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Lopes Cardozo, M.T.A.; Maber, E.J.T.

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Chapter 1
Introduction

Mieke T. A. Lopes Cardozo and Elizabeth J. T. Maber

Peacebuilding and Education – Why This Book on Myanmar, and Why Now?

Communities and nations around the world are faced with contemporary and multi-scalar challenges, ranging from huge social inequalities to conflicts over political autonomy, belief systems, citizenship rights or natural resources, to name a few. Myanmar plays a unique part in relation to such challenges, which not only feature within its national and state borders, but in many ways is connected to ongoing processes in the region and beyond. Conflicts within Myanmar are of a very diverse nature in terms of what drives these, while at the same time conflict-affected regions are covering various parts of the country's soil. Most notably is the enormous crisis in Rakhine state, where large parts of its Muslim Rohingya population have fled the country amid a highly insecure situation. While tensions that led to the current emergency in Rakhine have their historical roots (see Chap. 3), present-day media has painted a dire picture of the state of human rights due to the recent eruption of violence and displacements in this state. For reasons noted below, the findings in this book do not deal directly with the conflict in Rakhine state, yet touch upon a myriad of other dimensions of conflict and social injustices as experienced by students, teachers, trainers and policy or NGO officials included in the research. In such turbulent times, the schooling of a nation's younger generation lies close to the hearts of the various population groups, regardless of their socio-economic

M. T. A. Lopes Cardozo (✉)
University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
e-mail: mlopescardozo@fmg.uva.nl

E. J. T. Maber
University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK

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background, faith system or geographical location; parents desire the best possible education for their children and the possibility of a brighter future. In addition, education has gained the interest of policy-makers, international organisations and civil society alike, as its crucial role in relation to conflict and peacebuilding becomes increasingly pertinent. Nevertheless, there is still a gap of knowledge on the specific relations and interactions between education systems, actors and outcomes and broader societal processes of conflict or peacebuilding. This book is dedicated to further explore these themes in the context of Myanmar, and respond to the growing body of literature over the past two decades in the field of education, conflict and peacebuilding (see for instance Bush and Saltarelli 2000; Davies 2005; Smith 2005; Novelli and Lopes Cardozo 2008; UNESCO 2011).

This introductory chapter first highlights the specificities of the research location of Myanmar. Secondly, we briefly introduce the three key research areas that informed the structure of our data collection, analysis and its presentation in this book in three parts. Thirdly, we discuss the partnerships, scope and limitations of the study as well as the ethical and practical challenges faced. Finally, we invite the reader to explore this book further by outlining the structure of the book.

Research Context – Education in Myanmar in a Time of Transition

Although the book title is referring to *the role of education in Myanmar* the scope of this collection of works is not covering the whole of the country by any means. More specifically, while in the sections dealing with national (and regional) issues of peacebuilding and education policy and reform we do aim to speak to the national context, our data collection and analysis has focused on two specific geographical regions: the wider Yangon area and Mon State. We chose these regions in consultation with UNICEF, being one of the partners of the consortium that formed the major framework in which this work took place (see below). We based this regional selection on a range of practical (accessibility, prior networks) and ethical considerations (no clearance for research in more conflict-prone areas). The authors are mindful of the unique contexts of both Mon and Yangon in relation to peacebuilding within the broader national context, such that our findings are not generalizable to other areas of the country with specific conflict drivers, some of which are currently conflict-affected.

While initial data collection started in August 2014, most of the analysis of the data collected for this book was completed at the end of 2015. Considering Myanmar's period of constant transition, we have aimed to update our data concerning the political and peacebuilding situation as much as possible up to the time of writing this edited book (end of 2017). However, we would like to mention up front that the empirical findings of this report should be seen in the light of this specific time period. In addition, our analysis of the current policy environment has been characterised by a constantly developing approach, as documentation (of reforms) is of conditional nature and meant an engagement with 'latest' versions available to

the research team. This 'developing' and 'emerging' nature of Myanmar's transition is reflected throughout the analysis presented in the book.

