History Teachers in Post-Conflict Contexts and their Role in the Peace Process

A case study of Mon Schools in Myanmar

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1 The picture on the cover shows history teachers participating in a focus group and filling out questionnaires for this research
I would like to dedicate this thesis to the teachers that were so willingly participating in this research. I am very grateful for your openness talking about sensitive issues and I am very honoured that you shared your experiences and opinions with me.

First of all I would like to thank my supervisor Elizabeth Maber for supporting me in the whole process and always giving helpful advices. I appreciate her knowledge about the topic and the country and I am very grateful for her support. She is an inspiration.

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I would like to thank my IDS friends for a wonderful time with great discussions and Friday drinks. Tobi, thank you for always being by my side and encouraging me to keep going.

Last but not least, I want to thank Myint Mon and Mara Moe for supporting me so much in the field. Without those two people, the research would have not been that successful. Thank you for translating, giving advice and being there for me.
With its multi-ethnic background and its democratic transition over the last few years, Myanmar offers an insightful new perspective on the relationship between conflict and peace. Myanmar’s past has been coined with violent conflicts between ethnic minorities and the autocratic government since independence in 1948. In this legacy of conflict, the nexus between education and peacebuilding is extremely interesting, because Myanmar’s minorities developed independent education systems. Aligning these education systems is a challenge for the country and has its impact on the peace process.

This research focuses on history teachers in the ethnic education system of the Mon people and their contribution to peace through teaching history. The study is based on a 4R approach of peacebuilding focusing on issues of Redistribution, Representation, Recognition and Reconciliation, arguing that a sustainable peace is only possible through a socially just peace process between the state and the Mon Education System. The research applied a mixed methods approach using mainly focus groups, interviews and questionnaires.

Findings reveal that the Mon National Education Committee’s (MNEC) increasing cooperation with the government fosters relationships between the two education systems, but that these new encounters as well make inequalities between state and MNEC teachers more visible, which increases divisions. Additionally, MNEC teachers in schools are using history teaching mainly to build and protect an ethnic superior identity, which threatens a process of building a national identity and a peaceful coexistence with all ethnic groups in the country. The construction of the Mon ethnic identity through history teaching in MNEC schools, is a potential problem for a reconciliation process and therefore is in opposition to a positive peace in Myanmar.

Reflecting on the theoretical framework it became evident through this research that the four dimensions on peacebuilding can negatively affect each other if the context on the ground is not considered. It suggests that contextual timing of the different dimensions is essential for the success of peacebuilding efforts.

It is recommended to start a joint history curriculum writing process and include ethnic education stakeholders in the nation-wide education reform. The research was conducted shortly after the second democratic elections, hence the findings need to be understood in this political context.

**Keywords** - peacebuilding, positive peace, conflict, education, history teaching, Myanmar
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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AMRP – All Mon Regions Party
CBO – Community Based Organization
CESR – Comprehensive Education Sector Review
CSO – Civil Society Organization
EAG – Ethnic Armed Group
ILO – International Labour Organization
MNEC – Mon National Education Committee
MNED – Mon National Education Department
MNLF – Mon National Liberation Front
MNP – Mon National Party
NLD – National League for Democracy
NMSP – New Mon State Party
RCEP – Research Consortium on Education and Peacebuilding
SITAN – Situation Analysis of Children in Myanmar
UNDP – United Nations Development Program
UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFC – United Nationalities Federal Council
UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF – United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund
WGEC – Working Group of Ethnic Cooperation
1. Introduction

“Education is one of the building blocks of human development. It is not just a basic right, but also a foundation for progress in other areas, including health, nutrition and the development of institutions and democracy. Conflict undermines this foundation and also contributes to the conditions that perpetuate violence.” (UNDP, 2005)

The UNDP captures in this quote the essence of why a focus on education and conflict is crucial for a nation and its development. Everything can be destroyed by violence and education and school children have an especially high risk of becoming the victims of conflict (UNESCO, 2011). Education is affected by conflict on various levels and can either contribute to the promotion of peace or swirl into its opposite and perpetrate the conflict.

After decades of violent conflict between ethnic minorities and the autocratic national government, the recent democratic transition makes Myanmar an extremely interesting case to analyse the relationship between education, conflict and peacebuilding (Maber, 2014). 60 years of military rule have left behind an atmosphere of mistrust and suspicion. Although the first democratic elections in 2010 and the slow but constant opening of the country are the first steps towards a peaceful democracy in Myanmar, such a violent legacy is not easy to overcome, especially for the ethnic minorities who had to fight against oppression and discrimination since independence in 1948. These negative memories are one of the main factors that can hinder or jeopardise the peace process in Myanmar. As McCully (2012:147) argues: “(w)here deep division exist it is usual that these are underpinned by reference to perceived grievances or betrayals in the past (...)”. Such divisions demonstrate the importance of teaching history, where children can be confronted with the past of a conflict and can learn to reconcile with it. When children are taught about history in an open manner, it offers possibilities to engage with other ethnicities in a peaceful way and a nation-wide peace becomes imaginable. Values such as tolerance, critical thinking and the discussion of different “truths” of history enhance the chances for peace (Metro, 2006; McCully, 2012).

Just as important as the content are the methods (Freedman, et al., 2008). The history taught is ultimately dependent on who is teaching it. Teachers are highly
relevant for the success or failure of an education system (Horner et al., 2015; Novelli & Higgins, 2016). Therefore this research will engage with two important aspects of peacebuilding in the Myanmar context: history teaching and the role of teachers.

1.2 Background of the research

The research derives from a project conducted by the Research Consortium on Education in Peace (RCEP) as a cooperation between the University of Amsterdam, University of Sussex and University of Ulster. Although the research is not officially affiliated with the work of the Consortium, it argues from the same theoretical standpoint and attempts to contribute to it. The Research Consortium seeks to explore across various countries the relationship between education and peacebuilding in post-conflict situations and developed a framework for peacebuilding based on Nancy Fraser’s social justice framework. Hence, this research aims to fit into this approach. With the 4R approach on peacebuilding, the focus lies on aspects of \textit{Redistribution, Representation, Recognition} and \textit{Reconciliation} within the education system.

The underlying concept of this research is ‘positive peace’ as described by Galtung (year), which seeks to explain that peace is not only the absence of violence but a transformation that needs to address inequalities of power, resources and life opportunities (Winter, 2012). Only with a socially just peace transformation is positive peace in Myanmar achievable. Because of the decade-long conflict, different ethnic education systems developed as a result of issues of access and acceptance of government schooling. The Mon education system that is the focus of this research is a particular interesting case, because it is often described as a prime example of cooperation between an ethnic education system and the government. This research seeks to engage with this assumption and therefore focuses on history teachers in the Mon Education System.
1.3 Research Rationale – Objectives and Relevance

This research is based on two main assumptions drawn from the literature. Firstly, it acknowledges that the teaching of history is enormously important for a country’s peacebuilding process and reconciliation. The purpose of history as an identity building process and a form of preparation for peaceful cohabitation in a diverse nation is therefore a focus of this paper. Myanmar as a case study is perfectly suited, largely due to the recent opening of the country for a peaceful transformation after decades of violent civil war and military rule. Secondly, the role of teachers as “agents for peace” (Lopes Cardozo & Hoeks, 2015) is recognized and will be analysed in depth throughout this research. The role of teachers has been identified as crucial for the educational system and therefore as crucial for a peacebuilding process, yet it hasn’t been analysed to any great extent in the context of Myanmar and especially not in the context of the Mon ethnicity. As Weldon (2010) indicates, more research is needed on how the experiences, emotions and beliefs of teachers not only filter the curriculum they are teaching, but also alter their role as “peace agents”. This research seeks to contribute to exactly that knowledge gap in the literature. In the context of Myanmar the different ethnic identities in the nation state pose simultaneously a very interesting hurdle and a potential tool for the peace process. Hence, this research seeks to engage with the nexus between the role of ethnic history teachers and their contribution to peace. It tries to broaden the understanding on how to enhance the chances for peace through history education in the aftermath of ethnicity-based conflicts by focusing on the teachers’ identity and work environment. On the whole, the research aims to contribute to the discourse around education and conflict in general and the peacebuilding process in Myanmar in particular.

1.4 Outline of Thesis

The thesis is organised in seven main chapters. It begins with a theoretical discussion around the main concepts of education and peacebuilding, outlining the importance education can have in post-conflict contexts. Additionally, it draws on literature on identity and nation-building as these two components are identified as important for transition to peace and specifies the importance of history teaching and
the role of teachers. In this chapter the 4R’s framework on peacebuilding developed by the Research Consortium on Education and Peacebuilding is introduced. It is used as the theoretical foundation for the subsequent data analysis.

The second chapter explains the underlying research design of this study. Beginning with the research question and sub-questions, it describes the methods used for this research and illustrates the research location. It provides a discussion around ethical considerations and limitations that emerged during the fieldwork phase.

The methodology chapter is followed by a contextual chapter, which gives an overview on the Myanmar context regarding the official peace process and national education reform. Implications for Mon State and the MNEC of these processes are displayed in order to contextualise the research.

The three following chapters analyse the findings of this research and present the main results. Firstly, it engages with the organisation MNEC and its peace contribution in a wider context through cooperation with the government. Contrasting the MNEC view, perspectives of the teachers are presented afterwards. Experiences of inequality that became evident through this research will be discussed and analysed with regard to a peace transformation. Lastly, issues of identity such as language, ethnicity and religion are broached with the aim of giving evidence on consequences for their ability to act as ‘peace agents’.

In the last chapter of this thesis the main findings will be presented in a summary. Following a theoretical reflection on this research will be a discussion around the applied methodology. The thesis concludes with recommendations for practice and theory and identifies future research areas.
2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter breaks down the theoretical debate around education and peacebuilding with the aim of underpinning the theoretical standpoint this research takes. Beginning with the broad nexus of education and conflict, it provides a debate about the two key roles education can play – either contributing to peace or perpetrating conflict.

This research focuses on the peaceful contribution of education and therefore introduces the concepts of positive and negative peace, while putting a particular focus on identity building processes through education.

The pivotal roles of teachers and the importance of teaching history in post-conflict contexts reflected in the literature are used as a foundation for the empirical chapters of this thesis.

2.1 Education and Conflict

Understanding the relationship between education and conflict is essential for the determining how education can promote peacebuilding. Conflict can impact education either directly or indirectly, depending on the context. Seitz (2004) argues that states in conflict are more likely to spend the national budget on military expenses rather than on social services such as education, which affects the educational sector indirectly. However, education can also be touched on a direct level; students and teachers can be physically harmed by conflict and access to education is limited as the routes to and from schools can become extremely dangerous for children and especially for girls. Children in conflict-affected contexts are often exposed to violence because the state is not able to provide adequate security. On an institutional level, school buildings are often accidently or purposefully attacked or destroyed as they are easy and symbolic targets for creating a violent atmosphere (Davies, 2004b). Hence, children are often deprived of their educational rights by conflict and are, as the Human Development Report 2005 mentions, “most of the victims of today’s wars (...) civilians” (UNDP, 2005, p. 12). But without access to education, which provides children the possibility of some normalcy, young people are more likely to take an active role in the conflict rather than
following an alternative and peaceful lifestyle (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000).

However, education is not only the “victim” of conflict. The literature suggests that it can also be the “perpetrator” of conflict and legitimates it (Bush & Saltarelli 2000; Novelli & Lopes Cardozo 2008; Davies, 2005, 2010). As Degu (2005) points out, education is often deeply connected to the root causes of conflict, such as the recognition of identity, cultural development and community survival, the distribution of resources, access to political power and ideological orientation. Uneven distribution of education increases inequalities between conflict parties, which can lead to further fuelling of a conflict. Segregation in education between ethnicities, as is the case in Sri Lanka, can worsen relationships between ethnicities and endanger peaceful co-operation (Davies, 2011a). Besides issues of access to education the curriculum itself can be harmful. The “hate curriculum” implies the portrayal of other groups with bad characteristics and imposes feelings of suspicion and mistrust onto students. Similarly, the “defence curriculum” teaches children how to use weapons and uses education as preparation for war and conflict (Davies, 2010). In addition to the content of the curriculum, the way it is taught is also important. Methods that promote the acceptance of authoritarianism, obedience and corporal punishment lead to a culture that represses critical thinking and normalises a violent status quo (King, 2005). On the other hand, the introduction of critical thinking in class or an acceptance of ambiguity enhances a culture of discussion and tolerance. By acknowledging different opinions and “truths” and demonstrating different futures, children are prepared for a challenging and diverse world and mitigate the risk of falling back into violent behaviour. Direct peace or human rights education can also improve children’s perceptions and ability to react to violence and subsequently promote unity, equality and social cohesion within a nation (Davies, 2011b). Through education, children are empowered and given the chance to stand up for themselves against conflict and oppression. In acknowledging that education can have a “positive” and a “negative” face in conflict and post-conflict contexts, it is important to engage with the question of what education aims to achieve and what its purpose is.


2.2 Education for Peace – from negative to positive Peace

In this research education is understood as a social institution and practice that is driven by ethical principles in a society and conducted for the realisation of social values. It is problem-oriented and aims to reconstruct social justice, which has been damaged during conflict (Snauwaert, 2012). Therefore it is the urgent task of education in post-conflict contexts to educate both teachers and students to become transformative agents in order to restore social justice (ibid). This understanding of education is based on the assumption that a sustainable peace in post-conflict societies is only possible with a combination of social justice and peace. Hence, the process of peacebuilding focuses on building a sustainable future. However as Galtung (1975) points out, the peacebuilding process is to be separated from peacemaking and peacekeeping, which are understood as direct responses to conflict rather than having a preventative perspective on the future. Peacebuilding goes beyond the notion of ‘negative peace’ which implies the absence of war, but promotes ‘positive peace’ by creating harmony and justice between people (Gill & Niens, 2014). Thus, negative peace “is the absence of violence, absence of war” and positive peace “is the integration of human society” (Galtung, 1964, p. 2). Stewart indicates that vertical inequalities between individuals and horizontal inequalities between groups often lie at the root of conflicts (Stewart, 2009). Lederach and Maise (2009) argue that peacebuilding is a holistic process that concerns entire societies and the individuals living within them. Therefore it is a transformative approach on the individual as well as on the societal level. Without focusing on social inequities such as access to education, a transformation from negative to positive peace is not possible (Novelli & Higgins, 2016).

