Best & Kahn, 2006). Therefore the author takes ethics a serious consideration throughout the research process. Four important ethical considerations have been taken from Michel Jay Polonsky & David S. Waller book chapter 5 (Polonsky & Waller, 2010).

The first consideration is '**voluntary participation**' that there should be no coercion or the feeling of such act by the interviewee from the researcher. The author in every interview or conversation didn't force or in any way tried to influence a person whom I interviewed rather explain the role of researcher as a neutral actor and that there should be no obligation to answer the question or no negative consequence for what they just told.

The second one is '**informed consent**' which is to say that the participant or the interviewees fully understand what they are being asked to do and that they are informed if there is any potential negative consequence for such participation. The author thoroughly explained for what purpose the interview is and how it would be used. Only after the participant's consent the interviews were done.

And the third ethical consideration is '**non-discrimination**' which is equally important when conducting research in a socially and culturally diverse and complex society like Myanmar. The researcher in advance choose the people to interview carefully with the advice of individuals who have experience in doing research in Myanmar.

The last one the author takes into consideration was '**confidentiality and anonymity**' which is particularly important in the country of newly opened Myanmar. At the time of research, people were still concern about their safety and thus requested for confidentiality and their name to be anonymous. There are several interviewees who requested for anonymous.

CHAPTER FIVE

Findings and discussion

5.1. Different types of CS

5.1.1. NGOs

NGO stands for non-governmental organization, which means a group organizing itself without being organized or controlled directly by the government. These types of organizations, for the purpose of clarity in this thesis, are more structured, more organized and usually larger in their operations. Further the author makes a distinction between the NGOs from other types of CSOs including faith-based, anti-government or oppositional, media and ad hoc groups that will be discussed later in this chapter.

It's fair to group the NGOs into three categories, the first would be local NGOs or LNGOs operating inside the country with or with registration with government, and secondly international NGOs or INGOs operating through Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) with the government. And finally government controlled organizations, which aims are to promote government's policy goals. The last category includes for example Myanmar Red Cross (MRC), Myanmar Medical Association (MMA), the Myanmar Maternal Child and Welfare Association (MMCWA), and these are seen often run by military officers or their wives (ICG, 2001, p. 22).

The author finds very challenging to find official or reliable statistics on the number of NGOs operating in Myanmar. However, estimated number suggested is not hard to find. For example, according to David Steinberg in 2010, there were an estimated 214, 000 community based organizations (CBOs) and some 270 apolitical LNGOs with varying social missions in Myanmar (Steinberg, 2010, p. 126). Number of INGOs according to Harvard report in 2011, titled "Working through Ambiguity: International NGOs in Myanmar" is 65 (Saha, 2011), but it would not be exaggerating to assume the number to be double at this point due to rapid opening of space over the last two years.

Though the aims of establishing NGOs in Myanmar are in a large decree the same that is to alleviate the poor livelihood of citizens, their roles and functions with regards to the 'how to' is varied. While most NGOs are primarily relying on funding from foreign donors, a very few other depend on resources come from local donors. The two such donors are well known Zaw

Zaw and Tay Za, the two notorious tycoons who recently have been seen in the medias donating millions of fund for charities and other humanitarian needs inside the country. The two were accused of having connection with the previous military regime, thus subject to economic sanction from the western countries until very recently.

For example, while a LNGO called 'i Love Myanmar' (www.ilovemyanmar.org), which was started in 2008 out of a disastrous Cyclone Nargis, was actively providing social humanitarian aids to people affected by the cyclone, other relatively similar organization, Free Funeral Services Society (FFSS) is committed to helping the poor who couldn't afford to pay for their funerals. These two organizations are providing aids to the needy, but as mentioned their goals are directed to different groups with the former focusing on the cyclone affected population and the latter focusing on the poor who lack financial resource to cover their own funerals. Both are intended to filling up holes left by the government's capability.

The 'i Love Myanmar' extended its role beyond Cyclone Nargis by providing cash and material donations to hospitals and charities across the country. Its founder-cum-president of the organization Levi Sap Nei Thang is reportedly in close contact with the military regime with some complaining that she is getting direct order from military generals and other defending her position by saying that there must be some kind of understanding or compromising attitude towards the ruling military if one is to function effectively. FFSS head U Kyaw Thu said in the interview with Mizzima (Mizzima, 2011) the leading exile media now operating inside Myanmar, that his organization is not a political party or organization but purely social organization rendering assistance to needy people.

U San Aye, joint secretary at FFSS said that though his organization is not engaging in party politics, it chooses to get involved in national politics which he confirmed is a necessary activities for those who love and care for the benefit of the people of Myanmar. He added that the organization is filling up holes left behind by government's capability particularly in the areas of social, humanitarian and basic capacity building (personal communication March 16, 2012). The organization also opens free medical clinics and free English class for the poor and needy. Through free education, a much-needed population of illiterate and impoverished will be strengthened, as time goes, those receiving education will be more aware of needs for more education in their respective networks. This could potentially create more religious and cultural tolerance among diverse groups.

When asked if the organization is controlled or instructed by the government authority, he denied such control but said his organization has no problem dealing with the authority, and sometimes even received donations from them with no condition. He further added, “when our organization accepts donation from anyone, we accept it without conditions, if donors asked for some kind of report or accounting, we simply say ‘no’ we don’t have that practice, if you don’t trust us, don’t give us anything, there are many people who want to contribute” (Ibid.). An NGO worker who identified himself as amateur observer said, “it’s quite normal that lack of transparency and accountability is a serious problem among so-called social and humanitarian organizations in Myanmar” (personal communication, March 28, 2012).

Another important and well-known organizations are Metta Development Foundation (MDF), the Shalom Foundation (SF), and Network Activities Groups (NAG). The MDF, established in 1998, is active in several states where their projects include —election education programs. MDF main objectives according to the organization website are (Metta-myanmar.org, 1998): create a framework for self-help initiatives; support sustainable community-based projects, facilitate skills training; establish partnerships with like-minded organizations or individuals. The MDF’s approach is participatory, stressing the empowerment of community-based groups and their eventual coalescence into local NGOs. Through educational trainings and practical guidance the MDF and SF enhance democratic values such as participatory, freedom of expression and women empowerment.

The Shalom Foundation employs 12 full-time staffs and works on mediation and conflict resolution issues, building local capacity in these key sectors. The SF organizes trainings that offers topics of understanding conflict; approaches in responding to conflict; practical experience of peace work; and developing strategy for peace. It has been continuously making efforts geared towards creating space for a constructive dialogue between the military government and ethnic armed groups with the end in view of achieving just and lasting peace (shalommyanmar.org, 2000). The most important expertise of SF is peace building, thus helping national reconciliation between multi ethnic, multi cultural and multi religions society.

NAG is also a non-profit, non-governmental local organization dedicatedly working for the emergence of a society of Myanmar people, which is sustainably developed and prosperous. The main approaches that NAG applies are building the capacity of the people and community-based and civil society organizations, creating economic opportunities, and

promoting good governance in target issue areas. Currently, NAG has been implementing livelihood and governance projects in three main regions of Myanmar- Delta region, Dry Zone and Hilly region (Nagmyanmar.org, 2010). One of the organization focuses has been improving fishery governance system at the community and township level by giving practical guidance and trainings with relevant information.

Virtually all INGOs operate in Myanmar under some sort of framework agreement with the government, be it a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or a Letter of Agreement with the ministry that has purview over the sector in which they are working (Saha, 2011). The government was skeptical towards international NGOs until May 2008 when they began to understand that the government alone could not provide necessary humanitarian assistances to the people affected and clear up the mess after the devastating Cyclone that took an estimated 138,000 lives and destroyed thousands of residences. As the INGOs were not allowed immediately after the Cyclone, local NGOs were rushed into the scene providing food and drink much needed for people in urgent needs. Before the cyclone, some 40 INGOs were on the ground, the next year, the number grew to over 100 and has now settled at around 65, said one report from Harvard university (Ibid.).

5.1.2. Faith-based or religious organizations

Buddhist monkhood as CS actor

Ones of the most influential CS actors with regard to political liberalization are faith-based organizations, especially the Buddhist monkhood. An estimated number of monks in Myanmar is set to be around 400, 000. Monks are organized within an monastic institution called “*Sangha*” and they are in Burmese called ‘*Phaya*’, which literally means ‘god’; thus they command very high ‘respect’ among Myanmar Buddhists. ‘Respect’ in the context of Myanmar could well mean to give power and influence in the societal structure- both politically and socially. Monks are often seen involved in political movements, which were meant to topple or dismantle the power of corrupt government.

Due to their involvement in politics, monks have a long history of being victims of political strife in Myanmar. For instance in 1757, Bama kings overthrew the Mon empire, and brutally slaughtered over three thousand Mon monks in a ‘Fire Burn’, in a group near Rangoon (Hongsar, 2010). Again in 2007, monks led mass demonstration, which earned a name “Saffron revolution” in recognition of the leading roles of Buddhist monks. Though the

protest came in response to a sudden fuel hike, it was unexpected or spontaneous act, without permission from highest levels of monastic hierarchy. Among hundreds slaughtered were the Buddhist monks.

The *Sangha* has long been an important voice for liberalization under the British colony as well. Young monks like Hsaya San organized the *wunthanu athin* (own race society) to agitate against anything that was deemed British and foreign in Myanmar's socio-political life. And monks U Ottama and Wissera led public opinion against the British, which is disfavored because they were viewed as corrupted and secular (Aljunied, 2010).

After independence, the *Sangha* became even more integrated into the country's socio-political fabric that every government since then deliberately allows *Sangha* to be de facto part of unified and hierarchical order of political supervision and thereby Buddhism to be superior to any other religions in the country. The then prime minister U Nu for instance attempted to make Buddhism a state religion following the election of 1960. Today virtually every edition of controlled Burmese press, the military is pictured as attending to Buddhist needs and customs. Using central Buddhist tenets such as the universal ruler, rulers claim divinity in order to uphold their position as the revered overlord of the masses. Even though *Sangha* lacks the taught administrative structure of the *tamadaw*, it is the only institution in the country that rivals the *tamadaw* in size, influence and national presence (Steinberg, 2010, p. 206).

Despite their superiority in political supervision and the social setting, Buddhist monks in many situations put themselves in the position of defying dictatorship- the military regime. The most significant role played by monks in anti government movement was in 1988 nationwide bloody protest that witnessed the lost of at least three thousands innocent lives including monks. Although monks were not the ones who led the protest- the university student led the protest- they were actively participating in the movement prominently demanding an end to military dictatorship and holding multi parties democratic election. In late 1999, two highly respected senior monks including U Zawtipala offered to serve as mediators between ASSK and the military regime in which the latter rebuked the offer.