Research Themes and Transversal Topics

The chapters that form the body of this book were developed as part of the work of the Research Consortium on Education and Peacebuilding, which is a co-led research partnership between the Universities of Amsterdam, Sussex and Ulster, and supported by UNICEF's Peacebuilding, Education and Advocacy (PBEA) programme. This 2-year partnership with UNICEF (mid 2014–mid 2016) sought to build evidence on the relationship between education and peacebuilding in conflict-affected contexts. The consortium carried out research in five countries: Myanmar, Pakistan, South Africa, Uganda and Liberia. The research was carried out in partnership with colleagues in each of the participating countries and sought to contribute both to theory and practice in the field of education and peacebuilding, developing theoretically informed, policy relevant outputs. The report draws on the theoretical framework developed for this broader consortium (Novelli et al. 2017), which gives a distinctive focus on the role of education within cultural, political and economic processes of conflict and peacebuilding from a '4R's' perspective, including the analytical and strongly interconnected dimensions of redistribution, recognition, representation and reconciliation (further developed in Chap. 2). The consortium worked on three key thematic research areas, and two transversal themes, which are also present in the structure and contents of this book on Myanmar (Fig. 1.1):

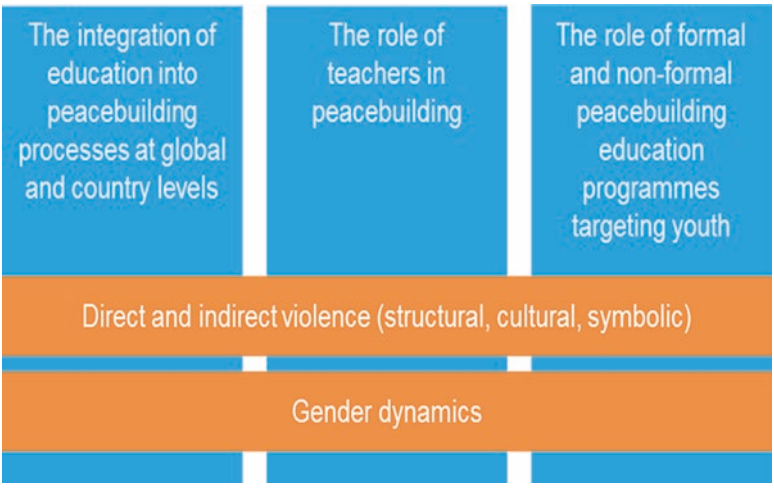

Fig. 1.1 Three thematic research areas and two cross-cutting themes

The Integration of Education and Peacebuilding at (Global/ National) Policy Levels

Notwithstanding the growing recognition that education plays an important role in the context of a fragile state, the majority of education and peacebuilding interventions remain explicitly and implicitly framed in terms of service delivery and formal, or conventional, educational infrastructures. This research area therefore addressed two main questions:

1. *To what extent is education (as part of social service provision) integrated into broader peacebuilding policies and practices at the global and country levels?*
2. *What policies and programmes are being adopted to ensure the integration of education into peacebuilding at country level?*

In examining these questions, we pay particular attention to policies related to the following areas: equity, social cohesion, reconciliation and governance in education, recognising their inter-relations.

The Role of Teachers in Peacebuilding

This research area identifies education policy interventions that enable (or hinder) teachers to become active agents of peacebuilding and social cohesion in and outside the classroom contexts, exploring how such agency is both enabled and constrained. It specifically explores the governance of teachers, their training and professional development, their recruitment and deployment, their morale, terms and conditions and their role in promoting peace, reconciliation, social cohesion and violence mitigation. Hence, this area of research focused specifically on the conditions under which education interventions focused on teachers can promote or mitigate violence, focusing on:

1. Teacher training
2. Teacher recruitment, deployment and management
3. Teacher performance and practices
4. Curricula and textbook reform

The Role of Formal and Non-formal Peacebuilding Education Programmes Focusing on Youth

This third research area explores the ways in which the agency of youth – or their 'space for manoeuvre' – is impacted through a range of formal and non-formal education interventions, and how this enables or restricts young people to contribute

to processes of peacebuilding and social cohesion, either in political, socio-cultural or economic ways. It combines a focus on youth agency, peacebuilding and education – an intersection that is often not addressed simultaneously. The report discusses the voices of youth respondents, including how youth see peace, (formal) education and their most pressing challenges in relation to gendered inequalities and violence. Our analysis aims to illustrate both the heterogeneity of 'youth' in the five countries, as well as highlight how often only a selection of youth constituencies are included in (formal and non-formal) education.