It requires changes in the attitudes of people in each group towards the “other” to achieve a true reconciliation (Clark, 2009). Reconciliation is more than restoring and healing relationships between conflict parties, it is about acknowledging and dealing with the past and eventually reshaping its legacy. According to John Paul Lederach (1997) it includes the identification and acceptance of what has happened and an effort to ‘right’ the wrongs that existed and forgive the perpetrators. As Nietzsche argued: “The past has to be forgotten if it is not to become the gravedigger of the present” (cited in Olick 2003: 22).
It can be discussed whether the past needs to be forgotten, as Nietzsche suggests, or processed in order to peacefully move on from it. Clearly, the past and one’s acquaintance with it shapes one’s self-identity and the identity of a whole group within a nation. Education and especially history classes are essential spaces where identity building takes place (Keddie, 2012) and determine, to some extent, the success of a peaceful reconciliation process.

2.2.1 Identity-building through Education

Identity is linked to inclusion or exclusion and gives a sense of self and place within history (Davies & Talbot, 2008). It is challenging to combine self-identity with a collective identity without overemphasising one of them. For Davies ‘identity questions are at the heart of the causes of conflict’ (2001: 21) so it is unsurprising that they should also be the focus of peacebuilding. Social identity is defined as ‘that part of an individual’s self-concept, which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership’ (Tajfel, 1981: 255). Social identity is based on a collective memory, understood as people’s shared recollections of past events and how memories are transmitted to future generations (Panteli & Zembylas, 2013). But as acknowledged in the literature, it is possible for an individual to establish several identities and develop feelings of belonging to more than one social group (Morris, 2007; Mattis et al, 2008; Mahalingam et al, 2008). Being able to develop multiple identities is extremely important for a sustainable peace in a post-conflict and ethnically diverse context (Levy, 2014). Through a process Gaertner and Dovidio (2000) call ‘recategorization’ an individual can develop feelings of belonging for a wider societal group, and within this embed identification with a smaller social group. It supports the understanding of identity in layers, which values ethnic identity to the same extent as national identity and therein allows for a dual identity. By bringing smaller social groups together under a superordinate group (the nation), intergroup conflicts can be solved and unification and peace can be developed. The literature suggests that a superordinate identity can be achieved through intergroup co-operation, calling attention to superordinate partnership and the introduction of common goals and a shared fate (Levy, 2014). However, if the group identity functions only through associated values and uniqueness,
forcing a national identity-building process could lead to counter-reactions and the fostering of sub-group identities (ibid).

This idea of a superordinate identity resembles the political concept of nation states as “imagined communities” (Anderson, 1983) that are formed around a common identity and belonging. The steps from a small group identity to a national identity as an aspect of nation building are enormously important for post-conflict societies. Distinct but complementary to a national identity is the concept of citizenship, more belonging to a political community than inclusion in a cultural community (Guzina, 2007). But as Bauböck (2001: 320) insists it is ‘morally wrong and politically naive to think that appealing to a shared civic identity is sufficient to integrate marginalised groups whose grievances have been brushed aside’. It takes more than just the concept of citizenship and national identity to form a sustainable peace, especially in ethnically diverse post-conflict contexts. A practice of reconciliation has to be initiated in order to create a social space where truth and forgiveness can peacefully coexist and conflict can be rehabilitated (Wang, 2009). Education can offer a space where this process of reconciliation can be initiated, with schools and curricula often influencing the formation of a child’s identity, particularly through the teaching of history and language, and enabling them to enter an open discussion about the possibility of forgiveness and peace.

2.3 Peacebuilding in the 4R’s framework

In this section the 4R’s framework on peacebuilding conceptualised by the Research Consortium on Education and Peacebuilding (RCEP) is explained. The research is based on the theoretical framework, which is used as a guideline for the analysis.

The framework finds its origins within the cooperation between the University of Sussex, the University of Ulster, the University of Amsterdam and UNICEF as a partnering organisation. The approach is focused on the connection between education and peacebuilding and argues that sustainable peace is only possible through and with a socially just education system. Acknowledging the nexus between social justice and sustainable peace, it builds upon the 3R’s framework on social justice by Nancy Fraser
and identifies a fourth dimension related particularly to post-conflict contexts – reconciliation.

Nancy Fraser defines social justice as a “participatory parity of opportunities”, which is not exclusively related to the redistribution of resources. As Fraser indicates, it additionally entails questions around representation and recognition of groups of people in the society that had been disadvantaged prior the conflict. In adding a dimension on reconciliation the approach gains a transformational character, which encourages a conversion from negative to positive peace in post-conflict situations. To cite Lederach, reconciliation "is both the place we are trying to reach and a journey we take to get there" (1999: 24).

The four dimensions of peacebuilding within the education sector of a nation state can be explained as following:

- **Redistribution**: financial dimension; equal distribution of funds and financial resources, but also equal access to education.
- **Representation**: political dimension; involvement of all stakeholders in decision-making processes in the education sector, including the development of the curriculum. Political representation of all groups in a society.
- **Recognition**: cultural dimension; acknowledging and respecting cultural and language differences (e.g. mother tongue education). Celebrating diversity in a society and encouraging multiple identities in a diverse country.
- **Reconciliation**: transformational dimension; building bridges between former conflict parties to connect the violent past with the peaceful future and enabling people to forgive. It is linked to historical memories in different groups of the conflict and supports encounters between groups through education.

An unequal redistribution of resources can undermine the peace process, further enhancing inequalities between groups in a nation state. Such imbalance risks fuelling intergroup tensions with feelings of discrimination, and potentially to a re-eruption of conflict.

Representation in a democratic system and feeling that there is a way of expressing one’s own voice increases the legitimacy of the system and creates a feeling of belonging to the nation. A process of building a national identity through
representation on a political scale as well as processes of decision-making concerning issues of one’s life contributes to a peaceful society in general.

Without valuing differences of all kinds, such as cultural, linguistic or ethnic, a peaceful society, especially an ethnically diverse society, is not possible. Allowing people to express and live multiple identities within a state and seeing advantages in this is crucial for people to feel recognised and therefore accepted. A peaceful society only survives by recognising all of its citizens to the same extent.

Reconciling with the past and moving on as a united nation is the end goal of any peacebuilding process. It is acknowledged that this dimension in particular takes time and a change of behaviour and attitude. In comparison to the other three dimensions, where the state has a more direct influence, reconciliation requires both sides of society to come closer together and forgive the events of the past.

Taking the 4R approach as the underlying framework, this research focuses on two dimensions within an ethnic education system. History teaching as, explained above, is an extremely important aspect due to its impact on how identity is formed and its ability to open up space to reconcile with the conflict affected past. The history curriculum is indeed effectively dependent on the teacher; the teacher decides what and how the children learn about history. They give meaning to the content of history classes and influence the outcome.

The next two chapters will discuss in detail the role of history teaching and teachers in peacebuilding contexts.

2.3.1 Teachers as “peace agents”?

In order to explore the role of teachers in the peacebuilding process, one has to acknowledge the process in which content is constructed. According to Apple (1986), the curriculum is never neutral and always linked to power. The decision about legitimate knowledge is a selection made by powerful actors in the state. Hence, textbooks are the result of political, economic and cultural influences, but how they are taught and used is ultimately dependent on teachers (Apple, 1992). Additionally, Lopes Cardozo & Hoeks (2015: 57) identify teachers as “a necessary condition for countries to
recover from crisis”; they provide an environment for children to learn what a peaceful society looks like. Teachers are the basis of peace and can be recognized as agents for peace. Ultimately teachers underpin the success or failure of education systems around the world and play a pivotal role, especially in conflict-affected situations, for forming peace anew (Horner et al., 2015; Novelli & Higgins, 2016). The UNESCO and ILO (2008) definition of teachers reflects the understanding of teachers in this research: ‘All those persons in schools or other learning sites who are responsible for the education of children or young people (...).’ Teachers are therefore not limited to schools of formal education.

Similarly to the ambivalent role of education, is it possible for a teacher to have a dual role in conflict. They can position themselves on a spectrum from good-bad, competent-incompetent or solution to problem. This double-sided nature of teachers should be further researched in order to understand what circumstances influence the “quality” of a teacher. The Research Consortium on Education and Peace (RCEP) identified various conditions in the literature that encourage teachers to enhance peace and fulfil the role of a peace agent. The dual role of a teacher in conflict is especially highlighted, as teachers do not just affect conflict; they are simultaneously themselves affected by it (Horner et al, 2015). Teachers do not exercise their peacebuilding agency in isolation from their environment; it influences their surroundings while simultaneously is influenced by them (O’Sullivan, 2002; Vongalis-Macrow, 2007; Weldon, 2010; Welmond, 2002). Teacher agency, as defined by Novelli and Smith (2011: 7), is the capacity to influence these violent surroundings and the ability to act in order to foster ‘values and attitudes that offer a basis for transforming conflict itself’. Hence, one should focus on both sides of the teachers’ role to improve teachers’ situations. Teachers can function as transformative ‘peace agents’ as they teach children how to live together in peace and overcome prejudices within and between individuals and communities (Horner et al, 2015). Likewise they help build social cohesion, which is concerned with ‘processes and structures of group cohesion’ that create ‘a sense of unity (...)’ (Darby, 1991).

The RCEP identified teacher training as one of the primary issues that affect a teachers’ ability to promote peace. Although training is important for equipping a teacher to handle classroom situations and developing their individual competencies, employability and peacebuilding, it is not always realizable, especially in post-conflict
contexts. Suggested in the literature is that payroll and working conditions influence the teacher’s agency to promote peace positively and are extremely important for the motivation, status and ability to teach (Horner, et al., 2015). Subsequently, if the motivation of a teacher is higher, the quality of education will improve. Allowing space for religion and ethnicity are enormously important in order to provide teachers with the possibility to act as ‘peace agents’.

It is not exclusively incentives that enable teachers to be better peace agents, it is to the same degree the context of the teacher. It is still important to create an environment, where teachers can express themselves and feel comfortable. Teachers are always the ones giving meaning to textbooks and that is ultimately influenced by the teachers’ ethnicity, geographical location, personal beliefs, political leanings and the perception of the “other”. This will lead to agreement, submission, defiance, resistance or selection of the material and textbooks they are to teach (ibid). Additionally the literature points out that the environment and accountability of teachers are key influencing factors. A supporting environment and the perception of all community or school members (parents, political representatives, head teacher) stimulate teachers to do a better job, whether this means creating peace or not.

However, it must be acknowledged that teachers are not a homogenous body. Teachers’ identities’ become deeply internalised and bolstered with group memories (Weldon, 2010). As Leach and Humphreys (2007) indicate, teachers not only act positively for the peace process but are also capable of representing their own biases in the classroom and reproducing inequalities. The perception of a teacher’s representation of the past influences both teaching practices and attitudes (Murphy & Gallagher, 2009). But as teachers are the ones transmitting collective memory, which is highly linked to identity building to future generations (Panteli & Zembylas, 2013), the linkage between teacher environment, own background and performance as ‘agents for peace’ is extremely important. In post-conflict contexts especially the role of teachers in history classes is influential (Freedman, et al., 2008; McCully, 2012; Metro, 2013)
2.3.2 The power and responsibility of History Teaching

Aside from the important role of teachers in peacebuilding, the teaching on history holds a great potential to lead children to a peaceful future for their country and is a major feature of identity and nation building. As Freedman et al (2008: 666) argue:

“In the aftermath of conflict, revising the content of history curricula presents states with an important means of conveying new narratives of the past, which influence the national identity of citizens, particularly those of the next generation”.

While the function of history in most countries is to build a national identity and shared history to create a feeling of “otherness” towards other nations (McCully, 2012), this power of history teaching becomes extremely important in post conflict contexts, where ethnicity is a big source for constructing identity. McCully (2012) suggests that the creation of a unified national identity is especially difficult in contexts where different ethnicities have experienced discrimination over decades. The strong connection between the history curricula one is taught and the way one’s own identity is built emphasizes why research on history teaching in post-conflict countries is so crucial (Cupcea, 2014).

Hence, history textbooks are highly political, because they are influenced by political considerations and “truths” (Wang, 2009). Nations after a conflict often consider a new and accurate history as essential for peace, and the re-teaching of history has been acknowledged as laying the foundations for reconciliation, reconstruction and a peaceful future (Metro, 2013). However, this re-teaching of history through telling a new “national story” risks endorsing some groups and marginalising others, which could result again in a form of inequality and potential conflict.

According to McBride (2001) has “the interpretation of the past [in Ireland] (...) always been at the heart of the national conflict”. Indeed, history textbooks are presented as teaching neutral and legitimate information, but they are often used as “ideological tools to promote a certain belief system and legitimize an established political and social order” (Apple & Christian-Smith, 1991: 10). If a feeling of “us versus them” is created or enemies in historical events are “dehumanized” through the teaching of history, children develop a feeling of “otherness”, inheriting the risk of violent behaviour against these “other” groups. As Wang (2009) points out, the representation of the past often entails
the use of stereotypes and prejudices to describe the “other”. He suggests focusing on a joint writing process with different conflict parties in order to overcome these risks.

Additionally, a great deal of attention has been given to the “multi perspective approach” (Lopes Cardozo & Hoeks, 2015; Metro, 2013; McCully, 2012). This approach seeks to open students’ minds to the idea that multiple narratives of different historical events are possible, to acknowledge that there is no single truth in history and develop a culture of tolerance. The realization that one’s own history, the history of one’s ethnicity, is only one version and is not “truer” than other versions, is the first step to achieve a more open minded way of engaging with different people. By identifying and analysing the root causes of a conflict and violence in history classes, students’ attitudes towards the “other” change and a process of “humanisation” begins. It opens possibilities for forgiveness and reconciliation (Gill & Niens, 2009).