A Christian pastor who based in Yangon said, "Because monks often play leading role in nation's democratic or anti government movements, the government views them as enemies of the state and has treated them accordingly. Most of them are now acting like political activists doing political things rather than religious things" (personal communication, March

24, 2012). It is not difficult to see monks publicly talking about the country's social economic and political problems. Though their position is expected to be neutral in politics, decades long and yet deep-rooted crisis has inevitably made them side with the downtrodden people or the victims, thereby became the moral authoritative voice against the corrupt and oppressive dictatorship.

The same informant told the author also that although government's general view on monks is hostile, there are a number of leading Buddhist monks advising and guiding the generals at top of hierarchy (Ibid). Therefore, it can be argued that there are at least two opposing views among the *Sangha*, the one supporting dissenting forces and another supporting the perpetuation of the ruling military regime. The latter that advocates status quo maintains that strong state apparatus- the military- is necessary to safeguard the three national causes: non disintegration of the union and national solidarity and the perpetuation of sovereignty. Multi party democratic system or federal system demanded by opposition forces is seen as a threat to the aforementioned three national causes.

As monks command high respect among the Buddhist dominated country, their action speaks loud and is always crucial. While ordinary citizens are afraid of expressing their opinions, monks are often seen openly criticizing act of corruption and wrongdoings by anyone including government officials. Thus monks play check and balance role over the country ruling system. One can say that Buddhism, the *Sangha* and monks are deeply associated with anti-colonial protests, nationalist movements and nation building.

As neutral actors in Myanmar society, monks have held key roles in mediation since ancient times. When national reconciliation in Myanmar does occur, senior monks, along political leaders and ethnic minority leaders will play key roles in the reconciliation process. In June 2012, bloody inter-communal violence broke out in Arakan State, southwestern Myanmar where more than 120,000 people, mostly Muslim *Rohingyas*, were displaced by the violence and more than 150 people were killed. Medias across the globe portray the violence in different pictures supposedly to serve their own agendas, thus what really occurred on the ground is difficult to ascertain. Buddhist monks on one hand were accused by international medias of being racists and citing hatred against Muslim community in the region (Hindstrom, 2012); however, some Buddhist monks were reportedly invited to be part of problem finders and solvers.

While not all monks are nationalists or racists, there are undeniably some monks attempting to promote hatreds and violence against other religious groups and smaller ethnic minorities. A monk-led movement called '969' was founded by racist monks who stated the aims of organization as preserving Buddhism in the face of multi religious influence. According to Dr. Zarni, a leading researcher and political activist, leader of the '969' movement, Wirathu⁷ effectively scapegoats the country's Muslims for the general economic hardships and cultural decay in society, portraying the ethnic Burmese as victims at the hands of organized Muslim commercial leeches and parasites (Zarni, 2013). As moral authority in the society, monks can be not only very effective in promoting democratic principles; they can also be very destructive elements towards national reconciliation and good governance. Outside the Buddhist community, monks are less influential as moral authority stems from population of the society. In ethnic areas mostly populated with Christians, pastors and priests are playing very important roles.

Christian churches and organizations as CS actors

Though Christian population is very small – estimated less than 10% - Christian associations, churches, charities and Bible schools play important role when it comes to democratization, national reconciliation and good governance in Myanmar. The declared roles of Christian organizations, to avoid complication and confrontation with the authorities, are social-humanitarian, development and of course religious, however much of what these organizations are doing is targeted towards democratizing the society and related population in particular.

An informant who is holding a leading position in a Bible college in Chin state revealed the undeclared objectives of his college is; “to develop and finally transform our theological college into one of the internationally recognized universities where students would have opportunities to pursue internationally recognized higher educations of their choices - both theological or secular educations”(personal communication, March 30, 2012). In many of Christian colleges across the country, the teaching language is mostly English and students are encouraged to debate, criticize and be active voices in structurally decision-making process. Therefore, it is clear that Christian organizations inside Myanmar use spaces

⁷ A renowned anti-Islamic Buddhist monk who incited hatred against non muslim population accused Islam of polluting Myanmar culture. [see video clip at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RJAPKavKb_U]

available wisely in the name of religious goals but at the same time effectively promoting democracy values through teachings, trainings and development projects.

Christian pastors and leaders are often invited by government or opposition groups- armed groups in most case- to be mediators in peace talks or reconciliatory dialogues. This is particular the case in conflict resolution arrangement among Christian dominated ethnic population. Because they are not only seen as neutral but also as morally influential actors, their input is mostly desirable and highly expected to be productive. In January 1997, a group comprised of Chin Christian pastors and leaders called 'Peace and Tranquility Committee' proposed to an armed group, CNF (Chin National Front) to agree on a ceasefire. The pastors sent by military regime met with the CNF on four occasions: September 25, 1994, January 25-26, 1997, April 20-21, 1997 and July 9, 1997(Keenan, 2012). Likewise, subsequent peace talks in 2007 and the last one in 2012 were also held with the help and participation of people from Christian organizations as mediators or facilitators.

Under the military regime, the reasons of asking Christian pastors to help organize dialogue could firstly be because the armed groups were outside the existing laws and thus they have legal problem directly communicating with the authorities and thereby a mediating actor is needed. Secondly, given their moral authority within their society, the military regime might have assessed that Christian dominated armed groups might pay better attention to pastors than them and thereby a better and productive dialogue is more likely to happen. Thirdly, there are such important cases as transparency, legitimacy, trust and openness and so on, therefore, with the presence of a wide range of society spectrum including Christian pastors, these issues can be said partly achieved. Though pastors are expected to be neutral, their knowledge and expertise towards solving conflicts is highly appreciative and welcome.

After the 2010 election, president elected Thein Sein publicly called for ceasefire and peace talk, inviting exile to return home. Most armed groups and many other organizations in exile responded the president's invitation by returning home and with the former joining step-by-step process of ceasefire talks and finally signing agreements, which likely pave way forwards to permanent peace and goal all sided desired. A Christian pastor based in Yangon said, "once the only channel available for Christians to build a better society was through religious based organization such as schools and charities, but now with the opening of politics and returning of exile groups, religious based organizations are no longer popular or relevant as before"(personal communication, March 24, 2012). The motives of many of those

who started religious organizations are in fact not religious, but rather social, humanitarian and developmental. In fact, they are consciously doing the basic need of democratization.

“Obviously the scope of our operation is limited within our own religious community, not reached across socially, religiously and ethnically diverse population of the country”, a pastor added (Ibid.). The role played by religious or faith-based particularly the Christian organizations is important, but as they are small in scale, fragmented and lacks proper collaborative mechanism, no significant power to impact on nation-wide campaign for democratic change.

5.1.3. Political organizations

Political parties under military dictatorship

Myanmar has undergone a number of political transformations since its independence in 1948. The three noteworthy transformations were; a short-lived democracy from 1948 – 1962, a long-hauled military dictatorship from 1962- 2010, and rapid democratic reforms from 2010 election onwards. Throughout these significant transformations and particularly after the 1990 general election, political parties have been the most important voices in promoting democracy, good governance and peace building or national reconciliation.

During military period, the only political party allowed was BSPP, the party that led by dictator Ne Win who, in 1962, banned all institutions that promoted the rule of law and subsequently in 1964 through the ‘National Solidarity Act’ banned all political parties. Political parties under military regime operated under harsh oppression either by military or military-backed political organizations such as Newin-led BSPP and Than Shwe-led USDA.

The NLD founded in September 1988 and other parties were banned by military regime after the former won the nationwide election in 1990 by a landslide, the result the military never recognized. During the 1990 campaign NLD had over two millions members and offices countrywide while winning 392 of 485 seats (ICG, 2001, p. 40). Parties’ leaders including ASSK and activists were arrested, intimidated and silenced, resulting in many of them had to flee from the country. In September 2010 the NLD was dissolved by the military, as a result smaller number of party members founded a new party, National Democratic Front (NDF).

Those escaping arrest and seeking refuge in exile found their ways to continue to fight for freedom and democracy from outside, with the blessing and support of foreign governments.

Those remained inside were either put in long-term jail sentence or restricted from freedom of speech and movement. However, there were always members who continued party work to function underground or in the form of social and humanitarian activities. These remaining parties, though declared illegal, are the most active CS actors providing social humanitarian needs of the people and anti-government campaign despite being under intimidation, restriction and threats.

Political parties after 2010 election

Opposition political parties are now once again considered key stakeholders in the process of Myanmar's democratization. In fact, if these opposition political parties are large enough to compete within the current political system and influence political decision-making, they should not be treated as CS movement, but rather as part of the state apparatus.

As of November 2012, there are 54 political parties in Myanmar. They can roughly be divided into two groups: 21 majority ethnic parties (Shigehara et al.) and 33 minority ethnic parties (non-Bama). The Democratic Friendship Group/Group of Friends of Democracy Parties (10 parties), including five ethnic parties, was established in March 2011. The six ethnic parties including five in the alliance also formed the Nationalities Brotherhood Forum (NBF) in order to raise the voice of minorities in Myanmar. Three other small parties, which criticized the victory of the NLD of the 2012 by-election, established the Burma Political Friendship Parties (BPFP) (A. Aung, 2013).

Total of 37 political parties contested in the 2010 election, but with the absence of major opposition party, the NLD, which boycotted the election on the ground that its leader ASSK was under house arrest and that the 2008 constitution was not undemocratic. After the government amended election law to allow NLD to take part, the NLD took part in the 2012 by-election and won 43 seats out of 45 seats up for grabs and became the largest legal opposition party within parliamentary system. The NLD's win gave refreshing hope that the military was willing to give space to the oppositions and that the country could finally be free of military grip. So far, the NLD's most important aim is to change the constitution to be more in accordance with democratic principle- the rule of the people. Dr. Hans-Bernd Zöllner who has been researching about Myanmar said, "the problem with the NLD is that the people who support don't really know party's policies but just follow the lady, ASSK. I asked people

in *Kawhmu* township why they support her, and they are not sure what to answer, so clearly the NLD has a lot of work to do” (personal communication, March 27, 2012).

However, the combined strength of opposition parties is insignificant, just about 10% of lawmakers in the new parliament, thus their role is very limited and expectation is low when it comes to reforming from within the structure- unless the military themselves is willing to change. Many Burmese in exiles who didn't see any substantive change voiced, the opposition forces' decision to fight within the system is like falling in a trap set up by the military, there will be no room for maneuvering, because they [the military] have been preparing this set-up strategy to be effective, self-serving and successful for two decades. When the president publicly invited exiles to return to Myanmar to help reform process, many voiced skeptic views on the motives behind the reform and questioned if their safety is guaranteed, no conditional measures were imposed and etc.