Research Collaborations and Scope of Work: Partnerships and Ethical Considerations

One month after the official start of the Research Consortium's work, in late July and early August 2014, a small team on behalf of the University of Amsterdam visited Myanmar to establish relationships with possible in-country partners and to inform multiple relevant organisations and actors about the project. Based on the responses that were received to an expression of interest (December 2014), the University of Amsterdam selected seven in-country researchers. Four of these in country researchers fall under institutional partnerships, with World Education and Point B.

The team, consisting of three researchers from the University of Amsterdam, one colleague from the University of Auckland and seven researchers in Myanmar (three individuals, one affiliated with World Education, and three affiliated with Point B) carried out the fieldwork between January and April 2015. The research team was extended with the inclusion of four (now graduated) Master students that were part of the International Development Studies Master programme at the University of Amsterdam, who were able to provide additional data beyond the timeframe and providing complementary analysis into topics not yet covered in detail by work of the Research Consortium on Education and Peacebuilding. All together, 72 RA1-related respondents (including policy-makers, peacebuilding actors, and experts), 115 RA2-related respondents (including head teachers, teachers, and teacher trainers), and 144 RA3-related participants (including youth and staff of micro-cases) participated in the research. Additional data collected by the four students added 127 youth respondents (58 through interviews and 69 through questionnaires/surveys) and 72 teacher respondents to this picture. The main research sites where we collected data were Yangon and Mon State, including two specific townships (kept anonymous in public outputs for ethical considerations).

The first training and workshops with the newly established research team were held in the last week of January 2015. In these workshops, the research team together with colleagues from UNICEF collectively adapted the methodological and theoretical framework developed by the Research Consortium to suit the context

of Myanmar in collaboration with local researchers, and specifically focused on six data collection areas:

1. **Research Area 1 (RA1):** processes of reform development and competing perspectives; a unique peacebuilding moment and challenges of a situation in flux;
2. **Research Area 2 (RA2):** teacher training and teacher deployment; violence at school; gendered nature of the teaching profession;
3. **Research Area 3 (RA3):** 'post-secondary' youth leadership/voice; youth perspectives and responses (targeted focus on gender and general theme of violence); formal and non-formal education initiatives;
4. **Educational autonomy**, including the training of teachers and youth responses;
5. **Language of instruction** by inclusion of ethnic languages in policy discussion, teacher training and deployment, and youth experiences of this;
6. **History education**, as presented in policy reform, curriculum development, teacher training, and youth agency/perceptions for reconciliation.

On a more practical level, due to very limited internet access it proved to be difficult to engage in-country researchers in collective data analysis processes using online analysis software. However, we ensured that in-country researchers could have their input on initial coding and findings in the second data-analysis workshops in April 2015 in Myanmar. The members of the research team collectively developed and presented the initial insights drawn from the data collection period in an end-of-fieldwork dissemination seminar, hosted by UNICEF and visited by a range of participants in the study. Further validation of findings is ensured through continuous (online) communication between members of the various country teams and in meetings (in Myanmar and during collective team meetings connected to a conference in Oxford in September 2015).

As a result of the partnership, the UNICEF Country Office Myanmar and local researchers and civil society institutions have been engaged throughout this process. For instance, our interaction with UNICEF in Myanmar (Country and Field Office) was dialogic, involving the exchange of documents, methodological insights, literature and useful contacts. We have also shared and validated our research methodology, theoretical framework, literature review and findings of the study. The support of UNICEF has been indispensable with regard to facilitating contacts and meetings with key respondents in the international civil society networks, as well as with national and local government and non-government organisations.

