

The role of civil society in democratising authoritarian regimes

The case of Burma (Myanmar)



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Preface

This master thesis serves as the final part of the master programme 'Conflicts, Territories and Identities'. During my previous study of political science I have learned quite a bit of theories on international relations. This master programme has helped me to apply these theories in real world situations. From the beginning of this master programme I knew I wanted to do research on one particular conflict. That would be the ultimate way to get more grip on reality and apply the theories I have been studying in the last couple of years. The first moment I learned more about the case of Burma, I was convinced that this should be my research topic. There is very little research done on the situation in the country. And that results in the situation where not many people really know what is going on in Burma. At the same time I learned that this conflict has the potential to become much bigger with even some international involvement. It is a country with a very fragile political situation; people have barely any freedom, the human rights are violated on a daily basis and the room of the democratic opposition is highly restricted. At the same time there is no country in the world that has as many different ethnicities between its borders as Burma. And the two countries that are dominating the international arena, the US and China, are both highly interested in the country. China has major influence in the country and is the most important supporter of the regime, while the US is the country that installed the strongest sanctions against the regime in Burma. All of this is worsened by the fact that the country has many natural resources like oil, gas, tropical wood and precious stones. I don't expect the conflict in Burma to become the trigger for a war between China and the US. But the conflict has all ingredients that could make the conflict much bigger than it is right now. More international involvement in the future is one of the potential scenarios.

I have decided to focus this research on the civil society in Burma. The civil society is the actor in a closed society that can make a difference. It gives people the opportunity to come together and unite on shared interests. And it can be an actor that can fight the uneven balance of power in a country with a dictatorial regime. In the past, civil society actors have been very influential in democratisation processes, for example in Eastern Europe and Latin America. We also see that international organisations put their hopes on the development of the civil society in Burma. Therefore the civil society seems to be the right focus when studying the current situation and the possible future developments in Burma.

I am happy that with this thesis I am able to contribute to the research that is done on the situation in Burma. I hope this research will also lead to a little more awareness on the situation in the country. Because only when people all over the world are aware of the reality

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in Burma, more pressure on the regime will develop. International pressure might be crucial in provoking a change in Burma.

Chapter 1. Introduction

The very basic facts of the research will be presented in this first chapter. The research goal, research questions, research methods and the structure of this Masterthesis will all be explained and explored.

1.1 Research goal and research questions

Every research starts with thoughts and ideas. When it comes to research related to political issues, these ideas often refer to how something *should* be or *should* work. One of these ideas about how the world should be was for me the idea of eliminating all repressive regimes. People should be able to live freely, in whatever political system they prefer to live. Not giving people the chance of living in freedom ignores human dignity and respect. One of the most important characteristics of authoritarian regimes is the limited freedom people live in. The fact that in countries that cope with such authoritarian regimes, people are fighting their whole life for a little more freedom and respect received my sympathy from the first time I ever studied such cases. And the idea that in some countries the situation has been so severe for decades and that people have been fighting such authoritarian regimes for decades as well, convinced me of choosing the master specialisation 'Conflicts, Territories and Identities'. And in the end it also convinced me of writing my Masterthesis on authoritarian regimes. No wonder that I end up writing about a country which has faced authoritarian regimes ever since 1962. And because of these authoritarian regimes, this country faces a war that is known to be the longest civil war on earth (AsiaNews 2009). These facts also convinced me that the case of Burma would be an excellent choice in the context of the master specialisation 'Conflicts, Territories and Identities'. Especially the fight against living without freedom was one of the aspects of the situation in Burma that caught my attention and sympathy. The focus on the civil society of Burma came forward when I found out that although the existence of the civil society is very minimal, there is a functioning civil society in the country. And more and more, small (semi-)autonomous organisations seem to arise in Burma in recent years. It is a first sign of more freedom and people using that freedom to change the society and maybe even influence politics. Together with the stated aspirations of the regime to democratise the country, this is a very interesting development for the country. It is very unsure if these stated aspirations will become reality, but that is a topic that will be discussed in part 2 of this Masterthesis. All together, the recent developments in Burma result in a situation where democratisation could be closer than ever. And therefore this is the time to contribute to the research that already has been conducted on possible democratisation of the country.