Next to this basic understanding of history as an underlying focus of education, the materials and methods also play an important role. As mentioned previously, analysis methods such as critical thinking and the acceptance of different opinions in discussions are important for the process of peace and reconciliation, especially when it comes to history teaching and the building of a common identity. Using primary and secondary sources and exposing students to a critical examination of this evidence and a range of views leads to greater mutual understanding of history in society (McCully, 2012). Confronting the past and thinking critically about it is acknowledged as an established norm for reconciliation (Wang, 2009).
3. Research Design

3.1 Problem Statement

The issues discussed in this thesis revolve around the long-lasting conflict between the ethnic minority Mon and the national government of Myanmar since independence in 1948. Due to conflicts based on equal rights, oppression and self-determination, the government has failed to provide quality and affordable education for Mon children, especially in rural areas. In response the Mon people organised their own education system, one that is still operating throughout Mon State. Nevertheless, the Mon people feel discriminated and underrepresented on various levels, although cooperation between the two education systems is increasing. As was pointed out in the theoretical framework, history teaching in schools can be a powerful driver for peace or violence. This thesis is therefore focused on history teachers in Mon schools and their contribution to peace in Myanmar. By focusing on history teachers in Mon State, the aim is to give those silent but influential participants in the peace transformation a voice and enhance understanding of the issues these actors perceive as relevant in their daily life.

The teaching of history plays an important role in identity building processes and has the potential to contribute to peace or hinder it. This research argues that teachers can only act as 'peace agents' if the conditions given support them doing so. It therefore explores the role of history teachers in MNEC schools throughout the peace process.

3.2 Research Location

The following section provides an overview of the field site this research was conducted in. It begins with the broader context of the country of Myanmar and goes on to present detailed information about Mon State and the Mon people. A more contextual passage for the empirical chapters of this thesis is provided later on.
3.2.1 Myanmar

The Republic of the Union of Myanmar is a sovereign country in South-East Asia, with Bangladesh, India, China, Thailand and Laos as neighbouring countries. A former British colony, Myanmar became an independent democratic nation in 1948. Following a military coup in 1962, the state became effectively a military dictatorship until 2011. With the democratic transition and the first elections in 2011, the longest on-going civil war between different ethnic groups and the Burmese majority came to an official end. Although there are still violent conflicts in some areas of the country, most ethnic communities have signed a ceasefire agreement. In November 2015 the second elections took place and as a result the National League for Democracy (NLD), led by the famous female activist Aung San Suu Kyi, won the majority of votes and provides the first democratically elected president. The history of Myanmar is marked with decades of military rule, armed conflicts and oppression. With a dictatorship that lasted over 50 years, people were used to poor governance and stagnating economic development. Many people in Myanmar, particularly ethnic minorities, look back at this time with fear and anxiety. Under military rule ethnic discrimination was the norm, which promoted intolerance and inequalities in society over a long period of time. A history of isolation also developed an atmosphere of distrust and suspicion, where people were not exposed to human rights, democracy and tolerance (UNHCR, 2014). Hence, education can be a crucial component of overcoming these stereotypes and promoting peace by introducing these normative values to the next generation. With a weak state apparatus and purposeful exclusion, the education system has been declining since independence. According to the HDI, the mean of years of schooling in Myanmar lies at only 3.4 and in general the Burmese education system is characterised by poor quality and an outdated pedagogy (Zobrist & McCormick 2013).

3.2.2 Mon State/ Mon Ethnicity

The Mon State is an administrative division in the south of Myanmar. The capital of Mon state is Mawlamyine, where this research was based. The Mon population is rich in history and claim to be the first people to settle in modern day Myanmar. After three Mon kingdoms, the Mon people were under pressure from other ethnic groups, mainly
the Burmese, and were oppressed or fled the country. In the colonial period, the Mon assisted the British with hope of being rewarded with an autonomous state. Thousands of Mon refugees returned to the country during the British rule. In the first years after independence, when the Burmese state was not well constituted, the Mon sought self-determination. In reaction to the military coup in 1962 and the failure of the first democratic system in Myanmar, the separatist “New Mon State Party” (NMSP) was formed, with a more militaristic arm called the Mon National Liberation Front (MNLF). Although the Mon State has had a ceasefire with the government since 1995, Transparency International and other global organisations still report numerous human rights violations in Mon State caused by the Burmese government (Amnesty International, 2015). The relationship between the Burmese government and Mon State has therefore always been difficult and occasionally violent, which makes a peace process tenuous.

Mon state was remarkably successful in developing its own education regime. Beginning in NMSP-controlled areas in the 1970s, it then spread all across the Mon State following the ceasefire agreement in 1995. Different types of schooling had emerged in Mon State: traditional monastic schools run by monks, community schools, ethnic schools and, more recently, “mixed” schools, a cooperation between the government and the Mon National Education Committee (MNEC). Since the democratic transition in 2010 there has been much debate about the presence of non-state schooling in Myanmar and former president Thein Sein eventually called for an expansion of non-state schools (Lall & South, 2014). In 2011 the new and first democratic government decided to focus on decentralisation in the state-sponsored provision of basic education. The decentralisation effort could lead to collaborations between the state and the ethnic education regime, which has the potential to improve the quality of social services and the war-to-peace transformation (Jolliffe, 2014). There are currently 156 MNEC schools and an additional 116 ‘mixed’ schools. This research focused mainly on MNEC schools, but also interviewed teachers from ‘mixed’ schools.
3.3 Research Question and Sub-Questions

- How does history teaching in MNEC schools promote (positive) peace in Myanmar?
  - How is peace/conflict integrated into the history curriculum and in the classroom?
  - How does the teacher's position, work environment and motivation influence their ability to promote peace?
  - What role does the MNEC in general play in the peace process?

3.4 Conceptual Scheme

The conceptual scheme displays the main theoretical assumptions underlying this research. The essential concept is the contribution that education has on a transformation from conflict to peace. Identifying the two key dimensions of this research, history teaching and the role of teachers, it presents their relationship to the peace building process. It is argued that both variables contribute to different
dimensions of the 4R’s peacebuilding approach. This research focused on the motivation behind history teaching and the content of the lessons as crucial aspects for a positive peace transformation. Identity and work environment display the essential dimensions within the role of the teacher that influence their ability to act as ‘agents of peace’.

3.5 Methodology

This research is based on a mixed-methods approach and includes mainly focus groups (n=7) and questionnaires (n=61) with MNEC history teachers. In addition to these, data was collected through observations, identity mapping exercises, MNEC documents and interviews with MNEC representatives. A local supervisor was consulted for academic advice in the field as well as for access issues and an interpreter. Due to organisational barriers the focus groups, questionnaires and identity mappings were combined in a 2-3 hour session. Most of these sessions took place in either the MNEC schools themselves or the NMSP offices of different townships.

3.5.1 Qualitative Data

Focus Groups

The purpose of the focus groups in this research was to grasp multiple perspectives on the issues surrounding history teaching and peace (Kambarelis & Dimitriadis, 2013) in a group of MNEC history teachers and involved around 20 open-ended questions. In regards to this particular tool and the role of the local interpreter, open discussions arose and my influence as a researcher was mitigated (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011).
The focus groups were organised in cooperation with the MNEC office based in Mawlamyine and were located in different parts of Mon State. Because of the history of the conflict, the MNEC schools operate mainly in rural areas, which made access sometimes difficult and time consuming.

The questions for the focus groups focused on four main domains, namely; school environment, history teaching, peaceful society and identity. Although the preparation for the group discussions was always the same, the order of the questions and/or the questions themselves varied from time to time in reaction to the atmosphere or the participants’ answers and reactions. Over the course of the research questions about democracy and the current elections were added, as it became clear during the first focus groups that participants wanted to talk about these topics.

The research draws on data from seven focus groups with an approximate length of 1 hour each. The number of participants varies from 4 to 20, depending on the area they were conducted in and included in total 60 teachers.
**Interviews**

In order to be able to compare perspectives on history teaching and peace between the individual level of MNEC teachers and the organisation MNEC itself, interviews with people that are currently working for MNEC or had been part of the organisation for a long time were conducted. Although the questions for the interviews were mostly the same from the focus groups, some additional questions revolving around MNEC, its history and working progress were added. One interview was conducted with a member of the history curriculum development team and gave particular insight into the process of curriculum development in the MNEC. Three interviews were conducted in total and varied from 35 minutes to almost two hours.

**Identity Mapping**

During the last two qualitative sessions an identity mapping exercise was included. The exercise required the teachers to draw a map of Myanmar and position the different ethnicities on this map. As most of the teachers were not able or did not feel comfortable doing so, they were encouraged to relate other ethnicities in regards to their own on a piece of paper. In this process the teachers had to think about other ethnicities and how they perceive a relationship with these ethnicities. Some were also inspired to include groups of people they want to have more interaction with such as the USA among others. In total, the research managed to collect ten identity maps.

**Observations**

In the planning process of the research, the aim was to undertake classroom observations to develop an impression of the routine in MNEC schools as well as to observe methods being used and the atmosphere in general (Attkinson & Hammersley, 1994). Unfortunately the research was not able to transpose this, due to the end of the school term. Instead of classroom observations in MNEC schools, observations of the MNEC summer school were conducted. The MNEC summer school is run by the same teachers that work in the MNEC schools, but it is based completely on volunteer work and focuses exclusively on Mon language. Most of the students attending these summer schools study the rest of the year at the government school where Burmese is the only language of instruction, and the summer school encourages the children to learn Mon.
Three observations were undertaken in summer schools and gave a small amount of insight into the teaching routine of MNEC teachers.

**Analysis**

The qualitative data analysis included data gathered through interviews, focus group discussions, identity mapping, observations and field notes. The interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed upon arrival and analysed with support of the program Atlas.ti. The aim of the analysis was to be open to emerging and unexpected themes to reduce the researcher's subjectivity as it is acknowledged that participants have their own reality, which is with the presence of an independent researcher already influenced. The research therefore used open coding, organising the data in different themes around peace, conflict, history teaching and identity. The groups of information were then linked back to the research question to be able to find comprehensive answers.

Data from identity mapping exercises, observations and field notes were used to complement the results from interviews and focus group discussions.

### 3.5.2 Quantitative Data

**Questionnaires**

To complement the qualitative data on issues around history teaching and peace, the research used quantitative questionnaires including 30 variables. Their purpose was to gather more comparable data, which helps supply detailed information about individual differences of participants. The indicators were separated in to three different groups relating to teacher training and environment; ethnic, identity and values, and demographics. The questionnaire included both closed and open-ended questions (Porst, 2011). In regards to the analysis of the data, most of the questions are based on a Likert scale, which permits...
explanatory data analysis (Diaz-Bone, 2006). In total, 61 questionnaires were collected during the period of the research.

**Analysis**

The quantitative data was analysed with SPSS, using mostly descriptive analysis tools. The questionnaire entailed in total 32 variables, but not every single one was used specifically in the analysis. With data from the questionnaire an overview of the participants’ demographics was created. The analysis draws on frequency scales and cross tabulation and does not try to make causal assumptions. It is mainly used to complement and support the qualitative data.

**3.6 Ethical considerations**

As I was engaging with a very sensitive issue around the violent history of Myanmar, ethical considerations needed to be taken into account. Especially for the Mon people, who were in conflict with the military junta for decades and are still experiencing human rights abuses and discrimination, the atmosphere during some focus groups was tense. Interacting with history teachers made it clear that some of them had own experiences with violent conflict in the past and I had to be careful not to ask inappropriate questions and make them feel as comfortable and safe as possible. Acknowledging the power relations between me as a researcher and the participants of this study, I was very sure to clarify my position and the motivation behind this research to everyone involved, if in an active or passive role. I am aware that I have a biased mindset when it comes to history teaching, due to my own experiences being educated in the German school system with a particular relation to history teaching. My own reaction during focus group discussion on topics such as democracy and elections, which are highly controversial in Myanmar (Metro, 2014), automatically generated a narrative of the “truth”, influenced the participants and subsequently affected the results of this research. Depending on where the focus groups were conducted, my position as a researcher and my behaviour varied. In the villages where my translator knew the participants, the atmosphere was friendlier and the participants were more open. They knew my position very clearly from the beginning on and ethical considerations weren’t present at all time. When the discussions took place in NMSP offices the situation was
much more official and my position as a researcher much stronger. I focused on stating clear my aim and purpose. In this research a form of “localised ethics” (Kovats-Bernat, 2002) clearly applied as my ethical considerations depended on the situation of the focus group discussions. Although I don’t have written consent forms for the focus groups, I obtained oral consent from all and the people were aware that I would use the data for academic purposes. It is extremely important in this research that the participants are anonymous, as the cooperation between the government and MNEC is still fragile and the teachers should be protected against any harm.

3.7 Limitations

The language barrier affected this research to a great extent. Because I didn’t speak the language of my participants, I needed an interpreter for every focus group. Although we discussed the research in the beginning and my position as a researcher, I had the feeling that my interpreter occasionally influenced the participants in the way she was translating or explaining. I was dependent on her answers and needed to trust her translation of the outcomes and her summary of group discussions. I was therefore unable to personally grasp every nuance of the focus group discussions and the results are biased by this limitation.

The end of the school term was as well a limitation to this research. It was a hectic time of the school year as everyone was preparing for exams or planning for the new school year, which in the case of MNEC, meant searching for financing and debating with donors. Due to this limitation I had to wait sometimes for weeks to set new dates for the focus group sessions. Additionally, most of the focus group sessions were in rural areas, which made the travel time consuming and costly. Without these barriers the research could have managed to collect more enriched data, especially for the qualitative part of the research.
4. Regional Context

The following chapter introduces the context in which the research was conducted. It supports the understanding of the empirical analysis later on and offers a framework with which to contextualise the research results. It draws a small picture of the participants’ reality in order to enhance the understanding of the outcomes of this research. It begins with a recapitulation of the official peace process in Myanmar, followed by a detailed revision and explanation of the education reform and its impacts on the Mon Education System.

