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Declaration

I, Julie Marie Hansen, declare that this thesis is a result of my research investigations and findings. Sources of information other than my own have been acknowledged and a reference list has been appended. This work has not been previously submitted to any other university for award of any type of academic degree.

Signature.....
Date.....

*Everything passes away - suffering, pain, blood, hunger, pestilence.
The sword will pass away too, but the stars will remain
when the shadows of our presence and our deeds
have vanished from the Earth.
There is no man who does not know that.
Why, then, will we not turn our eyes toward the stars? Why?*

– Mikhail Bulgakov

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Abstract

It is generally recognised that women should not only be included in peacebuilding but that they are also a peacebuilding resource. This recognition is evident in the agenda set out in the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (UNSCR 1325) and subsequent resolutions. Based on the knowledge that the gendered nature of armed conflict means women and men experience it differently, UNSCR 1325 calls for the need to include women and their gendered perspectives of conflict in matters of peace. However, less recognized are the roles of refugee women as actors in peacebuilding. This reflects the relative lack of focus on people affected by forced migration in general as peacebuilding actors. This thesis takes a qualitative case study approach to understanding how women contribute to peacebuilding in the context of forced migration. It looks specifically at the case of resettled refugee women from Myanmar in Norway. The case study finds that the women in the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora included in the study demonstrate considerable potential to contribute to peacebuilding through their various transnational activities in the economic, social and political spheres, and which are particularly relevant to sustainable development and peacebuilding in Myanmar.

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1 Introduction

It is generally recognised that women should not only be included in peacebuilding but that they are also a peacebuilding resource. This recognition is evident in the agenda set out in the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (UNSCR 1325) and subsequent resolutions (UN 2000). Based on the knowledge that the gendered nature of armed conflict means women and men experience it differently, UNSCR 1325 calls for the need to include women and their gendered perspectives of conflict in matters of peace. To paraphrase Anderlini (2007), the Women, Peace and Security agenda deals not only with what peace can do for women but also what women can do for peace.

In Myanmar,¹ a country characterised by decades of internal ethnic armed conflicts, women demonstrate considerable capacity to build peace. In autumn 2014, I travelled to southeast Myanmar to conduct qualitative research, together with the research institute Swisspeace and the Gender and Development Institute based in Myanmar, for a UN Women report looking at why gender matters in conflict and peace in the region (see UN Women 2015). The report looks specifically at the gendered nature of armed conflicts and peacebuilding in the minority ethnic areas of Mon and Kayin² States. The report finds that even in the midst of targeted violence towards women, such as rape perpetrated by the military, and exacerbated outcomes of conflict, such as loss of livelihoods, due to the gender inequalities women face, many women continue to engage in strategies for peace.

Some examples from the UN Women report of women's gendered contributions to peace include their individual initiatives such as running informal education centres in order to counter the perceived role that lack of education and information has had in creating and sustaining armed conflict. Peacebuilding also takes place at the collective level through civil society organisations where they raise the issues they want to see included in formal peacebuilding and engage in other activities for long-term approaches to transforming society (UN Women 2015). The report argues that women's gendered contributions can also add value to more formal efforts towards resolving conflicts and building peace in Myanmar.

¹ The country can also be referred to as Burma. While the State Law and Order Protection Council military regime changed the name in English from 'Burma' to 'Myanmar' in 1989, the name 'Burma' has continued to be used by some, namely those in the democracy movement (Dittmer 2008). In this thesis, the country is referred to in the main text as 'Myanmar' and in some instances, when citing interview and secondary sources, as 'Burma'.

² Also referred to as Karen.

One of the major impacts of armed conflict and violence in Myanmar has been forced migration. The country has for many years been considered to have one of the world's worst refugee situations (Ytzen 2014). The question then arose: how do women who have fled Myanmar still contribute to building peace 'back home'? However, a review of the literature shows that there has been generally little attention given to the roles of refugee women as actors in peacebuilding. In reference to refugee women's organisations, Snyder and Stobbe (2011: 4) point out that while policy frameworks such as UNSCR 1325 "does not specifically include refugee women as partners in peacemaking, [refugee women's] organizations are no less important in furthering those resolutions." This reflects the relative lack of focus on people affected by forced migration in general as peacebuilding actors.

1.1 Research Question

Based on the problem statement that I arrived at during research in Myanmar and subsequent review of the literature, this thesis seeks to understand the ways in which refugee women from Myanmar can play a part in peacebuilding 'back home'. The thesis uses a qualitative case study approach to answer the following research question:

How do women refugees from Myanmar contribute to peacebuilding in their country of origin?

The case study specifically looks at women from Myanmar that migrated to Norway in the mid-2000s through the UNHCR refugee resettlement programme. While refugees from several different ethnic backgrounds have resettled in Norway, this case study includes only refugee women from the Burman and Chin ethnic groups. The research question was operationalised in the data collection phase by asking two further sub-questions: What are the women's perspectives on peacebuilding in Myanmar, and what kinds of connections do they maintain with their country of origin that might have a peacebuilding impact.

1.2 Case Selection

The case of Myanmar refugee women in Norway was selected based both on its convenience and relevance: convenience because I live and study in Norway, and relevance because of the

many links between the women's country of residence, Norway, and country of origin, Myanmar. At 3400 people, the Myanmar immigrant group in Norway is numerically insignificant when compared with many other groups such as Somali immigrants comprising a population of around 27,000 and Pakistani immigrants of around 19,000 people (Statistics Norway 2015).³ Nevertheless, it can be argued that the Myanmar group is a *qualitatively* significant group in the Norwegian context.

The Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora is arguably a particularly relevant diaspora group for Norwegian actors engaged in Myanmar. Particularly relevant for this thesis is the engagement of Norwegian governmental actors in Myanmar. For example, Myanmar is a priority country in Norwegian international development and foreign policy. In 2014, Norway gave close to 250 million NOK in development assistance to Myanmar, which was an increase from just over 100 million NOK in 2011 – more than a doubling the amount of development assistance over the course of a few years (Norad 2014). Also particularly relevant for the topic of this thesis is that Myanmar is also a priority country of Norway's recent National Action Plan for 2015-2018 on Women, Peace and Security (NMFA 2015a). Norway has also been engaged in the peace process in Myanmar, both through leading the Myanmar Peace Support Initiative and through supporting the Myanmar peace process via the Peace Donor Support Group (Johnson & Lidauer 2014).

Diaspora hold a unique transnational position with bridgebuilding capacity and with knowledge of two locations and thus can be an important resource and bring 'added value' to the engagements of actors external to the diaspora in the diaspora's country of origin (Sinatti et al 2010). As such, a case study on the peacebuilding roles of refugee women in the *Myanmar diaspora in Norway* is a particularly significant one.

1.3 Scope of the Case Study

This case study refers only to specific ethnic groups. Only two ethnic groups from entire population of resettled refugees and other migrants originating from Myanmar and residing in Norway are included in this study. These are the Burman and the Chin ethnic groups. The intention was, however, to also include in the study women from the Muslim Rohingya ethnic group in order to broaden the ethnic-religious backgrounds of those included in the study and

³ These figures do not include people born in Norway to immigrant parents.

to better reflect the heterogeneity of the diaspora. However, it proved very difficult to find women from the Rohingya group to participate in the research, despite attempts using several community gatekeepers. Instead, this thesis deals primarily with empirical material and analysis from women situated in the specific contexts of the Burman and Chin ethnic groups in Norway. Such a narrow scope was, however, expected at the outset of conducting this case study. Given the limited time in which to carry it out, it was expected from the start that it would not be possible to include women from all ethnic groups in this case study. Members of the same ethnic groups also tend to reside in the same areas in Norway, and therefore to use time effectively data collection was done in Oslo. This means that while in some instances interview data refers to women (and men) in the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora as a whole, the main empirical material and analysis is based on information pertaining to *women in the Burman and Chin ethnic groups specifically*.

Another boundary of this case study relates time. The perceptions and experiences of informants that comprise the empirical data refer primarily to the period between 2004/2005 when the majority of Myanmar refugees resettled in Norway and July 2015 when the data collection and analysis phase of the research process ended. Thus, recent developments in Myanmar, particularly in the political arena, are not covered in this case study.

Moreover, the case study is single-sited, and therefore data from only the diaspora's country of residence – Norway – has been collected. In other words, the scope of the empirical material of this study is confined to 'here' rather than 'there' (i.e. the country of origin Myanmar). This study has therefore been limited to collecting data on women's engagements that *may* contribute to peacebuilding. In other words, this thesis cannot say anything about the *actual* peacebuilding impact of the women's engagements, but instead deals with the women's *potential* peacebuilding impact based on the empirical material and supported by the theory. This limited scope is not considered problematic, however, as the study aims to say something about how resettled refugee women *can* contribute to peacebuilding in the context of forced migration, rather than their actual peacebuilding impacts.

1.4 Thesis Outline

Chapter 2 will introduce the overall approach to this thesis and the methods used in finding research participants and gathering the data needed to answer the research question. Chapter

3 outlines the theoretical framework used to situate refugee women as actors in peacebuilding. Chapter 4 forms the main body of the thesis, including a section providing background to the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora following by the empirical material and analysis on the perspectives and transnational peacebuilding engagements of women in the diaspora. Chapter 5 concludes the thesis with an analysis on how the empirical findings link to the theory in demonstrating the peacebuilding potential of refugee women in the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora; the key contributions of the thesis and areas for further research.

2 Methods

This qualitative study takes an inductive approach to understanding how refugee women in the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora can contribute to peacebuilding in their country of origin. The inductive approach is particularly useful when studying a phenomenon that is relatively understudied, as is the case with the peacebuilding role of women in forced migration in general and refugee women in the specific context of the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora.

2.1 Research Design: Qualitative Case Study

The thesis uses a qualitative case study to answer the research question: How do women refugees from Myanmar contribute to peacebuilding in their country of origin? A case study was chosen as a suitable approach to answering this ‘how’ question guiding the study. According to Yin (2003), case studies are particularly appropriate for studies that ask ‘how’ and ‘why’. Moreover, case studies are ‘empirical investigations’ used to understand “contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context” (Yin 2003: 13). Context is particularly important in this thesis given the many dynamics found in diaspora groups in general and in particular in the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora which demonstrates a high degree of heterogeneity. The case study allows the specific ‘contextual conditions’ of the phenomenon under study (Yin 2003: 13), making it a particularly useful strategy in this thesis.

One of the main limitations of the case study approach relates to generalisation. Generalisation deals with whether findings can be applied “beyond the confines of the particular context in which the research was conducted” (Bryman 2008: 156). This can be done by making a sample which is representative of the population to which it belongs (Bryman 2008). Thus, generalisation depends on the type of sampling method used and the size of the sample relative to the population as a whole (Berg & Lune 2012). For example, probability sampling (i.e. the sample is randomly selected) is used in quantitative research to “generate a representative sample” (Bryman 2008: 156). Sampling methods common in qualitative case study research, such as purposive and snowball sampling, are a type of non-probability strategy (i.e. the sample is not randomly selected) (Bryman 2008). However,

findings from data collected from a sample selected using a non-probability strategy cannot be generalised to the population from which the sample has been taken (Berg & Lune 2012).

This case study includes women from only two of several ethnic groups that comprise the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora, these being the Burman and Chin ethnic groups. The study is therefore not representative of the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora as a whole not of the Burman or Chin groups in Norway specifically. Moreover, only a relatively small number of women from the two ethnic groups included participated in the research. Thus, this case study gives an insight into the two ethnic groups in the diaspora, but may not be representative to the extent that similar questions asked to other individuals from the same groups give the same results. However, actions are taken to increase the reliability through the use of semi-structured interviews with all participants and by checking and comparing. Therefore, given the narrow scope and the relatively small number of informants of this case study, the findings from this thesis cannot be generalised to either the Burman or Chin groups or the larger Myanmar diaspora group in Norway.

With that said, generalisation is not a category of quality in qualitative research to the same extent as it is in quantitative research. A key category of quality in cases studies, in particular, is validity. As Berg and Lune (2012: 329) point out: “Theory that comes from cases is known to be basically valid in at least these cases.” While this still means a limitation in generalisation, “it cannot be a bad thing to begin with a strong empirical grounding.” Moreover, when working with case studies, it is important to distinguish between statistical generalization and analytic generalization. Statistic generalisation is the generalization used within the quantitative research strategy whereas analytic generalization is where “previously developed theory is used as a template with which to compare the empirical results of the case study” (Yin 2003: 32-33). Rather than generalising findings to a population, findings from qualitative case studies can be generalised to theory (Bryman 2008). Thus, the qualitative findings of this case study on the peacebuilding roles of refugee women in the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora can provide valuable insight and input into the development of conceptual and theoretical frameworks within which the broader phenomenon of refugee women’s peacebuilding roles is situated.

This case study has also made attempted to use multiple sources of information in order to increase the reliability of the findings. These sources of information include two groups of informants divided into primary and secondary informants, and documentations. Thus,

patterns running across data from primary informant interviews are corroborated against responses from secondary informant interviews as well as documents.

2.2 Research Participants

Research participants were contacted through the use of gatekeepers familiar with the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora. Community gatekeepers included organisations in the diaspora, as well as Norwegian non-governmental organisations that have close contact with the Myanmar diaspora. Even with the use of community gatekeepers, however, finding research participants proved difficult. Around fifteen potential primary informants were contacted, with positive responses from most. However, many of these potential informants either had to cancel the interview last minute or not respond to requests to meet for the interview. Nevertheless, the snowball approach to finding research participants was used whereby interviewees were asked to assist in recruiting others from their communities. This strategy was more successful in increasing the number of primary informants that participated (though still a relatively small number). Moreover, in order to decrease the chances of bias in using gatekeepers as a strategy in ‘selecting’ participants, the process involved using several gatekeepers from different communities.

Figure 1: Overview of primary informants

Interview number	Age	Employment	Marital status	No. children	Ethnic & religious background
1	40s	Yes	Single	0	Burman, Buddhist
4	40s	Yes	Single	0	Burman, Buddhist
6	20s	No/student	Single	0	Chin, Christian
7	30s	Yes	Single	0	Burman, Buddhist
9	40s	Yes	Married	2	Chin, Christian
10	40s	Yes	Married	2	Chin, Christian

A total of 13 research participants participated in this cases study. They are grouped into primary informants – including women from the Burman ethnic group (3) and Chin ethnic group (3), and secondary informants including male members of the Norwegian-Myanmar

diaspora (4), professionals from non-governmental organisations in Norway (2) and a politician who resides in Myanmar (1). The table in Figure 1 gives an overview of the primary informants (see also Appendix 1: List of Interviews).

2.3 Data Collection

The main method used to collect data was semi-structured interviews. In qualitative research, interviews are one of the most common data collection methods (Bryman 2008), and for case studies specifically are also one of the ‘most important’ sources of data (Yin 2003: 89). Qualitative interviewing was chosen for this case study as the most suitable method to collect data on individual perceptions and experiences from the person’s their own point of view.