Burma can be called an extreme real world case. When developing theories on the roles that civil society can play in democratisation processes, many cases are studied and used to draw conclusions on the average role of civil society. All cases used in such research must have had some form of authoritarian regime. But of course variance is possible in both the degree of repression and the time such an authoritarian regime has been in power. There will not be many cases that score high on both indicators, but Burma does. Burma has been facing authoritarian regimes for more than four decades and the degree of repression is very high (as will be deliberated on in part 2). Therefore Burma represents an extreme case compared to other countries that are facing an authoritarian regime.

This case study of an extreme real world case has two central goals it is aiming for. The first goal is to test and possibly adapt theories on the role of civil society in democratisation processes. Many thoughts and ideas are found in the literature on this subject, but I would like to find out if these ideas also fit the situation in Burma. And what does this mean for the chances for democratisation? Testing theories and maybe suggesting some changes in theories is the theoretical goal of this research.

The second goal is the exploration of the Burmese case and exploring what could happen in this country. Does the civil society play an (important) role in creating or advancing a democratisation process? This is the empirical goal of this project.

The goal of this research is therefore to explore scientific theories on the role civil society can play in democratisation processes, in order to illuminate the role the civil society of Burma can play in a democratisation process in this country and to draw conclusions about the relevance of the scientific theories used in this extreme real world case.

This research goal results in the following research question:

To what extent and in what way are civil society actors able to create or advance a democratisation process in Burma and what does this tell us about the relevance of the scientific theories used in this extreme real world case?

Although it is addressed in the research goal and central question, I would like to stress that this research can only conclude on the relevance of the scientific theories in this particular case of Burma. If it turns out that one of the theories does not fit the reality of this country that does not tell us that this theory is useless, but it could affect the value of this theory. More on this will be explained in the next paragraph.

1.2 Social and scientific relevance

Burma is one of the most authoritarian and closed countries in the world, it has been ruled by a military junta ever since 1962. For decades now the Burmese people have not been treated well by their leaders. Thousands of people have been killed, imprisoned, moved to other places or forced to participate in slave labour. Repression and aggression are the most used policies in Burma. There is evidence of widespread violations of human rights. The democratic opposition is underground and is given no space to manoeuvre. Even though the country has an enormous amount of natural resources, the population does not profit and the majority is very poor. And as mentioned in the preface, the conflicts in the country could expand and get more attention from the international political arena. It is therefore of great importance to keep the attention on the country and to focus on possible solutions to this difficult situation.

Many people believe that democratisation would bring the people of Burma a better life. Democracy implies respect for human rights, participation in the political system and freedom of speech, movement and thoughts. All these important aspects are missing in the lives of the people of Burma. Democracy in Burma would not only be good for the people in the country, but also for other countries in the neighbourhood. People would be able to travel through the country freely and the market would open up. Although many cases show that richness in natural resources is not a guarantee for economic prosperity for all people, the natural resources could be an answer to the low level of development many people suffer from in Burma. Therefore it is important to do research on chances for democratisation, to keep the attention on the situation in Burma. Civil society in Burma and international NGOs trying to help the Burmese civil society could profit from this research. The research will give clarity about ways in which democratisation can be advanced or created by civil society actors. The knowledge generated within this research can be used to adapt the focus of policies and projects, in order to have more influence on the situation in Burma. That makes this research socially relevant.

Civil society is central in many researches and literature on development, democracy and conflict. But there are lots of different approaches and ideas about the way civil society can influence the situation in a country. It is therefore important to test these theories by applying them to different cases. Burma represents an extreme case since the regime is extremely authoritarian and this situation has been like this for decades. That makes it harder to do research on the country, but also interesting to use it as a case study. Testing of theories is one of the important scientific goals a research can have. When testing theories, the theoretical framework an author or school of thought has produced is tested in the empiry. This way, theories can be adapted or strengthened, or theories can be proven to be valuable.