We encountered a number of challenges during the research process that limited the scope and possibly the generalizability of the findings in this particular work. Firstly, while UNICEF and our other prior network has been crucial in the sampling of both case studies and respondents, we encountered difficulties in obtaining formal permissions to collect data within school settings. Our access to teachers and students was further hindered by the timing of school examination periods and the Thingyan (water festival and New Year) holidays. With support of UNICEF and our Myanmar research colleagues, we managed to have access to a number of teachers and students, mainly outside of school premises, yet we were not able to conduct observations of educational practices. As a creative solution, we asked youth

respondents to enact classroom practices in role-plays, which obviously represent a certain interpretation of classroom realities. Furthermore, our partnership with UNICEF also meant we had to find consensus on the locations of our data collection, where we could build on existing networks and on-going relevant activities, while at the same time being aware of the safety of respondents and our research team. This resulted in the choice to focus on Mon State and the broader Yangon area, which considering the historical and present-day nature of these regions as relatively stable, obviously has implications for our findings in relation to peacebuilding. We therefore strongly support the idea that more research is needed, on thematic areas we have not covered in these contexts, as well as on similar thematic areas in other regions of the country.

Secondly, due to a legacy of restricted interaction with the academic research community, we were unable to establish partnerships with universities or other academic research institutes, as happened in the other country studies in the Research Consortium. This led us to select seven Myanmar researchers with very relevant (academic and/or practitioner) experience in conducting (qualitative) research. The set-up of the team, with members from different linguistic, ethnic and religious backgrounds, might have influenced the way we have selected certain (micro-)case studies, while for reasons of safety and (political) sensitivities we could not select others.

Thirdly, trust building with participants in the research and avoiding where possible a wholly extractive approach to data gathering was an important dimension of the process, especially in relation to engaging youth. Nevertheless, the relatively short time frame implies that the ethnographic nature of our research approach was somewhat limited, and would benefit from a continued research engagement, which is something we hope to be able to take on.

Finally, the actual status of a country in (political, economic and socio-cultural) transition means our study is both timely and time-bound, especially in light of the elections in November 2015 that followed immediately after the writing of the initial report. This also calls for further studies to document and understand the highly complex and rapidly changing nature of transition in Myanmar.

However, having clarified some of the main challenges and why we see these findings as reflecting a particular geographical as well as time-bound context within Myanmar, rather than representing the country as a whole, we do feel this book brings a unique and more ethnographic, while at the same time 'critical realist', understanding into the wider debate (see also Chap. 2). Our aim is to facilitate a better informed discussion on the possibilities as well as the limitations of the role of formal and non-formal education governance, policies, practices and experiences in the on-going and highly complex, and yet very much unresolved, processes of building a lasting peace. We welcome feedback to the findings shared in this book, as we consider knowledge building and sharing as a dialogical rather than 'final' or linear process. This book is also aimed to foster further debate on the potential opportunities and limitations that the various forms of education and learning covered here might play in the future, and hence does not provide clear-cut recommendations.

Structure of the Book

We begin the following chapters of this collection with Mieke Lopes Cardozo's in-depth presentation in Chap. 2 of the theoretical and methodological approaches employed in the work of the research consortium and across the studies presented here. The chapter defines the key concepts and terms that are applied throughout the book before going on to outline the '4R' framework and theoretical underpinnings which have informed the analysis of the studies. The framework builds on Fraser's (2005) dimensions of social justice to explore the contribution of education to building sustainable peace through combining the dimensions of Redistribution, Recognition and Representation with notions of Reconciliation. Lopes Cardozo also presents the methodologies and methods applied in gathering the data for this work, reflecting on the ethical considerations that have been imperative in conducting research in such a sensitive context. These ethical reflections underlie the nature of our work and partnerships, resurfacing in the subsequent chapters and the conclusions of this research. Likewise, across the chapters, attention is paid to the transversal themes of the research and recurrent areas of focus introduced here. So gender dynamics and diverse experiences of direct and indirect violence are prioritized throughout the three parts of this work, as are issues relating to educational autonomy, language of instruction and the teaching of history.