Military is still no doubt the most powerful institution in Myanmar with 25% of the seats reserved without a need to take part in election, and the USDA which was founded to support the perpetuation of military dictatorship now operating as political party, USDP, the largest political party in the country with over 80% of the votes won in the 2010 election. According to the USDP website (www.usda.org.mm), the party's policy towards military is as follow: the military is a national defense force that together with USDP will play leading role in Myanmar national politics. Therefore the party will support the military in line with our determination that a nation is strong when military is strong (USDP, 2013). The NLD however maintains its stance towards the military that the role of the Myanmar armed force is to defend the national interests, and thus 25% the parliament seats reserved for military representatives is not in conformity with democratic principle (Networkmyanmar.org, 2012).

In February 2012, a seminar titled “the Role of Political Parties in Democratic Transitions” was organized by a Netherlands and Danish-sponsored program, Myanmar Multiparty Democracy Program. The seminar was reportedly attended by 50 political parties, which are in a nascent stage but in a very important position to generate the right kind of impact over the reform direction. Some of the focused topics of the seminar were: strengthening the political party organization; establishing multiparty dialogue; negotiating democratic space with the reforming government; responding to voter expectations – representation and delivery (DIPD, 2013). Six decades of military dictatorship has severely weakened the people's ability to organize and run an organization effectively and professionally. Even the

largest opposition, the NLD and its reverse leader ASSK is at times criticized for the lack of vision and professionalism in running her party effectively (Lauras, 2012).

Structurally speaking, political organizations in Myanmar are weak not only because of inexperience caused by various levels of restriction under the military regime, but also because leaders are overly trusted and having too much power to maneuver organizational decision-making process. In this kind of atmosphere, the dead of a leader in an organization could well mean the end of an organization. Understanding this weakness, political parties now legally running their day-to-day operation are seen reorganizing themselves to be more structurally organized and efficient (P. Aung, 2012). Seminars, workshops, trainings aimed at delivering skills and understanding of capacity building, democracy, human right, nation-building and organizational administration are very popular and being organized everywhere. These parties are preparing for the next nation-wide election in 2015 in which the opposition forces aim to win and finally rule the parliament.

Though insignificant, small political parties are grouping to be larger and more effective in their policy implementation process. Their policies and priorities are going towards one common direction, which is to work for a democratic system where multi ethnic groups would live in harmony and in peace, and where individual right is protected by the state and where economic prosperity is shared equally among all citizens of Myanmar. ASSK said in her speech presenting her party's policy as below:

“I strongly believe that our national brethren want only a genuine democratic Union, and they don't want secession at all.”

A democratic Union based on equality for all ethnic nationalities is what all political parties inside the country are believed to be seeking for. An informant who had worked for NGO in Myanmar said, “We to be democratically peaceful and prosperous nation, we need first national reconciliation [peace among multi ethnic groups] and then good governance at all levels” (personal communication, April 24, 2012).

Political organizations in exile

“We will make reviews to make sure that Myanmar nationals living abroad for some reasons can return home if they have not committed any crimes” (president-office.gov.mm, 2011)

The statement above made by President Thein Sein in August 2011 was the first of its kind that paved the way for exiles return home to either visit or make permanent return for the first time in decades. This gives raising hope for thousands of exiles that are being treated like second-class human beings in neighboring countries- Thailand, Malaysia, China and India. The genesis of Myanmar citizens in exile can be traced back to as far back as the country independence in 1948.

Since independence, Myanmar has never been fully peaceful, internally impaired by protracted armed conflicts and political oppressions systematically directed towards oppositional forces, independent medias and ethnic minorities. Just after three months from independence in January 1948, the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) became the first major force that went underground. Soon after, the Karen (www.karennationalunion.net) in 1949, Mon, Kareni (Kayah), Pao, Rakhine and “Mujahid” Rohinya nationalists also rebelled (ICG, 2011).

The Kachins also started taking arms in 1961 in response to central government’s decision to take over all of the schools in Kachin state, replace Kachin language and history classes with Burmese lessons and declare Buddhism as the state religion (FreeKachin.org, 2013). Another major ethnic group, the Chins also took arms against military regime in March 1988 (Chinland.org, 2013) following the bloodshed protest that left more than 3000 killed. There are 33-armed groups in Myanmar, 11 of which were transformed into so-called government-controlled Border Guard Forces (BGF) and the rest with the exception of the KIA and allies AA, ABSDF and TNLA have signed ceasefire agreement with Thein Sein government (South, 2012).

Exile political movement in general can be categorized into two fronts, one is movement by arms revolution and another is through other means including campaigning, lobbying etc. And some groups including the KNU, KIO and CNF have their own military wings, the KNA, KIA and CNA respectively. These groups are all claiming that they are fighting for self-determination for their own people and federated state within a union based on the 1947 Panglong Accord. Though their primary goal is solving political problems, the activities carried out are wide-ranging from social humanitarian services to capacity-building and educational trainings with regards to democracy human right lessons and so on. Many of these armed non-state actors’ leaders are also the ones that started other forms of organizations including human right organizations, political campaign groups, research

institutions and news media organizations that all promote democracy, good governance and national reconciliation.

I will mention some previous members of armed groups who joined different unarmed organizations. Burma Centre for Ethnic Studies (BCES), an independent think tank and study center founded in 2012 was co-founded by Dr. Lian Hmung Sakhong who is a supreme council member of the CNF (Khonumthung, 2013). And Salai Bawi Lian Mang, director of the CHRO, a human right organizations working to protect and promote human rights of the Chin people, was member of the CNF as well (Globalchinnews.org, 2013).

Another leading actor once a member of ABSDF, now working as a research director at the MPC is Dr. Min Zaw Oo. He also joined the FBC, a Burmese-led political initiative to support Burmese people's aspirations and struggle for democracy and human rights through boycotts, pro-sanctions advocacy and Myanmar awareness promotion (Zarni & Oo, 2004). Therefore, it's fair to say that many exile Burmese leading figures have dual-roles both as armed and unarmed movement. The simple reason is that they have similar goal, which is to promote democracy and national reconciliation in Myanmar.

Burmese refugees in exile

Van Thang, a former Burmese soldier now based in Norway and actively participating in community affair said: "I'm working here to support my family back home, my ultimate goal is to return home to help rebuild my country if true democracy is restored (personal communication, April 23, 2012)."

According to the UNHCR, Myanmar was one of the largest refugee-producers (Linn, 2013) in the world with approximately half a million refugees stranding in neighboring countries. Thailand hosts an estimated 200, 000 Burmese refugees, Malaysia with about 80, 000 and India over a hundred thousands. The author estimates that European countries could host not less than 5000 and North America hosts approximately 100, 000 Burmese refugees. Exile Burmese in their respective host countries founded groups and organizations aimed to support democratization process in Myanmar in various means including financial and technical support to people affected by natural disaster, social and religious charities across the country.

It is estimated that Millions of dollar is sent home yearly by exile Burmese community. Money sent from abroad benefits the people in many positive ways; however, this also brings

about negative consequences, which is the deteriorating animosity among groups and people. The beneficiaries are people having family link abroad while the larger population is left behind in a tight spot. However, according to a Burmese who recently visited his home village, those who have family links abroad have become the consumers/buyers while other are in a way forced to become the providers of good and service, thereby become richer.

The amount of money generated and growth in knowledge acquired by refugee population abroad also attracts increasing number of people inside the country to set foot abroad to seek refugee status. This trend has reduced the number of towns/villages dwellers particularly in ethnic areas. A Chin ethnic pastor once said, “Its is very sad that there are only old people over 50s and children left in many villages across Chin state, most of the families I asked either have one or more of their family members living abroad” (personal communication, March 24, 2012).

Though the primary goal for leaving Myanmar and seeking asylum in other countries is to have secured life both politically and economically, this trend in return benefit the society democratically as a whole because through experiences, education and knowledge acquired in more advanced and civilized societies, the Burmese exiles are better prepared in rebuilding their own society. A well-known saying among the Burmese is, “*the knowledge pot of gold cannot be stolen by thieves*”. Therefore for the Burmese to have wide knowledge is indispensable for promoting a healthy democratic culture and principle. It’s not sufficient to have a democratic system but 'WE' to be principally democratic is what really matters- that we are tolerant, respectful, decent and law-abiding citizens.

With the opening of social and political space for the last two years, many Burmese refugees in exile for the first time in decades have chance to return home. Some have started making networks with CSOs inside so that they can contribute something positives for democratization. Recent reform also made transferring money to Myanmar much easier than ever because of the lifting of economic sanctions, which opened way for example for western union money transfer which opened offices in some bigger cities in Myanmar (Kyaw, 2013).

Previously all money sent to Myanmar was done through black market or illegal brokers. Previously, receiving cash donation from foreign donors for social-humanitarian work was challenging because Myanmar was isolated from international monetary system. Today, that challenge is over and there are all reasons to believe that CSOs in Myanmar will get more funding from donors abroad, after all money is the most important resource for organizations

to be able to function. For the first time in decades Burmese refugees abroad could impact the growth of small yet effective community-based or grassroots organizations across the country.

5.1.4 Media organizations

News media within a democratic system is seen or widely accepted as the Fourth Estate of Government, but in countries like Myanmar, independent medias is rather seen as threat to societal stability and as destructive elements. Under military regime- for five decades- news medias inside the country were subject to censorship known as Press Scrutiny and Registration Division (PSRD). All kinds of writers including newspaper journalists and songwriters had to submit their works to the PSRD for approval.

The author personally knows a gospel singer and songwriter who submitted his album for approval from censorship with no success; he was informed instead with an explanation that the proposed title and painting of album cover was contradicted with the existing laws. The name of the album literally means, “Man in a Rope Fence” and image of Jesus Christ was depicted in the painting. He told that the authority simply accused of his album as anti-government and pro-ASSK political campaign.

Even for the radio listeners to turn independent exile medias on was a risky business. In 1999, a teashop owner was sentenced to two years in prison for turning on a Voice of America (VOA) broadcast in his shop (ICG, 2001, pp.20). There were no private daily newspapers allowed to publish, the only daily newspapers allowed were state-owned, the rest were allowed only in a weekly basis after through and harsh censorship. There were only until recently 6 major TV channels and 3 of these are state-owned while the other three are private or joint ventures between state and private.

The job of state-controlled medias appeared to be promoting the propaganda of the government by trumpeting the projects done by military generals and condemning and labeling exile groups’ movement and the western countries’ democratic agendas as destructive elements. The state media for example has never mentioned about the talks between ASSK and the regime that began in October 2000 (Ibid, pp.20). ASSK said in several of her interviews that even her family picture with her image at the angle was intentionally cut off by state newspaper, which published a piece about Martyr Day.