One of the main benefits of semi-structured interviews is their flexibility (Berg & Lune 2012).

An interview guide was used during the interviews with questions designed to get responses that were ‘rich’ and ‘detailed’. Moreover, in the nature of semi-structured interviews, these questions were open-ended and constructed for the interviewees to present their own perspectives and what they saw as relevant and important. This also allowed for new issues to arise that then informed other interviews and the ongoing analysis process. The interview guide also helped ensure all relevant the issues were covered and avoided any divergence from the main aspects of the interview, as this would otherwise negatively affect the level of “standardization of the interview process and hence the reliability and validity of measurement” (Bryman 2008: 437).

As outlined above, interviews were conducted with both individuals from inside and outside the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora. Using other sources of evidence in the form of diaspora ‘outsiders’ , such as direct and participant observation, would have been less suitable in understanding individuals’ perceptions and experiences from the research subject’s point of view.

Interviews were conducted between April and June 2015 with most of the interviews lasting between one to two hours. Most of the interviews were conducted in person in quiet public spaces such as cafes and libraries, and three interviews were conducted using Skype. The

interviews were conducted in English or Norwegian with the exception of two interview for which an interpreter. The interpreter was also a primary informant who through snowball sampling had found two other women who wanted to participate in the research. The role of the interpreter in this case may have had an effect on the kind of information provided by the other two women, as they were from the same social network and thus may have felt they needed to hold back on sharing certain aspects in the presence of an interpreter they knew.

All interviews except one were recorded with the permission of the interviewee. Recordings were stored securely during the transcription process and then deleted once transcribed. Before interviews started, all interviewees were informed about the research topic and aims, and about their right to remain anonymous and to withdraw their participation at any stage. Interviews were only conducted and have only been included in this thesis with the consent of each individual interviewee.

Another dynamic of the interview method that may have had an effect on the information provided by interviewees is my nationality, particularly among informants from inside the diaspora who may not have shared certain information about their negative experiences living in Norway in case they might offend me. However, I informed all interviewees at the outset that I am Norwegian-British and grew up in the UK, and therefore do not feel such strong ties to Norway as 'home'. The aim in sharing my personal background with the informants from the diaspora especially was to establish common ground where they might feel I could relate with them in terms of living in two countries and to create a more comfortable and open environment in which they felt they could share their experiences of Norway – both positive and negative.

3 Theoretical Framework

This thesis situates the potential of refugee women as peacebuilding actors into the framework on Women, Peace and Security. In doing so, theory on the links between migration, development and peacebuilding is used as a framework to analyse how refugee women in diaspora that have resettled in third countries can contribute to peacebuilding in their countries of origin. Two key concepts first need to be defined in order to operationalise them in the context of this case study – diaspora and peacebuilding.

3.1 Defining Diaspora

Broadly defined, the concept of diaspora refers to “the scattering of people from their homelands into new communities across the globe.” (Brazier 2008: 24) Moreover, diaspora groups are a distinct category of migrants, whereby a main characteristic is a “shared commitment [to] a home place, somewhere other than where they reside” (Page & Mercer 2010: 104). Reason for migration is another category by which to define diaspora (Cohen 1997). For example, one category of diaspora groups is those that have been generated out of forced migration due to traumatic circumstances such as armed conflict, violence, persecution and human rights violations (Cohen 1997). This is the most relevant category of diaspora in which to place the women of the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora. Women, men and children have been forced to migrate both internally in Myanmar and outside the country due to decades of internal armed conflict, political repression by military regime as well as sectarian violence and persecution.

Another defining feature a diaspora group is shared identity. This may be an idea of ethnic or national identity that a group of migrants share (Cohen 1997). Moreover, the diaspora concept is denoted by a collective consciousness and memory based these identities (Orjuela 2008). Identity is particularly important as it raises the issue of homogeneity versus heterogeneity; that is, to what extent the diaspora can be seen as a single entity. Members of a diaspora do not necessarily identify in the same way despite originating from the same place. Factors that shape identity among diaspora members include social classes such as ethnicity, religion and language (Warnecke 2010). This is especially relevant in the case of the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora which comprises several different ethnic groups with their own specific linguistic and religious backgrounds. To take the Burman and Chin ethnic

groups that are included in this case study as an example: the Burman group is predominantly Buddhist and speak the Burmese language; while the Chin group is predominantly Christian and speak local Chin languages.

As such a broad definition of diaspora I used in this thesis, borrowing from Horst et al (2010: 8) as “expatriate minority communities who are engage in their countries of origin through transnational economic, political and/or socio-cultural contributions.” Moreover, given the heterogeneity of the Myanmar diaspora in Norway it may make more sense to talk about a ‘Norwegian-Burman diaspora’ and ‘Norwegian-Chin diaspora’, for example. Refugees (and other migrants) originating in Myanmar and residing in Norway are in this thesis referred to collectively as the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora, with reference is made to the specific ethnic group – Burman, Chin or other – where relevant.

3.2 Defining Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding is generally defined today as interventions aimed at preventing a lapse or relapse of violent conflict. As such, peacebuilding is understood as taking place before, during and after conflict. Mac Ginty and Williams (2009: 20) argue that there is no longer a “strict delineation of peacebuilding as an activity that occurs after a violent conflict ceased.” Moreover, peacebuilding is distinguished from other conflict resolution interventions such as peacemaking in particular. Peacebuilding goes beyond resolving violent conflict through establishing peace agreements, which is the work of peacemaking. A peace agreement in itself does not necessarily guarantee peace will be sustained; “The warring factions do not suddenly change their behaviour after peace agreements.” (Jeong 2002: 4) Peacebuilding aims to transform society and address underlying issues of conflict in order to make peace last. This definition of peacebuilding can be seen in the case of Myanmar, in which context Petrie and South (2014: 223) define it as involving “a commitment to transformative action” and “going beyond conflict management to address underlying (structural) issues and inequalities.”

The theoretical foundation of peacebuilding in the sense it is used in this thesis is found in the relationship between development and peace. The concept of peacebuilding is based on the idea that development guarantees peace. For example, that post-conflict development

prevents relapse into violent conflict, and that the absence of peace impedes development, based on the premise that peace is a prerequisite for development (Stokke 2011). Development can also have the counter effect of maintaining, fostering and sustaining peace. The general idea is that: “War retards development, but conversely, development retards war.” (Collier et al 2003, in Stokke 2011: 20) Development is thus generally considered essential in preventing conflict and as a tool to be ‘targeted’ in peacebuilding activities (Mac Ginty & Williams, 2009, p. 5).

Given that peacebuilding and development are ‘intrinsically linked’ (Horst et al 2010: 7), a broad definition of peacebuilding is used in this thesis to capture this relationship. Again, the definition is borrowed from Horst et al’s (2010: 6) handbook diaspora engagements in development and peacebuilding, which defines the concept as: “different kinds of development activities that are undertaken with a long-term commitment to create stability through sustainable transformation of structural conflict in all relevant social, economic and political spheres.”

3.3 Recognising Refugee Women as Actors in Peacebuilding

The main victims of armed conflicts today are civilians. Forced migration can be both an intended and unintended outcome of such violence (Koser 2009). Whether intended or not, the number of people forced to leave their homes is on the rise. The latest figures from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) show an increase in the number of people forcibly displaced due to persecution, armed conflict, human rights violations and other forms of violence. Of the global displaced population, the number has risen from over 51 million persons at the end of 2013 to almost 60 million persons at the end of 2014 – the largest increase in forced migration ever seen in one year (UNHCR 2014a: 2). Of these approximately 60 million, over 14 million⁴ are refugees fleeing their homes under the mandate of UNHCR (UNHCR 2014a: 2).⁵

While the number of people affected by violence and forced migration is increasing, the representation of these people in the decision-making processes that affect their lives remains

⁴ In addition to over 5 million registered Palestinian refugees.

⁵ Internally displaced persons and people seeking asylum account for around 38 million and 2 million, respectively (UNHCR 2014a: 2).

largely low. Despite being disproportionately affected by armed conflict and other forms of violence, those who have been displaced are often also disproportionately left out of the processes constructed to resolve the drivers of forced migration. In peace agreements, for example, more focus has been given on the situation of people in forced migration. However, this has not been met with increased attention to the roles of displaced people in matters of peace. As Koser (2009: 5) explains, people in forced migration are “still rarely consulted or represented in peace process; their particular circumstances are often overlooked in the language of peace agreements; and peacebuilding initiatives often marginalize them.” When forced migrants such as refugees *are* considered as playing a part in peacebuilding, the emphasis tends to be on their roles in repatriation and reintegration back in their countries of origin.

However, refugees tend only to be considered as playing a part in peace after they return to their countries of origin, yet it is often not possible to return to these countries until there is peace. Moreover, recognising the peacebuilding roles of refugees is also about recognising that they are important *stakeholders* in the peace processes of their countries. As Petrie and South (2014: 242) point out in the case of Myanmar, refugees in neighbouring countries such as Thailand and elsewhere are “[a]mong those with the greatest stake in the peace process in Myanmar”. Refugees and other groups affected by forced migration can and do play valuable roles in all areas of conflict resolution, and not only after return. They can be agents in changing the violent situations that led to their flight, and therefore should also be included in overall approaches to fostering peace. Snyder and Stobbe (2011: 4) argue that: “It is important to understand how the millions of refugees affected by armed conflicts have the capacity to facilitate peacemaking and peacebuilding to address their own needs and [...] help develop new theory, policy, and practices necessary to address contemporary ethno-political conflict.”

The tendency to leave refugees out of peace is also reflected in the paradox facing conflict-affected women. Women in situations of armed conflict have traditionally been excluded from matters of peace, evident both in the low level of women’s participation in peace processes and the poor recognition of their peacebuilding efforts. However, women are often among those most adversely affected by conflict and forced migration. Indeed, women form a ‘significant proportion of conflict-induced refugee populations (Raghuram 2004). Nonetheless, there has been increased recognition among activists, researchers, governments

and intergovernmental organisations alike of the potential of women to make positive contributions to conflict-affected societies. The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (UNSCR 1325) and subsequent resolutions provide a key example of recognising the role of women as actors in peacebuilding and the need to support their peacebuilding efforts (UN 2000).

The recognition of the potential for women to be peacebuilding actors is rooted in the acknowledgement of the gendered nature of conflict and peace; that women and men experience and respond to conflict and peace differently and thus have different needs during conflict and after conflict. Moreover, the recognition that women play active as well as passive roles during conflict and the transformative effects of conflict on gender relations – in that women often experience gains in terms of increased agency and empowerment during conflict – have supported an increased focus on the potential of women as peacebuilding actors (Behera 2006). UNSCR 1325, adopted in 2000, was a landmark document because it brought into the dominant discourse the recognition that women’s participation in peacebuilding should be supported (Anderlini 2007). It also recognizes women’s agency as going beyond the passive role of women (and others) as beneficiaries of conflict resolution, and focuses on their active roles in bringing about such resolutions.

The argument for supporting the inclusion of women in peacebuilding comes from both a normative and an efficiency standpoint (Anderlini 2007). The normative argument is predicated on the notion that women should have equal rights and opportunities to participate in processes that affect their lives. The efficiency argument deals with recognising the value of women’s activities in peacebuilding, thus viewing women involved in peace-related activities as a valuable resource in bringing about effective change. Indeed, excluding women from peacebuilding efforts may be seen as an efficiency failure as not all resources are used, which may then negatively impact the rate and sustainability of peacebuilding efforts. As argued in the UN Women report on gender, conflict and peace in Mon and Kayah States in Myanmar, the “missed opportunity to incorporate women’s contributions and perspectives [in peace agendas], puts the efficacy and sustainability of the peace process at risk.” (UN Women 2015: 18)

Women’s peacebuilding activities have in general great potential for transforming conflict-affected societies and laying the foundations for sustainable peace. A review of case studies

by Conciliation Resources (2013) covering a range of different conflict contexts between 1998 and 2010 shows that women's peacebuilding activities in particular add value to transforming underlying factors of conflict, such as the "deeply engrained divisions, mistrust and exclusionary politics" that characterise contemporary internal armed conflicts (Conciliation Resources 2013: 6). Women's activities broaden the scope of peacebuilding through activities that promote consensus and inclusion, address a broader range of social injustices and that go "beyond the negotiating table" (Conciliation Resources 2013: 6), and these can have transformational effects.

Similar to the increased recognition and value of women as peacebuilders, diaspora as actors in development and peacebuilding has also gained the attention of policy-makers in recent years. Diaspora contributions to development, in particular, in their countries of origin have been recognised by a number of Western European governments that have adopted domestic policies to promote engagement with diaspora groups in their respective countries as partners in development (de Haas 2007). In Norway, for example, international development and foreign policies from the late 2010s reflect the importance placed on diaspora groups as actors and partners in development, as outlined in the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs White Papers 'Climate, Conflict and Capital' and 'Interests, Responsibilities and Opportunities' (see NMFA 2008b; NMFA 2008a). For example, it is recognised in the policy framework that:

These minority groups have resources that have been utilised too little in the Norwegian development policy context. They possess valuable knowledge about culture, language, society, history, religion and politics. Both individuals and organisations have good contact with key milieus in their own or their parents' country of origin. They can provide important information and improve our understanding of ongoing political processes. (NMFA 2008b: 101)

This increased recognition of the peacebuilding roles of both diaspora and women reflects a shift in perspectives on people affected by violence. That is, they are seen not only as passive victims of their circumstance but also as agents of change. There remains a gap, however, in recognising and supporting the peacebuilding roles of *refugee women* in diaspora. When looking at the peacebuilding roles of refugee women, the respective paradoxes of excluding and marginalising refugees and women from peace efforts – despite them being key

stakeholders in peace – intertwine and it can be said that refugee women as a specific group of actors and stakeholders face exclusion at two levels – as refugees and as women. Indeed, refugee women in particular have often been left out of peace processes (Koser 2009).

When it comes to refugee women, however, there has been little recognition both in policy frameworks such as UNSCR 1325 on these women as actors in matters of peace. In reference to refugee women’s organisations, Snyder and Stobbe (2011: 4) point out that while UNSCR 1325 “does not specifically include refugee women as partners in peacemaking, [refugee women’s] organizations are no less important in furthering those resolutions.” In the context of the women, peace and security policy framework in Norway, the national action plan for 2015-2018 for implementation of UNSCR 1325 highlights as a priority area of action the need to strengthen women’s participation in peacebuilding. However, rather than refugee women being seen as actors in the area of peacebuilding, they are referred to instead in the context of vulnerability rather than agency; for example, the plan states: “Refugee and internally displaced women are particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence and discrimination.” (NMFA 2015a: 35)

The general lack of recognition of refugee women’s peacebuilding roles may lie in the tendency to view groups affected by forced migration as non-gendered. Indeed, women’s specific experiences of migration have generally been left out in migration research: “Most research within the field of migration studies is based on the experiences of male immigrants.” (Akman 2014: 2) Feminist scholars have critiqued the creation of such a homogenous image of diaspora and sought to include women’s experiences as different to men’s (Al-Ali 2010). Indeed, diaspora are not ‘gender-neutral’. The diaspora experience is gendered due to the different impacts that migration has on women and men and thus their gendered responses to the various changes and experiences that come with migration (Akman 2014).