The chances that a theory is close to reality are smallest when we explore extreme cases, since theories are usually based on a lot of cases, where the average development or results are used to build the theory on. Scores of extreme cases often fall out of the reach of the theory. When a theory is tested to an extreme case and the theory shows to be accurate in explaining or predicting reality, the theory becomes more valuable. When the theory is not accurate enough in this case, it can be adapted. When it comes to theories on civil society and democratisation, such a test and an eventual adaptation of the theory can help to predict and explain situations in other extreme real world cases like North Korea or Syria. When it comes to a proposal for adaptation of a theory we do not only speak of theory testing, but also of theory developing as a scientific goal.

Several authors have recently claimed that there is a small, but functioning civil society in Burma (see for example Steinberg 2001, James 2005 and Hulst 2006) and signs of an upcoming civil society are showing the last year¹. Because of these developments, this is a good moment to undertake this kind of research. More on the growing civil society can be read in part 2 of this Masterthesis. For years the prevailing idea has been that there is no civil society in Burma, therefore almost no research has been done on this topic. That makes this research innovative, important and very relevant to the scientific world.

The role of civil society in authoritarian regimes is important to both the scientific world and the world of development organisations. One important research project that is currently running is the knowledge programme on Civil Society in West Asia. This project is jointly undertaken by the University of Amsterdam and Hivos, focussing on civil society in authoritarian states in West Asia, in particular Syria and Iran².

1.3 Research methods

As mentioned before in this chapter, the core of this research is the testing of scientific theories on a single case study. One important advantage of using the single case study method is that the research can explore this case very thoroughly and go into details (Verschuren and Doorewaard 2007, 184). Because the case that is chosen can be studied thoroughly, the research can produce less general conclusions about the theories tested, compared to the situation where multiple cases are used. Although some conclusions can be made on the theories tested. The advantage is that the research can conclude on the case that is studied. In order to being able to conclude on the case that is being studied, it is of

¹ For more information on the growing presence and impact of the work of the civil society see for example the report of the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies , *Listening to the Voices From Inside: Myanmar Civil Society's Response to Cyclone Nargis*, published on the 4th of May 2009

² I have been involved in this research programme by writing a comparative paper on civil society in Burma. This more extensive research on Burma also fits in the framework of this knowledge programme, since case studies are very useful in generating more knowledge on civil society in authoritarian states.

great importance that many different sources are used. When many different sources are used, the chances for having an accurate idea of the real situation are much bigger compared to a situation where only a couple of sources are used. Then the chances for a biased idea are much bigger.

A second characteristic of the single case study method is therefore that qualitative information will be the most important source of information (ibid.). Sources that are used in this research are mostly written sources like books and articles. Some interviews complement this information. Especially when you are studying cases as difficult as Burma, interviews are necessary to complete the picture. Literature often gives you contradictory or limited information, which has to be explained or verified by experts on this case. Important experts on the situation in Burma are David Steinberg, Timo Kivimäki, Gustaaf Houtman and Marco Mezzera. All of these people have been asked questions via e-mail or telephone conversations. Their answers have been of great importance for this research. The Burma Centre Netherlands has also provided detailed inside information on the civil society in Burma.

The third characteristic of the single case study method is that the choice of the case is strategic instead of random (like is done in surveys) (ibid.). In this research I have chosen to use Burma, as it is an extreme real world case. This makes it more valuable in testing theories. But it is also strategic in another way. It is a country in which lots of things seem to be happening on democratisation and opening up at the moment. This is a very important time for the people of Burma, because there are signs that more openness or democracy might be on the way. More can be read about this in part 2 of this research. This shows that the subject of this research is up-to-date and relevant for the present developments in the country. Therefore the research and its results could actually be important at this particular moment.

1.4 Burma or Myanmar?

In 1989 the military junta changed the name of the country from “Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma”, to “the Union of Myanmar”. Both names have historical meaning. The international community is divided on which name to use. The United Nations adopted the new name Myanmar, but others, like the government of the United States, stick to the old Burma (Hulst 2006, 9). The opposition also uses the old name. Their main reason is the fact that the regime that changed the name is illegally holding power (since the elections in 1990). This will be further elaborated on in part 2. Nowadays more international media are deciding to use the old name of the country again.