As a result of such restriction, not to mention about influencing public opinion from inside, independent journalists inside the country ceased their operation, fled and sought refuge in neighboring countries. Journalists seeking refuge abroad started organizing exile media outlets such as radio channels BBC, VOA, DVB, RFA and news websites such as the Irrawaddy, Mizzima and other ethnic based medias including the Chinland Guardian, with the support of foreign countries. Until recently, these exile media outlets abroad have been playing pivotal role in promoting democracy and human right by giving unbiased information about what happen on the ground and most importantly educating citizens about basic human rights and other educational information including democracy and the role of SC.

An informant based in Yangon said, “no one could really rely on domestic news media because they are government controlled, so their job is to trumpet the regime’s propandas and hide the realistic circumstance of what the country is going through”(Bawi, personal communication, March 13, 2012). Another informant, a taxi driver said, “the country is opening up, but still the ghosts of previous officials continue to haunt our daily lives, so there is no guarantee as to what will happen if some of us are to expose the wrongdoings of the authorities”(personal communication, March 29, 2012). 50 years of dictatorship rule has a tremendous negative impact over citizen ability to rational assessment.

After the election in May 2010, the quasi-civilian government led by Thein Sein took a series of bold reform steps including allowing exile medias to return home and abolishing five decades old censorship. Medias landscape also saw new era and fresh motivation in playing positive and constructive role in democratization process. At a conference on media development held from 19-20 March 2012, the then information minister U Kyaw Hsan at his opening remark said, “we sincerely believe that Myanmar’s media sector will have more transparency and freedom in the future”, and he also referred to the President Thein Sein address to the government on 31 March 2011 that said that new laws should not be an obstacle to the fundamental rights of citizens, but the aim is to facilitate the proper use of press freedom for the long-term progress of Myanmar’s media sector (IMS, 2012).

Reforms in the last 2 years or so have led the return of a number of exile news medias including DVB, a once active exile media based in Oslo. BBC reports that some 300 newspapers and magazines covering less sensitive issues had already been given permission to print without prior censorship and restrictions were lifted on 30,000 Internet sites, allowing users unrestricted access to political content for the first time (BBC, 2012). DVB has

announced the close of its Oslo office and started operating inside Myanmar. Its journalists through different media channels mostly via Facebook report news directly from inside, and this is the first time in history that Myanmar see independent medias including foreign medias operating freely.

In early February 2013, another exile news media Mizzima announced that it would begin to refer the country name as ‘Myanmar’ instead of ‘Burma’, which is still used ASSK and most exile medias. Mizzima claimed that the time has come to recognize that the new dawn is upon us, and to revert to a phraseology that is accepted by almost everyone else in the political arena, the business world and the international media (Mizzima, 2013).

“By shifting their operation inside the country, the news media give hope for ordinary citizens who lost their lands, property and business under the military regime”, noted Tluang (personal communication, March 13, 2012). The commitment made by most exile media returning to Myanmar is the same, for example Mizzima firmly stated that it will continue to investigate and report on the government’s failings, on land seizures, on the conflict in Kachin State, Rakhine State and elsewhere, to monitor human rights abuses, inequality and corruption, and to give voice to those who oppose injustice – whichever parlance they prefer to use (Mizzima, 2013). That is to promote democracy and good governance and of course national reconciliation.

The intention is no doubt good and necessary to uphold the spirit of moral ethics and democratic values in Myanmar society; however there are many questions arise as to how these good aims and objectives will best be implemented, do the people involved in multi faceted conflict society are qualified enough to carry out tasks effectively without bias as media ethics guide or do they have sufficient financial capital to do such huge operation and do they have support and cooperation from general public to be able to assert their effectiveness in governance.

Mr. Kyaw Min Swe, Editor of The Voice Weekly journal and Living Color magazine argues that media people need to understand democracy, and what are the needs of media, expresses his concern over media people acting like activists and advocates rather than objectives observers (ibid.). It is also important that the state and other sectors of governmental institutions and of course the people, ordinary citizens understand the role of media as the fourth estate of state power and that mutually respected relation and check-and-balance role is clearly understood and tolerated by both side. In Myanmar, it seems that the role of media

is solely seen as anti government force, not as responsible actor that is supposed to expose prevailing corruption as well as enhancing good governance and a much needed national reconciliation.

Media recently coming inside the country are chasing business opportunities; they are not trying to play constructive roles as they are expected to do, what's really important now is all medias outlets work together to promote democracy, transparency, we have a lot to offer, said a journalist of the voice weekly (personal communication, March 28, 2012). This view is shared by a number of other people the author had conversation with, with some even go further in saying that most media people are spending times chasing ASSK and her party, the NLD not the world at grassroots levels. The focus seems to be driven by politically motivation long held by exile media groups for decades. When they return their agenda is not changed with some confusing or mixed feeling about what to do next as independent medias operating inside the country and most importantly under the new laws.

5.1.5. Student organizations

Students in Myanmar have been seen in the frontline and as leading voice in fighting for the people against both the British colonialism and the military regime. In 1920, student protested against a new University Act, which included many restrictions on Burmese students. And again in 1936, another student-led protest broke out demanding the rights of the students and independence following the speech made by student leader, Ko Nu who was later expelled from the Rangoon University together with his fellow Aung San (Clymer, 2003).

In 1962, when Ne Win took power in a coup, university students protested the coup, the government responded by abolishing student unions and dynamited the student union building at the Rangoon Arts and Sciences University (Weerasuriya et al.). In 1974, when UN general secretary U Thant died in New York, his corpse was brought to Rangoon. As the government made no effort to receive the body or to give it an appropriate burial at a distinguished site, and also denying a state funeral, thousands of students marched in protest of government's irresponsibility in handling the corpse of a well-respected leader of the world. As a result many students were arrested and sentenced a long-term imprisonment and schools were closed down for four months (ABFSU, 2013).

The most memorable and significant event in recent student's movement history was in 1988 when students led nation-wide protests against the military dictatorship across the country. The first protest on March 13, 1988 that led three students killed was ignited by the ruthless police's response to a shop brawl. Student leader MKN made the following speech to a crowd of estimated 10,000 outside the US embassy:

"We, the people of Burma, have had to live without human dignity for twenty-six years under oppressive rule. We must end the dictatorial rule in our country. Only "people power" can bring down the repressive rulers. In twenty-six years, Burma has become one of the poorest countries in the world. The worst thing is that our society is so corrupt that we have lost our self-esteem and values. If we want to enjoy the same rights as people in other countries, we have to be disciplined, united, and brave enough to stand up to dictators. Let's express our suffering and demands. Nothing is going to stop us from achieving peace and justice in our country" (Clymer, 2003).

The protest came initially as a response to police's violent response to the demonstrators but led to a nation-wide movement calling for an end to military dictatorship and the restoration of democracy. As many as 10,000 students and political activists from the cities, including lawyers, doctors, soldiers, monks and teachers fled to liberated zones controlled by the country's diverse rebel armies. They sought refuge while resolving among them how best to resist the military dictatorship. These students soon realized that in order to pursue democracy for the people and for the motherland they must organize their numbers then scattered along the isolated areas of the 2,000-mile-long border. With the help of the NDF, 50 representatives from some 18 groups were finally able to get together to form an umbrella organization, ABSDF (Ibid.).

More than others in the society, students are motivated by commitment to justice, belief they have a historical legacy to fulfill, and relative independence from family responsibilities. While most parents are reluctant to see their children risk their lives in political activities, student activism is generally viewed favorably, because students are seen as genuinely acting for the public good (ICG, 2001, p.41).

With a series of rapid reforms taken place after the 2010 election, the release of political prisoners also became one important part of president Thein Sein's reform agendas. On 13 January 2012 students leaders including MKN, Ko Ko Gyi and Htay Kywe, the trio who founded the 88 Generation Students group, were released (enigmaimages.net, 2012). The 88

Generation group is a loosely organized group primarily advocating for political reforms, democratization and national peace and reconciliation in Myanmar (Lin, 2013). Immediately after their release, they reorganized the group to support democratization by meeting with ASSK and joining hands with opposition political parties and ethnic groups. Meeting with government officials, the medias, other CSOs and expressing their concern and opinions regularly on the current political development have been parts of their regular activities.

While reorganizing themselves, these morally influential leaders are seen taking part in many peace negotiations between the government officials and opposing forces including the exile Burmese groups. Student leaders also said that they have intention to form a political party to compete at the 2015 general election to work for democratization, peace and reconciliation in the country (Ibid.). There are some who question the ability of the long-imprisoned individuals to carry out the political organization effectively and professionally because of their long years under confinement while other argue that the forming of another political party could undermine the largest opposition party the NLD led by ASSK. Moe Thee Zun, the former chairman of the ABSDF, wants the 88 Generation Students to steadfastly remain as a social force (Thant, 2012).

Regularly, student leaders are engaging in public speeches where they freely challenge undemocratic acts and expose wrongdoings of government officials while they also give democracy lessons such as the rule of laws, tolerance and responsible citizenry. In one of his speech, student leader MKN said, “Its not sufficient that top leadership alone carry out democratic reforms, government officials at the bottom level must also actively contribute positively to the reforms otherwise there will be no tangible changes. We the people must also have courage to speak out against wrongdoings and corruptions, open our eyes and ears to contribute towards a transparent society”(speech: www.youtube.com)⁸.

Students of 88 generation seem to have strong network across the country for prompt whistle blowing against what they think to be undemocratic or any act against the progression of democracy. The presence of such network was confirmed by MKN when there occurred communal violence between Buddhists and Muslims in *Meithela* town. Not just against the authority, but also against any actions seen to be destructive elements believed to destroy unity and the stability of the state would be reported to their connection at the higher levels-

⁸ Min Ko Naing, Public Speech at Hlaing Township, Yangon', 2012
<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yaq2ng0VPeg>> [Accessed 12.03 2013].

the higher authorities that believed to give them insurance that they would do their best not to deviate the democratization process.

5.1.6. Professional and intellect forces

In the societal concept of Myanmar, the personalities of leaders are often seen more important than the organizations they are leading or involved in. It has always been the case that well-known artists, writers or politicians can contribute to a tremendous impact on social and political changes. In modern history, these well-known individuals have been seen at the center stage of mobilizing mass movement against dictatorships.

In fact, ASSK was not widely known before she returned to Myanmar to aid her ailing mother in 1988 but just because she is a daughter of a well-respected national hero, Aung San, she was quickly given the center stage to lead nation-wide protest. A respondent said, she [ASSK] is now seen as more important than her party the NLD, which suggests, the NLD is not in existence without ASSK.