Looking at migration populations as gendered is a relatively recent development in migration theory. Until the early 2000s, gender was either absent or at best in a ‘peripheral position’ in research theorising or analysing migration (Akman 2014: 1). In the 1980s, gender started to feature in research on migration, although through an approach of placing women into existing frames of research (Behera 2006: 27). Nonetheless, gender has since become an increasingly important dimension of migration research (Behera 2006). However, most

research in the sub-field of gender and migration has focused on issues related to labour, households, reproduction and the role of identity in transnationalism, and less on gender in the context of forced migration (Behera 2006).

When it comes to recognising refugee women in the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora as actors in peacebuilding, the links between migration, development and peacebuilding provide a useful framework in which to understand how they may contribute to peacebuilding.

3.4 Migration, Development and Peacebuilding

The literature on the link between migration and development is the starting point to understanding how people forced to migrate outside their countries of origin can still impact conditions in those countries, including having a peacebuilding impact. Traditionally, the link between migration and development has been seen in negative terms; namely that underdevelopment drives migration. Portes and Zhou (2012: 192) point out that “outmigration has been regarded as a symptom of underdevelopment or, in the case of professional migrants, as a net loss of talent – the so-called brain drain.” However, a more nuanced view of the migration-development link has emerged in recent years that takes into consideration both the “developmental costs and benefits of international migration” (Portes & Zhou 2012: 214).

The recognition of diaspora generated out of forced migration as actors in peacebuilding is rooted in the more overarching roles of diaspora in development. At the core of the theory on link between migration and development – or the ‘migration-development nexus’ – is the two-way nature of the relationship. While the migration-development nexus has tended to deal with the negative developmental impact of migration on origin countries as a consequence of ‘brain drain’, as well as the positive impact of migration on development in residence countries due to ‘brain gain’, de Haas (2007) points to a third dynamic of the migration-development nexus: the positive impact of migration on development in migrants’ countries of origin. Not only does migration impact development, but diaspora and other types of migrant groups can also have an impact on development (Sinatti et al 2010).

At the core of diaspora roles within the migration-development nexus is the phenomenon of *transnationalism*. While the concept of transnationalism is relatively new, the phenomenon itself is not (Torres 2008). Transnationalism is broadly defined as maintaining links across borders over time that can include the flow of material and non-material elements (Vertovec 2009). The idea of transnational migration is a more nuanced approach to understanding the dynamics of international migration. It is a departure from the traditional focus of international migration as understood in static terms; of moving only ‘from and to’ (Torres 2008). *Transnational* migration, on the other hand, implies more fluidity; making and maintaining connections across borders ‘between there and here’. The transnationalism concept has relatively recently been further broadened to include different types of migration flows, such as refugee flows (see for example Al-Ali & Koser 2002).

The activities of diaspora that can have positive impacts on their countries of origin take place within the ‘transnational social field’. The idea of a transnational social field refers to the space in which migrants maintain connections to their countries of origin, and that potentially impact conditions in those countries (Levitt & Nyberg-Sørensen 2004). The very idea of a transnational field in which social interactions occur challenges the traditional notion that migrant integration, on the one hand, and maintaining transnational links, on the other, are mutually exclusive (Carling & Pettersen 2015; Erdal & Oeppen 2013). In fact, integration and transnationalism are found to be complex social processes that migrants experience as ‘balancing acts’ (Erdal & Oeppen 2013). Moreover, Carling and Pettersen’s (2015) ‘matrix of attachment’ shows that integration and transnationalism interact and influence each other in varying and complex ways.

Within the transnational social field, diaspora can impact development in their countries of origin through a certain type of development contributions in the context of migration, namely the ‘development-by-diaspora’ type. ‘Development-by-diaspora’ is one type of diaspora contribution of Mohan’s typology (2002, in Page & Mercer 2010), which also includes ‘development-in-diaspora’ and ‘development-through-diaspora’ where both types of contributions impact positively development in the residence country. ‘Development-by-diaspora’, on the other hand, benefits the country of *origin*. This can happen through diaspora transnational contributions that support education and health, for example (Page & Mercer 2010). Development by diaspora can also benefit peacebuilding in the country of origin. As

such, the notion of diaspora as agents in development extends also to the specific contributions of diaspora as agents in peacebuilding.

With the view of diaspora transnational contributions narrowed-down to peacebuilding impact specifically, attention shifts to the nexus between diaspora, conflict and peace. Namely, how the positive relationship between migration and development in countries of origin impacts *peacebuilding* in those countries. This relates back to the close link between development and peacebuilding, as discussed earlier in this chapter in Chapter 3, whereby development can be a means to building peace and where peace is considered a fundamental element for sustainable development.

Paradigms in the theory on the diaspora-conflict- peace nexus have shifted from focusing on the negative role of diaspora in creating or fuelling conflict to more balanced analyses of both the negative and positive impacts of diaspora transnational engagements through contributions to development and peacebuilding (Pirkkalainen & Abdile 2009; see for example Orjuela 2008 and Zunzer 2004). These positive and negative impacts may also be understood as ‘constructive’ and ‘destructive’ roles, respectively (Warnecke 2010). The distinction between the two roles is, however, not always clear. The binary of constructive and destructive roles of diaspora obscures the reality that contributions intended to be constructive can at the same time have *unintentional* destructive outcomes. For example, a recent multiple case study on the transnational engagements of Nigerian, Ethiopian and Kenyan diasporas between 1995 and 2013 shows that they have had both a peacebuilding and peacewrecking outcomes (Beyene 2015). Nonetheless, in case studies from Sri Lanka, Somalia and Afghanistan, Zunzer (2004: 4) shows that “the positive potentials of diaspora communities for conflict transformation in their home countries outweigh their negative potential to become spoilers.” This illustrates the nuanced and often unintended nature of the connections between diaspora, conflict and peace.

The notion that diaspora can be agents in peacebuilding also challenges the dominant view of diaspora as supporting violent conflicts from abroad (Pirkkalainen & Abdile 2009). The diaspora can also play a significant role in peacebuilding but are often an underutilised resource (Cochrane, Baser & Swain 2009). Diaspora as agents in peacebuilding in the origin country can occur through ‘development-by-diaspora’ activities. Indeed, diaspora contributions to peacebuilding may be thought of in terms of *peacebuilding-relevant*

development activities. Moreover, for development activities to be constructive to peacebuilding in practice, they must “provide alternatives to the dependency on a war economy, address grievances that are at the roots of the armed conflict or provide incentives for cooperation across enemy lines.” (Orjuela 2008: 439) For example, diaspora’s development activities that support education and health initiatives in the origin country can have positive social and economic impacts on local communities, which in turn help create the stable foundations necessary for sustainable peace (Sinatti et al 2010).

Moreover, by highlighting the impact of diaspora in terms of peace or conflict in their countries of origin – whether destructive or constructive – highlights the *agency* of people in forced migration. This relates to recognising refugees (and not least refugee women) as agents rather than only passive victims, as discussed above. In recognising this, Shanmugaratnam, Lund and Stølen (2003) call for a more balanced view of people affected by forced migration that takes into account features of agency as well as structures that affect them, to avoid making narrow assumptions about the roles that people in these situations can play. As Shanmugaratnam et al (2003: 11) put it: “Without denying the devastating impact that violence, persecution and flight may have on the action and self-perception of displaced people, agency and creativity rather than passivity and resignation are more accurate characterisations”. In the context of refugees from Myanmar, Egreteau (2012: 117) also argues that a focus on agency helps better understand the diaspora as it goes “beyond the emotional focus on the plight of Burmese refugees and migrants”.

Diaspora can bring an ‘added’ value to the peacebuilding efforts in their countries of origin. Diaspora can function as bridges or mediators between origin and residence countries. Diaspora members are in a ‘unique bridging position’, meaning they often have context-specific knowledge of and transnational networks across the two locations of the origin and residence countries (Horst et al 2010: 6). Diaspora development and peacebuilding contributions are also more likely to be long-term engagements owing to their “emotional commitment and personal motivation that is unmatched by other actors.” (Horst et al 2010: 12) This kind of commitment common among diaspora groups is especially valuable because peacebuilding – understood as transforming conflict factors in order to move towards sustainable, lasting peace – is a long-term process requiring long-term commitment. Diaspora members engaged as actors in the origin country itself are also more likely to have access to isolated or high-risk areas that may otherwise be inaccessible to external actors; that is, actors

outside the diaspora that engage in development and peacebuilding work in the diaspora's country of origin (Horst et al 2010).

However, in looking at the relationship between transnational migration and peacebuilding, it is important not to essentialise the development or peacebuilding role of diaspora. That is, to have the simplistic view that diaspora members who maintain transnational links are *inherently* peacebuilders or *should* contribute positively to their country of origin. A nuanced perspective on the role of diaspora in matters of peace and conflict shows that diaspora can be both peacebuilders *and* spoilers of peace (Orjuela 2008). This relates to the heterogeneity of diaspora groups, where members have different and even conflicting interests.

Nevertheless, diaspora have been found to play important roles in peacebuilding in their countries of origin. And since this thesis is concerned with the potential of refugee women in the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora to contribute to building peace in Myanmar, the focus here is on the potential *constructive* roles of diaspora.

3.5 Transnational Peacebuilding Activities

Diaspora peacebuilding contributions can take place in different spheres. Diaspora may engage in transnational activities in certain 'action spheres', namely the spheres of economy, society and politics (Pirkkalainen & Abdile 2009: 7). Transnational activities in the economic, social and political spheres can be categorised as: *economic remittances*, *social remittances* and *political involvement*, respectively (Pirkkalainen & Abdile 2009; de Haas 2007).

Economic and Social Remittances

Economic remittances are one of the most significant and recognised ways diaspora contribute to development. Economic remittances from migrants to countries of origin can make up as much as twice the total official development assistance given by residence countries (de Haas 2007). They are sent in the form of capital and commodities, and in 2007 comprised of around UDS 251 billion monetary contributions to developing countries (Page & Mercer 2010: 103). As such, economic remittances can have positive impacts on

employment and economic growth in origin countries (de Haas 2007). Moreover, they can be ‘harnessed’ for post-conflict reconstruction and development, where recovery from the destruction of armed conflict and economic collapse is necessary for peacebuilding (Pirkkalainen & Abdile 2009: 23) Indeed, the significant role of economic remittances in supporting post-conflict development is one of the main arguments for recognising diaspora as a development *resource* (Nyberg-Sorensen, Van Hear & Engberg-Pederson 2002).

Economic remittances come primarily in two forms: individual remittances and collective remittances (Pirkkalainen & Abdile 2009). Individual remittances tend to be sent to support family members in the country of origin, and as such can be termed ‘family support systems’ (Erdal & Stokke 2009: 407). Collective remittances include donations to organisations in the country of origin that benefit community development and economic investments in, for example, local businesses in the country of origin (Pirkkalainen & Abdile 2009). Collective remittances tend to go towards community needs (Pirkkalainen & Abdile 2009). Diaspora members may remit to development organisations in their countries of origin where the development work of these organisations may include projects at the village level that improve livelihoods and increase access to financial resources. Collective remittances can also be important funding sources for development organisations in the country of origin (Erdal & Stokke 2009). Moreover, collective remittances can also be sent to countries of origin for the more direct purpose of supporting peace efforts there. For example, the Somali diaspora in Norway have sent remittances to finance reconciliation initiatives between conflicting clan groups (Horst & Gaas 2008).

However, the extent to which economic remittances translate into ‘development’ is debateable. While the recent debate on the migration-development nexus has focused increasingly on the positive impact diaspora can have on development in their origin country, migration is not necessarily a panacea to solving development issues. Indeed, de Haas (2007) stresses that migration is not the solution to reducing poverty in developing countries. De Haas (2007) argues that economic remittances are non-productive and oriented towards consumption which can lead to dependency among recipients, ultimately having negative consequences for development. Portes and Zhou (2012) also argue that there is the risk that a strong emphasis on migrant-led development and peacebuilding through transnational engagements such as economic remittances take away from the responsibility of the country of origin state. Moreover, economic remittances can also have the impact of creating or

fuelling conflict. For example, collective remittances in the form of financial support directed at conflicting parties can fuel and prolong conflict (Orjuela 2008).

Social remittances are another way through which diaspora can contribute to development in their country of origin. Social remittances are a consequence of migration, in that the transnational spaces of diaspora allow for the transfer of ideas, values, behaviours and social capital such as skills and knowledge (Levitt 1998). The notion of movement is important in understanding this concept, as social remittances “flow from receiving to sending country communities” (Levitt 1998: 926–927). Such movement of social elements can lead to changes in communities in countries of origin; for example, challenging patriarchy, questioning ‘tradition’, renewing commitments to democracy and to advocate for good governance (Page & Mercer 2010).

The movement of social remittances can be thought to take place through certain ‘channels’. These channels can include temporary return, for example when diaspora members return temporarily to their origin country a regular basis in order to visit family and friends, to do volunteer or other forms of work (Erdal & Stokke 2009). This temporary return or ‘diaspora circulation’ can result in ‘brain circulation’, wherein social capital in particular is circulated between the residence and origin country rather than drained from the country of origin (Erdal & Stokke 2009).

Political Involvement

Diaspora can also contribute to development and peacebuilding in their origin country through their political involvement. Diaspora can be politically involved *indirectly* through advocacy and lobbying and *directly* through formal political participation (Pirkkalainen & Abdile 2009). Political involvement may be considered more directly significant for peacebuilding, where political activities such as advocacy and lobbying may be centred on issue related to conflict and peace, and where formal political participation may influence policy-making in the residence country that is relevant to improving conditions in the country of origin (Pirkkalainen & Abdile 2009).

Indirect political involvement through advocacy and lobbying includes activities such as raising awareness through public demonstrations about the situation in the country of origin.

The diaspora may also advocate and lobby governments and non-governmental organisations to pressure them to take action on issues such as human rights violations (Warnecke 2010). Advocacy and lobbying is often carried out through diaspora organisations, where organisations formed by the diaspora in the residence country have been found to play an important role in public political debate, strengthening civil society and improving the rights of marginalised groups such as women and minorities (de Haas 2007). For example, diaspora organisations from the Ethiopian diaspora in Germany have been active in campaigning, raising awareness about issues in Ethiopia and arranging public debates in the residence country (Warnecke 2010).

Some governmental development agencies, particularly in Europe, have recognised the potential for diaspora as partners in development. Diaspora can thus also be politically involved through engaging with governmental agencies in setting the international development objectives of residence countries towards the diaspora's origin country (de Haas 2007). In doing so, many of these governments have established platforms from which the diaspora can be represented. However, de Haas (2007) also argues that this approach is less effective than supporting existing diaspora organisations that are already working on development-related activities.