In order to be absolutely clear about the country I am doing this research on, I have decided to use the new and old name both in the title of this research. But in order to write a

report on my research that is easy to read I have chosen to use only one name during the rest of this Masterthesis. I have decided to use the old Burma. First, because it is the most known name of the country. And second because of the illegitimacy of the military junta. I realise that the decision to use one name also give away your affiliation within the conflicts between the regime and the opposition. But that can also be seen by the subject of this research. Doing research on democratising authoritarian regimes shows your preference for a certain type of regime and for a certain political system. I am very aware of my own affiliation and the biases and assumptions this affiliation can bring along. In order to make this research least biased, I will use very different sources from various authors. Asian, European and American sources will help me to overcome my own biases and assumptions as much as possible, in order to make this research valuable and least influenced by my own affiliation.

1.5 Structure of the Masterthesis

This Masterthesis is divided into several parts. Part 1 is the theoretical framework, in which the theoretical basis for the research will be explored. Theories regarding civil society and democratisation are part of this theoretical framework. These theories lead to an analytical framework. Based on this theoretical part, the research will specify on the situation in Burma, which is explored in part 2 of this Masterthesis. This part specifically focuses on the civil society in Burma and in part 3 the roles the civil society organisations fulfil are analysed. From this analysis the connection between theory described in part 1 and the case of Burma described in part 2 comes forward. Both these theoretical ideas and the reality in Burma come together in part 4 of this research, which is the concluding part of this Masterthesis. Here, the research questions are answered and possible connections with other cases are sought. Some suggestions for further research are also part of the conclusion.

Part 1. Theoretical framework

Chapter 2. Theoretical framework

This second chapter introduces the most important theorists and theories on the role of civil society in democratisation processes. The first focus will be on the definition of civil society and the democratisation process; what is civil society? How can a democratisation process be defined? And what actors can influence such a process? Then the chapter will introduce the three leading schools of thought in the field of civil society in political processes, of which democratisation is of course an example. The three schools of thought are used to draw an analytical framework which will be central in analysing the situation in Burma.

2.1 Civil society

“Collective action in search of the good society is a universal part of human experience, though manifested in a million different ways across time, space and culture”

(Edwards, 2004, 1).

Many different views on civil society are discussed in this chapter. Before it is possible to discuss a case from the real world, the definition that will be used on this concept will have to be clear. Although the classical liberal school of thought is dominant in the debate on civil society, the other schools are also taken as important input for the definition of civil society. The classical liberal school sees civil society as a part of society. The focus of the neo-Tocquevillian tradition is on associational life. The liberal egalitarian school pictures civil society as the potential good society. When civil society is well regulated, it can enhance emancipation and equality in a society. This good society is then characterised by positive norms and values as well as successful in meeting particular social goals. And the critical theorists' school sees civil society as the public sphere in which everybody is able to participate (ibid., 10). Since all schools have such different views, this research will use the very core of all ideas on civil society. The different interpretations of the definition of civil society are explained in the remainder of this chapter. To take the very core of all ideas results in a very minimal definition of civil society, but it is the only way to take in all the different views that are discussed in this research. As becomes clear in this chapter, all schools see the civil society as the independent sphere where individuals voluntarily come together to organise on mutual interests. Or as Michael Walzer puts it *“the space of un-coerced human association”* (quoted in Edwards 2004, 20). There is no agreement on the question if the influence on political processes is equally distributed among the groups and classes in society, and if this system should be altered. But this is the core of all ideas on civil society. As Flyvbjerg argues, most writers on civil society agree that civil society has an