Like ASSK, comedian Maung Thura (aka Zarganar) and writer Tin Maung Than also made important contribution to the anti-military movement. All of them were put either under house arrest or prison. People know very little about what they are doing, but who they are is what the people seem to care- and that is most important thing when it comes to making impact in Myanmar.

Knowing that artists, intellectuals and writers can make huge opposition against the rule of dictatorship, previous military regime tried to create divisions among them by rewarding those who cooperate and punishing those who oppose them. Those who choose to cooperate or make no opposition are rewarded with luxuries such as mobile phone licenses, cars and so on, however those who opposed face threat with some even get arrest and sentenced long term imprisonment.

A well-known historian Thant Myint U is one of the most influential intellectuals living abroad but regularly returning to Myanmar to help democratization process. Not only through his writing, but also through his personal engagement in meeting with leaders from all sides, advising them and organizing workshops and lectures, he made significant contribution to national reconciliation and democratization. As he has readers worldwide, his insightful understanding of Myanmar gives better understanding of the complex situation of the country to the world in general and policy makers in particular. He is known for not siding with either

the exile oppositions or the government; therefore his voice draws wider attention from the international community and intellectual groups. His last book, “Where China meets India” is one of the most sold book in India and most quoted books in the policy making after the 2010 election in Myanmar. He is now regularly seen with many of important events taking place in Myanmar in relation to peace, nation-building and reform workshops. His Facebook page is one of the most active with more than 9000 likes – regularly updating comments, news and information relating to the current democratic progress.

5.1.7. Ad-hoc groups

When natural disasters occur without warning to the people especially unprepared and underdeveloped with their government dysfunctional and unable to provide quick and adequate assistance, the destruction is often more devastating and that small groups are formed to best help the most needy people. In this kind of situation, ad hoc groups are essential to provide first hand aids such as food, medicines and clothing. Ad hoc groups are set up to solve a specific issue and generate recommendations or work on a resolution. Such groups are typically temporary in nature and disband when they satisfactorily achieve their objectives.

Ad hoc groups are especially visible when Cyclone Nargis hit Myanmar in 2008. Ordinary people with their own initiatives started groups that mobilized through the affected areas and helped as many people as they could filling the gaps the government unable to fill. Hla Hla Win of ME said, “Cyclone Nargis was the turning point for CS back to trace in Myanmar society, the government knew that they alone could not manage the recovery of destruction so they this time could do nothing but let CSOs do the jobs” (personal communication, March 26, 2012). Previously military regime was always skeptical to people forming groups and engaging in societal needs. There were frustrating reports saying that authorities in the beginning tried to control aids coming from local people telling them that permission is needed if ones are to work as group (Washingtonpost.org, 2008).

A same respondent continued in saying that they [the regime] seemed to understand better after the Cyclone that citizens’ participation in nation building is inevitable if a country is to go forwards in the right direction. Ad hoc groups were formed not only by ordinary people individually but also by representatives from already existing organizations coming together and formed ad hoc committees providing financial aids to those CS groups helping on the

grounds. There were thousands of groups on the ground giving helping hands to hundreds of thousands of people severely affected by the disaster.

In September 2011, President Thein Sein announced a suspension of multi billions dollars Chinese-backed Myitsone Dam project announcing that the project was contrary to the will of the people (Harvey, 2011). Groups comprised of ethnic armed groups, oppositions and CSOs spontaneously came together and organized protests against the project demanding the project to a halt because of negative environmental consequences.

These coalitions have come together and moved apart depending on need. For example, one public campaign, through which farmers were able to voice their concerns about the new proposed legislation, was considered so effective that, on their own accord, other groups replicated them around the country. NGO workers, lawyers, journalists, and the average concerned individual freely come together after hours and weekends. This is, in fact, an expression of CS's awareness of their ability to impact and effect change (SiuSue, 2012).

Previously very closed and isolated regime became more open and transparent through relation built within the period of months-long communication in the process of recovery work. Ad hoc groups are very important players in building confidence and trust from previously skeptical military rulers. Also through knowledge and financial incentives, ad hoc groups are influential and thus they have some level of moral power in contributing suggestions and guidelines to the authorities in line with democratic principles, which slowly but importantly promote democratization in the country.

5.2. CS's relation to the people, the state and among themselves

The general sentiment is that, after so many years of military dictatorship, the people are always ready to support every movements come from groups not related to the government, said an informant. Traditionally social and humanitarian activities are mostly organized by SC organizations at local levels. Therefore the people normally regard CSOs as providers of needs for the needy, not as opportunists attempting to exploit resources for their own benefits. Though the general view towards CSOs is positive, there are also cynicisms across ethnic, religious, and political ideology line. Different groups of people view different CSOs differently according to their religion, political belief, ethnic background and professional background.

Religious organizations working with schooling and charities are often criticized for having hidden agendas of indirectly forcing people into conversion. This applies all religious organizations in the country. Lian Mang, a Christian pastor and founder of a Church said, the most important mission of every Christian organizations working with social and humanitarian activities is to preach the gospel and make people to become Jesus followers [Christians](personal communication, March 23, 2012). This similar goal is hold by Buddhist organizations stationed especially in ethnic areas with Christian majority. Buddhism is assimilated into part of the state apparatus, thus it can be expected that activities in line with the state policy are directly sponsored and promoted by the government, namely the Military regime.

Myanmar government's practices regarding religious freedom have been contradictory to section 34 of the constitution, which give every citizen the right to profess religion of their choices. Even among Buddhist organizations that have enjoyed state direct support over centuries, some face scrutiny and restriction from the authorities. Historically, Buddhist monks are one of the most active dissenting voices against the corrupted rulers. I have discussed monkhood's involvement in politics more detail under religious or faith based CS organizations and their role in promoting democracy, good governance and peace or national reconciliation. However it's noteworthy that the relations between CS actors and the people are diverse across religious and ethnic lines.

The most racist comment that prompts flares of religious tension mainly between Buddhists and Muslims was made by Wirathu, a notorious monk, who is actively campaigning for the isolation and eradication of Muslims minority in Myanmar. He said Muslims' most important agenda is to Islamize the larger Bama population and control the whole country with proxy. He warned in a speech that the Muslim in Myanmar are doing everything in nationalistic views, so they are destructive if no action against their agendas is planned. It's surprising to see that there are many who support this movement, which they call '969⁹' movement. The ostensibly aims are to protect Buddhism and Bama race in a peaceful mean, but their actions so far is completely contradictory to their ostensible objectives. The supporters of this movement are no other the Buddhist nationalists who share the same concern that Myanmar would soon be controlled by foreigners who could destroy Bama cultures, traditional power

⁹ 969, was derived from Buddhist tradition in which the Three Jewels or Tiratana is composed of 24 attributes (9 Buddha, 6 Dhamma, 9 Sangha).

structure. Other religious groups, Christians and Muslims see 969 movements as dangerous and toxic that could jeopardize national unity and peace and thus object it.

CS movements led by newly returned exiles also face criticism particularly from political activists who served long-term imprisonment. An informant, a former political prisoner said that these people [exiles] fled abroad to escape arrest, but they enjoyed lives, got rich, got famous, did little good for the country and now when they return they want to lead us again (Personal communication, March 25, 2012). When former student leader and ABSDF leader Moe Thee Zun and his colleagues returned to Myanmar in September 2012, they were criticized harshly for wearing suits and neckties, which some see as foreign western symbol. There are also other people who have little knowledge and experience of other countries and easily misunderstand every foreign element in relating to colonialism, thus thing from abroad meets with skepticism and critics. This sentiment also applies to people in top military post or in government there are those who worried that Myanmar will be like Thailand in term of foreigners' exploitation of Thai cultures and girls if foreigners and foreign related exiles Burmese are given free hands.

Since the 2010 election and new quasi-civilian government is installed, rapid reforms have been carried out primarily by Thein Sein. He publicly acknowledges that his government is incapable of carrying out what the country needs, thus citizen participation is indispensable. Since the relationship has changed dramatically, increasing number of CSOs are operating across the country and accelerating their operation and upgrading human resource to be able to meet the demands. SCOs are mostly dependent on financial resources from donors abroad especially the international NGOs, their goals and operation is restricted to standards pre set by those donors. As a result of that and lack of experience combined, SC actors are in dilemma of how to response rightly to the need of the society. When the government is involved, even social and humanitarian movement faces harsh criticism because there had been countless cases of forced labors across the country where ordinary people are forced to work at government planned construction sites with no payment. Therefore CS actors under the military were rather

State and CS relationship can best be described as 6 and 9, which visualizes relation in conflict, under the military regime (1962-2010). Government treated CS not as partners in nation-building process but as enemies that always try to destabilize the government's capability. For example, people uprising led by SC student groups in 1988 was brutally

confronted by the military force that seized power and declared martial law forbidding groups of five or more from gathering, marching, chanting slogans, and delivering speeches. Without any consultation with CSOs, the military made announcement where they promised to hold nationwide multi party election that was held on 27 May 1990 in which the NLD led by ASSK won by a landslide. However, the election result was never recognized; the regime instead arrested hundreds of oppositional forces leaders including ASSK who was put under house arrest.

CS was not permitted to engage in the election campaign, which effectively restrict the free movements of the media and other organizations to spread news and agendas of parties that took part in the election. The military regime imposed strict controls on freedom of expression and assembly during the election campaign. Speeches and written materials had to be submitted for approval and censorship prior to distribution. Despite restrictions during the campaign, the NLD won the 1990 election by a landslide partly because SC actors were able to engage in pro-democracy activities underground as well as the election was generally free and fair.

Between 1990-1998, more than 110 MPs were dismissed or forced to resign under threat from the regime. MPs were threatened with land confiscation, bans on educational opportunities and the right to enter monkhood. In addition, the military regime amended an election law and dismissed some MPs for ‘offenses’ such as discussing the formation of an interim government (ABSDF, 1998).

In 1993 the military regime established its own CSO called Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA). This organization is aimed at supporting the policies of the military and its activities include organizing rallies condemning the opposition. It is believed that there are informal, socially desirable incentives for joining. By 1999, USDA was estimated to have 11 million members Perinova (2005). USDA was believed to be the mastermind behind the assassination attempt against ASSK on May 30, 2003. The attack that almost killed ASSK and claimed more than a hundred lives of her followers.

A few private organizations were allowed to continue welfare and religious activities but they were kept far away from politics or power. Those that had more than local potential were circumspect to a degree that vitiated the use of the term CS in describing their activities. Advocacy groups were non-existent except for those directly mobilized by the state, or those underground or in revolt in the jungle. Dissent was publicly eliminated. CS had disappeared

(Steinberg, 1997).