4.1 The Peace Process in Myanmar

The peace process in Myanmar has been highly complex, largely due to the involvement of varied groups of stakeholders. Aside from the obvious parties - the government and the Ethnic Armed Groups (EAG) - CBOs, CSOs and the international donor community are also involved in the discussions (Lall, 2016). Although the government recognises that the peace process entails more than the political and military legacy of the conflict and involves as well socioeconomic issues, it has no particular budget allocation to the peace process (ibid).

The government’s focus in the peace debates so far has been to concentrate on the ceasefire agreements and their implementation, whereas the EAGs go beyond the official notion of peace (Myanmar Peace Monitor, 2016). The aim of a three-phase plan by the government is to sign an eternal peace agreement with all conflict parties in the presence of the parliament. The government’s demands of integration into the Union of Myanmar, the promise not to pursue national sovereignty further and the acceptance of the constitution of 2008 pose particular problems for the EAGs and constitute core concerns within the ethnic population.

As one of the New Mon State Party (NMSP) representatives stated, “(w)e did not accept the 2008 constitution but they approved through referendum and formed the government. We cannot accept this government and constitution but we have to make a deal with them although we do not accept the government legitimacy. [...] If we cannot change [the constitution] then we cannot get peace and civil war can start again and this will block the country’s development.” (Cited in: Lall, 2016). Although the government
claims that it is possible to make changes through winning seats in the parliament, the EAGs disagree, especially as 25% of seats in the parliament are guaranteed for the military legitimised through the unaccepted constitution. The various ethnic groups, including the NMSP, realise on the one hand that the time is ripe for the possibility of a successful peace process, but on the other hand do not want to build on an undemocratic foundation. Giving up their arms, but letting the government keep the national military takes a high degree of trust and a strong belief in the peace process. It symbolises a point of no return for the EAGs and would place them in a position of dependency. The EAGs have demanded an independent outside negotiator, namely international organisations or state representatives.

The EAGs base their peace negotiations on the Panglong Agreement of 1947. This Agreement came into existence amidst the independence struggle between the national independence hero and father of “the Lady” Aung San and the ethnic groups of Myanmar. It ensures self-determination, federalism and equal rights, which are still the main demands within the ethnic population. Cultural protection in the future and amnesty for the armed groups are priorities instead of claims for reparation by the government.

In the peace discussion the ethnic groups organised themselves in two different groups representing their common wishes and interests - the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC), which the NMSP is part of, and the Working Group on Ethnic Coordination (WGEC). One of the main demands of the UNFC is the legalisation of the EAGs, especially those with ceasefire agreements with the government, which would result in the NMSP becoming a legal organisation along with its education department, the MNEC. It would simplify processes around financial matters and would also symbolise a step forward in acknowledging and valuing ethnic education in Myanmar. So far this has not been implemented and the NMSP as well as MNEC struggle with their illegal condition.

Although there are still violent conflicts in some regions of Myanmar, the peace process is viewed as quite successful and optimistic (Lall, 2016). In an informal nationwide poll of perceptions of and opinions on the transition, 69% of participants
expressed satisfaction with the peace process. The poll was conducted in all seven ethnic states and involved 1,329 participants in total. However in Mon State, only 18% of participants agree that the peace process fully satisfies their demands (ibid). This demonstrates that there is still a long way to go to achieve positive peace in Myanmar and that education is an especially crucial aspect in Mon State.

During research and in discussions with participants about the transition, peace always referred to the wider process of peace; a peaceful society and coexistence between all ethnic groups in Myanmar. It never referred to the official peace discussions between the EAGs and the government or the official peace process monitored by the Mon Regions Peace Monitoring Group, but rather to the implications of the peace process for the everyday life of the teachers and their future.

In order to avoid confusion between the ethnic armed group, the NMSP, and the Mon National Education Committee, the relationship is described shortly. The New Mon State Party was formed in 1958 as an armed opposition to the central military rule of Myanmar. Its aims are constitutional and political reforms to enhance self-determination for the Mon people. The Mon National Education Committee developed as an affiliate department to provide basic education for children in Mon State during times of conflict. It is nowadays still a part of the NMSP and in many regions the people are both connected to MNEC and NMSP.

4.2 Reforming Myanmar’s Education System

Similar to the complexity of the peace process in Myanmar is the formation of education, its political implications and its aims for development. Different stakeholders within the parliament (such as the NLD, the military or the president) as well as international organisations fight over the agenda of education. Reform of Myanmar’s education system could either contribute to peace or deepen the division between different stakeholders in the conflict. The consequences for the MNEC education systems are particularly explored in this section.

In theory, government schooling has been free since independence. However, with a steady decrease in GDP spending on education, the parent’s contribution to their
children’s education has steadily increased with schoolbooks, school uniforms or even teachers’ salary. As in the case of Mon families, ethnic minorities often could not afford state education or lived remotely, without any access to government schools. In some active conflict zones state teachers stopped teaching, simply because it was too dangerous for them to stay. In response to these challenges, the Mon National Education Committee was formed.

With the opening of the country and the democratic transition, Myanmar signed the “Education for All” declaration and obligated itself to offer free basic education to every child in the country (Ministry of Education, 2007). As former President Thein Sein announced, the three main priorities for the country were reconciliation with the NLD, ethnic peace and economic reform (Lall, 2016). In the Mon context especially, ethnic peace is strongly linked to the education sector, as most Mon communities recognised the importance of education and were able to set up their own schools in absence of state school access. In the last few years, education has become a fourth priority for the government as they also draw the connection between schooling and economic development. In 2011 the government decided to focus on decentralisation of the education system to provide better access and quality of schooling to children in Myanmar. In reaction, UNICEF initiated a research program called SITAN in Mon State in order to identify what capacity building the local and state staff would need if the decentralisation policy were to be pushed through.

The government Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR) seeks to determine the problems and challenges that the education sector, including the curriculum, is facing and attempts to find solutions. Unfortunately, the ethnic education groups are not part of the reform process, which has led to, as Marie Lall argues, a “disenfranchisement of the ones who for decades assured the education of the ethnic groups” and the “disconnection between the peace process and the education reform” (Lall, 2016: 183).

The government is in danger of making the same mistake twice by not utilising the ideas and perspectives of different population groups in the education process. The state education system has in the past used Bama Saga (Burmese language) as the only language of instruction across the schooling system in order to further develop a national identity. As the existence of ethnic education systems show, this has not had the intended effect, but has rather increased feelings of a “Burmanisation” among ethnic
minorities such as the Mon. With practices of manipulating history textbooks displaying Bamar people as superior, ethnic identities were marginalised and ethnic groups segregated. The goal of the government has been for decades to “assimilate and disempower Burma’s minorities.” (Callahan, 2010, p. 167).

In response, monasteries provided ethnic language classes and literature and cultural committees emerged, which gradually transformed into education systems providing a viable alternative to many ethnic families. Following this logic, the Mon National Education System was established, which currently has 156 schools and 760 teachers. Although the decentralisation of education and former President Thein Sein’s call to expand non-state schools lead to more cooperation between the Mon education system and the government schools, the isolation of the discussion about the education reform entails risks that could endanger the peace process and re-ignite conflict. The past of the education sector is particularly conflictive in Myanmar and therefore poses a big challenge for the peace process among all ethnic groups.

4.3 Overview of the Participants

The following chapters provide a presentation of the research’s results. In order to set the scene and introduce the participants, the tables and figures below present some demographics of the teachers that were interviewed in this research. It gives a small overview of the background constellation and contextualises the empirical chapters.

![Figure 6: Quantitative Data 'age of participants']

Figure 5: 'Age of Participants in years'
This bar chart indicates that most of the teachers were aged from 20-30, which to some extent explains why I didn’t encounter much direct conflict experience, as most of the teachers were born right before or after the ceasefire agreement. It also reflects the average age of MNEC teachers in general.

The table below introduces some details about the gender, the region they are teaching in, and their marital status. Unsurprisingly, many participants were female as the role of a teacher and the development of children is perceived as the duty of a woman. An additional explanation may be that many men leave the village they live in or even the country to find better paid work to provide for their family. The women are the ones staying behind in the village to care for the children and often become teachers at a very young age. Over 80% of the teachers were teaching in rural areas, which matches with the original goal of MNEC to providing basic education to children in remote areas. It shows that MNEC is still fulfilling this duty.

Many teachers (n=46) were single when this research was conducted, which is a result of their age. I experienced in the field that many younger women have boyfriends but would never admit so in an official setting such as the questionnaire. Therefore it is unsurprising that only one teacher answered being in a relationship. Additionally, the salary of an MNEC teacher would make it difficult to support a family, which possibly explains why so many young women were part of this research and in general work at MNEC schools.
Table 1: Summarized Quantitative Data ‘gender, region and marital status’ of participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Marital status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>female</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
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<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>46</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(7 missing)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The next chapters analyse in detail the connections between peace, identity and inequality in Mon schools within the group of history teachers. Issues of redistribution, representation, recognition and reconciliation associated with contributions to the peace process will be explored in order to answer the main questions of this research.

The first chapter explores the MNEC as an organisation and its contributions to the general peace process through cooperation with the government. The following two chapters contrast this image by analysing the perspective of history teachers in MNEC schools. Firstly, they describe the inequalities the teachers face and explore their implications for the peace process. Secondly, issues around the identity of history teachers and their influence on identity building processes in schools are examined.
5. The Mon National Education Committee and its Contribution to Peace

“Mon National Education Committee (MNEC) is dedicated to creating a society that provides its people with basic education to enable all ethnic groups to peacefully coexist” (MNEC, 2016)

The MNEC in its vision acknowledges the important connection between education and peace in Myanmar. It sees equal education for all ethnic groups including the Bamar as a major tool for promoting peace during the next years.

This chapter engages with the organisation itself and its major peace contributions. It argues that MNEC has had a wider impact on the national peace process through increasing cooperation with the government, but that differences between MNEC and the teachers on the ground concerning the attitude towards the government exist and affect the peace transformation conflictive.

5.1 MNEC’s Peace Contribution

The Mon National Education Committee consists of approximately 30 staff members and provides basic education in 156 schools with around 720 teachers (Interview 1). It was established in the 1970s and has mostly been funded from outside the country, mainly through international organisations like UNICEF or donor countries such as Norway. Today MNEC is part of the “Myanmar Indigenous Network for Education” (MINE) and has been described often as a “good practice” on how to combine state and ethnic education (Lall & South, 2014).

While conducting this research it became evident that MNEC is fostering its cooperation with the government on various levels. Firstly, by increasing the number of “mixed schools” and therefore ensuring that more school children learn Mon language and history, the MNEC has found a way to work with the government instead of avoiding it. Although the mixed school approach has some negative side effects for the teachers, which will be discussed in the following chapters, it has had a positive contribution for
the relationship between the two education systems and can be described as part of a trust-building initiative. Constant, on-going dialogue and cooperation between members of the two education systems create a safe and reliable relationship.

In addition to the mixed schools program, the MNEC and the government also collaborate on the development of teacher trainings. Unfortunately, some interviews revealed that the MNEC’s input to the content of this training is very limited, which suggests an imbalance in the relationship. Particularly in decision-making processes such as teacher trainings, the MNEC and the state should share an equal voice in order to represent all stakeholders.

As a member of the curriculum development team at MNEC indicates is the cooperation with the government increasingly important to support Mon people acknowledging that the time is ripe for peaceful cooperation:

“We have the opportunity to work with government, but not for the government, for our people.” (Interview 2)

He continued arguing that still most of the Mon children are taught in government schools, hence a stronger influence of Mon people in government schools and an alignment of curricula for all children is desired to foster a stronger position of MNEC in discussions around education and promote a peace process.

The MNEC clearly identifies the government and the Ministry of Education as a “good asset” (Interview 1), especially for resources, and therefore seeks to increase cooperation in order to secure funding from the government. This urgent need to increase funding is largely due to a range of challenges that the MNEC has faced in recent years. Since the opening of the country in 2011 and because of the government reform process, most financial assistance from outside is channelled directly to the Myanmar government and is not focussed on ethnic education systems anymore. As a result, the MNEC has experienced a decline in resources and partners over the last few years, which has developed into an unstable financial situation for the organisation and the teachers. The MNEC teacher job becomes even less attractive due to problems of unreliable financing, which results in another issue for MNEC. As the capacity building officer at MNEC expressed:

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A detailed discussion around teacher training at MNEC follows in the next chapter
“We sometimes at MNEC feel that we are losing teachers to the government” (Interview 1, Capacity Building Officer MNEC)

Because the state has increased its salary for teachers and MNEC is continuously losing financial resources, the recruitment of teachers has become a major challenge. Even though the Myanmar Peace Support Initiative (MPSI) has lobbied strongly for the MNEC in Yangon, they were not able to obtain financial support (Lall, 2016). Without enough teachers, the MNEC will not be able to sustain all of its schools and the teachers left working for MNEC are showing real passion for the cause as demonstrated in this quote:

“(…) we are all volunteer. If you don’t love Mon, you don’t come and spend time.” (F5)

As a result, those teachers who have a sense for nationalism and a strong connection to their ethnic identity stay in the schools and teach children their absolute and mostly unquestioned ‘love’ for the Mon people. This has the potential to increase the divide between the Mon and other ethnic and social groups in the country and thereby hinders a peaceful transformation.

Letting the MNEC drain in this way will not contribute to a transformation to positive peace, because a large proportion of Mon people want their children to go to MNEC schools to learn the language and history. It is for many children in rural areas the only possibility to receive primary education, because the government still lags behind with providing basic education to all children. Although the government has signed the ‘Education for All’ declaration, it is still failing to implement it throughout the country. Ethnic education systems such as the MNEC can help to achieve this goal by contributing to the country’s development, which eventually enhances the chances for peaceful cooperation between all ethnic groups.