institutional core constituted by voluntary associations outside the sphere of the state and the economy (Flyvbjerg 1998, 210). It is important to mention that businesses are not part of the civil society. In businesses people also come together in order to create outcomes that are in the interest of everybody involved. But since people need to be a part of this economic life, there is no voluntary participation involved. While in civil society, people can really choose to participate in certain organisations and they can even choose not to participate at all. That is the major difference with the economic sphere. Another important implication of this definition is that political parties are part of the civil society as long as they are not in the government. When they are in power, they become part of the state institutions and are no longer independent. But when they are not in the government, they are also organisations in which people come voluntarily together to reach certain goals and act on mutual interests. Using this definition also means that militant rebellion groups are part of the civil society of a country. Although these groups use violent methods to reach their goals, their intention to come together is the same as other more peaceful civil society organisations. That intention is to come together and defend their mutual interests. The definition used here does not say anything about the way in which these mutual interests are defended or fought for. Sometimes this means literally a fight for your interests.

Civil society is made up by very different organisations, networks and associations. From football clubs to debate groups, from women's networks to labour unions, from book clubs to political parties (as long as they are not in government) and from environmental lobby groups to religious groups. Although some organisations will have a much clearer influence on political processes and democratisation than others, all are included in the civil society and all do have some influence on democratisation according to the theories that are included in this chapter.

2.2 Democratisation

A democratisation process is a process in which a country gets more democratic; takes the path towards becoming a democracy. Many definitions of democracy exist from which the oldest stems from the ancient Greek society. The exact meaning of the word democracy is 'rule by the people'. But in practice this can mean many different things. The democratic rule in the ancient Greek society is different from the one we know in modern Western societies. And even those societies are different from each other when it comes to the practical meaning of the concept democracy. The danger of using a concept like this is that because it can mean anything to anyone, it is in danger of not meaning anything at all (Heywood 1997, 68). For that reason every research about democracy or using the concept democracy, will have to take clear position on the definition used for democracy. For this research I will use a broad definition of democracy, given by Thomas Pogge: *"Democracy means that political*

power is authorized and controlled by the people over whom it is exercised, and this in such a way as to give these people roughly equal political influence” (Pogge 2002, 146). This definition has two important components. First, that all the people have influence on the political process. And second, that this influence is equally distributed among all people. This definition is valuable since it gives answer to the two most important questions when talking about the concept democracy; ‘who are the people?’ and ‘in what sense should the people rule?’ (Heywood 1997, 68). But while answering these questions it does not prefer any modern model of democracy over the other.

Democratization refers to the transition to democracy. In order to achieve a democracy as is defined by Pogge there are several important features that have to be part of the transition process. People can only authorize and control political power when they are free to express their ideas and when their political rights are ensured by law. Therefore the granting of basic freedoms and democratic political rights are an important feature of the transition process. The next step is to elect representatives of the people that will form the government of the country, in other words the establishment of popular and competitive elections. Only when these two steps are taken, we can speak of a democracy as Pogge described (ibid., 81).

2.3 Which actors can influence democratisation processes?

This research is on the influence of civil society on democratising authoritarian states. But of course the civil society is not the only actor that can influence such political processes. In this paragraph the most important actors that can influence democratisation processes will be discussed in order to get a good idea of the situation a civil society is in. And it will help to analyse the situation in Burma better.

The actor that is most influential is the state itself. The state shapes and controls, but also regulates, supervises, authorises and proscribes. Its influence on society and especially on political processes is huge (Heywood 1997, 85). The state and its institutions are populated by the people who have direct political influence and power. They create policies and execute them. The people working in state institutions are therefore also the ones that decide which course to take. The state is eventually the most important actor to actually start a democratisation process. No other actor can accomplish this without the support of the state, simply because a country is not democratic unless the constitution, laws and total political system are based on democratic rules. But the state can also be the initiator of a democratisation process. This can happen when for example the government believes that a democracy would be much better for the development of the country. But in most cases we see that a democratisation process is started after a change of power. The state is an actor that can show a lot of variance in its decisions, since the course it totally decided by the

people that populate the government. Because the state is the ultimate starter of a democratisation process, for the civil society the relationship with the state is very important. When this relationship is good, the chances for civil society to influence policies are much higher than in a situation where relationships are poor. Interests, norms and power play an important role in these relationships (White 2004, 15-16). The state is not the only actor that has influence on political processes. In today's societies, other actors have gained more influence during the last decades. The borderline between state and society is vague. The interaction between the state and society actors is based on the recognition of (inter)dependence. No actor has all the knowledge and resources to solve complex and dynamic problems that face today's societies (Kooiman 1993, 4).