Direct political involvement includes members of the diaspora who participate in the formal politics of residence and origin countries. For example, members of the Somali diaspora in Norway are active members of Norwegian political parties in which they also work to improve conditions for Somalis in both the residence and origin countries (Horst & Gaas 2008). Direct political involvement may also include participation in the formal politics of the country of origin. For example, individual representatives from the diaspora may take on central political roles in the origin country, as is seen in the case of Afghanistan's transition period (Warnecke 2010).

3.6 Refugee Women in Transnational Peacebuilding

Some recent research has extended the focus of diaspora peacebuilding to look at the specific roles of refugee women. For example, research carried out by Snyder (2011; 2015) looks at the peacebuilding capacity of Myanmar refugee women in the context of refugee camps

along the Thai-Burman border and Myanmar women from Karen State in the context of the resettled refugee population in Canada. Snyder highlights the ‘unique strengths’ of refugee women as well as the “obstacles that refugee women face as diaspora operating across multiple borders” (Snyder & Stobbe 2011: 4). This is a research focus that is otherwise largely lacking in peacebuilding capacity literature (Snyder & Stobbe 2011).

As well as bringing more attention to the peacebuilding potential of refugee women in neighbouring and third countries, Snyder’s research also makes important contributions to an otherwise scarce body of knowledge on the topic. These contributions include revealing the specific value that refugee women in diaspora can and do bring to peacebuilding. For example, Snyder (2011; 2015) shows how these women demonstrate significant bridgebuilding capacity as a means of non-violent social change that can transform conflict-affected societies (Snyder & Stobbe 2011: 4). Moreover, in assessing the value refugee women bring to peacebuilding, Snyder reveals the unique contributions of these women; namely, that they bring broaden and make more inclusive the dominant models of peacebuilding (Snyder & Stobbe 2011).

This case study on refugee women in the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora seeks to bring refugee women further into the discussion on peacebuilding – namely, as actors in peacebuilding. The following chapters present the empirical material that shows the potential for refugee women in the specific case of the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora in playing a part as peacebuilding actors.

4 Transnational Engagements of Women in the Norwegian-Myanmar Diaspora

4.1 The Norwegian-Myanmar Diaspora

The Burman and Chin women included in this case study are situated within the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora. A description of this diaspora group therefore needs to be presented in order to understand the context of the country from which the women have been forced to leave, and the diaspora group within which the women's potential peacebuilding contributions take place.

Myanmar's Recent History and Development

Development in Myanmar since independence from the United Kingdom in 1948 has been characterised by decades of ethnic armed conflicts, political violence by successive military regimes and the struggles for ethnic autonomy and democracy. Egreteau (2012: 115) summarises to this period as the “postcolonial decades of military rule, interethnic violence and underdevelopment.” A recent nationwide census recorded Myanmar's population at just below 51.5 million people (Myanmar Ministry of Immigration and Population 2015: 2). Ethnic diversity is among the highest in the world, with the population comprising of around 135 ethnic groups (Ditlevsen 2014: 122). The Burman ethnic group is the largest, accounting for around two-thirds of the population (Ditlevsen 2014: 122), with other ethnic groups comprising a total of around 33–40 per cent of the population (Gravers 2014: 155).⁶

Tensions between the military regime, comprised predominantly of people from the Burman ethnic majority, and marginalised ethnic minorities have been the source of armed conflicts in the country since independence. As Ditlevsen (2014: 121–122) points out, the ethnic diversity that characterises armed conflict in Myanmar “is partly a result of British colonial rule, the country being mapped in a manner that split ethnic groups between Myanmar and

⁶ This percentage does not account of the Muslim Rohingya population which numbers around 800,000 or other groups such as Indians and Chinese ethnic groups of around 800,000 and 400,000, respectively (Gravers 2014: 155).

neighbouring countries – a situation that may partly explain the ongoing conflicts and challenges in uniting the country.”

However, the hand-over of state governance from the military to a quasi-civilian government in 2011 started a series of positive changes in the country. The post-2011 government led by President Thein Sein set about the process of political and economic reforms and a nationwide peace process. The main opposition party National League for Democracy (NLD), led by Aung San Suu Kyi, won the majority of its seats contested in 2012 by-elections, and in the recent elections in November 2015 won a landslide victory in the country’s first democratic elections in decades. Economic reforms have aimed to open up Myanmar’s market and establish a market-based economy after decades of isolation and economic policies guided by the ‘Burmese Way to Socialism’ ideology of the former military regime led by Ne Win. Moreover, a nationwide peace process began in 2012 following the President Thein Sein’s ‘1/11 Peace Call’, which invited ethnic armed groups to peace talks. The peace process has since resulted the recent signing in October 2015 of the Nationwide Peace Agreement. Despite the apparent successes of the peace process so far, armed conflict has continued in some regions. Namely, in the northeast region conflict has increased following the breakdown of the ceasefire between the government and the Kachin ethnic armed group, and fighting continues in Shan State (Petrie & South 2014).

Decades of military rule and armed conflict has led to underdevelopment that is still visible in the country today. Myanmar is classified a ‘least developed country’ and is regionally one of the poorest countries in southeast Asia (Ditlevsen 2014: 124). Basic social services such as education and health care have also suffered greatly due to poor governance and economic mismanagement of military regimes (Ditlevsen 2014: 124). The civilian impact of armed conflict and political violence in Myanmar is also evident in the many forms of human rights abuses that have characterised the decades-long struggles for ethnic autonomy and democracy. Human rights abuses such as the use of forced labour, child soldiers and sexual violence in conflict have been widespread and perpetrated by both state actors and non-state actors (Ytzen 2014). Particularly affected by insecurity in Myanmar have been women. For example, sexual violence against women and girls such as rape has been used by the military as “an instrument of war and oppression” (Ytzen 2014: 261). This illustrates the particular gendered impacts of conflict in Myanmar, also highlighted in the UN Women report on gender, conflict and peace in Mon and Kayin State (UN Women 2015). Moreover, despite the

peace process gender-based violence continues. Since 2013, it has been raised as an ongoing problem in Myanmar by Human Rights Watch (Ytzen 2014).

Forced Migration from Myanmar

The decades-long military rule and armed conflict in Myanmar has had major civilian impact. This is evident in the large flows of forced migration both inside and outside the country. The history of Myanmar exiles a relatively recent one, with forced migration mostly due to Myanmar's post-colonial history (Egreteau 2012). Myanmar has long been considered to have one of the world's worst refugee situations (Ytzen 2014). Figures from 2013 show an estimated 458,000 people internally displaced in Myanmar (Ytzen 2014: 259). Moreover, UNHCR figures from the end of 2014 show the proportion of the global refugee population originating from Myanmar at around 500,000 persons, placing Myanmar among the top ten refugee source countries (UNHCR 2014a: 14).

Political oppression has been one main driver of forced migration. Pro-democracy activists, many of whom come from the majority Burman ethnic group, opposed to the military regime were forced into exile following violent crackdowns of the 1988 pro-democracy protests (Egreteau 2012). This "pushed many Burmese dissidents into exile – regardless of their ethnic background." (Egreteau 2012: 120) Other main reasons for forced migration from Myanmar are ethnic-based conflict-induced displacement and displacement due to military occupation (South 2007).⁷ For example, any in the Christian Chin ethnic minority group were displaced following conflicts after "Christian-dominated minorities took up arms against the Burmese central government." (Egreteau 2012: 120) In the border areas such as Chin State where armed ethnic conflicts have occurred, forced migration has predominantly affected ethnic minorities living there (South 2014; Egreteau 2012). As Egreteau (2012: 120) explains of the ethnic majority-minority dynamics of the country, "Post-independence Burmanization campaigns led by the central Burman-dominated authorities [...] have also driven non-Burman communities across the country's porous borders." For example, approximately 150,000 refugees from Myanmar are situated across nine camps in Thai region bordering ethnic minority Kayin and Kayah States (Ytzen 2014: 256). While migration from Myanmar slowed down in the 1990s and 2000s following a number of ceasefire agreements, migration inside the country and transnationally continued (Egreteau 2012).

⁷ Other reasons for migration include development-induced displacement and livelihood vulnerability (South 2007).

One estimate of the total number of people comprising the global Myanmar diaspora sets the population at 2–3 million people (Egretau 2012: 116). In 2010, the total number to have migrated from Myanmar was over 500,000, with the top destination countries being Thailand, the USA, India, Malaysia, Australia, the UK, Japan, Canada, South Korea and Germany (World Bank 2011: 186).

The number of immigrants from Myanmar residing in Norway as of January 2015 is around 3400 persons (Statistics Norway 2015).⁸ Swe (2013: 230) claims that in 2013 there were “over 3000 Burmese with a refugee background (including family members who have been granted family reunification with refugees)” in Norway. Moreover, Myanmar refugees resettled in Norway appear to have migrated to the residence country mainly from 2005 onwards (Swe 2013: 230). The number of Myanmar refugees in Norway and the year in which they started to arrive are also corroborated by both primary and secondary informants in this case study.

Refugees resettled in Norway come through the national quota scheme which prioritised resettlement cases referred by UNHCR (UNHCR 2014b). Of those that have migrated through the UNHCR resettlement programme, the majority of refugees from Myanmar come mainly through transit countries such as Thailand, India and Malaysia (Swe 2013). The Myanmar refugee population in Norway comprises ethnic minorities fleeing insecurities due to ethnic armed conflicts (such as the Chin ethnic group) and political exiles and former political prisoners fleeing political violence (such as the Burman ethnic group). A more recent in-flow of people from Myanmar have been the Muslim Rohingya resettled refugees and asylum-seekers, which according to one informant from the Rohingya group in Norway comprises of around 90 people (Interview 3).

The Burman and Chin Ethnic Groups in Norway

The refugee women included in this case study come from Burman-Buddhist and Chin-Christian backgrounds. In Myanmar, the Burman ethnic group accounts for around two-thirds of the total population (Ditlevsen 2014: 122). Burmans also make up the majority of

⁸ This figure does not include people born in Norway to immigrant parents.

Buddhists in Myanmar (89 per cent), with Buddhism being the majority religion in the country (Gravers & Ditlevsen 2014).⁹

Chins in Myanmar comprise a population of around one million and reside primarily in Chin State, with smaller populations found in India (namely the Mizoram and Manipur regions) and Bangladesh (Gravers 2014). The majority of Chins are Christian (Baptist and Catholic), with Christians making up a religious minority of around 4 per cent of the total Myanmar population (Gravers & Ditlevsen 2014: 280).¹⁰ Between the six tribal sub-groups of the Chin ethnic group, native ethnic languages are mutually unintelligible (Gravers, 2014, p. 157).

Figures from the Norwegian statistics bureau Statistics Norway do not disaggregate the number of people from Myanmar residing in Norway by ethnicity or other classes. Nonetheless, some informants in this cases study provided approximations of the size of some Myanmar ethnic groups in Norway, though not the Burman group. According to a secondary informant from the Chin community in Norway and who also works with the Kayah community in Norway, the Myanmar refugee group in Norway is composed of mostly Chin and Karen ethnic backgrounds (Interview 12). He estimates around 1800 refugees from the Chin group, of which around 90 per cent belong to the Baptist Christian church in Norway, and around 1500 refugees from the Kayah group, of which about half are also members of the Baptist Christian church (Interview 12).¹¹

Among the informants in this cases study, the majority migrated to Norway in the mid-2000s either alone or together with their families through family reunification as part of the UNHCR refugee resettlement programme. The Myanmar diaspora is thus a relatively new diaspora group in Norway comprising primarily of first generation migrants.

The “Norwegian-Myanmar Diaspora”

An important aspect when referring to ‘the diaspora’ is how individual members of the diaspora identify themselves, also known as their ‘self-identification’ (Abdile 2014). Given

⁹ Other religions groups in Myanmar include Muslims (4 per cent; mostly Sunni) (Gravers & Ditlevsen 2014: 280), Hindus (2 per cent) and Animists (1 per cent) (Ditlevsen 2014: 123).

¹⁰ Other Christians in Burma/Myanmar include people from the Kachin and Kayah ethnic groups and a smaller number from the Kayin ethnic group (Gravers & Ditlevsen 2014: 280).

¹¹ In Myanmar, the Kayah ethnic group comprises between 3-4 million people, including a Buddhist majority and Christian minority (Gravers 2014: 155).

the importance that ethnic identity has played in Myanmar's recent history and, not least, ethnic armed conflicts, it is perhaps unsurprising that expressions of identity were found among the informants from the diaspora focused on their respective ethnic backgrounds. Some self-identified as being from a particular ethnic group based on feelings of belonging and attachment to the country of origin, while others expressed this through highlighting the differences between ethnic groups. Some examples from the interview data illustrate these different forms of self-identification:

Even though I have a Norwegian passport, I feel that I am still Burmese. For example, if something happens in Norway, then I feel that I'm Norwegian. But if something happens in Burma, I also feel it – it's my home, that's where I come from. (Interview 7; from Burman ethnic group)

We – or “people from Burma”, which is what I say – we are not like original Burmans. We are our own ethnic population. We are very different. (Interview 12; from Chin ethnic group)

Self-identification based on ethnicity also manifests itself in the social networks that the respective ethnic groups have in Norway. In another study on Myanmar refugees in Norway, Swe (2013) finds that the refugees' participation in religious and ethnic activities is a way of maintaining their transnational identities. As Swe (2013: 236) explains, these kinds of social networks that centre on religion and ethnicity are a way to “maintain their existing social networks and status within their group in order to confirm their ethnic identification and pursue their interests in Norway.” All of the primary informants in this case study said their social networks comprised primarily of others from the same religious and ethnic backgrounds as themselves. For example, Chin refugees in Norway have formed a close community whose social life centres mostly around the church and other religious activities, as one informant from the Chin group explains:

Chin community is very close. We are a strong, tight-knit community. (Interview 6)

The different ethnic identities and ‘ethnicisation’ of the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora's social space brings into question whether the group can indeed be called the ‘Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora’ given the group's identity-based heterogeneity. Heterogeneity in terms of identity in a given diaspora takes place when the “same divisions that were relevant in the origin country are reflected in the set-up of diaspora groups in the residence country”

(Warnecke 2010: 9). This ethnicisation is also seen among the Myanmar diaspora in Asia where the diaspora is fragmented along ethnic lines (Egreteau 2012). Moreover, ethnicisation of identity can also lead to fragmentation within the diaspora (Warnecke 2010), as has been found in this case study in relation to the diaspora's political involvement, discussed in Chapter 4.3.

4.2 Perspectives on Peacebuilding

This section deals with perspectives on peacebuilding both in the sense of the perspectives on peacebuilding of the women and in terms of the general perspectives among all informants in this study as regards the peacebuilding role of the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora. First, interview data is presented to illustrate the peacebuilding perspectives of the women from the Burman and Chin ethnic groups in the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora, before presenting the general perspectives on this particular diaspora's peacebuilding role from those inside and outside the diaspora.