Following the three thematic research areas of the consortium the subsequent chapters are correspondingly divided into three parts. Part I draws together three chapters which serve to further introduce the context of conflict, peacebuilding and political transition in Myanmar, ultimately focusing attention on the processes of policy reform in the education sector initiated since 2012. Beginning by providing historical context in outlining the multiple nature of Myanmar's conflicts, in Chap. 3, "Conflict and Peacebuilding: Background, Challenges and Intersections with Education", Elizabeth Maber explores the interrelation between the conflicts and educational grievances, examining the renewal of peace processes and the potential role for education reforms. In seeking to locate education within the broader peacebuilding architecture, Maber sets up the policy landscape which forms a backdrop to the processes of education reform.

In Chap. 4, "Myanmar's Education System: Historical Roots, the Current Context, and New Opportunities", Ritesh Shah and Mieke Lopes Cardozo provide an overview of the education sector and the multiple school systems that operate within the country. In so doing they highlight challenges for the ongoing education sector reforms, drawing attention to inequalities within and between the education systems and the contentious issue of the language of instruction used in classrooms. Analysis of the education reforms is expanded on in Chap. 5, "Education and Policy Challenges of a Situation in Flux", by Ritesh Shah, Khin Mar Aung and Mieke Lopes Cardozo detailing the original drivers of the ongoing reform processes. Particular attention is given to the Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR) begun in 2012, the National Education Law (NEL) first passed in 2014 and later amended, and the development of the National Education Sector Plan (NESP)

ultimately approved in 2017. Questions are raised over participation within the reform process and implications for peacebuilding revealed through the application of the '4R' framework, setting up a dialogue with subsequent chapters which reflect responses from teachers and from youth.

The chapters collected in Part II shift the emphasis from policy development to the practices and experiences of teachers. In Chap. 6, "Understanding the Changing Roles of Teachers in Transitional Myanmar", Elizabeth Maber, Hla Win May Oo and Sean Higgins draw attention to the position that teachers occupy within Myanmar society as well as how the traditional respect that teachers have received may have been eroded by underinvestment in the education sector. The authors explore varying perceptions of the roles of teaches, including within policy discourse, on the part of teacher educators and from the perspectives of teachers themselves, revealing the diverse ways in which teachers navigate conflicting influences. These influences and experiences are then related to the context of conflict and teachers' agency for peacebuilding, examining opportunities for promoting peace and social justice that are emerging from the reform processes. In particular, ongoing revisions to the state curriculum and textbooks are presented as an opportunity to reduce the negative impact of unequal representations within textbooks and to support teachers in creating more inclusive classrooms.

Attempts to reform textbooks and teacher pedagogy evidently require complimentary attention to teacher education practices, and consequently Chap. 7, "Navigating Teacher Education Reform: Priorities, Possibilities and Pitfalls", presents an examination by Sean Higgins and Naw Tha Ku Paul of teacher preparation and professional development. Situating their study within the context of teacher deployment, governance and accountability, the authors highlight four case studies of teacher education initiatives including three implemented nationally and one uniquely in Mon State. The challenges, opportunities and peacebuilding implications of such initiatives are discussed in relation to the '4R' framework which reveals factors evident in the implementation of the teacher education reforms which may contribute to or conversely undermine broader processes of social justice.