The definition of civil society that is used in this research is based on the idea of uncoerced cooperation. The civil society of a country is therefore populated by voluntary associations of people living in that country and forms one of the major links between the state and the people (Heywood 1997, 270). These associations are founded for very different purposes, from local sport clubs to labour unions. But all these associations are to some extent dependent on the state and the rules and laws created by this state to help them achieve their goals. At least the state has to create a situation in which such associations can flourish. This means that the civil society is embedded in an environment which it has to interact with and it is even hugely dependent on this environment. This makes the civil society surely not always the most influential actor in political processes. But at the same time civil society does represent many of the citizens of a country and is therefore very interesting for the state and its institutions to listen to and cooperate with. In that way it can have major influence on politics. And autonomous mass media institutions, also part of the civil society, are in most democratic countries so influential that they can set the agenda of the political debate. The behaviour of the civil society in a country can convince the government to start a democratisation process. This can be done by rational arguments on why a democracy would be better for the development of the country. But most of the times this triggering is accomplished by creating enough pressure on the state. The civil society is in some countries able to represent quite a large part of society. If several civil society actors are able to come together and put one's foot down, this can create a huge amount of pressure on the government. Civil society can also try to increase the pressure on the state by influencing other actors like the international community and companies. If the government loses too much support among the population, chances for demonstrations and even uncontrollable riots are growing. These uprisings could eventually lead to a revolution or a coup d'état. In order to avoid such events undemocratic governments will try to suppress these kinds of unrest. But when the state turns out to be too weak, they probably will at some point give in and listen to the demands of the civil society.

Besides the state and civil society, liberal societies also consist of a market sector, representing the economy of the country. Businesses can have major political influence, especially when we are talking about a country with an open market system. In liberal economies the major companies have such a large influence on the economic situation in a country, that their influence on political decisions is huge. As Heywood puts it “at almost every level, politics is intertwined with the economy and with society” (ibid., 177). In authoritarian countries businesses are usually not that strong and largely owned by the state. When this is the case, the influence of this sector is not easily separable from the influence of the state and its institutions. This also means that there is no development of a middle class. This middle class often forms the basis of the civil society in a country. Another question that needs to be answered is what the main source of income is for the state. In most modern societies taxation is the most important source of income. Taxation strengthens the social contract on which the society is based. More on the social contract can be read in paragraph 2.4. If taxation is not the most important source of income this will also have important consequences for the possible democratic dynamics that can develop in a country. The state will be less sensitive to demands from citizens when they do not provide the biggest source of income for the state apparatus to function (Verkoren 2003, 48). Even though the market sector is usually highly interwoven with the state institutions, economic considerations can have major influence on the decision to start a democratisation process. Because of the globalising economy, state institutions are becoming more sensitive to demands from international companies. If it turns out that very few companies are willing to invest in a country because it is not democratic, this could become a trigger for the government to start a democratisation process. This is especially the case in countries that have largely based their economies on foreign currencies. Another way that economic considerations can influence the decision to start a democratisation process is when other countries decide to put economic sanctions into effect, for example by creating a trade boycott. These economic sanctions can have a huge effect on the income of a country and are therefore very influential on the position of the government of that country. A government that has less money to spend is also a government that is less powerful. It will for example not be able to expand the number of soldiers in the army or policemen in the streets. This is simply because there is no money to pay more salaries. The civil society can also play a role in the pressure that is developed in the economic sector. They can talk to international companies that are investing in the country or trading with the regime. These companies will be asked to leave the country. If that doesn't work an international smear campaign focussed on the companies can be started. The civil society can also try to convince other countries to impose economic sanctions on the regime. Of course considerations about who is affected most by these economic sanctions are important. Usually we see that in authoritarian

countries the regime and their families profit most from the international trade. But we also see that they usually will try to minimise the effects of economic sanctions by burdening the citizens.