“The Foundation is Education”

In a review of multiple case studies on women's peacebuilding across difference conflict contexts, Conciliation Resources (2013) show that women's gendered perspectives of conflict and peace bring different experiences, interests and priorities into peacebuilding efforts. Moreover, the perspectives that women have in terms of peace often involve taking peacebuilding beyond negotiations at the peace table by recognising the deeper issues that need to be addressed (Conciliation Resources 2013). The UN Women study in southeast Myanmar also finds that women's gendered experiences of the armed conflicts have led to broader perspectives on peace that goes beyond the cessation of fighting and towards long-term solutions. As pointed out in the report: “[Women] have specific socially-acquired knowledge, skills and capacities that complement men's in peace and development processes – all of which enhance the inclusiveness and potential for greater sustainability of peace and development.” (UN Women 2015: 10)

In relation to peacebuilding in Myanmar, the women in the study discussed a range of relevant issues including access to health care, livelihood security and poverty reduction,

democracy and ethnic minority rights, illustrating the broad nature of their perspectives. Interestingly, women's empowerment and gender equality were not raised in any of the interviews in relation to peacebuilding. The key perspectives that came across in all of the interviews with primary informants, however was the emphasis of peacebuilding through the education. This development-related focus reflects the need to look at the perspectives of diaspora members themselves in order understand how *they* understand peacebuilding. Indeed, diaspora members do not necessarily define their transnational engagements with their country of origin in terms of 'peacebuilding'. For example, in the case of the Somali diaspora in Europe, many diaspora members view their engagements with the origin country in terms of development aid rather than peacebuilding (Sinatti et al 2010). Similarly, members of diaspora organisations originating from the Horn of Africa and residing in Norway view their engagements in terms of humanitarian or development aid (Horst & Gaas 2008).

Education appeared to be a top priority among the women in the study in their views how to improve conditions for peace in Myanmar. The following interview data illustrates the emphasis that the women in the study place on education in relation to peace:

I think that education is the most important thing. (Interview 9)

I have four most important things that I think should improve. The first one is education. [...] I put education first because I have seen that normally in Burma in one school class there are about 60 or 70 students in one class. So many people do not have a chance to learn properly. (Interview 10)

The most important thing is education. If you cannot pay high price, your children don't have the good education. [...] These basic things – education, health care – you need to have your own money, otherwise your family have health care and education in a good way. That is the most serious problem.” (Interview 4)

Moreover, the women in the study also emphasised the need for education in Myanmar to be *democratic*. This relates to the perceived need that children should be able to think freely, creatively and critically. Some of the women also stress that this kind of education should extend to all levels and sectors of society, as the following interview data illustrates:

One very concrete thing is how students learn at school. In Burma, when we study, there is a test and we have to memorise everything – parrot learning. You don't know what you learn. But you memorise it. Without analysing, without really knowing what you know. So I would like that to be improved in Burma also. I think that by memorising, you only learn one person's perspective. But if you put in your reading your reasoning and your thinking, I think that it will make you broader. But right now it's memorising and it doesn't give you much room to think and create, to do critical thinking. (Interview 10)

In our country, the teacher gives the student a novel and then the teacher writes down what they learn. We cannot change any words in the exam. We have to memorise by heart every word, and we have no right to free thinking. Also we have to change education from primary school to the university to have free thinking. People need to think freely. (Interview 1)

Education is important for everyone in Burma. Even though they finish school, their knowledge isn't good enough because the teachers aren't good, they aren't 'upgraded'. For a hundred years they've used the same book and they still use it. There is no thinking. Everyone has been closed in in Burma, they can't learn from the internet. All they read is this book. [...] Just write the same thing, what the teachers say. No thinking, no creativity. (Interview 7)

Some of the women also seem to consider democratic education as necessary in transforming Myanmar society, as illustrated in the following responses:

Because only educated people understand their rights and what should be done in the country. So that's why I am supporting education for that. (Interview 9)

I think that one of the things it will change, if we have proper education, is that we are going to have good leaders. And then generally more people will have broader view and broader perspective. (Interview 10)

Democratic education was seen among some of the women as a way to foster an *evolution* of Myanmar society, wherein evolution is understood as empowering people with education. Such an evolutionary is seen as a slower but more sustainable way of transforming society as opposed to revolution. Revolution was seen as potentially counterproductive in achieving democracy and peace in Myanmar due to the high degree of diversity in the country, as one informant explains:

When we were young we thought that we can change the government by the revolution, with demonstration, with the student army. It is maybe about 30 years ago. It is not realistic to change with a revolution, especially in our country, because there are different types of people, different knowledge of people, different goals of people. That is why it is not easy to change my country with a revolution. (Interview 1)

4.3 From Perspectives to Practice: Transnational Activities

The perceptions among the study's informants on what is needed for peacebuilding in Myanmar closely reflect the actual engagements of the women in this study in activities oriented towards their country of origin. These engagements take place in three intersecting spheres: the economic, social and political. This next sub-chapter presents empirical material on the transnational engagements of Burman and Chin women in Myanmar-Norway diaspora within these three spheres.

4.3.1 Economic Remittances

Economic remittances are one of the main transnational activities in which the women in this study engage. According to both primary and secondary informants, economic remittances are the most significant way in which diaspora members (female and male) engage with their communities of origin in Myanmar. The significance of economic remittances among those in this study is also reflected in Swe's (2013) study on Myanmar resettled refugees in Norway. All resettled refugee families in Swe's study reported engagement in economic remittances.

The significance of economic remittances among the women in this study is reflected in informants' perceptions of the way in which they think the diaspora can impact conditions in Myanmar. The following interview data illustrates this:

One thing we are doing within these two decades of time is all the time we are supporting our colleagues, our families, our relatives who need help by giving money. (Interview 4)

I think mostly remittances, the money they send. I think that the money that they send plays a very important role in the everyday lives in Chin State. (Interview 6)

The economic remittances of the women in this study can be divided into two main types: individual and collective. As Erdal and Stokke (2009) show in their study of the Tamil diaspora in Norway, concern for the country of origin is expressed in material contributions to both families and communities ‘back home’. Moreover, Erdal and Stokke (2009: 407) term economic remittances from the individual diaspora members to family members as ‘family support systems’. The following sub-section will start with demonstrating the women’s engagements in family support systems, before turning to their engagements in collective remittances.

Economic support systems

All of the women in this study reported sending money primarily to family members in Myanmar. Among the respondents in Swe’s (2013) study, economic remittances fit primarily into the economic support system notion, with recipients being close and extended family and friends in Myanmar. The purpose of economic remittances sent by the women in this study to their families is primarily for livelihood support and education. Some also send money to cover the costs of family members’ health care needs. This trend is also supported by Swe’s (2013) study which finds that respondents engage in individual economic remittances in order to cover the living costs (such as food and housing), education and health care of their families and friends in Myanmar.

There is an important distinction between the purpose and the actual use of economic remittances, which has implications on the impact of these support systems. The issue of how recipients actually use of remittances sent by the women in the diaspora cannot be covered in this single-sited study. What this study has found, however, is the various reasons – economic, social and political – for sending money to family and friends in Myanmar. This also shows the women’s understanding and perspectives on the conditions facing their families and friends living in Myanmar.

One of the main reasons motivating remittance-sending among the women in the study was to support family members in Myanmar facing economic insecurity for various reasons. For example, some informants’ families face a lack of employment opportunities. Another reason for support systems is to help elderly family members living on low pension incomes.

Moreover, informants said that the economic needs of these family members facing low employment opportunities and pension incomes have been further exacerbated by recent rapid increases in living costs in Myanmar. These increased living costs meant some of the women in the study more regularly send money, either directly or indirectly through their immediate family in Norway, to elderly family members in Myanmar. The following interview data illustrate these motivations:

There [in Burma/Myanmar], there's not much job opportunities. So many people depend on the money that you send from abroad, for everyday living. I think they're very grateful. (Interview 6)

I send money to my parents because they are old and they cannot work anymore. So I send to them more regularly. I have to send money to my parents enough for their everyday living because my father has a little pension but it's not enough for the everyday life. So I send that so they don't have any problems living everyday life. (Interview 9)

The living costs are pretty much higher than when we were there [before 2005]. And my grandmas, I think they have some income from pension, but then it's not really enough [...] So I think my parents always send them [money]. (Interview 6)

A further reason for sending remittances, primarily among the Burman women in the study, was to support family and friends who had lost their sources of livelihood following Cyclone Nargis in 2008. Many people living in areas around the city of Yangon (Rangoon) experienced the destruction of their livelihoods after the cyclone, referred to as the worst natural disaster in Myanmar's history. The following response from one woman in the study reflects the significance of diaspora remittances in supporting origin-country recovery from disasters:

There was a cyclone in 2008 in Rangoon. The government didn't care for the people who suffered. But the people like us, we support with money. (Interview 4)

The other main purpose for engaging in family support systems was to help family members access education. This included opportunities for primary, secondary and higher education both in Myanmar and abroad. The primary motivation given by the women in the study for supporting access education was so that recipients of the remittances, namely siblings, nieces and nephews, could receive not only an education but also a *quality* education. An emphasis on quality was evident across many of the interviews with primary informants, who pointed

to a lack of quality in education provided over the years and under the current system in Myanmar. In order to support access to quality education among their family members, remittances are targeted at funding extra tuition, private education and education abroad. The following interview data illustrate the role that the women's engagements in family support systems play in strategies for accessing better education:

Since the government is so bad, if you get government education, you don't really learn that much. So you have to go to either private school or you have to take extra tuition time. So that kind of thing costs money and since the parents cannot support I send money for that purpose. (Interview 9)

I send money to my little brother because he wanted to study in India, which is the neighbouring country. So I send money to him because my parents cannot support him for his school. (Interview 9)

These forms of monetary support may also be sent as expressions of political solidarity. For example, according to one secondary informant who has worked closely with Myanmar diaspora in Norway for many years, many from the Burman ethnic group in Norway provide financial support to families of political prisoners from the democratic opposition and who have not been able to leave Myanmar (Interview 5).

Experiences shared by some informants about how political imprisonment impacts families show that family support systems as expressions of political solidarity are also gendered. For example, in families where the husband has been imprisoned, the women 'left behind' are often met with significant economic challenges to provide financially for their families (Interview 1). Thus, financial support from the diaspora can have a preventative impact on these families falling (deeper) into poverty, and the likely feminisation of poverty among this group. Moreover, the insecure economy of families in these situations can affect children's access to education when there is no longer enough income to pay for school fees (Interview 1). In particular, this is gendered because it may disproportionately affect access to education for girls. In many poor families in Myanmar with limited financial resources to pay for the school fees of all children in the family, the priority is often given to educating sons (Interview 8). Thus, by financially supporting poor families in this situation, the financial contributions from the diaspora may also have the (indirect) impact of supporting girls' education.

Collective remittances

As well as individual-based support systems through which economic remittances reach family and friends in the country of origin, another form that diaspora financial contributions can take is *collective-based* economic remittances. These remittances are collective in that they are to diaspora organisations or other non-governmental organisations, and that they (are intended to) reach a collective of recipients. Based on data from interviews, the women in this study, as well as other women in the diaspora communities to which the informants belong, engage in collective economic remittances in both formal and informal arenas. In the formal arena, the women give donations to development NGOs, both directly and indirectly, via diaspora organisations, and to political organisations in the country of origin. In the informal arena, they remit through small informal groups that send to their communities of origin.

The main purpose for engaging in this form of economic remittances is to support basic needs and foster democratic political change. Thus, the women's collective economic remittances can be further grouped by purpose: remittances for development and for democracy. These engagements are further characterised by ethnicity-based distinctions. While the women from both the Burman and Chin ethnic groups included in this study engage in collective economic remittances both for development and democracy, engaging in remittances for democracy is found primarily among the women in the Burman ethnic group.

It is evident from the interview data that the main way in which the women from both ethnic groups in the study contribute to their country of origin, through their transnational activities such as collective economic remittances, is by having a (potential) positive impact on the development of the country. Supporting education and health care from outside Myanmar was identified by a number of informants as an important way the Myanmar diaspora can contribute to development 'at home'. According to a Burmese politician interviewed for this study, the Myanmar diaspora shows the capacity to support a number of organisations in Myanmar, such as the Daw Kan Gyi Foundation which works in the health and education sectors and Mother House which runs free education centres across the country (Interview 8). This is an example of the intersection between economic and social transnational spheres, wherein economic activities in the residence country can have social impacts in the origin country. Moreover, the development-oriented contributions of women in this study reflect a more general trend among the transnational engagements of women in other diaspora groups

in Norway (Interview 13). According to a secondary informant who works on co-development with diaspora organisations, women in the Norwegian-Somali diaspora in particular play a central role in the diaspora's development contributions. In reference to the women's participation in co-development projects, the informant explains:

A very important activity women do is fundraising. They fundraise for the schools, the [development] projects. And there I would say cooking is often as part of what women would often do, because they sell food [at local festivals in Oslo]. (Interview 13)

All of the women in this study send collective economic remittances in the formal arena for the purpose of development. They donate to organisations doing development work in Myanmar, namely in providing education and health services. These donations are given either directly by the women to the development organisations or indirectly through diaspora organisations, or in some cases both. A good example of this is found in the collective economic remittances of the women in the Chin group and, according to both primary and secondary informants, many women in the Chin community in Norway as a whole.

Women in the Chin group in Norway donate to an NGO called Partners Relief and Development (referred to as Partners) both directly and through their membership in a diaspora women's group called the Norwegian Chin Christian Women's Federation (NCCWF), which is a sub-section of the diaspora faith-based organisation the Norwegian Chin Christian Federation (NCCF). Donations to Partners are collected from NCCWF members and from fundraising activities. Partners is a Christian faith-based organisation founded by a Norwegian and an American in 1995 and operates in Myanmar and Thailand. The organisation provides supports livelihood strategies, education and health services to internally displaced populations as well as stateless persons (namely the Rohingya) in Myanmar, and support similar services in Thailand which are oriented towards Myanmar refugee and labour migrant communities (Partners Website n.d.). The organisation works on sustainable development projects, including empowering families through supporting livelihood strategies in, for example, agriculture and animal husbandry (Partners Website n.d.). It also focuses on women's development, for example through a skills training and income generation programme for Karen refugee women on the Thai-Burma border, internally displaced women and women in migrant communities in Thailand (Partners Website n.d.). Another main focus of their work is to increase children's access to healthcare and medical provisions and schooling (Partners Website n.d.).

While Partners does not work with supporting forced or voluntary migrant communities originating from Chin State, women appear to support this organisation based on feelings of faith-based solidarity, as the beneficiaries of Partners' work are primarily forced and voluntary migrant communities from Christian ethnic groups such as the Karen and Kachin. These feelings of faith-based solidarity appear to act as a motivation for these women's collective economic remittances, and illustrate the important role that religion plays in transnational activities oriented towards development in the origin country. Borchgrevink and Erdal (2015: 1) also find in their case study of a Pakistani women's organisation in Norway that "religion provides a significant frame for development engagement." During data collection, collective economic remittances through faith-based initiatives came across more generally as an important arena among the Norwegian-Chin diaspora group especially. According to one secondary informant who is active in the NCCF, the Chin community's engagement in Myanmar and with co-ethnics in other countries takes place primarily through church groups, where members fundraise and give donations to be sent to development organisations (Interview 12).