The creation of Myanmar Egress in 2006 by, as their website claims, a group of Myanmar nationalists committed to state building through positive change in a progressive yet constructive collaboration and working relationship with the government and all interest groups, both local and foreign (Myanmaregress.org, 2007), was seen by many as another critical step towards openness and democratization under the military government. In the beginning the organization was harshly criticized as being a supporter of the military regime's agenda and compared as military proxy organization like USDA.

Hla Hla Win, an informant from ME who is also research fellow admitted that the organization has a working relationship with the government but never get direct order or control from the military as some seem to think, what they do instead is to give trainings for government officials including police and military for knowledge and capacity building. While doing so the trainers have exceptional opportunity to influence officials not only by giving knowledge of human right, good governance but also by leading as a moral figure- in Myanmar culture teachers are highly respected thereby having moral authority to some extent (personal communication, March 26, 2012). Today ME has several branches doing many important works including research, educational training, development and news media.

A devastating Cyclone Nargis that hit delta region of Myanmar in 2008 that reportedly killed more than a hundred thousand and forcing a million homeless was, many acknowledge, a watershed for the CSO in Myanmar. In the beginning the military regime warily rejected any outside interference including foreign humanitarian aids fearing that any such intervention might help bring their power unstable and thereby lose the grip. The sad fact was that the government could not provide sufficient aids to the people affected.

As a result, ordinary citizens in their own initiatives started forming groups to help the helpless victims unreached by government's capacity. Another important players were religious organizations both Buddhist monasteries and Christian denominations that could give helping hands in a very quick and effective manner. Local NGOs were also very helpful in providing mobile clinics, shelters and other necessities. The numbers of NGO operating during the recovery process was estimated to be around 1,500 and most of them are not registered with the government. And international NGOs were also in operation with the memo of understanding signed with the government. Somewhat fewer than fifty international

NGOs also provided services before the Cyclone Nargis, but since January 2006, they had been under more stringent and controlling operational requirements. After Nargis, regulations were relaxed, and they expanded their roles and increased their local staffs, providing needed relief in stricken areas (Steinberg, 2010, p.216)

5.3. The changing role of CS

As mentioned, Cyclone Nargis in 2008 was a watershed for the resurrection of CSOs in important decision making that impact the people lives. An informant said, “what happened after Nargis is really amazing, when the state was helpless, international aids were not allowed to come, SC groups from various parts of the country came to the scene donating food and water necessary for the survival of the affected people” (Hla, personal communication, March 26, 2012).

For example in 2009 with the government reducing restrictions on INGOs’ access to the country, the Global Fund returned to the country with aid amount of 110 millions dollars and in 2010 the ICRC also was allowed to visit prisons and provide humanitarian assistances. World Bank and Asian Development Bank previously out of contact with Myanmar moved to open offices in support of reform process by granting aid in millions of dollars. The WB pledged \$85 million in development grants and help in clearing nearly \$ 400 million of past loans in arrears (Vandenbrink, 2012).

Australian government announced in early 2010 that its aid to Myanmar would increase from A\$50 million, the program was expended to include a capacity building element. The British government also announced aid package of £46 million a year for four years period for strengthening of CS (InsideStory, 2011). Norway also in January 2013 announced that Myanmar’s debt of \$ 534 millions dollars would be cancelled, and this is the largest debt cancellation ever by Norway, claimed the Minister of International Development Heikki Eidsvoll Holmås (Regjering.no, 2013). Other countries including Japan and the US also have moved forward in support of reform process by providing large amount of development aids.

2010 election came, as many expected, with the clear winning of the USDP claiming more than 80% of the electoral vote and former general and Prime Minister Thein Sein was elected as president. He moved quickly to release thousands of political prisoners, relax press freedom, and publicly denounce corruption and opening dialogue with ethnic armed groups.

On August 17, 2011, president Thein Sein formally invited the people of Myanmar in exiles to return home (Irrawaddy.org, 2011). Thousands of exiles including politicians and activists have returned either to observe the situation or start life permanently. Exile news medias such as Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB), Voice of America (VOA), Irrawaddy and Mizzima also have returned and some of them have even set up offices in Myanmar to function as independent medias.

The author also had a chance to return with the financial grant from the NBC to Myanmar in March 2012 after more than 10 years in exile. By the time the author returned, the most visible changes in the formal capital city, Yangon was the atmosphere of openness and positive hope among ordinary citizens on the street. People used to be afraid of criticizing the government officials are now no longer afraid but took to the street and demanding what they feel needed to be done by the authorities. CSOs are also reorganizing themselves and took initiatives in democratizing the society by arranging workshops, seminars where ideas, knowledge and strategies are delivered and exchanged. Dr. Khin Zaw Win who is a well known activist, scholar and former political prisoner said, “democracy cannot come overnight, but if we want to see things change more quickly we need to be proactive, we need to get involved in nation-building process, here CS actors are very important in educating both the public and the government. If we do not act now, things will get worse and the consequence will be more hardship for the people and more isolation from the international community” (personal communication, march 15, 2012).

The reforms led by President Thein Sein also have paved ways for ethnic armed groups who have been fighting against military regime for decades to sign ceasefire agreement. The largest ethnic armed group, the Karen National Union (KNU) and several others including the CNF have signed peace agreement with the government, the former on 13 January 2012 and the latter on January 6, 2012 respectively. These armed groups have been in several rounds of talks since their respective ceasefire - the deliberation is an ongoing process. The only major armed group that hasn't signed truce is the Kachin Independence Army (KIA). News reports that hundreds have been killed while hundred thousands were forced to flee as refugees as a direct result of war between the KIA and the government troop. The latest report said that in on February 4, 2012, the KIA and government representatives held a 7 hours long talk in Ruli, China that without ceasefire agreement but agree to hold further talk. CS plays pivotal role in helping ceasefire agreements and political dialogues a more transparent and

legitimate.

For example religious leaders and representatives from Euro-Burma Office, Myanmar Egress, Chin Human Right Organization (CHRO), and Myanmar Peace Center (MPC) have been at virtually every peace talk. Another important SC player in working for peace is Shalom Foundation (SF), which was founded in May 2000 by Rev. Dr. Saboi Jum and a group of principled leaders from different backgrounds (shalommyanmar.org, 2000). These organizations' roles as peace facilitator and sometimes as an observer or witness enhance mutual respect, trust and understanding between the two sides.

Another example of influential CSO is the 88-generation led by former imprisoned student leaders such as Min Ko Naing (MKN hereafter) and Ko Ko Kyi. These leaders are highly respected in the country and thereby regarded as influential figures socially and politically. To help stop the arm conflict they traveled to Kachin state meeting with the local and KIA leader and expressing sympathy and support to the internal war victims (Pauk, 2013). The group also plays important role in campaigning against a 3 billions worth Myitsone dam project, which was cancelled by President Thein Sein showing that the new government of Myanmar care about the public concern. Ad hoc types of CS groups are also popping up recently as the country is opening up with less and less top-down restriction. They are also effective in providing immediate needs such as food, water and medicines of warzone victims and organizing demonstration and petitions of particular concern such as Chinese-backed copper mine in Latpadaung in northwestern Myanmar, which became a national concern (Radio Free Asia, 2013).

One of the most known social service providers is the Free Funeral Service Society (FFS) founded in 2001 and led since then by former well-known actor Kyaw Tu. The donor-driven organization is providing free funeral service to the people who are unable to afford their funerals. According to their Facebook page the organization has rendered more than 80, 000 funeral service free of charge. The aim of this service is to ease the sorrows, miseries, grieves and hardships of the bereaved families to a certain extent (FFSS, 2013).

CS in Myanmar is gaining ground and will likely to grow rapidly but the concern though is that they might fail to engage more coordinately and collectively, as it appears at the moment that they only focus on their own initiatives and in some cases not willing to collaborate each other. In such scenario there could arise unnecessary and negative consequences that

potentially could undermine nascent reform and positive atmosphere already taken root in the country. Though structurally changes in the system, the situation on the ground hasn't changed much because military still hold decision-making power at the very top level. Ongoing domestic war in the Kachin state is an obvious manifestation of who has the final say in key decision-making in Myanmar politics. The fight continues in spite of the president's order to halt the attack against the KIA, which claim the military accelerate its offensive by using air force and heavy artillery.

However significant changes in many areas have been made, the atmosphere of freedom of speech and openness among the ordinary citizens who have never experienced such level of freedom for several decades. People now appear to be no longer afraid of expressing opinion about the authorities, their desire on how they want the country to go ahead etc. Media freedom is also another encouraging factor as The Press Scrutiny and Registration Department (PSRD), which has been in tight control over all aspects of medias since 1964 was also abolished in August 2012 (BBC, 2013).

At this point the government appears to better understand the role of CS as essential players in alleviating the deteriorating socio-economic situation of the country. And they seem concern that Nargis like natural disaster could again hit without warning in the future in which they could totally lose control and could even face international military backed humanitarian intervention. The government is also observed as being afraid of facing Arab spring like uprising in reaction to the decades long extreme poverty and mismanagement of the country economy by the military regime. These are probably few of key factors that lead the government to open up itself to its people and international community.

CS movements in Myanmar modern history have been dominated by religious organizations. Traditionally, CS, in the western sense, does not exist in Myanmar. However, it will be misleading to assume that CS does not have a role in Burmese society. CS in Myanmar is hard to detect and observers often overlook their functions. CS under in Myanmar functions under the banner of traditional activities and religious motto. CS in such situation does not fit in the definitions that are common in free societies.

Under the British colonization as the idea of CS in Myanmar society is closely related to cultural and traditional way of life among the many ethnic nationalities in Myanmar. Myanmar is ethnically diverse nation with, according to the official data, 135 ethnic groups;

therefore it will be impossible in this thesis to cover civil societies in all ethnic groups. However I will rather shed light, when trying to find the existence of CS in pre-colonial history, on cultural and political background of Chin ethnic people which is one of the eight largest ethnic nationalities in Myanmar. When it comes to CS after independence I will look at a broader picture of the whole union of Myanmar as the union was established after the 1947 Panglong Agreement.

Many of the associations thus have been emerging and working without active state consent, they rather gradually filled the gap created by state's lack of interest in this area. They are, of course, limited by the military rules of the game, however the legal framework for their functioning is lacking and this creates a chance to be independent from the state as far as the activities do not provoke crackdown.

Although a common consensus that CS plays important roles in contributing social and political impact, it is important to remember that CS in Myanmar is not fully in a western liberal sense. Rather culturally an Asian sense of CS where actors are hardly managing its effectiveness under suspicious watch of the state or government. Independent CS activities in an authoritarian country like Myanmar where the state suspicious of any kind of free association, symbolize a struggle to break down barriers to freedom and democracy.