The most influential national spheres have been discussed, but the world we live in is globalising ever more. We experience more influence from places other than our own country, the geographical distance and territorial boundaries are becoming less significant (Heywood 1997, 138). And even developing and closed authoritarian countries can no longer deny the influence of the international context. The international context can mean many things, it can have influence by regional organisations supporting each other in political decisions, or creating free trade areas. But the international context can also bring in moral considerations in treaties signed by the government or pressure from allies to create policies that benefit them. Considering the international context means discussing the relationships with neighbouring countries, the major political powers in the world and region, the regional and international organisations the country is member of and the organisations that try to influence the political situation in the country (White 2004, 16). These actors can also have influence on if and when the state decides to start a democratisation process. From the international arena pressure to democratise can develop through different channels. Countries that support the authoritarian regime can try to convince them to change the political course. This can be done by single countries or by regional or international organisations that the country is a member of. If the authoritarian country has ever signed an agreement or treaty in which it promises to start a democratisation process this can also be used to build international pressure by other countries. Countries that are no supporters of the regime will choose different methods. They for example create pressure by installing political or economic sanctions. International civil society actors can build pressure by different means. This pressure can be created by influencing countries to take action, or by convincing companies to stop investing in the country. Civil society organisations can also decide to support oppositional organisations or movements in the authoritarian country. This can be done by giving economic, political or moral support. Pressure can also develop the other way around. The local civil society actors can try to get the support of the international arena. They can try to contact international civil society actors, governments and organisations and try to make them listen to their stories. Usually we see that the international pressure is developed by the influence of the local civil society in the international arena and by foreign initiatives.

Although this research focuses on the role civil society can play in democratisation processes, all the other actors on national and international level that can influence these developments and that are mentioned here, will have to be taken into account in analysing a

real world situation. More on the influence of these other actors in the case of Burma can be found in part 2 of this Masterthesis.

2.4 Classical liberal school of thought

In early classical thought, civil society and state were seen as indistinguishable. Both referred to a type of political association that can govern social conflict through the imposition of rules that keep people from harming one another. These classical thoughts found their first origins at Aristotle whose polis was an 'association of associations', that enabled citizens (a term that was understood in a much more limited way than today, since only male adults who had completed their military training were considered to be citizens) to share in the virtuous tasks of ruling and being ruled. The state represented the civil part of society, and being civil meant being a good citizen. These ideas were continued in medieval times with politically-organised commonwealths: societies in which people would come together to sign a social contract. In this contract people promised to turn down violence in order to live a good life. But this situation needed to be protected by the state in order to function. This state was created by signing the social contract. The contract that led to the creation of a politically-organised commonwealth, led people to live a civil or good life without violence. This way of living was only possible because people lived in associations protected by the state and the rule of law. It was inviting to live the civil life - although it meant giving up some of your freedom and obey the rule of law - because the alternative was, as Hobbes pointed out in his *Leviathan*, survival of the fittest and a war of all against all (Edwards 2004, 6-7).

But the ideas on the civil society changed as Enlightenment ideas got more influence on political theorists. Individual rights and freedom became more important and civil society was seen as a defence against unwarranted intrusions by the state on these newly gained rights and freedoms. The defence was realised by the creation of voluntary associations in which people with similar ideas and needs would come together in order to stand stronger against the state (ibid., 7). This was the beginning of the classical liberal school of thought and one of the most famous thinkers of this school of thought is Alexis de Tocqueville. De Tocqueville was a Frenchman who came to the United States in 1831 to study the state of democracy and to compare his findings with what he knew back home in France (Howell and Pearce 2001, 43). One of his most important findings was that Americans of all ages and all social positions associated in different organisations (Kinneking 2004, 167). In his nineteenth century writings, four themes connected to the political culture and associationalism are central. He found out how the Americans found reconciliation between liberty and equality. There was a transformation going on from a state governed by the wealthy few, to the rise of the mass society where inequality in wealth and income would no longer be a barrier for