Through a capacity building approach that includes the whole community, the MNEC does much more than just provide basic education. With ‘Parent-Teacher Associations’ and ‘Youth Development’ (see appendix 3) the MNEC contributes to peaceful transformation on various levels of the society and represents more than just the school children. The MNEC has the legitimacy to promote a peace process with the government through a range of initiatives for the Mon people and contributes to the trust building process between Mon state and the government.
While talking to history teachers in the focus groups, there were no major differences between the specific groups in attitudes or opinions. However, interviews with MNEC staff revealed that there were differences in attitudes between the MNEC teachers in the classroom and the people who worked or had been working in the MNEC offices. Different levels of willingness for stronger alignment of the two education systems and differing attitudes on the country’s development in general have an impact on the contribution to an overall peace process.

When talking to MNEC staff about democracy and the government, it was discovered that they had a more open attitude towards the recent development than I experienced with the teachers. They positively described cooperation on various levels and seemed satisfied with discussions with the government. In contrast to the teachers, there were no feelings of mistrust or suspicion present; it was rather believed that the government is open towards cooperation with ethnic minorities.

“The government is trying to listen to the ethnic minorities” (Interview 1)

These strong differences in relationships with the government and democracy are likely explained by a greater number of interactions between MNEC and the government. While the teachers are barely in contact with the government and if so, only with other teachers, the MNEC staff are regularly involved in meetings and discussions with government representatives. The majority of the time, third-party organisations like UNICEF also sit at the table, helping to diffuse tension and ease the negotiations.

The value of democracy and its contribution to peace was more tangible within the MNEC staff than in the focus group discussions, which can be explained by being more exposed to democratic processes in their organisation and being more educated about it. There was a lot of interest in the last elections and democratic values in general, although I also occasionally experienced hesitation.

In general, the MNEC office was much more hopeful for the future and supported an increasing alignment between the two education systems in order to foster sustainable peace in Myanmar, remaining independent from the state was still a priority though.
5.2 Concluding Remarks

The previous chapter explained in detail how the Mon National Education Committee as an organisation supports the peace process through three major contributions. Firstly, it builds trust between the government and Mon teachers through an increasing number of encounters and by general cooperation with the government. Secondly, through its community approach it affects various levels of the Mon population and therefore contributes to a peaceful transformation on multiple layers of society. Lastly, with its provision of basic education, especially in rural areas, MNEC willingly supports the government’s EFA goal of providing education to every child of the country, which subsequently contributes to the overall development of the country and decreases intergroup tensions and inequalities.

MNEC affects the reconciliation process through this major peace contribution as it demonstrates how to work together with the former “enemy” to achieve own goals, in this case more funding, and forgive the past by concentrating on the future. Efforts are made within the dimension of ‘reconciliation’ and ‘recognition’ by increasing cooperation and the teaching of Mon language and history in “mixed schools”, but problems remain around issues of ‘redistribution’. Without equal financial ‘redistribution’ of cooperation and the inclusion of MNEC in decision-making processes, the further peace process is endangered.

MNEC has made a positive impact on the peace process in combining the curricula and allowing transition to the state education system, but the remaining financial inequalities between the two education systems are a threat for the peaceful coexistence of the next generations in Myanmar and leads to precarious tension between MNEC and state schools.

Although it is demonstrated that MNEC finds legitimacy in the peace process and impact on the positive peace transition, experiences with the MNEC teachers in focus group discussion disclosed differences. They revealed a wider problem: cooperation between the two education systems is increasing, but within MNEC schools the relationship with the government and Bamar people remains fierce and specific images of the enemy are kept alive – especially through history teaching. These problematic
issues around inequalities and identity among the group of teachers in MNEC schools are explored in the two following chapters.
6. The Negative Impact of Inequalities

This chapter seeks to explain how inequalities between the state and the Mon education system are impacting MNEC teachers negatively and therefore curbing their ability to promote a sustainable peace process. It is argued that through enhanced cooperation between the MNEC and the government, inequalities in school facilities, salary or teacher trainings become more visible, which instead of fostering peacebuilding, endangers any transition from negative to positive peace long-term.

“Equal rights and then we can say it is peaceful Burma.” (F5, female teacher)

The strongest wish of many participants in this research in order to achieve peace in Myanmar was equal rights, as expressed in the quote above. It has often been discussed in relation to the Panglong Agreement and the NMSP. The memory of the Panglong Agreement is still vivid; it is perceived as a fair agreement between ethnic minorities and the majority of Bamar people, but was also more than 60 years ago and never really came into existence because of the military coup. In their view, the people who betrayed the Panglong Agreement, namely the military and the autocratic system, are still the same people in power today, and can logically not been trusted after a history of tension. The possibility that the people on the ‘other side’ might have changed and are truly committed to the peace discussions is not imaginable. This attitude and static view of the government hinders the building of trust and impedes moving forward together to achieve sustainable peace. It demonstrates how the past still haunts the present and indicates that a true reconciliation process among the teachers hasn’t really begun.

When asked about equal rights and their meaning, teachers described it as being able to make their own decisions for the Mon people without having to listen to the government or anybody else. The quantitative data suggest the same, as equality was with an overwhelming majority the most important value for the teachers in a peaceful society – 59 respondents out of 60 agreed with equality being ‘totally important’ for a peaceful society. The teachers indeed also agreed on values such as trust and tolerance, but with far less conformity.
This desire for equality and equal rights can be explained by the many inequalities teachers face in their personal lives as Mon people, but also in their position as teachers in MNEC schools. Fighting inequalities and guaranteeing equal rights is perceived as full recognition of the ethnic identity and would contribute to a peaceful Myanmar.

6.1 Inequalities in the teachers’ position and environment

One of the first steps of the government in 2011 was to increase the salary of social servants, including the base teacher salary (Lall, 2016). One of the interviewees reported that the state teachers earn around 150.000 Kyat per month, which equates to around 100 Euro. On the contrary, the MNEC teachers earn 20.000 Kyat per month at maximum (around 13 Euros). This increase in state salaries resulted in greater pay inequalities between state and MNEC teachers and had the effect of increasing discrimination against MNEC teachers, who feel less worthy.

Therefore, one of the biggest conflict issues that arose during the focus group discussions was the payment gap between state and MNEC teachers. This chart shows that many MNEC teachers are not satisfied with their payment, because it is most of the time irregular and not enough to make a decent living. More than 70% of the participants vary between categories from 1-3, with 1 meaning ‘not satisfied at all’ and 5 meaning ‘totally satisfied’.
As one of the officers at the MNEC explained, most teachers get paid every three months, sometimes even longer due to budget constraints. This payment is handed out by their head teachers, who get the money from the township officer, who himself gets it from the MNEC office. Salaries have to take a long journey through the system before it arrives to the individual teacher, and although there is no evidence of corruption, it is a fact that the teachers occasionally don’t get paid at all.

The unequal distribution of salary between the state and the MNEC teachers has strained relationships between the two groups, largely due to feelings of discrimination stemming from the salary discrepancy. Additionally, the MNEC teachers, as the quote below highlights, hold the government responsible for the problem, which has a negative impact on their perception of the government in general. Not are only the individual relationships damaged, but a new negative characteristic of the ‘other’ is also created – they willingly don’t support MNEC to harm the Mon people.
“She said, for the salary, for the allowance of the salary they already asked the government to pay more and the government not allow.” (F2, female teacher)

As one participant expressed, many Mon teachers believe that the government does not want to support MNEC on issues of the teacher salaries. This mindset nurtures resentment against the government and the state teachers, who are mainly Bamar, and increases the division between “us” and “the other”.

The quantitative data slightly suggests that teachers who are more satisfied with their salary are more likely to believe in a peaceful future as all of the teachers who are totally satisfied with their salary, totally believe in a peaceful future. It seems that if the burden of worrying about surviving from one’s salary is taken away and teachers are better able to provide for a family, they are subsequently encouraged to envision a peaceful future.

Table 2: Crosstabulation 'Believing in a peaceful future * Being satisfied with the salary'

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I believe a peaceful society for Myanmar is possible * Are you satisfied with what you get paid monthly as a teacher? (1- totally disagree; 5 – totally agree * 1- totally unsatisfied; 5- totally satisfied)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I believe a peaceful society for Myanmar is possible</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you satisfied with what you get paid monthly as a teacher?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similarly to the salary inequalities, MNEC schools also face a lower average quality of school facilities, such as classroom buildings or teaching/learning materials. The differences between the two schools are demonstrated in the two pictures below, the left from a MNEC school and the right from a government school. While the government school is equipped with tables and chairs, the MNEC school children sit on the floor. This affects their learning ability, as it is easier to learn when you are comfortable. Besides the classroom equipment, the MNEC children have to share textbooks or pencils, which
is not the case in the government school. It hinders the learning process for MNEC children, because they are always dependent on others and can’t learn at home to improve their performance. Additionally, there are differences in the school buildings. The government school is built of concrete and has windows to close, which facilitates a quiet and safe learning atmosphere. On the other hand, in the MNEC school, it is much easier for the children to get distracted by noises or people, because the room lacks windows or doors and is located directly next to a street.

The teacher in this particular MNEC school explained that this year there will be a shortage of schoolbooks because UNICEF is no longer financially supporting the MNEC in this township. This financial fragility results in an impeded learning environment for the children and produces a learning disadvantage.

The teachers were aware of these inequalities and most saw it not as a failure of the MNEC to acquire funds, but a responsibility of the government for not financing the MNEC.

6.2 Teacher Training at MNEC

In discussing teacher training sessions, many teachers expressed how it helped them to become better teachers by learning new teaching methods, materials and skills such as time planning and management. One teacher indicated that the training removed a burden for her:
“Before she didn’t join [the teacher training], she was tired of teaching.”
(F7, young female teacher)

Such training allows teachers to perform better and the children are happier with the lessons. Most of the teachers had attended short in-service teacher training provided by the MNEC, which are normally anywhere between 10-45 days and are done alongside teaching in class. The two most popular ones among the teachers that were interviewed were “Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking” and “Child Centre Approach”. When the teachers were describing a ‘good teacher’ from their perspective, the words ‘child centred’ and ‘critical thinking’ were often repeated. It suggests that the training sessions had an effect on the teachers’ idea about what constitutes good teaching. The question remains how it is transferred in the classroom.

It was surprising that these trainings do not follow the same structure every time they are offered. The content of the trainings highly depend on the trainer and are never the same, therefore some teachers undertook some sessions multiple times. The MNEC also offers mobile teacher trainers who visit the teachers in class for observations, and courses on becoming a teacher trainer (ToT) (for further information see appendix 2).

Although many of the teachers had teacher training, the data shows that not all of them got a certificate for it or were aware that they got one.

![Figure 11: 'Did you have teacher training?'](image1)

![Figure 10: 'Do you have an official certificate as a teacher?'](image2)
Either way, the consequence is the same; teachers felt that their training was not worth as much as the training of government teachers, even though it helped them improve their own teaching skills. This feeling of not being worth as much as the “other” side results in a hierarchy among teachers and education systems, further fuelling conflicts and disagreements. Most of the teacher trainings are not recognised by the government and this makes it difficult for MNEC teachers to compete with state teachers.

Inequalities between recognised certifications and training further divide the teacher groups and school system as MNEC teachers are limited to the MNEC system, which is not the desired aim when trying to foster cooperation in order to promote a peaceful coexistence. Although through a recent change of policies and a shortage of state teachers the government has increasingly employed MNEC teachers, this is not perceived as progress in the recognition of MNEC teachers, but rather as the government ‘stealing’ MNEC teachers because there is no alternative solution. The result is that MNEC teachers feel the government is exploiting them and causing the recruitment problem MNEC is facing. Hence, the attitude towards the government worsens and a peaceful cooperation is not likely.

In one focus group teachers explained a training session, which they called the “module” and seemed to be a cooperation between the government and the MNEC. Further exploring this cooperation in an interview with the capacity building officer at MNEC, it proved to be indeed joint venture, but
mostly between UNICEF and the government. The “effective teaching and learning” module is used in MNEC teacher training, but unfortunately was an initiative from UNICEF rather than from the MNEC, which demonstrates that MNEC is occasionally excluded from the decision-making processes on the content and organisation of their trainings.

Nevertheless, I did experience in some regions and schools an increase in cooperation between state and MNEC teachers. Either in the “mixed schools”, where MNEC sends a teacher to teach Mon language and history in state schools, or in monthly meetings between the school teachers encouraged by MNEC and the government. The mixed schools approach seems to be a good way of combining the two education systems, but it also entails some risks. The government indeed allows Mon language and history in state schools, but does not support the teaching. The financial and organisational burden is shouldered by the MNEC, more particularly on the teachers. This uneven distribution of responsibility and resources makes it difficult for the MNEC and their teachers to sustain such practices in the future and doesn't support a shared process of alignment. This example shows that while an increase in encounters and cooperation are forms of desired progress between the two former conflict groups, they can have negative effects if the cooperation is unequally divided, especially when the ethnic minority has to put in more effort than they can afford. Even a 50/50 share of responsibility and resources would not equal a fair distribution because the government has a bigger pool of resources to draw on. It suggests that in order to strengthen reconciliation efforts such as by increasing encounters, other dimensions of the peace process, like the redistribution of these encounters, need to be settled first. Some teachers expressed, as demonstrated in the quote below, that the monthly meetings stress them rather than actually supporting the intergroup relationships, although they acknowledge that it also has positive effects in the contact with each other.

“During their holiday they want to relax, but they have to participate in government group, no more time with the family, more time with the state.” (F2, older group of female teachers)

Increasing cooperation and number of encounters with the aim of developing a peaceful relationship between state schools and MNEC schools, has turned out to have
the opposite effect, and is perceived as a hardship within the group of MNEC teachers. This example demonstrates that the intention of both sides to foster peaceful cooperation can develop negatively if the context of the teachers is not considered.