Collective economic remittances are also sent by some the women in this study within the more informal arena. Some women send money that they fundraise together with other women and family for the purpose of supporting education in particular in their communities of origin. For example, one woman from the Burman group described being part of an informal women's group that saved up parts of their income over a number of months and pooled their earning to donate to community projects in Myanmar:

We collect money and help those who need it. [...] It's only women from Burma, just very small, not any support from the government in Norway. For example, 200 kroner every six months. We each collect it and just send it, informal. Those that are active are about seven to eight people, not so many. (Interview 7)

Women in this informal group also raise donations at special events organised among the Norwegian-Burman community:

We are also on our national day, on Aung San Suu Kyi's birthday, for example, when we also have a special celebration, we collect money. We have to be out with others and talk together, share information too. (Interview 7)

Moreover, the same informant also sends remittances together with her family, namely with her sisters, and sometimes her father, who live together in Norway. They save and pull their portions of their earnings to send to their community of origin, as the informant explains:

We collect money, the whole family helps. All of my sisters, all of us four work and our father has some money to help. We save a bit each month. (Interview 7)

The money is sent to cover the school fees of children from poor families in the community. They send money twice a year at the start of each school term when school fees are due (Interview 7). The informant explains that the family's motivation for sending these kinds of remittances is to support families facing economic challenges and help children in these families access an education:

For students, for those that can't continue at school because they don't have enough money, their parents can't support money for those that will continue at school. So our family collects money so that they can continue with school. (Interview 7)

What the collective economic remittances of women in both the Burman and Chin groups have in common is that their remittances are predominantly targeted towards women and children as the main beneficiaries of development work. This reflects what appears to be a general feature of diaspora organisations' engagements in co-development projects. According to one secondary informant who works with these diaspora organisations in Norway, women and children tend to be the main target recipients:

"When we develop our projects together I also see that the men and the women, their interest is often for children or women. So often the target group is the women group in the country of origin. And of course the Sri Lankan diaspora, the target group – the beneficiaries – are almost all women in the north and east because these are war widows." (Interview 13, professional)

The main purpose for collective economic remittances was for fostering political change, namely democratisation in Myanmar. These 'remittances for democracy' were found among informants from the Burman group in particular. This is perhaps unsurprising considering political activism for democratisation in Myanmar is a key characteristic of the Burman ethnic group both in the country and in the diaspora, and that these women are political

refugees who were active in the democratisation movement in Myanmar prior to flight. Financial support is given to political organisations involved in the long struggle for democratisation in Myanmar. Financial support has also been given to civil society actors in the democracy movement, for example sending money to undercover journalists to cover their various costs, such as for technical equipment, during the pro-democracy demonstrations during the Saffron Revolution in the city of Yangon in 2007. The following interview data illustrate these types of collective economic remittances:

All those who came to Norway, all Burmese most have a political background, so they just help in their own way. They just help their own organisations they have contact with in Burma. (Interview 7)

[Money] is not the most important thing, but it is a kind of important thing because supporting financially is not only the use of money but also a kind of mental support. It says that, 'we are behind you, we are supporting you'. So this is not only about the value of financial amount, but other kinds of value. (Interview 4)

Economic remittances for this purpose may be considered expressions of political solidarity. In particular in the case of financially support to the undercover journalists mentioned above doing dangerous in the name of democracy. However, such 'political solidarity' through economic remittances may be problematic. Remittances for political purposes are an example of the intersection between different spheres of transnationalism – namely economic and political. This is also a sensitive area of intersection.

4.3.2 Social Remittances

While economic remittances from the women in this study represent the potential material contributions to development and peacebuilding in Myanmar, the women may also contribute through in *non-material* ways – through social remittances. Social remittances are the transfer of non-material, non-monetary elements such as social capital such as knowledge and skills, ideas, values and behaviours by members of the diaspora to others in their country of origin (Levitt 1998). The interview data show some examples of the women in the study engaging in this type of transnational activity in the social sphere.

It should be noted, however, that it was not been possible while analysing the interview data to say anything about the kinds of ideas, values or behaviours that the women in the study may transfer to others in Myanmar. Nevertheless, it is possible to say something about their engagements in certain *channels* through which social remittances tend to be transferred. Moreover, the women in the study demonstrated potential to transfer social remittances in the *future*, whether through permanent return to Myanmar or through contributions while remaining based in Norway.

Channels of social remittances

Most women in the study showed to make use of two of the main channels through which social remittances are transferred: *regular contact* with the country of origin, and *temporary return* to the country origin.

All of the women in the study said they maintained regular contact with family and friends in Myanmar. Swe's study (2013) of resettled refugees from Myanmar in Norway shows the ways in which they maintain transnational ties through contact with family and friends in Myanmar as well as in other countries of residence (Japan, Australia and the USA), primarily over the telephone and the internet. This shows how (relatively) recent and inexpensive modes of communication facilitate transnational connections to those 'back home'. This is reflected in an interview response from one woman discussing how she maintains regular contact with her family and friends online:

We do keep in touch with each other because we have Facebook, so it's really cheap to keep in touch with each other. (Interview 6)

Making use of these forms of communication also depends on their availability in the country of origin. Access to telecommunication and internet services in Myanmar has increased dramatically in recent years. After 2011, when the new quasi-civilian government opened up the Myanmar market to foreign investors, people in Myanmar have had increased access due to services provided by Telenor (Norway) and Ooredoo (Qatar), the two companies to win contracts to provide mobile communication and internet services in the country. Prior to this, poor services were the major obstacle to the diaspora in Norway maintaining cheap and easy contact with others in Myanmar (Swe 2013). Transnational communication was limited due to expensive services and poor coverage of telecommunication in Myanmar (Swe 2013).

However, recent improvements are reflected in the response from one woman in the Burman group, who says:

Communication is much better. Before it wasn't so easy to get in touch by mobile phone, and no internet. So now it's much better to contact each other. (Interview 7)

The important role of access to the internet and other news forms of telecommunications is also evident in the diaspora's use of this technology in creating 'virtual spaces' for political activism (Egreteau 2012: 130). Improvements in internet services also mean the increased flow of information that the internet facilitates between the residence country and country of origin, as the same respondent explains:

It's easy to get news and everything about what's happening in Burma, to be informed. It's easy to get information. But they are still very strict also. (Interview 7)

The last comment in the interview data above refers to some existing restrictions on communication in Myanmar. In previous years, maintaining transnational contact through was constrained by the fear of being 'watched' or 'listened into', as one woman in the Burman group explains, contact with her family in Myanmar was limited due to the fear of being monitored owing to her father being associated with the political opposition. However, the situation has since improved, as the informant explains about contacting her family in Myanmar:

Before they were scared to get a call from us. When we called them they didn't want to take the call because they were very scared that someone would come and listen through the line. They were very scared about what we talked about. Five years ago, if we called, we talked very quietly, not too loudly. Now we can talk whenever we want. It's now a bit open. (Interview 7)

Another aspect of social remittances is the types of elements that are transferred. For example, discussing with family and friends in the country of origin experiences from and perceptions of the residence country can be a source of transferring new or different ideas and values. This is the case for one woman in the Burman group who, along with the family she lives with in Norway, discusses with other family members and friends in Myanmar experiences and perceptions of life in Norway:

We tell them about our rights and how we live in Norway, how the education is, how everyday life is, about health care and how the government gives support. (Interview 7)

Another example of transferring social remittances through discussing experiences and perceptions of the country of origin is seen in the same informant's use of Facebook to share her experiences from Norway and knowledge that she has gained in Norway. For example, she regularly shares information about the Norwegian education system based on the knowledge she has gained through working in the sector. Another example is found in how she transfers ideas about parenting practices in Norway (again learned through her working in the Norwegian education sector) and the potential influence this can have on the behaviours of others in Myanmar, as the following interview data shows:

The majority [of friends and family] I'm in contact with are on Facebook. I always write on Facebook, articles and things like that. For example, how it is in Norway. [...] I write in Burmese. I write often on Facebook about my experiences in Norway. Sometimes they reply and ask how parents [in Norway] raise small children because parenting is completely different in Burma. If the child doesn't listen to the parents, they just hit. [...] For example, if the child jumps on the sofa, we say, 'No, you shouldn't jump on the sofa'. But the child continues to jump. We don't explain why they can't jump on the sofa. If the child doesn't listen, they just hit. [...] But in Norway we explain why you shouldn't jump on the sofa, why you shouldn't do that kind of thing, we just explain. (Interview 7)

The second channel of social remittances in which most women in this study engaged was temporary return, or visits. Diaspora members who return temporarily to their country of origin to visit family and friends, to work or to volunteer can during that period transfer social capital, ideas, values and behaviours. Regular periods of temporary return during which social remittances may be transferred are termed 'diaspora circulation' (Erdal & Stokke 2009). In this study on Myanmar refugee women in Norway, only some women in the study have visited their country of origin since resettling. These women come primarily from the Burman group in the diaspora, pointing to some differences in opportunity for temporary return based on ethnicity. Nonetheless, the interview data gives some evidence of these women engaging in diaspora circulation.

For example, one of the women in the study who explained how during a few visits to family and friends in she shares experiences, values and knowledge acquired in Norway to relatives in Burma/Myanmar when she visits, in particular in relation to parenting practices:

[In Burma] They are very used to smacking children. If they do something, they just smack them straight away. When I was in Burma last year, a cousin of mine has a child, he's only two years old. He threw his food. In Norway, we say 'Don't throw your food. If you don't want it, don't eat it.' She just says you have to eat everything. But he doesn't want to, he just throws it. So he just got smacked. I ask why she smacks. I just discuss with my cousin how it should be. (Interview 7)

The same informant also returns regularly for short periods together with her sisters to Myanmar. The purpose of these visits is to do voluntary work in their community of origin improving school facilities, as the informant explains:

I help where I went to school as a child. It's completely destroyed, the school. Almost falling down. The older class is still going to this school, but it's not safe, it's very dangerous. It needs to be repaired and refurbished. [...] I will be there for three weeks to visit family and we will give donations to the school and refurbish the old school. (Interview 7)

An interesting observation from the interview data that should be pointed out is that social remittances are also shown to be transferred in the opposite direction. That is, from the country of origin to the country of residence, in addition to the more commonly understood direction of social remittances as residence-origin. Origin-residence remittances took place after some women in the study had returned to Norway following temporary return to Myanmar. In the case of one informant, this involves transferring experiences in and knowledge of the situation in the country of origin and using that back in the residence country. For example, this informant from the Burman group had recently visited Myanmar and returned with new knowledge of what she understood was the slow transition in the country towards democracy, economic growth and well-being of the people (Interview 4). This first-hand knowledge gained through diaspora circulation can help inform development and peacebuilding efforts in the residence country oriented towards the country of origin, thus in turn having a potentially positive impact on the origin country. Diaspora circulation can also lead to more engagement of the diaspora in transnational contributions to the country of origin. In the case of the Tamil diaspora in Norway, temporary visits to the origin country

“strengthened and renewed transnational ties and engagements with development initiatives in their regions of origin” (Erdal & Stokke 2009: 399).

One secondary informant – a local politician from Myanmar – reflects on this process of diaspora circulation in discussing the ways in which she thinks the Myanmar diaspora can contribute to development and peacebuilding in the country:

Just now some [in the diaspora] can go inside our country. They come back [to Myanmar] and they connect with some people and ask them what are their needs and how can they help. They ask, they discuss in our country. After that they take this information and they go back to maybe Norway, USA, Germany, and after that they arrange for other things for us. (Interview 8)

Some differences were found in the engagements of women in the study in terms of temporary return. Those who were married and had children had not and did not plan to return to Myanmar to visit, while those who were unmarried and did not have children had visited Myanmar at least once or were planning to visit in the near future. Another difference is in the ethnic background of the women. For example, only women in the Burman group were among those who had visited Myanmar. As suggested in the interview data above – “*Just now some [in the diaspora] can go inside our country*” – origin country conditions play an influencing role in determining who has the possibility to return.

Future social remittances

‘Future social remittances’ refers to the social capital that the women in the study said they are building or are planning to build in order to remit these for the benefit of their country of origin in the future. This temporal dimension of social remittances also implies a desire or intention to return to Myanmar on a more permanent basis in the future. Permanent return to the country of origin depends, however, on the actual possibility of return. Nevertheless, most of the women in this study expressed their activities and plans aimed at *building social capital for future use*.

Many of the women in the study from both groups talked about plans to build knowledge and skills in Norway. They expressed a strong motivation to use this social capital to benefit ‘those back home’ in Myanmar. Some of the women said they made the decision to study in Norway in order to contribute specifically through teaching in Myanmar itself or working in the development sector from Norway but oriented towards Myanmar (Interview 7; Interview

6). This raises the question of whether return is possible or even desirable, and the implications this has on diaspora members transferring social capital through permanent return. Most of the women in the study did not view permanent return to Myanmar as possible. However, some also did not view return as necessary either in order to contribute their social capital to the country. The following interview data reflect the social capital building in which the women engage and their reflections on return:

My life goal is to work with poverty alleviation in Burma. I don't know if I will be moving back, but I know that I want to work for Burma, if they ever let me or want me there. So I think that I would like to work for Burma someday. (Interview 6)

I have studied because I would like to contribute to my country. [If I return] I would work in the daytime, and in the evening after working hours I can teach the students who cannot pay for the extra tuition. So I would like to teach mathematics and some science to children who cannot afford to pay or get to study. (Interview 4)

At that time [after resettling in Norway] I had only one dream – to study. After my studies, I had hoped to go back to my township. (Interview 1)

I often think about [working as a teacher in Myanmar]. First and foremost, I need a good education, higher education. To share with those who live in Burma. (Interview 7)

The possibility of the women in this study returning to Myanmar with new and more knowledge and skills is a source of potential 'brain circulation'. The impact that this kind of social remittance can have on the development of Myanmar is expressed by one informant, a politician residing in Myanmar, while reflecting on the role of diaspora:

I hope all the people from outside Burma will come back and contribute to our country for the future. Without their help I think it is a really long way for us. (Interview 8)

There are some differences to note in terms of the backgrounds of the women in the study who engage in future social remittances. The first difference is found in the women's level of education. For example, the women in the study with higher education (all of the women from the Burman group and a woman younger woman from the Chin group) talked about their motivations behind getting their education and, in some cases, continuing to study; namely that they wanted to contribute something 'useful' to others in Myanmar in the future (Interview 1; Interview 4; Interview 6; Interview 7). The other women in the study with a

lower education level did not express the same goals towards higher education. The difference here may be influenced by difficulties learning the local language Norwegian. This language issue was raised by all primary and secondary informants in the Burman and Chin diaspora as something they had experienced. The older women in the Chin group, however, pointed to additional factors that seem to have exacerbated their experienced difficulties learning Norwegian: their older age and gendered barriers to education in Myanmar (Interview 9; Interview 10). The latter factor points to the tradition in many families in Myanmar of prioritising education for boys, while less investment is made in girls' education given that they are expected to fulfil gender roles in the unpaid domain of the home (Interview 8). These older Chin women in the study talked about their older age and low education as extra hurdles to learning the language, and that this had in turn affected the types of jobs they had (namely jobs where only limited knowledge of Norwegian was necessary) and whether or not they felt they were able to study in Norway (Interview 9; Interview 10). These intersecting factors – age and gendered inequalities experienced in the country of origin – combined with the need to learn the local language in order to access financial and educational opportunities set limits on these women's ability to engage in future social remittances, as defined in this chapter.