One is to be careful when talking about democracy and reforms in Myanmar, given important roles of cultural differences and understanding of democracy can be different from what most people studying Myanmar society might vary. According to Dr. Hans-Bernd Zöllner, a historian and researcher, educational reform is one of the keys to success in democratizing the society, only if the people are educated, the people would be able to assess and propose what kind of democracy they have dreamed for, thereby reforms proposed by both the opposition forces and the government could be implemented effectively and successfully. CS most important task in this reform process therefore is to educate the general public as well as the official at all levels so that governance can be good and the proposed reforms move forward meaningfully, said an informant who has been studying Myanmar since the 1980s (personal communication, March 27, 2012).

5.4. A comparison: CS before and after 2010 election

Over the past two years, Myanmar has seen a rapidly transformation from the state of being a pariah nation to a striving democracy, a policy of self-imposed isolationism to a strong

willingness of integration into the global community. The prolonged government's grip on virtually every sector of society has been loosened dramatically, and consequently free and independent medias, CSOs including NGOs and grassroots organizations are booming. Groups that once operated abroad are now returning either to set up working offices or join in CSOs already in place. In this changing political landscape, the author finds it very natural to compare the two different political atmospheres; one under restrictive military regime and one after the popular reforms led by President Thein Sein, particularly to highlight the scope and scale of impact generated by CS engagement in the three areas that this study is trying to investigate.

The development of CS in Myanmar had been severely interrupted by a series of undemocratic governments since the country's independence. During democratic era from 1948 to 1962, some spaces were opened for CSOs, however their role was rather limited to social and humanitarian goals because any dissenting views that could amount to political implication was not tolerated by the authorities and their paramilitary organizations. When general Ne Win staged a coup d'état in 1962, all CSOs were subsequently banned except for those state-controlled organizations that promote his regime's goals. Despite this strict ban, there were still social-humanitarian and religious based organizations cautiously engaging in social humanitarian works by setting up churches, charities for parentless children and trainings ostensibly with religious goals but providing skills and knowledge of capacity building as well.

Under the military regime, the role of CS is restricted and thereby very limited impact on political decision-making process. However, it would be misleading to conclude that CS did not exist under such circumstance; it is rather to say that their roles are reduced to providers of merely social-religious and healthcare not to mention influencing government decision-making process. If military regime suspected that organization working for healthcare or social service engaging in making contribution to democratic movement or anti-government activities, they are forced to cede as organization and in some cases people involved in such suspected activities are arrested and imprisoned.

The role of CS under military regime is therefore not amounting to game changer in the struggle for democracy. They were secretly operating in different names and guises claiming to be only interested in religious, social and developmental activities for their own population. In the process implementing their goals, they often engage in bribing local

authorities so that their operation would be somehow free from scrutiny. “Bribery is part of daily activities for NGOs operating in Myanmar, sometimes, I must say bribery is unavoidable if one wants to work social friendly with the authorities”, said an informant who worked for an NGO in Yangon, the former capital of Myanmar (personal communication, March 28, 2012).

“Before, as you know we cannot sit in an open restaurant to talk about politics, even if we do we should look around and whisper- not talking loud. I’ve given interviews to journalists and researchers without having any condition; I answer all questions they raise with without fear. So that is the most significant change we have seen recently”, said Dr. Khin Zaw Win (personal communication, March 15, 2012). The fundamental difference between the roles of CS under military regime and now is in their goals. Now, CS actors including grassroots level community-based organizations, ad hoc groups and NGOs are actively engaging in political goals such as, organizing demonstrations, campaign against government projects and conducting trainings, seminars and workshops where they openly invite and encourage government officials to take part and learn about every topics ranging from the rules of laws, human rights, democracy and federalism etc.

According to Hla Hla Win, conducting trainings for government officials especially security forces are beneficial towards collective effort to democratizing Myanmar because through such discourse CSOs and their leading activists are able influence over officials personally to some extent, as in Myanmar culture teacher are well respected and therefore they are morally and intellectually influential in society (personal communication, March 26, 2012).

Aung Aung a researcher observes reform in Myanmar in his paper, “In the eye of the international community, especially in the West, changes might be awkward and not fully meeting global standards, but for a people who have lived under authoritarian regimes this is a huge change” (A. Aung, 2013). A taxi driver who actively talked about political situation in Myanmar told the author, “our country is now free 50%, un-free another 50%, at the top level, I believe people are working hard for structural changes such as the constitution, rules and regulations but the impact at the bottom level is still insignificant, but it is understandable, we also need to be patient. The reality on the ground is that thing are getting more difficult in term of employment and livelihood” (personal communication, March 29, 2012).

5.4. Future prospect: through the lens of current political landscape

Recent political development in Myanmar is characterized as significant way forward and positive with more freedom, dialogue, and compromise. The releasing of thousands of political prisoners, abolishing Press Censorship Board, allowing CSOs to be booming, inviting exile Burmese return home to help nation building, signing ceasefire former enemies- ethnic armed groups are all good signs that promotes democracy. In reciprocal act, international community particularly the west began to relax economic sanction and started pouring aid money and investment.

However, amidst all changes, praises, rewards and recognitions over political reform driven mainly by former general and current president Thein Sein, there are a number of grave concerns freshly occurring in recent political landscape. The most significant challenges that could slow down and even cripple the reform processes are ongoing communal violence in several cities across Myanmar and war in Kachin state in northern Myanmar, two complicated yet major issues that have claimed hundred of lives and thereby received international condemnation.

A series of communal violence orchestrated by groups that believed to get support from the authorities and targeted at Muslim minority particularly the 'Rohingya'. On 22 April 2013, the US based Human Right Watch issued a report accusing the government of Myanmar of committing crime against humanity in a campaign of ethnic cleansing against Rohingya since June 2012. This is a major impediment that has slowed the reform process down, jeopardizing stability in the region and bringing up potential threats to further violence inside the country.

News reports claim that violence in Arakan state was triggered by the alleged rape and murder of an Arakanese woman by three Muslim men, one of them committed suicide while other two were sentenced to death (Lwin, 2012). The incidence prompted the killing of ten Muslim pilgrimages in revenge by local Arakaneses (Stout, 2012). The violence has so far claimed, according to official report, 80 lives and causing the destruction of hundred of thousand of houses and forcing estimated 80 thousands of Rohinya¹⁰ run to be refugees, and prompting serious concern internationally including by the IOC and the UN.

¹⁰ The term 'Rohinya' is a controversial one but referred to a group of people believed to be of indian origin with estimated number of 800,000 residing in Arakan state in southwestern Myanmar. The term is not accepted

In August 2012, the government, in response to the violence, formed a 27-member investigative commission that includes members from a variety of ethnic, politics, religious and professional backgrounds, to investigate the crime. On September 18, members of the commission have had the first press conference where they described the investigation as complex and difficult and therefore would be delayed (Nyein, 2012). By the time of this writing there has not come the commission complete report out of this investigation.

Another major challenge facing the country is an ongoing war in Kachin state where fighting between the government troops and armed group KIA still continues despite after three round of ceasefire talks. KIA is an armed group that has been fighting against the Myanmar central government for autonomy and self-determination within a federal union since 1961 (freakachin.org, 2013). The KIA is inspired by the historic Panglong Accord, which equally promised the Kachin to be an equal stakeholder in forming Myanmar Union.

Shooting exchanges have resulted in the dead of hundreds from both sides, the internal displacement of over 70 thousands Kachins and estimated ten thousands being stuffed in a refugee camp along the border. Despite request for another round of talk by the government there has not been response, as far as my reach of news report is concern. The government is confident though that ceasefire could be reached with the KIA in the near future and thereby holding the second level of talk where all ethnic nationalities would participate in a ‘national conference (youtube.com, 2012)¹¹’, which reportedly would include the ultimate political dialogue believed to include federalism and self determination; the two topics previously offensive or taboo.

In March 2013, another violence between Buddhists and Muslims in the central city of Meikhtila, killing at least 54 and displacing ten of thousands of people mostly the Muslims. The Irrawaddy reports that the violence has largely targeted Muslims and has spread to several other towns where extremist Buddhist mobs have torched or ransacked mosques and Muslim-owned property. The government declared state of emergency to stop the violence but critics accused the government of instigating the violence instead of stopping it. In the following month in April, a fire engulfed a mosque housing Muslim schoolchildren in former capital, Yangon killing at least 13 children flaring up angers and raising much doubt over the country’s prospect for democratization process.

by Myanmar government therefore referred to as ‘Bangali’, claiming that the ‘Rohinya’ are not found in the history of Myanmar and thus unacceptable to be included in ethnic tribes list in the Union of Myanmar.

¹¹ Aung Min, TV interview with DVB: [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0X1smUyvor4> .]

The mass killing and arson mostly suffered by Muslims population in several towns in Myanmar has generated Islamic extremist groups from Indonesia publicly declaring holy war *Jihad* against Myanmar (Vrieze, 2013). And tens of thousands of Burmese refugees and migrant workers in Muslim countries particularly in Malaysia also express fear of reprisals by Islamic groups. In May, terrorists plotted attack on Myanmar's embassy in Jakarta, Indonesia but they failed, leading to three being arrested and 7 killed by Indonesia armed force according to news on May 9, 2013 (Marsiela, 2013). This development is a grave concern not only to Myanmar but also to neighboring countries, including ASEAN nations.

Another development that has significantly weakened the opposition movements is growing criticism against ASSK on her silence on major issue like the 'Rohingya'. While some argue that it's not helpful but harmful to stand firmly for controversial issues lacking public support at the moment as she could lose majority votes in the upcoming election in 2015, which [losing] could mean to allow the perpetuation of the military rule, other critique by saying that she has swayed her stand for peace and justice that helped her get the Nobel Peace Prize and international recognition.

Demands are growing that ASSK needs to stand for the downtrodden. Consequently there seem to be wider power vacuums need to be filled as reform goes ahead, but the questions remain are who would be, if not ASSK, and what would be the most influential voice that would enable to unite forces to counter-balance powerful Military. Would ASSK continue to be silent on important issues that could potentially ruin all that has been built? Are the non-state actors or CS well equipped to realize their political goals of democracy, good governance and finally national reconciliation? Are political organizations inside the country well prepared to effectively garner sufficient command from people from all background? What should be done to best realize the real democracy with all stakeholders to be satisfied?

The government from its part is trying hard to lead the reform as successful as possible, however, given six decades record of their rule, they clearly lack legitimacy and public trust. Therefore even with the highest point regarding reform, the Military still be treated as 'unwanted' and illegitimate rulers, indicating that there is possibility that division between the army and citizen is widening. Regarded themselves as the safeguard of national unity and sovereignty, the Army plans to play a leading role in national politics (Hookway, 2013), which is totally contrary to what the opposition parties are campaigning.