6.3 Inequalities in the political sphere

Inequalities were not only visible on a financial or resource level of teachers. Many participants expressed that the democratic system works unevenly for different groups of society and they felt disadvantaged. Hence, the general attitude towards democracy was negative, which will be explored in the following section. It provides an interpretation of the teachers’ perception of democracy and critically analyses the impact on the peace process.

Aung San Suu Kyi – A hope for Myanmar?

Looking from the outside at Myanmar and its development, people tend to get very excited. Excited about the democratic elections, excited about the NLD and probably most excited about Aung San Suu Kyi, the noble peace prize winner who gave so much for her country and was under house arrest for 15 years.

Discussing democracy, the elections and Aung San Suu Kyi with Mon teachers gave me a different picture of the enthusiasm and hope many people feel. For them Aung San Suu Kyi was two things: largely a disappointment and secondly a Bamar woman.

“They had the Aung San Suu Kyi announcement that she is kind of for equal rights for the salary at the state level, but also for our nationality (...). She said that, but nothing happened.”

For the Mon, little has changed in Myanmar with Aung San Suu Kyi’s help – at least according to the teachers. Although you can argue whether that is really the case, it doesn’t make a difference right now, because the people believe what they believe. Describing her as Bamar to me, made me realise that this is exactly what she is to the ethnic minorities. She is not a fighter for democracy or the one hope for the ethnicities to achieve self-determination or equal rights, she is just Bamar and not to be trusted too much. The hope I experienced before coming into the country and in Yangon, didn’t hold up the moment I arrived in Mawlamyine. For the Mon teachers it is better than before, but not quite good yet.

The former president of Myanmar Thein Sein said: “There can never be peace without democracy nor democracy without peace” (cited in Lall, 2016: 104) and thereby stresses the government’s view on democracy and its importance for the future of the country. The extent to which the system under the rule of Thein Sein was in reality a democratic system has been debated, but nevertheless, it demonstrates that democratic processes are valued by the national government.
“You know, our Mon we don’t know about democracy. We know about our federalism” (F5, male head teacher)

This quote expresses the idea I was repeatedly hearing from teachers talking about democracy. It is interesting for two reasons. The first part entails an argument many teachers were using, saying that people are not educated enough to participate in the elections or understand the democratic system. Secondly, the last part of the quote is related to the wish of self-determination. The teachers don’t believe that democracy will change anything for ethnic minorities, but prioritise federal decision making processes, which enables them to be independent and autonomous within the country.

Although it was an extremely interesting time politically while this research was conducted, with the second democratic elections having recently been held (with the majority of votes going to the NLD) and it was close to the announcement of the new president, teachers in Mon State didn’t share the excitement.

“The democracy meaning is very good, very powerful. But after a while democracy is bla bla bla.” (F4, group of young female teacher)

The general attitude towards democracy is best encapsulated in this quote. It is explained by disappointments from the past and the legacy of the military dictatorship, that people are not yet able to believe the situation has changed and will have a long-term effect. Scepticism and indifference describes best the position most teachers were taking. The government was mostly referred to as the “Burmese government” which demonstrates how the teachers distance themselves and their ethnicity from democracy and the political entity. The distinction between “us and them” in political terms hinders nation-building efforts and decreases the government’s legitimacy, which ultimately prevents the Mon people from identifying themselves with the new democratic nation.

“The teacher said, she doesn’t believe, they [the government] are not working with us.” (F2, female teacher)

When discussing the last elections and the NLD it became obvious relatively quickly that the NLD is not believed to represent ethnic rights (see box 2). The teachers said that they were voted for, even in Mon State, but mostly because they were popular
and had the skills and resources to be present in many villages. It is linked with the argument that the people were not educated enough to vote for themselves and so they listened to promises made during the campaigns.

“Our ethnic right depends on the NLD, because we have no more people on the state and the national level” (Interview 2, Myint Mon)

The NLD and especially Aung San Suu Kyi is perceived from the international community as a real chance for development in Myanmar, realising that ethnic minorities do not share this perception and are sceptical about the democratic development was extremely interesting and demonstrated how deep the division in the country still is.

The most important step for the teachers to achieve something through democracy is to unite the Mon people under one party. Currently there are three different Mon political parties – The All Mon Regions Party (AMRP), the Mon National Party (MNP) and the Mon Women Party. While the latter one doesn’t have much influence, the first two are strong competitors in the elections. With only one seat at the Union level (Transnational Institute, 2015) it is understandable that the teachers were sceptic about the outcomes of democracy for their ethnicity. They don’t feel represented by the government and therefore don’t support the government – in their private life as well as in their function as a teacher.

The three parties were described as working against each other and the teachers expressed that they would prefer one party that represents all Mon people and is therefore stronger. The unity argument the teachers used suggests that they are not exposed to a multi-party system and cannot envision the benefits of it. The unifying element for them is interestingly not ethnic rights or self-determination exclusively, but only in combination with the ethnic identity. It didn’t occur to them that a comprehensive party of ethnic minorities could be a sign of progress at all. It showed that the country and even the democratic system are still almost exclusively defined through ethnicity, which makes a greater cooperation between these groups difficult.

The constitutional right of the military to automatically possess 25% of the seats in parliament was a particular indication for the participants that there is no equal political

3 Ethnic parties like ‘Ethnic National Development Party’ exist, but don’t have much influence in the political arena yet
representation for the ethnic minorities. This negative perception of democracy promotes a style of teaching that will pass these opinions onward to the students, thereby reproducing itself. The clear distinction between the desire for self-determination and the indifference towards democracy does not support a political coalescence.

Nevertheless, one teacher expressed some positive implications of the democratic transition. She indicated that nowadays she is able to say whatever she wants and must not be afraid of it anymore. The increasing freedom of speech is extremely important for an ongoing peace process, as it is crucial that both sides can be honest and critique each other without any possible repercussions; it builds trust and increases belief in a peaceful coexistence.

6.4 Concluding Remarks

This chapter explored several inequalities that Mon teachers face either in their working environment or in the broader political sphere. These inequalities interfere with the wider peace process and hinder the teacher’s ability to adopt a peace promoting position in the classroom. It suggests that good intentions like encounters between the state and the MNEC teacher groups can have negative effects if inequalities between the two education systems remain. Cooperation needs to be balanced on every dimension so that both sides can sustainably encourage the peace process. The difficult work environment for many MNEC teachers repress the teachers’ possibility to open up to a true peace process and these inequalities are reinforced through meetings between state and MNEC teachers. The financial redistribution of the cooperation between the two education systems and greater support for MNEC teachers has to become a priority for both the government and the MNEC if further exacerbation of inequalities is to be prevented. Redistribution is one of the first steps to encourage a sustainable peace process between ethnic groups and the government, especially as the specific context of Myanmar’s conflict entailed an economic exclusion of ethnic minorities for decades. This research revealed that without proper financial redistribution all other peacebuilding efforts are at greater risk of failure.

The teachers expressed a lack of political representation by the national government,
which reproduces a negative attitude towards democracy and the government in the classroom. The results can be devastating for the peace process - Mon children are not identifying with the national government, which decreases the legitimacy of the government and hinders positive peace between the ethnic minority and the state. The lack of representation of the Mon people in the democratic system and even in decision-making processes in their own education system fuels intergroup tensions. As long as the Mon people have no reason to identify with the democratic system, they will not support it. And without the support of ethnic minorities a positive peace between all groups in Myanmar cannot exist.

Linking the findings of this chapter back to theory, revealed that issues around ‘redistribution’ and ‘representation’ still present a challenge for the peace process between the Mon people and the government. The state seems to be obligated to increase financial support for MNEC in order to engage in a true peace process with ethnic minorities. MNEC as well needs to foster financial cooperation with the government, if peace between the two education systems is the priority. By achieving a financial redistribution, teachers would be enabled to act as ‘peace agents’ in the classroom and a reconciliation process could start. Issues around representation appear to be in the context of Myanmar particularly important as ethnic minorities experienced political oppression over decades and are extremely sensitive with these issues. This research suggests, that the state has to find a way to include ethnic minorities equally in the political system and thereby enhance their identification with the new nation.
**Funeral of a NMSP soldier**

The last focus group session for this research took place in a rural village at an NMSP office. My translator and I arrived early so we had to wait around half an hour for the teachers. While waiting we drank some energy drinks that were offered us from a lady seemingly living in the compound. We talked a little bit and the main officer told us that on this particular morning one of the soldiers of the NMSP had died of cancer. The office was therefore very hectic, a lot of talking on phones and people coming and leaving constantly. They were arranging the funeral. During the focus group discussion more people, soldiers in uniform arrived, getting out their guns for cleaning and preparing themselves for the funeral. While I was nervous being around guns, it occurred to me that nobody else was. Everyone, the teachers, my translator and obviously the soldiers were used to being around guns. Although the violent conflict has been over for years, it was still not that far away.

After finishing with the focus group, I was invited to join the funeral and out of respect I agreed. I wasn’t feeling really comfortable with the situation, but I thought it would be the decent thing to do and gave me more insight into the NMSP and Mon traditions. Upon arriving at the field the funeral was taking place after an hour – really remote and without real streets – they told me the whole village had gathered for the funeral out of respect. The ceremony involved five different monks praying together with the community and gun salutes from NMSP soldiers at the end. A NMSP general read a letter announcing that the deceased was with his death no longer part of the NMSP, which seemed to be important to the people and family and was a tradition, as I was told after asking about it.

The experience of the funeral showed me how important the NMSP still is. They are highly respected and people especially in rural areas look up to them. The soldiers were proud of being part of it and religion and traditions played a big role in this ceremony. It showed me once again that the legacy of the conflict is still tangible every day and that the Mon people are very proud of their religious and cultural heritage.

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*Box 3: Funeral of a NMSP soldier*
7. Ethnic Identity and the Fear of Loss

This chapter focuses on questions around the identity of Mon history teachers and the implications it has in the classroom and for the peace process between the government and the Mon people. It is argued that identity is connected to ethnicity and language and thereby excludes any other sources of identity such as the nation. The identity-building process in MNEC schools poses a threat to a peaceful coexistence with all ethnic groups in the country and especially the Bamar people.

7.1 Protecting the Mon identity

Hand in hand with the desire for equal rights, explained in the previous chapter, came the fear of losing what and who the Mon are. It is a result of being afraid that the Mon people, the language, the culture and their traditions could disappear. For the teachers, the solution to the problem is to protect it by reaching for autonomy. One female teacher indicates that a loss of nationality is always caused by someone taking it:

“We worry for our nationality, if someone destroys it or taking it.” (F2, female teacher)
The argument is that there are other groups in the country, mainly the Bamar people and the government, whose aim is to let the Mon disappear. It is the result of ‘Burmanisation’ during the military dictatorship and explains the defence automatism many teachers are using. For many teachers, this threat was the ultimate legitimising factor for the protection and defence of their ethnicity.

Although the government acknowledges that peace with the ethnic minorities in Myanmar is only possible by recognising their rights (Lall, 2016), the teachers that were interviewed in this research remained sceptical. When asked about the future for Myanmar and its chances to transform into a peaceful country one teacher said: “I hope so, I just hope so.” (F5).

Ethnic Identity and the fear of loss are extremely important underlying aspects for this research. They explain why and how teachers argue about history teaching and its purpose. The implications for peace are explained through the attitudes of teachers about the government, the Bamar people and their own identity.

“Because we are different. We are just Mon” (F2, female teacher)

As this quote shows, teachers in every focus group exclusively identified with the Mon ethnicity. Being someone was strongly linked to being Mon, which always entailed an element of exclusion towards others. The quantitative data supports this feeling, as many teachers didn’t agree that it is possible to identify with more than one social group. A majority of 28 participants answered ‘Can someone identify with more than one social/ethnic group?’ with ‘I totally disagree’.
Having ethnicity as the unifying element of the group goes hand in hand with separation from others. Some teachers accordingly expressed feelings of superiority as demonstrated in this quote:

“Yes, we are Mon. We don’t feel national, we have more superiority.”

(F3, female teacher)

This demarcation especially from Burmese people is legitimised through religion and history, but also through factors such as the visual nature and the behaviour. One teacher listed unique Mon characteristics that legitimised this superiority:

“We have fight about things, but we are the first to meet Buddha. We are the first with donations (...), we are the first one to apply religion, we have the hair of the Buddha, we are the first ones to build a pagoda.” (F3, older female teacher)

The connection between religion and the Mon identity is remarkable, introduced through the teachers into the classroom and therefore has a great impact on how identity is built through Mon education.

The “other” is created by legitimising a superiority that cannot be reached unless you are Mon. Its source is ultimately ethnicity, which is no one able to choose freely. In this sense it endangers a peaceful coexistence with other groups in the country because
there can never be a unifying element. Nation-building efforts have no effect on the Mon teachers, because they don’t identify at all with the nation. The wish for self-determination is a result of an ethnic identity that is described as unique and superior.

Being proud of one’s ethnicity is integrated into identity and creates an atmosphere of resistance. Mainly because of a common history of the Mon people being the first in Myanmar and oppressed for a long time, the teachers feel pride when talking about their people. This quote demonstrates the pride Mon people feel about their ethnicity:

“Even if they occupy us, even if they abuse us, but our Mon is still alive. We are still alive!” (F6, middle-aged female teacher)

Through identity mapping exercises it became obvious that the Mon teachers are not exposed to other ethnicities in Myanmar. They were asked to draw the map of Myanmar, which most of them were not able to. Not being able to imagine the outlines of your own country makes it difficult to find one’s part in it. When asked to put other ethnicities in relation to their own, the teachers put Bamar people the farthest away possible on the paper and the Pao, the Karen, the Chin and the Dawei relatively close to the centre.