The second difference is found in whether or not the women have children. This is closely related to the desire to return. For example, the women engaging in future social remittances (all of whom are unmarried) do not have children, and expressed their desire to return to Myanmar in order to use the knowledge and skills they gain in Norway to help improve the lives of others in Myanmar. On the other hand, the women who did not report this kind of engagement, nor expressed plans to engage in this way, have young children who were either born in Norway or were young when the family moved to Norway. These women said that although they may *wish* to return to Myanmar they did not plan to nor saw the possibility to return because their children had grown up in and become a part of Norwegian society (Interview 9; Interview 10).

4.3.3 Political Involvement

As presented in the previous two sub-chapters, the women in the study engage in transnational activities in the economic and social spheres. In this sub-chapter, the focus turns

to the engagements of these women in the political sphere. A key observation based on the empirical data is that the political involvement of the women in the study is closely tied up in the conditions of the diaspora in general. Thus, the following empirical material on political involvement of women in the Burman and Chin groups is integrated into an analysis of the overall political sphere of the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora.

Characteristics of Norwegian-Myanmar political involvement

‘Political involvement’ can be divided into two levels – direct and indirect – within which different types of activities take place. At the direct level, activities include diaspora participation in elections and party politics in the residence and origin countries. Based on the empirical data, women in this study did not participate in formal political activities. However, there is much evidence of their indirect political involvement. A further distinction can be made at the indirect level of political involvement between ‘from above’ or top-down and ‘from below’ or grassroots activities (Torres 2008).

In terms of grassroots political involvement, the women in this study appear to engage most in activities in this category. Grassroots activities include engaging in diaspora civil society organisations that serve the diaspora in the residence country, for example in maintaining links to country of origin and promoting a positive image of the diaspora through cultural public events (Torres 2008). An example of this kind of activity among women in the study includes their engagement in the NCCF and the NCCWF. Grassroots political involvement also includes the involvement of individual diaspora members in charity groups based in the residence country which link the diaspora to the country of origin. For example, in the Myanmar-Norway case, this would include again the NCCF and NCCWF, as well as informal groups that raise donations. Involvement in co-development projects is another example of grassroots political involvement, where diaspora organisations in the residence country link up with development projects in the origin country, for example the link between the NCCWF and Partners.

It is clear from this typology that the women in the study engage in grassroots political activities in the context of the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora. As already shown previously, the women engage politically at this level through their financial contributions to various diaspora and non-diaspora organisations. This illustrates the blurred boundaries between

different spheres of transnational activity, namely that economic remittances for social purposes can be politically significant. It is also interesting to point out that the women in the study engaged in these types of grassroots political involvement – namely, the women in the Chin group who donate to NCCWF and Partners – did not consider these activities political. These forms of engagements of the women in this study may be seen more as *implicit* political involvement as the examples of their engagements in diaspora and other non-diaspora organisations are for the purpose of more development-oriented issues such as education.

This is reflected in the case of the transnational activities of the Tamil diaspora in Norway. Erdal and Stokke (2009: 400) find that activities among this group are seen as “pragmatic and seemingly apolitical” which contrasts with the diaspora’s active involvement in development initiatives. Moreover, Erdal and Stokke (2009: 401) argue that diaspora involvement in the processes of conflict resolution, peace and development in their countries of origin is indeed political. As is the case for any actor involved in such processes, as Erdal & Stokke (2009: 401) point out: “Actors who are supporting transformative processes have interests as well as resources and strategies of power [and this] also applies to members of the diaspora and their transnational activities.”

Interest in politics among diaspora members can also be a determinant of their political participation. This can include, for example, expressing political opinion, talking about politics or reading the news (Torres 2008). As Torres also (2008: 174) points out, following home country news, for example online or via radio, is often termed as ‘socio-cultural transnational practice; however, if the news being consumed is political, then this can also be considered a *political* practice. In the case of the Myanmar diaspora in Asia, maintaining links with Myanmar helps the diaspora to remain up-to-date with political news in the country (Egretau 2012). Moreover, this tends to occur through regular contact with family and friends, a common channel for social remittances: “Exiles and refugees, even if uprooted, often keep a direct connection to domestic social and political events, mostly through relative or friends.” (Egretau 2012: 130) This illustrates the intersection between transnational spheres of action, namely that the social sphere of remittances can facilitate involvement in the political sphere. The women in this study are also involved politically in this way, facilitated by their engagement in channels of social remittances. The following interview data illustrates their different levels of engagement in this form of political involvement:

Mostly the news is about political issues. Not really that much, not really intense, but I do follow what's going on there. (Interview 6)

Personally I am every day keeping in touch with what is happening, with the situation in Burma. Every hour I get information because I am still connected with groups in Rangoon. That's why I'm getting up-to-date information and if they need my help I am still supporting them and helping them. That's why I'm up-to-date with Burmese affairs. (Interview 4)

Other grassroots political involvement includes sending material and non-material support to political activists in Myanmar, and engagement in the diaspora non-profit media organisation Democratic Voice of Burma (DBV), established by journalists in the Myanmar diaspora in Norway in 1992. According to one primary informant the Burman community in Norway has supported political activists in Myanmar both materially and with moral support (Interview 4). Here she expands on the type of material support the diaspora provides:

In any political activities in Rangoon, we are supporting mentally and physically. And the Saffron demonstrations in 2007, many people from outside we support these people. Smuggling information out and helping them [with] many things, including money and media technical [equipment] and materials, we send to them to use to get the information in time. (Interview 4)

The DVB has also been involved in providing these forms of support to political activists, particularly during the Saffron Revolution (Interview 4). While the stated goal of the DVB is to provide 'accurate and unbiased' news to people in Myanmar, it also plays an explicitly political role in the context of Myanmar reflected in its mission statement to also "impart the ideals of democracy and human rights to the people of Burma" (DVB n.d.). One of the women in this study in the Burman group talked about her experience working at the DVB when it was based in Norway. Her motivation was to use the knowledge she had learned through higher education courses in Norway about the role of the media in democracies and to share it with others in Myanmar:

I worked with DVB with the low salary because I wanted to contribute to my people. I wanted to contribute my knowledge through the DVB. (Interview 1)

This kind of transnational support appears to be a relatively new phenomenon given the recent migration of refugees from Myanmar. Such support represents a new way in which the

Myanmar diaspora may contribute to political change in their country of origin. This is a form of diaspora contributions that was not available to previous generations of political activists in Myanmar, namely students in the democracy movement during the 1980s and 1990s, as one informant explains:

When I was a student in 1988, we didn't have anyone who supported us. Everything we used we had to depend on our own family, our pocket money. We had a lot of difficulties, a lot of financial problems. But now today, these kinds of difficulties we [in the diaspora] can solve quite well.” (Interview 4)

Top-down political involvement includes residence country governments and civil society actors inviting the diaspora to engage in their development programmes (Torres 2008). There appears to be little in the way of ‘top-down’ political involvement among the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora. Engagement between the diaspora and other Norwegian civil society and governmental actors in more ‘top-down’ involvement appears to have been limited. This is despite more Norwegian NGOs starting to operate in Myanmar since the 2011 transition process began. The NBC is one of the few organisations to directly engage with the diaspora. In reference to Norwegian NGOs operating in Myanmar, one informant who works in the sector suggests:

It's my impression that they don't really have that much direct contact with Burmese. But it would be a welcome meeting point for everyone. I don't think they have much direct contact with Burmese in Norway. (Interview 5)

There also appears to be little direct engagement between the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora and Norwegian governmental agencies, in particular. Government engagement with the diaspora appears only to extend to meetings when high-profile Myanmar visitors come to Norway, such as with the visit of Myanmar President Thein Sein in February 2013, and indirect engagement through funding NGOs such as the NBC (Interview 5). The following interview data illustrates the limited engagement between the diaspora and residence country government:

I'm not sure they're really engaging that much directly with the diaspora. It's more like if you have Burmese coming from Burma which are relevant political activists or politicians, then they try to get a meeting often with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. But they don't really have much in contact with the Burmese diaspora in Norway. (Interview 5)

In contrast to the apparently little ‘top-down’ engagements is another key characteristic of Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora political involvement: its engagement with Norwegian NGO the Norwegian Burma Committee (NBC). The NBC works to promote democracy and human rights in Myanmar (Interview 5), and appears to engage with the Norwegian-Myanmar on a more equal footing than any kind of ‘top-down’ political involvement, as the following interview data suggests:

The diaspora is involved in work in Norway supporting what we are doing, or if they're doing something themselves that we can support, in that way we can cooperate with them.
(Interview 5)

According to one secondary informant who has worked closely with the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora for many years, the political involvement of the diaspora has been characterised by political stances from the democracy movement and opposition to the military regime in general (Interview 5), reflecting the political interests of both the Burman and Chin group. This characteristic of the Norwegian-Myanmar political involvement is also reflected in the political activities of the Myanmar diaspora in Asia in general, which Egreteau (2012) refers to in terms of the potential to foster democratisation in Myanmar.

Through its engagement with the NBC, the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora has engaged in political activities including awareness-raising to advocacy and lobbying (Interview 5). The diaspora has worked with raising awareness among the Norwegian public about events and issues of concern in Myanmar. For example, one diaspora organisation called the Burma Association in Norway has used the anniversary of Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest to raise awareness about human rights violations (Venge 2007). This is illustrated in the following interview data from one of the women in the Burman group who participated in such activities:

Before we had a lot of political prisoners and Aung San Suu Kyi also under house arrest. So every time we had a chance we worked for these issues, to release political prisoners and to have democratisation in Burma. So we were doing these activities regularly.
(Interview 4)

Awareness-raising is also a major activity among members of the Rohingya ethnic group in Norway, mainly through their participation in the Rohingya Community in Norway (RCN) diaspora organisation (Interview 3). The RCN is very active online, in particular on

Facebook, in sharing information about violence and human rights violations against the Rohingya Muslim population in Myanmar and of those that have fled to neighbouring countries. This takes place primarily via the organisation's Facebook page, which as of December 2015 has a following of just over 4,000 people.

The diaspora's advocacy and lobbying activities together with the NBC have also been oriented towards the Norwegian government in attempts to influence policy making relevant to Myanmar. For example, some diaspora organisations have engaged with the NBC to lobby the Norwegian government about private sector investment in Myanmar (Interview 5). The government has invested parts of the national pension fund into oil and gas companies that have been accused of being party to human rights violations in Myanmar. A report by EarthRights International (2010) documents some of the abuses against people in local communities, including forced labour, land confiscation and killings.

A common method used by the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora to raise awareness and put across political statements has been to hold public demonstrations. According to a Myanmar politician, raising awareness especially through demonstration is seen from the perspective of the country of origin as a major way in which the diaspora has tried to contribute to improving conditions in Myanmar (Interview 8). The following interview data from this informant illustrates this:

[The diaspora] try to demonstrate on every occasion, every special issue in our country. They let the outside society know what is the situation in Burma by doing some demonstration. So they can help like this. (Interview 8)

'Ethnicisation' and fragmentation of diaspora political involvement

The characteristic political engagement between the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora and NBC does not necessary extend to all groups of different ethnic backgrounds in the diaspora. In particular, there appears to have been a decline in the engagement of the Chin community in Norway with the NBC. According to secondary informants from the Chin group, the community's engagement with NBC has decreased in recent years (Interview 11; Interview 12). Ethnicity appears to have played a role in this reduced engagement, pointing to the 'ethnicisation' of the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora's political space. While the Chin ethnic group in diaspora has been active in past political activities organised through the NBC (Interview 11; Interview 12), a dissatisfaction/disagreement regarding the types of issue

raised as part of these activities appears to have led the Chin community to ‘distance’ itself from this kind of political involvement. According to two male informants from the Chin group, the political activities organised by the NBC prioritises so-called “Burman issues”, and thus the Chin community feels excluded (Interview 11; Interview 12). This reflects the impact of divisions and fragmentation in diaspora communities on collective political-based transnationalism (Torres 2008). Interestingly, the women informants in the Chin group did not raise this issue, but nor did they refer to engaging in any explicitly political activities. The interview data below illustrates the feelings of exclusion along ethnic lines from the more mainstream political involvement of the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora:

Today it is mostly Burmans who are politically active in Norway, in activities to promote democracy. Chin and Karen in Norway are not so active anymore because they feel they are being ignored in these processes. (Interview 11)

Chin and other ethnic minority groups have felt ignored. They’ve been left out. That’s why we stopped being active in demonstrations for democracy. We were active about five years ago, but haven’t been so active since then.” (Interview 11)

Nonetheless, the Norwegian-Chin community is involved politically in other areas. For example, the Chin diaspora community in Norway has mobilised around the church and the faith-based diaspora organisation Norway Chin Christian Federation (NCCF), which has several chapters across Norway (Interview 12). The community also engages with similar residence-country organisations, namely the Christian faith-based organisation that Norwegian Baptist Union (NBU). NBU also engages with the Karen community in Norway, also a Christian ethnic minority group from Myanmar (Interview 12). This illustrates the role that religion plays in mobilising transnational activities, as was found in Borchgrevink and Erdal’s (2015) case study on women in the Pakistani diaspora in Norway. These spaces of mobilisation and engagement may reflect more closely issues perceived as relevant to the Chin community. The religious dimension of this grassroots political involvement among the Norwegian-Chin community reflects the importance of religion in Chin national identity and the Chin ethnic armed struggle in Myanmar. This is reflected in the response from one secondary informant from the Chin group regarding the Chin community’s perception of exclusion from more ‘mainstream’ political activities in the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora due to the perceived dominance of “Burman issues”:

Chin Christian and Burman Buddhists are very different. The military and authorities in Chin try to remove Christian crosses from hillsides and replace them with Buddhist monuments. This still happens in Chin State today. The ethnic [Chin] struggle has not only been about religion but national identity as a whole. We still feel like our national identity is being threatened today. (Interview 11)

Gender-based differences in political involvement

In addition, there appears to be a low participation in general of women from the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora in more explicitly political activities, such as advocacy and lobbying through diaspora engagement with residence-country civil society actors such as the NBC. According to one informant from the NBC, the majority of those involved in such activities have been men (Interview 5). Moreover, this gendered difference in participation has been seen across all ethnic groups involved that have engaged with the NBC (Interview 5).