The issues of teachers' identities, motivations and experiences of inequalities are further explored in relation to education provision beyond the government school sector in Mon State by Taru Niskanen and Katharina Buske in Chap. 8, "Non-state Teachers in Mon State: Teacher Identity and a Struggle with Inequality". The authors present two case studies conducted with teachers in monastic schools and in the ethnic Mon parallel system of schools run by the Mon National Education Committee (MNEC). Despite differences in the school contexts, the authors find similarities in the desires of teachers to serve their communities and the influence of (Buddhist) religion and cultural preservation as motivating factors for their work. Additionally, in both cases the effect of low salaries and inequalities in the distribution of resources between the non-state and state school sectors, as well as inadequate representation in the political sphere of reform processes, has resulted in tensions which undermine attempts to bridge divisions in the educational landscape. However, extending discussions raised in the previous chapters in this section,

teachers are navigating different paths in negotiating their responses, with several monastic teachers expressing their intention to transition into work in the government schools, while MNEC teachers expressed greater inclination to move away from shared schooling or training initiatives that were perceived to reinforce their subordination. Together the studies presented in this section offer varying perspectives on the ways in which teachers are influenced by and respond to developments in the policy landscape, and the ways in which teachers' agency for peacebuilding may be constrained or enhanced by current reform efforts.

Reflecting the third thematic area of the research, the chapters of Part III each bring attention to the experiences and agency of youth in relation to education and to peacebuilding. The section begins with Sean Higgins and Mieke Lopes Cardozo's analysis in Chap. 9, "Youth Agency for Peacebuilding in and Beyond Education: Possibilities and Constraints". Varied young people are differently affected by conflict and are differently positioned within Myanmar's social, political and economic transitions, leading the authors to warn against a tendency to homogenise youth rather than seeking to understand the variety of young peoples' experiences. In addition to diverse experiences, the authors indicate the range of ways in which youth have been perceived and portrayed by others to form a variegated pattern of young peoples' agency for peacebuilding. The authors conclude by presenting a multiscalar conceptualisation of youth agency and strategic engagement for peacebuilding informed by the youth respondents participating in the research.

Building on this conceptualisation of youth agency for peacebuilding, Chap. 10, "Prioritising Education: Youth Experiences within Formal and Non-formal Education Contexts", explores the role that education experiences play in supporting or undermining agency. After positioning education as a priority amongst young people's concerns the authors, Elizabeth Maber, Naw Tha Ku Paul, Aye Aye Nyein and Sean Higgins, draw attention to the often negative prior experiences of youth respondents in formal education and their desires for changes. Subsequently the authors present three case studies of non-formal education initiatives which aim to empower and support young people to take action for positive transformation in their communities. In Chap. 11, "Youth Experiences of Non-formal Education for Peacebuilding", Tabea Campbell Pauli and Kiymet Schipper conclude this collection of chapters exploring youth agency with a discussion of two extended case studies undertaken with non-formal post-secondary initiatives in Yangon aiming to support students' political and social leadership. Campbell Pauli and Schipper find differences in the approaches of the two programmes, offering an exploration of the impacts, intended and unintended, of the application of political awareness training and peace education. Relating their findings to the 4R theoretical framework, the authors draw attention to the challenges that influence these non-formal learning sites including ensuring inclusion, the implications of instructional language and strategies for broaching sensitive topics.

Drawing the collection to a close, in the final chapter, "Drawing Conclusions: The Role of Education in Moving Towards Sustainable Peace in Myanmar", Elizabeth Maber, Mieke Lopes Cardozo and Sean Higgins reflect on the three strands of the research, presenting considerations and ways forward which resulted from discussion workshops held in Yangon and Mawlamyine. These workshops were undertaken at the end of the data gathering period with teachers, youth, policy makers and other stakeholders who had participated in the research to consolidate the findings of the study and collectively identify desired next steps. We then return to discuss the application of the 4R theoretical framework to the context of education and peace processes in Myanmar offering concluding reflections on the contributions of this approach.

Finally, a note should be made about the referencing of citations from respondents in the chapters. Chapters 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, and 10 all draw from the data collected by the research team of national and international researchers, as described above, and further outlined in Chap. 2. Citations from these interviews and group discussions are referenced with an anonymised description of the respondent in the text and the inclusion of the interview number (e.g. int. 32). The data referenced in Chap. 8, "Non-state Teachers in Mon State: Teacher Identity and a Struggle with Inequality", and Chap. 10, "Prioritising Education: Youth Experiences within Formal and Non-formal Education Contexts", were collected independently by the authors and are referenced with anonymised descriptions in the text only.

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