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4 It is acknowledged that borders of countries is a ‘western’ idea of a nation-state and therefore might not be as important for Myanmar
First of all, this demonstrates very accurately the feelings teachers had for the Burmese majority. There is still a large gap between them that is not easy to overcome. Secondly, it gives insight to how narrow their view of the country is. They mostly mentioned ethnicities that they are geographically surrounded by and most likely had contact with at least once in their life. It showed me that they had no reason to identify with the country or the nation, because they couldn’t even think of or imagine the whole country. The most important identifier remains their own ethnicity and the relationship towards the Bamar people.

Besides the ethnicity or, more accurately said, within their ethnic identity, language plays an important role. Participants only spoke in Mon during the focus groups, but also in school. The teachers emphasised how important it was for children to learn the Mon language, and it almost seemed like a trademark to be part of the group. Through summer schools, which I was able to observe to some extent, the teachers wanted to ensure that as many people as possible in Mon State were able to speak the language. The summer schools are set up during the normal school holidays and are especially for children normally visiting the state schools where they are not exposed to
Mon language. Many teachers expressed a wish to have Mon as an official language, at least in Mon State.

During the time I was conducting the research, the Mon National Day was celebrated in Mon State. It is a cultural celebration and was very important to the teachers and everyone else I met. In schools teachers and students were preparing plays and traditional dances for the Mon National Day. The teachers were very upset that the Mon people needed permission from the government to be able to celebrate that day; they considered the requirement a humiliation and believed that the government does not value such ethnic cultural days. Recognising and acknowledging the language and cultural celebrations like the Mon National Day would lead to a more open attitude towards the government and demonstrate that the Mon culture is an important and legitimate part of Myanmar.

7.2 Identity through history teaching

The next section explores issues around history teaching in MNEC schools as perceived by the teachers and their effect on identity-building process in relation to peace. The highest motivation for history teaching among the Mon is the protection of their identity rather than dealing with the past and trying to reconcile with it.

“History is the most important for who is Mon, only we have history, we can protect our culture” (F1, young female teacher)

This quote does not imply that the Mon are the only ones having history, although they expressed on several occasions that it is a superior history, but rather that only by having and knowing history is one able to protect it. Only by knowing the past are the Mon able to ensure that the present lives on, as indicated in this quote:

“We had our own history and then if we don’t know about our own history, someone can come and occupy our space, occupy our country or something like that. That’s why we need to defend.” (F1, young female teacher)

History will help them to protect and defend what is theirs and as history has taught them there is always someone with the aim to take from them that which is their
most precious to protect – their ethnic uniqueness; including an own language, own traditions and cultural differences. It starts with food and ends with rituals of prayer and worship. It encompasses every dimension of life and the teachers believed that by teaching history they contributed to the saving of it.

The logic behind this argument is that if one knows the Mon history, one will automatically be motivated by it to protect it. It never occurred in the focus groups that being critical about one's own history or feeling negative towards it could also be a possible reaction. The premise is full compliance with the ethnic history.

Besides needing history to protect the present, the teachers also mentioned the need to learn from the past “good lessons” to avoid conflict. One teacher explained it as following:

“History and peace are linked to each other. Now we are teaching about the peace on our history, but sometimes in our history we had a problem. It is good or bad and that’s how we learn from the back and decide now and we bring only good to the future. Like how to deal with other ethnic and the ones we used to fight about the history, because with every ethnic we want to peace our history, we don’t want to fight with other ethnic.” (F5, male head teacher)

This way of thinking contributes to a peaceful society and shows how history teaching in MNEC schools can promote peace if the teacher believes that peace is always better than conflict. Nevertheless, I did get the feeling listening to that argument that when the teacher spoke about other ethnicities, she was not including the Bamar people. They gave examples about old conflicts with the Karen, which suggested to me that they were mostly talking about other ethnic minorities rather than the biggest conflict party of the last decades.

The teachers expressed that telling the “true” history was important to them as well. History, for most of them, is facts that students have to know, although they acknowledged that the perspective on history can change and that it differs between different groups. Simultaneously it was also clear that the Mon only have one history, which is a proud history of kingdoms and heroes. As one interviewee expressed, do Mon people believe that the government has the aim to cover up the Mon history:
“The Burmese government just think how to destroy, how to cover the Mon history to disappear.” (Interview 2, Myint Mon)

The teachers argued that MNEC schools were the only place where the real Mon history was told and they were the only ones defending the legacy, because the government always had the aim to let it disappear. Believing in this urge to tell the “true” history, whether it is the reality or not, leads to a separation between the two conflict-groups with a lot of space for mistrust and suspicion.

The teachers in general expressed concerns with trusting the other side, which is also supported by the data from the questionnaires. Although they agreed that trust is important for a peaceful society, many of them answered that they rather don’t trust people if they don’t know them.

Talking about history in some focus groups revealed that some teachers still hold grievances towards the Bamar people and the government that they do not want to relinquish. Their motivation is to teach children how the Mon people were mistreated in order to motivate them to fight back if necessary.

“How we are fighting and how the Burma king is cheating us and fools us, kind of if we know like that, we promote our people to more understand, be more brave, more motivated by our history.” (F7, young female teacher)
This can be understood as a preparation for conflict rather than reconciliation with the past. They expressed that they don’t want conflict and fighting anymore, but protecting the ethnic identity and defending their traditions, language and culture would always be the number one priority.

7.3 Conflict in the History Curriculum?

The content of history lessons in MNEC schools is mainly focused on old Mon history and conflict issues are often not integrated into the curriculum.

“Actually they don’t have the conflict in the class” (F1, female teacher)

One teacher explained that conflict is often not mentioned in the textbook, because it is for many people still a sensitive issue. It was very surprising to hear that at least in the primary school children exclusively learn about old Mon history, like the kings, queens and heroes, but nothing about independence, the military dictatorship or the ethnic conflicts. Although one of the members of the curriculum development team at MNEC explained that independence is part of middle school curriculum, some teachers explained that they don’t really teach about it.

Box 5: Conflict – still a sensitive issue

“On the Mon National Day they had agenda that they are saluting to those who passed away. And she was crying, she couldn’t come, because she has seen and she has lost so many friends from there, from fight. And that’s why they would like to be, they say, if we didn’t know about the history, no more to maintain the culture, we lose everything.”

Preparing for the research and reading about the topic, I became aware that I might encounter situations where participants experienced the conflict and wanted to talk about it. As the quote shows, one teacher opened up in the group discussion and talked about her feelings and emotions being confronted and thinking about the losses during conflict. It meant for me that the teacher felt safe in this situation to tell me, a stranger, about it. It made me again aware of the sensitive issue I was dealing with and I was very thankful for having such personal and emotional memories shared with me. Fortunately was I able to build enough trust in a short period of time to get insights like this, but simultaneously made it very clear what my position in this discussion was. It also reminded me how much the conflict still impacts and influences the everyday lives of many Mon people and what consequences this draws for education and especially history teaching.
“You know, we don’t have the independence issue in history” (F1, female teacher)

Keeping in mind that MNEC mostly provides basic education and most children don’t transfer to middle schools afterwards, it would appear that most children attending MNEC schools are not exposed to the conflict history that defined the last few decades.

Many teachers argued that they don’t see their role in teaching the recent history, because they sometimes even don’t know much about it themselves. Instead defined their task as keeping the old Mon history and pride in the minds of the next generation. It doesn’t mean that children don’t learn about the violent past and conflict, they learn about it at home or in monasteries, but they don’t learn it in a school setting, which is supposed to encourage critical thinking about history and open spaces for reconciliation.

It became obvious that religion and education are greatly intertwined in Mon State, as many teachers use not only the textbook, but stories and knowledge from the monks they know. Monasteries are part of the curriculum development team and influence the history curriculum in MNEC schools (Interview 3). Teachers combine different sources of historical facts, which can be seen as a multiple perspectives approach. The teachers often called it “learning from the outside”, which included monks, but also the internet and Mon newspapers. Many of the teachers, especially those with trainings like CCA, tried to use different materials in their class such as pictures, maps or articles. Using different materials and sources of information is normally regarded as positive as it challenges static views on the past and allows an open discussion on a way forward. However in the Mon case, all these different sources and materials were used for the same purpose – to keep the old and proud Mon history of kings and queens alive without mentioning the conflict of the last few decades to open up reconciliation processes and promoting peace. This reverse focused position blocks any transformation where ethnic groups can be proud of their ethnic history but simultaneously appreciate the new national entity they are part of and contribute to its future.
7.4 Concluding Remarks

This chapter illustrated how the Mon identity is closely linked to the ethnicity with its own language, culture and tradition. Pride for being Mon played a crucial role in all focus group discussions and always entailed an aspect of exclusion of other ethnicities in the country. History is focused on old Mon history of kings and queens and does not appear to be self-critical. Conflict is, at least in basic education, not included at all and it highly depends on the teacher if discussions around the military dictatorship or the conflict with the Bamar people evolve. Conflict is still a sensitive issue and teachers are not used to and not trained to teach it to children.

The fact that Mon ethnic identity is mainly built upon a religious and historical superiority hinders a peaceful coexistence with other groups in the country beyond the mere absence of war. Although the MNEC is increasing cooperation with the government and therefore fostering relationships in support of a peace process, the identity building process in MNEC schools is a potential problem for a peaceful society.

The priority and essential motivation for history teaching is the protection of ethnic culture language and traditions, which occasionally sounded more like a mental preparation for conflict. Reconciling with the past and introducing new perspectives on the former ‘enemy’ is not a desired outcome of history classes. Interestingly, the teacher always acted on the assumption that every student who learns about the Mon history is automatically motivated to comply and does not critically question or challenge it. Pride for the ethnic history is a universal condition everyone agrees to.

Relating the main findings of this chapter back to the theoretical framework of this research, it became evident that it discussed the dimensions on ‘recognition’ and ‘reconciliation’.

The teachers feel that their ethnic identity and uniqueness is not valued by the government. Cultural differences are not celebrated, they are in many ways suppressed. The teachers react by seeking to protect their ethnic culture rather than opening and exposing it to the whole nation. Furthermore, it separates the different ethnic groups further and does not encourage a transformation to positive peace between all ethnic groups in Myanmar. The missing recognition of the Mon ethnic identity is an issue that both the government and the Mon people need to forge.
This chapter also demonstrated that a true reconciliation process with the government has not started yet. It seems there are obstacles to the other three dimensions on peacebuilding that hinder the beginning of reconciliation efforts and even endanger it. Especially the conceptualisation of and motivation for history teaching in MNEC schools exposed that Mon people are not ready to engage with the past in order to reconcile with it and forgive the ‘other side’. Relationships have improved during the last few years, but the Mon case also showed that ethnic minorities are still fighting with their past and need more incentives to join a sustainable peace process and transform Myanmar into a peaceful nation for every ethnic group.

This research suggests that a reconciliation process between the Mon people, the government and the Bamar people is possible, but needs more time, effort and will from all sides to be successful.
8. Conclusion

This thesis concludes with a summation of the main findings by reflecting on their theoretical and methodological impact. This is followed by recommendations for practice and theory and an outline of potential areas of further research this project has identified.

8.1 Main findings / Answers to the Research Questions

This research has uncovered two major findings highlighted in this passage. It provides as well answers to the main questions of this research. In order to easily engage with the questions, they are repeated here:

- How does history teaching in MNEC schools promote (positive) peace in Myanmar?
  - How is peace/conflict integrated into the history curriculum and in the classroom?
  - How does the teacher’s position, work environment and motivation influence their ability to promote peace?
  - What role does the MNEC in general play in the peace process?

Firstly, it became evident that an increasing number of encounters between the two education systems with the aim of fostering relationships and contributing to the peace process can have negative consequences if context is not taken into account. Secondly, the identity building process in MNEC schools that develops by teaching history can be a potential challenge for the transition to positive peace because it is focused on ethnicity with excluding elements that endanger the development of a national identity.

During many focus groups discussions, inequalities between the state teachers and the Mon teachers on various levels were talked about intensively. Although the salary is one of the biggest issues, the training and facilities also play a role. It is obvious that these inequalities are a major problem for the MNEC teachers to truly engage in a
process of reconciliation with the state. Next to the discussion about inequalities, increasing encounters and cooperation between the two education systems became evident as well, whether on the school level, with the monthly meetings of the ‘mixed school’ approach, or on the MNEC office level, with increasing development of shared programs and meetings.

Unfortunately, the inequalities become more visible by the increasing encounters between teachers. While the education systems were separate, MNEC teachers were aware of the differences, but didn’t have to face them monthly. This increasing awareness of inequalities results in MNEC teachers holding the government responsible, which is counterproductive for the wider peace process the MNEC is involved in. The major finding is that although the cooperation between the MNEC and the state schools aims to contribute to the peace process, it is often a financial and time burden for the MNEC teachers and has a negative impact on the relationships. It is argued that through increasing encounters between individuals from the former conflict parties, bonds can be developed, which would help the individuals reconcile with the past. This research suggests that the reconciliation dimension has negative impacts if the context, in this case that of teachers, is not considered. They are not prepared for these encounters and therefore cannot profit from them.

The MNEC has often been described as a prime example of how ethnic education can work with the state education system for many legitimate reasons, such as the combined curriculum, mother-tongue education and the possibility for students to transfer into the state education system (Lall & South, 2014). As Lall & South (2014) suggest, “(s)tate support and the development and rooting of ethnic identity is, therefore, essential for the multi-ethnic population to possess a sense of inclusion, which in turn will spur and enhance loyalty for a national language.” This research raises the question of what happens if the ethnic identity is defined by an ethnic superiority and does therefore not enhance loyalty to the nation.

The findings of this research give glimpses of how identity is created in MNEC schools through history teaching. Feelings of pride and exclusivity were often the main markers for the Mon identity. It was exclusively connected to the ethnicity and there were almost no identifications with something else, such as a concept of the nation. History teaching is used as a way to remember the past in order to protect the present and the conflict during the last decades is almost non-existent in the MNEC curriculum.
The aim is not to reconcile with the past and the Bamar people, but to assure that the Mon people remain and maintain their culture, language and traditions. It was revealed that identity in MNEC schools don’t promote a process of building an ethnic as well as a national identity, but quite the opposite. The identity building process in MNEC schools is therefore an issue that negatively affects the peace process.