While this cannot be corroborated by the data collected, it is reflected somewhat in the low engagement of women from the Chin group in study in more explicitly political activities. This reflects the general political landscape in Myanmar itself, where politics is seen as a male domain. For example, in the case of the participation in peace processes among women in Mon and Karen States in Myanmar, one of the main barriers experienced by women of both ethnic backgrounds was the “societal pressure to remain in secondary household roles, not in leadership roles” (UN Women 2015: 67). Indeed, despite some transformations in gender roles and responsibilities, gender relations in the political domain appear unchanged: “women in Mon and Kayah States are inadequately represented in political and governance structures, and have a very limited voice in the current peace process.” (UN Women 2015: 12) This suggests that gender norms and relations from the origin country may be reproduced within the diaspora in Norway.

Reproductions of gender norms and relations in the diaspora can account for gender differences in level and type of political involvement. A general trend from the relatively recent body of gender analyses of diaspora political involvement suggests that “men predominate in the more institutionalised and public arenas, while women are more active in other transnational activities mostly relating to the family and conditions in the receiving country” (Torres 2008: 163). Moreover, women tend to participate more in the politics of the residence country while men tend to participate more in the politics of the origin country

(Torres 2008). This is reflected in what appears to be the male-dominated political sphere of the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora.

Gender norms and relations often ‘prevail’ in diaspora (Al-Ali 2010: 119), and as such transnational spaces and activities may remain closed to women belonging to specific diaspora groups (Al-Ali & Pratt 2009: 14). In their research on gender, diaspora and transnationalism in the Middle East, Al-Ali and Pratt (2009) highlight gender as an important differentiating factor – along with other factors such as ethnicity, religion and class – that shapes the agency and mobilisation of women and men during all phases of migration and diaspora formation, including during settling in the residence country. During forced migration, social structures and institutions are transformed. This can have two outcomes for women, which may be experienced simultaneously. This first is that women may become more vulnerable in the forced migration context due to experiences such as poverty in the new country, which can make them more dependent on men. Second, women may experience increased agency and opportunity as ‘new spaces’ that were not available to them in the country of origin open up, with an overall effect of women’s increased empowerment. It appears that in the case of women in the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora, politics may remain a closed sphere also in the residence country.

Moreover, the political involvement of Chin women in the study contrasts with women in the Burman group in this study who shared examples of their participation in such political activities. This illustrates that not only gender but also ethnicity may be a factor influencing the different levels and types of political involvement of women in the study. The Burman women in the study have previous experience as political activists in the democracy movement in Myanmar. The role women having previous experience of political activism in the origin country is also evident among women who were active in the Women’s League of Burma (WLB), an umbrella organisation for women’s groups in Myanmar, and who are now politically active in Norway (Interview 5). This is supported by Torres’ (2008) gender analysis of Colombian diaspora political participation, which finds that one of the most important factors influencing the participation level and type of activity in diaspora political involvement is previous political activism. Moreover, given the discussion above regarding the ethnicity-base differences in political involvement among the Chin and Burman communities in Norway, the Burman women may find their political interests more represented in the mainstream political involvement of the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora in

general. Thus, the two potentially determining factors – gender and ethnicity – seem to intersect in explaining the lower political involvement for Chin women than Burman women.

Political involvement post-2011

In recent years, there also appears to have been a more general decline in the level of political involvement of the Norwegian-Myanmar since 2011. This six-year period is framed by the influx of the refugees from Myanmar to Norway and the beginning of the democratic transition in Myanmar. This suggests that since perceived improvements in Myanmar, the diaspora has considered their political contributions to country of origin less necessary. Interview data from primary and secondary informants illustrated this recent decline in political involvement among the diaspora in political activities in general and with the NBC in particular:

It was much more common before. The 19th of June, Aung San Suu Kyi's birthday, was a typical campaign day before. But this year we're going to have an event, but it's not going to be the same campaign thing that was more usual before, and especially before the 2011 reforms. (Interview 5)

With the Norwegian Burma Committee I have been quite connected before. Now is there not very much contacted with them. (Interview 4)

This contrasts with the higher levels of engagement in the years following the largest flow of Myanmar refugees to Norway in 2005. This level of engagement is likely to have been influenced by recent nature of the refugees' resettlement, as the following interview data suggests:

Many came directly from Thailand or Burma, and the Burmese regime and the society in Burma was close to their lives still. I think they had still this urge and need and want to do something and support their fellow citizens in Burma. So they wanted to help from abroad. So there was also a strong engagement that they wanted to try to do something from Norway. (Interview 5)

Moreover, the apparent decline in diaspora political involvement since the 2011 democratic transition may suggest a perception among the diaspora of a reduced role or need for diaspora political contributions in Myanmar in general. The interview data from a politician in Myanmar below illustrates this perception:

After 2012, the situation is changed a little. But before the Burmese outside have a lot of activities to do for our party and for our country. But just now they don't have so many activities like that. Because now the country is open and we can go through, everyone from the international society can go very easily and bring back information. (Interview 8)

5 From Transnational Engagements to Peacebuilding Potential

The research question guiding this case study was: How do women refugees from Myanmar contribute to peacebuilding in their country of origin? The empirical findings show that refugee women in the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora demonstrate considerable potential to contribute to peacebuilding in the country of origin. This potential is found in their transnational engagements in the economic, social and political spheres.

One of the key findings is that the forms of transnational engagements in which the women in this study participate are specifically related to development. Both the perspectives and practices of the women are primarily oriented towards development issues that can have a more indirect impact on peacebuilding. Their development-relevant engagements reflect the broad definition of ‘peacebuilding’ used in this thesis; as including development activities that can have an impact on addressing the underlying causes of conflict. As noted previously, such a broad definition is particularly useful when looking at diaspora peacebuilding as members of diaspora do not necessarily define their own transnational engagements in terms of ‘peacebuilding’ per say.

Moreover, the women’s development-related transnational engagements be thought of as ‘potential peacebuilding contributions through development’, given the positive relationship between development and peacebuilding. While underdevelopment is often one underlying causes of armed conflicts, development can be an important means for peacebuilding. Indeed, Galtung’s understanding of peacebuilding is that it is the “practical implementation of peaceful social change through socio-economic reconstruction and development” (Galtung 1975 in Warnecke 2010: 9).

The women in this case study show strong engagement in development-related activities surrounding education especially. This reflects the peacebuilding engagements found among many women in Mon State in Myanmar who run informal education centres, for example (UN Women 2015). The refugee women in diaspora in this case study also emphasise the role of education, namely democratic education, in relation to building peace in Myanmar. Moreover, perspectives among women (and men) in Mon State that “a lack of access to information and exclusion from education plays a role in conflict” (UN Women 2015: 60). The synergy between the women’s perspectives on peacebuilding and their practices in (potentially) contributing to peacebuilding is reflected in a response from one of the women:

We save money for education. Mostly for education. Only for education. Yes, that's what they need. (Interview 7)

The emphasis on education is evident in the transnational engagements of the women in this case study both in terms of the economic and social spheres and to a lesser extent in the political sphere. The women's economic remittances in the form of family support systems, for example, go primarily towards supporting access to education for family members. As Similarly, their the collective economic remittances the women send in the form of donations to diaspora and other organisations, for example, are oriented primarily towards education-related initiatives.

In terms of the significance of economic and social remittances in Myanmar, Egreteau (2012) finds that the Myanmar diaspora in Asia has contributed to fostering economic and social change through development-related transnational activities, including economic and social remittances. This has had a greater influence on development in Myanmar than the diaspora's political involvement has had on bringing about democratic change (Egreteau 2013). Indeed, economic remittances, for example, are a widespread expression of transnationalism, considered a form of 'development initiative' (Erdal & Stokke 2009), and can be 'harnessed' for post-conflict reconstruction and development, where recovery from the destruction of armed conflict and economic collapse is necessary for peacebuilding (Pirkkalainen & Abdile 2009: 23) While diaspora financial assistance to families has tended to be seen as 'low impact'-remittances, they can a significant development impact when invested in human capital (Erdal & Stokke 2009: 407), and this can be built through increased access to education.

Diaspora donations to development organisations can play an important role in funding development work in the country of origin. For example, the Tamil development organisation Tamil Rehabilitation Organization based in Sri Lanka is funded primarily by diaspora donations (Erdal & Stokke 2009). Thus the women's regular donations to diaspora and other organisations working in development in Myanmar demonstrates the women's long-term commitment to and potential long-term impact on development. Indeed, long-term commitment is one the main 'added values' of diaspora engagements in development and peacebuilding (Horst et al 2010).

Return may also positively impact the country's development: "The combination of money, ideas, expertise and new social behaviours learned in exile and then brought back to

Myanmar by and through the various returning Burmese diasporic groups may well indeed impact the country's development path." (Egreteau 2012: 137) However, economic remittances from the Myanmar diaspora may be more effective for the future development of the country than return (Egreteau 2013).

The women's engagements in social remittances also demonstrate their potential contributions to development and peacebuilding. One key example is the possibility of 'brain circulation', which is "the transfer of monetary resources, information, and know-how that returning migrants can bring home" (Portes & Zhou 2012: p. 214). However, not all women in the study expressed a desire or the possibility to return to Myanmar, also highlighting the potential barriers to women's peacebuilding contributions. Indeed, permanent return may not always be desired especially when there is "scarcity of opportunities at home and the experience or at least the prospects of a better life abroad." (Portes & Zhou 2012: 215)

In terms of political involvement, Egreteau (2012) concludes that despite the transnational activism of the Myanmar diaspora in Asia, their political activities have had *little* impact on the democratic political change that has taken place in Myanmar since 2011. This limited impact may be due to fragmentation in the diaspora along ethnic lines (Egreteau 2012). This is ethnicisation of political involvement in the Myanmar-Norwegian diaspora case may be a barrier to women's increased political involvement, particularly women from the Chin community where grievances about the 'Burma focus' of the diaspora's political activities Norway were expressed. Moreover, there appear to be certain gendered barriers to women's engagement in political activities in the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora due to the reproduction of gender norms and relations within the diaspora that tend to exclude women from the political sphere even in a relatively gender-equal residence country such as Norway. These issues deserve further exploration as a potentially significant factors in hindering the peacebuilding potential of women in the diaspora.

With their specific perspectives on development and peacebuilding reflected in practice through their transnational activities, the refugee women in the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora might be considered to have the potential to bring a '*double* added value' to peacebuilding in their country of origin. Though, it should be reiterated not to essentialise either diaspora or women as inherently bringing added or indeed double value to peacebuilding, nor should it be assumed or expected that they contribute to their country of origin. Still, given the potential for refugee women to contribute to peacebuilding through

development-related activities as demonstrated in this case study, their peacebuilding potential should be recognised and supported. This is especially relevant in the Norway-Myanmar case, where the women in the diaspora and the diaspora as a whole can be a valuable resource in Norwegian peace and development efforts in Myanmar.

5.1 Concluding Remarks

There is general recognition of the roles that women and migrant groups can play in peacebuilding in their countries of origin. Less attention, however, has been given to the peacebuilding roles of refugee women. This thesis has sought to fill this gap by looking at the roles of Myanmar women in the context of forced migration play in building peace in their country of origin. A qualitative case study of the Myanmar diaspora in Norway was used as a relevant context within which to study this issue. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with primary informants comprising refugee women from the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora and secondary informants comprising both men from diaspora and Norwegian and Myanmar civil society and political actors. Theory on the links between migration and development and diaspora and peacebuilding were used as a framework for understanding the peacebuilding contributions of refugee women resettled in third countries can have an impact on their country of origin. In looking specifically at women refugees, this thesis also situates diaspora peacebuilding into the women, peace and security framework.

This thesis has shown the peacebuilding potential of women in resettled refugee contexts, based on the specific contexts of women from the Burman and Chin women in the Myanmar-Norwegian diaspora. This findings show that these women demonstrate potential as peacebuilding actors. While the narrow scope of this study and the limitations of using a case study mean that the findings cannot be generalised to a larger population, this study nevertheless recognises and highlights the potential role women in this specific diaspora group can play in terms of engaging with Norwegian actors in development and peacebuilding efforts in Myanmar, for example. In this instance, the narrow context of the case study serves well, given the highly relevant relationship between Norway and Myanmar and the qualitative significance of the Myanmar diaspora in Norway.

Moreover, while the scope of this study has been limited to the specific context of the Burman and Chin ethnic groups in the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora, the scope has been rather wide conceptually. For example, all three main spheres of action – economic, social and political – in the transnational social field have been covered. However, to understand more about the peacebuilding role of refugee women in the Norwegian-Myanmar diaspora specifically, and refugee women in general, more in-depth studies employing a gender analysis should be done on each sphere in its own right.

Other areas that deserve further research include women's participation in diaspora political activities, in particular taking into account the intersectional factors of ethnicity and gender that may significantly influence women's transnational political involvement in particular. A multi-sited study looking at transnational activities from the residence country and their impacts in the country of origin would also be beneficial. This could be done by studying the impact of women's collective economic remittances to a development organisation or community project in the country of origin itself. Moreover, more research in general needs to look at how gender norms and relations in diaspora are reproduced and transformed, and how this influences women's transnational peacebuilding potential.

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Appendix 1: List of Interviews

Interview 1, diaspora member, female, Burman. Personal interview, Oslo, Spring 2015.

Interview 2, diaspora member, male, Burman. Personal interview Oslo, Spring 2015.

Interview 3, diaspora member/professional, male, Rohingya. Skype interview, Spring 2015.

Interview 4, diaspora member, female, Burman. Skype interview, Spring 2015.

Interview 5, professional, Norwegian NGO, female. Personal interview, Oslo, Spring 2015.

Interview 6, diaspora member, female, Chin. Personal interview, Oslo, Spring 2015.

Interview 7, diaspora member, female, Burman. Personal interview, Oslo, Spring 2015.

Interview transcript translated from Norwegian to English.

Interview 8, Myanmar politician, female, Burman. Personal interview, Oslo, Spring 2015.

Interview 9, diaspora member, female, Chin. Personal interview Oslo, Spring 2015. Interview interpreted from Chin to English.

Interview 10, diaspora member, female, Chin. Personal interview Oslo, Spring 2015.

Interview interpreted from Chin to English.

Interview 11, diaspora member, male, Chin. Personal interview Oslo, Spring 2015.

Interview 12, diaspora member/professional, male, Chin. Personal interview Oslo, Spring 2015. Interview transcript translated from Norwegian to English.

Interview 13, professional, Norwegian NGO, female. Skype interview, Spring 2015.

Appendix 2: List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

DVB	Democratic Voice of Burma
EAOs	Ethnic armed organisations
NBC	Norwegian Burma Committee
NBU	Norwegian Baptist Union [Det Norske Baptistsamfunn]
NCCF	Norway Chin Christian Federation
NCCWF	Norway Chin Christian Women's Federation
NLD	National League for Democracy
Partners	Partners Relief and Development
RCN	Rohingya Community in Norway
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNSCR 1325	United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security
WLB	Women's League of Burma



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