If the Army does not unclench their grip on power in the short run, there is a real risk that another uprising could prevail and totally dismantle even the already institutionalized structure. Understanding such risk could occur anytime, the government proposed peculiar type of democracy, which they call, ‘disciplined flourishing democracy’ as opposed to liberal democracy mostly found in the west. In this kind of democracy, freedom has its limited, raising doubt for example on the safety of those wanting to oppose and expose corruption of the authorities. There is no official definition of what entails in the term, making the already skeptical people more concern of their safety under the Military’s imposed disciplined democracy.

There are challenges and considerable shortcomings ahead for CSOs as well that requires a comprehensive overhaul. Lack of strategic planning, coordinated and cooperative effort, vague distinction between the different types of roles of CS actors, lack of sustainable funding from local donors and the burden of donor-driven agendas and weak institutional capacity within organizations are the main challenges faced by CSOs. “Reform is in my view irreversible as long as the military supports the process, and I believe that President Thein Sein is sincere and believing in what he has been doing. There are of course shortcomings ahead not just from the military and the government but we should also look at our [the opposition] weaknesses; inexperience in organizational work, lack of collective and collaborative efforts in bringing opposition forces together to work for the common good of the country. So we need time, democracy will not come overnight, it will come slowly but we need to work hard and together”. (Khin Zaw Win, personal communication, March 15, 2012).

Yangon based informant said, “CS to be effective and successful, it’s necessary to be strengthened from within based on shared visions and objectives rather than relying heavily on resources from abroad. Burmese intellectuals and professional abroad should be encouraged and given chances to participate in reform process in all fields by offering incentives attractive enough to draw their attention, thereby effectively reducing high cost as a result of heavy dependence on foreign experts” (Tluang, personal communication, March 13, 2012).

CS’s focus should be more vocational trainings and schoolings directly beneficial the current development process so that people in the country get necessary skills and know-how that could contribute meaningful economic and social development, which would further promote democracy and good governance. This could potentially enhance employment and thereby

could lead to economic growth and more democracy. More economic growth means more income that would reduce corruptions currently prevalent across the country. Peace and national reconciliation is also based on people's perception and knowledge of the country diverse ethnic and culture realities.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

My research primarily focuses on the roles played by CS organizations in the process of democratic nation building mainly in the three areas; democracy, good governance and national reconciliation or peace building. The preceding chapters explore, highlight and investigate the history, roles and current and future prospect of CS and of course also attempt to answer the research questions through qualitative method, which includes documents analysis, practical field research and daily observation of news related to my research topics. Though the focus has been after 2010 election, I also made relatively comprehensive investigation of CS role way back to pre-independence history and onward and through more than 6 decades of military's domination.

A comparative analysis through different historical perspective is also made to illuminate patterns of changes CS actors underwent in pursuing their goals and objectives. The study finds that throughout history, there had been significant contribution of CS in democratization from bottom-up, but lack of freedom and military's unwillingness to change the system has crippled CS to remain as merely social and humanitarian caretakers with most of them totally ceasing their activities, rather than being active in pursuing their real visions. With the initiative of CS, a number of mass protests against dictatorship had been organized, however all such movements had been crashed by the military and as a result, thousands of leading figures were arrested and put in jail with some serving as many as 60- 70 years sentence.

As a result of oppression inside Myanmar, many groups and well-known individuals fled abroad from where they continued resistance movement in different means. Resistance movements abroad became one of the most effective CS forces that effectively promote democracy, good governance and national reconciliation through mass media, advocacy and campaign works. Though CSOs across the border and abroad have been playing very important roles, their actions could not amount to changing the autocratic system long and well protected by the state arm force. Despite the claim that they have similar goal, exile SC groups are undergoing cooperation problem among themselves and lacking of shared operation. Many groups are inflicted with infighting and pointing fingers at each other instead of fighting against their common enemy- the military regime.

Situation after the 2010 election has been marked by significant and positive changes with the government publicly declaring a need for national reconciliation and peace to get real democracy. The government acknowledges that to practically realize these goals citizen participation including CS is essential. A number of important reforms that allows more engagement of CS actors have been made. New laws such as Peaceful Gathering and Demonstration Law has been approved while other law such as Press Freedom Law is being drafted with significant inputs from CS and waiting to be approved by the parliament. CS actors are not reactive in waiting for top-bottom reforms, they proactively engage in bottom-up approach in order to make best possible impact toward changes.

The reform is mainly led by the military and thus it's a 'top-down' reform process, but this study suggests that without the engagement of CS actors from bottom-up there will be very little prospect for meaningful changes because of stakeholder's varied interests involved. Myanmar is composed of multi ethnics with different interests uncoordinatedly pursuing their respective goals, which put CSOs in a very important position to promote democracy, good governance, peace and national reconciliation in a much effective level than top-down government controlled reform. That is what student leaders like MKN have been trumpeting since their release from prison that citizen engagement in the nation social political reform is necessary to get real and vibrant democracy.

Just over two years have passed since the election and reforms seen so far have been swift, bold and positive, however the study finds that there are questions remained as to how far reform has gone that it is irreversible or so nascent to be reversible. Lacking also is resourceful human capital across organizational spectrums, which is discouraging and worrisome. Burmese intellectuals abroad are coming back, however many are uncertain as to how they could best contribute to accelerate the reform process because of government's incapability in creating necessary incentives for individuals who want to be part of reform process.

Structural reform alone is not sufficient to have a vibrant democracy, in which all stakeholders abide by the rule of laws and work fervently for good governance and peace. Ethnic tensions across multi ethnic groups also has been high with an ongoing violence and confrontation between Muslims and Buddhists that have left hundred of thousands homeless and helpless. The raise of Buddhist extremist group '696', which promote hatred and

segregation against Muslims and other religious groups is another worrying development that could hamper reform process.

If government and CS do not make real attempt, as they now appear to be, to stop this violence, this negative development could spill in across the whole Burmese society with multi ethnic and multi religious. While working towards national reconciliation but simultaneously allowing violence against minorities particularly the ‘Rohinya’ could lead to a more complex kind of conflicts with many more groups involved. Military hard-liners are closely watching at conflicts arising and when they see conflicts as uncontrollable, another taking over of power could happen. This is the main duty of the Military according to the existing constitution- to safeguard national unity and sovereignty.

Progressively, power system in Myanmar is decentralized and deregulated, SC have flourished in scope and scale, and continue to play important roles by campaigning for a variety of political and economic reforms in the ongoing political transition towards a more vibrant democracy in Myanmar. Together with all other stakeholders, CSOs are striving through both ‘inside in’ and ‘inside out’ strategies to impact the whole society by acting as educators, facilitators, negotiators, monitors and counter-balance powers. What is needed is CS empowerment through financial assistance and qualified human resource both from local and international communities.

To conclude my thesis I would like to summarize what the SCO can do to promote democracy, good governance and national reconciliation in Myanmar. The first and perhaps the most basic role of SC is to limit and control the power of the state. No doubt that a healthy democracy needs the state, which is well functioning and some form of authoritative, but SC in Myanmar needs to find ways to check, restrain and monitor the power of political leaders and officials. That is not enough to just check and do nothing, what requires also is to expose wrongdoings (if any) to public concern so that responsible and corrupted officials might resign or reform is made with proper rules and laws applied. SC in Myanmar is still weak in this area because most seem not to be confrontational but supplementary role in bringing their goals.

Help promoting political participation by citizen is another area CS can contribute. That is to say that CS organize training and workshops where participants learn for example how to solve conflicts in democratic ways and what is tolerance means in the context of democratic perspective and so on. CS can also take initiative to promote pluralism in a multi ethnic-

religious society like Myanmar by being an arena for all groups to debate and express different interest openly. Democracy is not stable if people with similar interest, identity and religious associate each other. Many SCOs in Myanmar are staffed with same religious or ethnic group indicating that pluralism is clearly lacking. Therefore CS should improve to be an arena for pluralistic discourse- regardless of ethnic and religious background.

SCOs are reorganizing themselves to be more coordinated and collaborative forces that could have significant impact on government decision-making process. However they clearly lack coordinated effort or strategy with fragmented in goals and operations with each pursuing their own interest without taking proper consultation or communication with others. There should be a call for nationwide SC conference where representative could come up with a more coordinated platform with proper strategy to further agendas more to do with national level rather than small scale ethnic line or communal line impact. Such initiative can create a mechanism, which could potentially empower SCOs across the country through technical guides related to rules and organizational skills.

As important financial donor, international community can help change SC inside the country by giving strict and clear guidelines to financial assistance. Such guidelines can be that organizations seek financial assistance promote not only democracy but also pluralism and tolerance that come with democracy. And there are CS actors with ambitious goals and strong will to democratization and peace, however structurally weak and incapable of organizing well. Such organizations need supports in every means through clear guidelines that special attention should be given to them. Because they are incapable of advertising their agendas to the world or online market as these organizations are often led by people based in rural area. They should be strengthened and financed so that impact generated by CS actors inside Myanmar is equally distributed and balanced.

Finally, CS is not simply in tension or opposition with the state. Being independent from the state doesn't mean that CSOs are always to attack the government. Rather the role of CS is to be part of change agents in nation building by acting as examples abide by democratic principles and a supplementary to state's implementation of what the people desire. In doing so, CSO in Myanmar contribute very positive role in promoting democracy, good governance and peace/national reconciliation.

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Apendix 1: Interview lists:

No	Name	Position	Institution	Date og interview
1.	Tluang Lian Hnin	Lead researcher, freelance consultant	Myanmar Marketing Research & Development Co.Ltd (MMRD)	13.03.2012
2.	Bawi Tha Thawng	Land officer & Researcher	Foof Security Working Groups (FSWG)	13.03.2012
3.	Dr. Khin Zaw Win	Consultant & CS activist		15.03.2012
4.	U San Aye	Joint Secretary	Free Funeral Services Society (FFSS)	16.03.2012
5.	Pastor Lian Mang	Founder	Myanmar Mission Church	23.03.2012
6.	Christian Pastor	Retired	Church based in Yangon	24.03.2012
7.	Former Political prisoner		88 generation group	25.03.2012
8.	Hla Hla Win	Head og English Department & Research Fellow	Myanmar Egress	26.03.2012
9.	Dr. Hans-Bernd Zöllner	Historian, Researcher on Myanmar	University og Humberg	27.03.2012
10.	Journalist		The Voice Weekly	28.03.2012
11.	NGOs worker	Co-ordinator		28.03.2012
12.	Taxi driver		Private owner	29.03.2012
13.	Leader	Lecturer	Christian College	30.03.2012
14.	Salai Ceu Mang	Former CS activist	- Children developement program - Community developement initiative	24.04.2013
15.	Van Thang	Community leader		23.03.2013