The MNEC as an organisation is still one of the best examples of how ethnic education systems can cooperate with the state and it has many advantages for Mon children. It seems a good practice of how to combine mother-tongue education with a national curriculum. Nevertheless, MNEC schools create an identity through the mother tongue education of ethnic history and culture that is exclusive and doesn’t feed into the idea of nation building.

8.2 Theoretical Reflection

The study showed that all four R’s have an impact in the peace process and can either contribute to or hinder the transformation from negative to positive peace.

In this research, issues around redistribution are the biggest hurdle to achieve a sustainable peace between the ethnic minority of Mon people and the Burmese majority of the country. While the MNEC is facing a daily financial struggle that affects the teachers on a daily basis, the state education system is expanding since the opening of the country in 2011.

Although it is acknowledged in theory that the four dimensions (redistribution, representation, recognition and reconciliation) of the peace building approach overlap in reality, this study highlights how the dimensions can affect each other negatively if the context of the conflict and the individuals involved are not considered. Because issues of redistribution regarding education are not settled between the Mon people and the government, the reconciliation efforts don’t have their intended outcome, with some impacting negatively. It seems that the first three R’s need to be addressed first in order to begin a true reconciliation process that promotes a transition to positive peace. The basis of forgiveness and peaceful cooperation is equal redistribution for all citizens, equal representation of all citizens and equal recognition of all cultural differences in the country. If this is not the reality that individuals face, reconciliation cannot begin. This
research also suggests that reconciliation is already incorporated in every other dimension. By recognising someone's identity officially and incorporating that in the image of the nation, people already start reconcile with the past. Although this research still acknowledges that reconciliation is a valid extra dimension because of its importance, it lobbies for a holistic understanding of the concept and against a mechanisation of it.

As this study demonstrated, the framework needs to be adjusted to the specific context of the conflict. The four dimensions are equally important, but not always at the same stage of the peace process. This research suggests that in some cases, like in the Mon context, issues around redistribution, recognition and representation must be solved first, otherwise reconciliation cannot constructively be initiated.

8.3 Methodological Reflection

Reflecting on the methodological approach after conducting the research in the field, some aspects need to be highlighted.

Although the focus groups discussions were extremely interesting and revealing, they weren't always the appropriate method for this research in some cases. Especially when the groups were bigger than four to five people, in-depth discussions never came up. Due to the language barrier, the translator always immediately translated what was said, which interrupted the flow of the conversations. When discussions around issues like the salary, the elections or something else interesting evolved, I was most of the time unable to follow and my translator summarised for me what was said at the end. It was not my translator’s mistake, but the setup of my methods that didn’t take the language into account. One-on-one interviews would have been the better options on some occasions to give participants a chance to express themselves fully and grasp all the nuances of the answers. In preparing this research I thought that people could feel intimidated talking to me alone as a researcher and that a group would make them feel more comfortable, but it turned out that most teachers were very open and interested in talking to me. In the end the focus groups discussions were a good way of gathering qualitative data in this context, but maybe not the best option.
The identity mapping exercises in the last focus groups were very valuable to this research and explored interesting issues around the Mon identity and the sense of the nation among the MNEC teachers. This method could have been expanded, not just in numbers, but also regarding the content. Conducting the research, it was a spontaneous idea to introduce identity-mapping exercises to the participants, which developed into an effective method. In future research I would expand these kind of participatory qualitative methods.

The questionnaire was extremely helpful to start the session with. The teachers were more exposed to quantitative research methods and therefore had no problems filling it out. It was a good opening for the focus group discussions because it introduced the topic and the participants felt comfortable with the situation. Even simply observing the process of filling out the questionnaire was extremely interesting to identify group dynamics and relations between the individuals.

8.4 Recommendations

This thesis distinguishes between recommendations for the wider peace process in Myanmar suggested through the findings and specific recommendations for the Mon National Education Committee, starting with the wider peace process recommendations.

The most important recommendation for the wider peace process that emerged from this research is a joint history curriculum writing process. Appreciating that the MNEC has its own history curriculum, which is extremely important to them, a shared curriculum writing about the events since independence would be a great start for both sides to process the past, put oneself in the other position and find a common history together. Of course it is essential that both sides agree with the process and feel represented through the curriculum, but it would be progress to develop a common history of conflict than having two separate curriculums, which is the case now and has its difficulties.

This thesis earlier discussed the Education Reform Process in Myanmar and its aim of improving the education sector and achieving the ‘Education For All’ goal. It is recommended to open up the reform process especially for ethnic education systems and organisations as they play a pivotal role in the provision of basic education for the
rural ethnic population and should also be able to contribute their vision of education to the reform. Separating state and ethnic education is a step in the wrong direction if the aim is combining the education systems and appreciating differences in the country. Recognising the input of ethnic education committees would have two major effects. Firstly, it would contribute to the wider peace process, as the ethnic minority would feel valued, and secondly it would enhance the quality of education in Myanmar as aspects such as mother tongue education in ethnic education systems improve the learning performance of many children.

The recommendations for the MNEC mainly focus on the teachers’ environment and position in the organisation as well as on the cooperation with the government.

The working conditions for MNEC teachers need to be improved in order to support them in their teaching role. Although many of the working conditions are related to the financial limits that the MNEC works under, such as facilities or salary, the MNEC should be able to introduce permanent contracts for the teachers. It ensures their position in the MNEC and legitimises their role in cooperation with state schools. Officially recognising their role could enhance their own awareness of their position and increase their willingness to relinquish a higher payment and continue working for the MNEC.

Because the MNEC faces financial struggles on many levels that heavily impact the teachers’ conditions, this research recommends that the MNEC continues cooperation with the government, but applies pressure for a financial redistribution, especially in the mixed schools and monthly meetings between MNEC and state teachers.

Concerning teacher training, this research suggests there is a need to concentrate on subject training besides pedagogy training. It might also be useful to develop a common curriculum for each training course, standardising the practice with the idea that each teacher receives exactly the same education in each training course. It would be useful to be able to know what teachers already learned and could also help to convince the government officially recognise the training because it would be more comparable to state education. Increasing cooperation with the government to improve the teachers’ situation seems to be a good approach for the MNEC to continue its work and strengthen its position in the peace process.
8.5 Research agenda

Based on this research and its findings additional areas of research emerge. While the focus of this project was the individual contribution of history teachers in MNEC schools to the peace process, it would be useful to take a closer look at cooperation between the MNEC and the government. It seems that many different common projects are discussed between the two parties that could have a positive implication for the peace process and foster a relationship between the former conflict parties. Research with a focus on the meta-level of the peace process could be very interesting in regards to other ethnic education systems in Myanmar or even in different countries.

Unfortunately this research wasn’t able to engage in detail with the history curriculum and textbooks. Focusing on the curriculum could offer deeper insights to the purpose of history teaching and its implications on the identity building process. It could be of great use in regards to a joint history curriculum writing process.

Through this research it became also evident that the MNEC and NMSP are still strongly connected in reality and in the minds of many Mon people. Interactions between these two bodies in connection to peace implications would enhance the understanding of the whole peace process between the Mon people, the ethnic armed groups and the government in general. Questions around stakeholder involvement and representation appear to be very present and important in the peace process.
9. References


Horner, L. et al., 2015. Literature Review: The Role of Teachers in Peacebuilding, UNICEF.


Appendix 1: MNEC Capacity Building Efforts

MNEC/MNED Education Capacity Building Efforts

Teacher Education
1) Rob Htaw Education Empowerment Program Year 2 (PTE/MS/HL)
2) Mobile Teacher Training (EBIC/MNE)
3) School Level In-service Teacher Education (GoB/UNICEF)
4) Short In-Service Teacher Trainings (Thinking Classroom/GoB/HSPA/PnDI/FBCS/Norway/UNICEF)
5) Training of Min Junior Trainer/CoachingCatch Up Program (Norway/HSPA)

Education Management
1) Organizational Development Training Workshops (PTE/MPS/GoB/Norway/HSPA)
2) School Management Trainings (GoB/UNICEF)
3) Short In-Service Teacher Trainings (DGSH/EBIC/SO)
4) Professional Development Training Workshops for Multi-level Education Officers (EBIC/MOTC)

Youth Development
1) Rob Htaw Education Empowerment Program Year 1 (PTE)
2) Livelihood & Life Skills Training's for Out-of-School Children (ILO)

Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) and School Committees (SCs)
Strengthening
1) Income Generation Project (PnDI)
2) School Grant (GoB/UNICEF)
3) School Community Contract (PTE)
4) Livelihood & Life Skills Trainings (ILO)
## Appendix 2: Operationalisation Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
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<td>History Teaching</td>
<td>Content</td>
<td>Conflict/root causes</td>
<td>Is conflict part of the curriculum?</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Multiple narratives</td>
<td>How are different varieties of history represented? How are different ethnicities included?</td>
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<td>“us vs. them”</td>
<td>Do teachers resent other ethnicities? Is there a strong distinction between different people?</td>
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<td>Methods</td>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>Openness (allowing discussions)</td>
<td>Do teachers encourage open discussions and different opinions?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Variety</td>
<td>How many different methods do teachers use? Do teachers use different sources of information?</td>
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<td>Protection of culture</td>
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<td>How is identity constructed in history lessons?</td>
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<td>Is there a notion of nation building in history lessons?</td>
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<td>Teachers’ salary</td>
<td>Are teachers satisfied with their salary?</td>
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<td>Teacher-Student ratio</td>
<td>Are there enough teachers in the schools?</td>
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<td>Subcategory</td>
<td>Question</td>
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<td>How is MNEC financing its schools?</td>
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<td>Teacher training</td>
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<td>How is MNEC financing its trainings? Who is involved in the conceptualisation?</td>
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<td>Political</td>
<td>Are teachers political represented? What do they think about the last elections?</td>
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<td>Unity</td>
<td>Is political unity important to the teachers?</td>
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<td>Perception of democratic process</td>
<td>What do the teachers think about the democratic process?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recognition</td>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>How do teachers identify?</td>
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<td>Language</td>
<td>What language is used in history lessons and what implications does that have?</td>
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<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>To what ethnicity do the teachers belong to?</td>
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<td>Do teachers identify in any way with the nation state?</td>
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<td>Conflict experience</td>
<td>Do teachers have own conflict experience and what consequences does that have?</td>
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Appendix 3 : Questionnaire for MNEC Teachers

HISTORY TEACHERS IN POST-CONFLICT SITUATIONS AND THEIR ROLE IN THE PEACE PROCESS

Code: _______ Date: _______
Location: _______

Dear participant,

My name is Katharina Buske and I'm currently studying ‘International Development’ at the University of Amsterdam. In my studies I focus on the relationship between the role of teachers and building a peaceful society. I specialised on the Mon Education System and therefore would like to ask you to answer the following questions. This research is done in cooperation with the University of Amsterdam and the Graduate School of Social Sciences.

Of course the answers will be completely confidential and anonymous. Your name won’t be registered for the analysis of the data and it won’t be possible to match answers with participants. Please keep in mind that there are no wrong or right answers, this survey tries to seek your own beliefs and opinions. Therefore please answer freely.

The information given through this survey will be used for my Master thesis and possibly could be published afterwards. It is the declared aim of this research to broaden the understanding of the role of teachers in peacebuilding processes and gives you the chance to tell your views and opinions.

Please sign here to give your allowance to use your answers.

I understand this information and agree to participate fully under the conditions stated above:

Signed: _______________ Date: _______________

82
Teacher Training, Environment and History Teaching

How long have you been a teacher?

☐ Longer than 10 years
☐ 5-10 years
☐ 2-5 years
☐ Shorter than 2 years
☐ I am not yet a teacher

Why did you become a teacher? (Please fill out in your own words)

__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

Did you have teacher training?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ I am still doing it

If yes, how long was your training?

__________________________________________________________________________________

What kind of training?

__________________________________________________________________________________

Do you have an official certificate as a teacher?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ I don’t know

Did you always work in MNEC schools?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If no, in what other schools did you work? ____________________________

Do you have a permanent contract?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ I don’t know
Do you like being a teacher?

|   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| No, not at all | Yes, very |

Are you satisfied with what you get paid monthly as a teacher?

|   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Not at all satisfied | Totally satisfied |

How is the relationship with your head teacher?

|   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Bad | Excellent |

How is the relationship with other teacher?

|   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Bad | Excellent |

How is the relationship with your students’ parents?

|   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Bad | Excellent |

Do you consider history teaching as important for a peaceful society?

|   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| No, not at all | Yes, very much |

Do you think critical thinking in history classes is important?

|   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| No, not at all | Yes, very much |
Do you agree with the following statements?

(1 = completely disagree, 5 = completely agree)

- Trust is important in a peaceful society
- Tolerance is an important value for a peaceful society
- Equality between people is important for a peaceful society
- Someone can identify with more than one social/ethnic group
- I rather trust people even though I don’t know them
- I am a tolerant person towards different beliefs and histories
- I treat everyone equally
- I believe a peaceful future for Myanmar is possible

**Ethnicity, Identity and Values**

What is your ethnicity? (More than one answer is possible)
Demographics

What is your gender?

☐ Female  ☐ Male

What is your age? (in years)

☐ Under 20  ☐ 20-30  ☐ 31-40  ☐ 41-50  ☐ 51-60  ☐ Over 60

What is your marital status?

☐ Single  ☐ in a partnership  ☐ married  ☐ divorced

Where were you born?

☐ Rural area  ☐ small town  ☐ big city  ☐ I don’t know

Where do you teach?

☐ Rural area  ☐ small town  ☐ big city  ☐ I don’t know

Would you like to add anything to the topic around teachers and history teaching?

________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________

Any final thoughts or suggestions for this survey?

________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________

Thank you for participating in this survey and sharing your thoughts and opinions about history teaching and its role in a peaceful society. It will help me to understand the issues better and enriches my research.

Thank you again very much and have a nice day!
## Appendix 4: Transparency Report

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