participation in politics. And thus in this new situation there was political equality. The country was really ruled by the people. Not only in being represented by politicians but also by the legal system where a jury would hugely influence court decisions (de Tocqueville 1966, 173). The danger of the new freedom and influence for all citizens was the fact that it could easily lead to unrest and chaos. People would not be interested in what is good for the society but only in what is good for them. This individualism would be bad for the development of the country. Therefore people needed to get a sense of responsibility for the society they live in (Stein 2005). The fact that Americans massively associated with one another around mutual interests was one of the ways they found this reconciliation. They would not only look to the state for help, but would also look to their fellow citizens (Howell and Pearce 2001, 43). Civil society meant that people were able to organise things themselves and did not rely on the state, therefore they were protected by civil society from more state intervention. The associations that were most important in fulfilling this task are religious organisations that took care of the needed moral support. On the economic level this support was created by labour and trade unions. And people also started to organise for security reasons by creating their own neighbourhood watch and village councils (de Tocqueville 1966, 189-190). This independence from the state can also be seen as a cooperative role. The civil society takes on some tasks which also could be taken on by the state. In this way the civil society is a subsidiary for the state.

While associationalism means working together, it also means working for your individual interests, so in that way it also protects individuality. Because people started to organise themselves around mutual interests, they could protect themselves not only from the state, but also from conformity to the will of the mass (Howell and Pearce 2001, 44). De Tocqueville wrote: *“At the present time, the liberty of association has become a necessary guarantee against the tyranny of the majority”* (de Tocqueville 1961, 220-221). If no such associations would exist, the opinion and the needs of the majority of the population would always win it from the minority needs and interests. In political theory the concept of the ‘tyranny of the majority’ was developed when research proved that some groups in society would never be part of the majority group on any important issue. Therefore the society was not ruled by the will of all the people, but by the will of the group that would be part of the majority on most of the important issues (Mill 1991, 26). Alexis de Tocqueville was the first thinker to come up with this idea, but it became famous in the works of John Stuart Mill. When talking about minorities, de Tocqueville means groups with a different opinion than most of the people. If those minorities are able to organise themselves and stand stronger towards the larger groups in society, they would have more influence. That is exactly what happened in America. And it is something we still see today, since several minority groups

have managed to build a very strong lobby in American politics. For example the Jewish lobby or the weapon lobby.

According to Alexis de Tocqueville, civil society helps to nurture the true democratic culture, since the associations did not only teach Americans how to be protected from the state, but also taught democratic skills. The most important of these democratic skills are arguing for your cause through peaceful means and leadership skills (Howell and Pearce 2001, 44). People learn about democracy every day in the voluntary associations in which they are involved. Civil society has educational roles in this sense. It educates people on democracy and even raises good politicians. Both political and critical skills are educated. The political skills are for example how to influence political decision processes and how to represent a group of people with similar interests. And critical skills are more about debating decisions and how to build arguments against decisions taken by politicians. The people are also taught on the democratic citizenship, about involvement and putting effort into a democratic system. Another reason why de Tocqueville was interested in this educational role, was the fact that freedom of association would rather prevent instead of encourage revolutionary action because people learnt how to influence politics in a peaceful way. This was very much appreciated by Alexis de Tocqueville (ibid.) since in France he lived the aftermath of the revolution of 1789 and he had only had seen violent protest against government decisions (Stein 2005). This peaceful way of influencing politics also meant new roles for a civil society association in democratisation. Countervailing roles of arguing for the own cause, representing a part of society, and resistance against the state when decisions that are being made are not in line with the interests of that particular association became important. With communicating both opinions and reactions on state decisions to the state and the rest of the society, communicative roles like functioning as channels for communication and creating a platform for open debate, can also be mentioned as roles of the civil society in political processes. So besides being involved in politics by voting, people were also involved because of their membership of civil society organisations.

The last central theme of de Tocquevilles work is the importance of public/civic engagement. Since civil society is about individual and collective interests, people are encouraged to be interested and actively involved in politics. In a democracy, the connection between the private interest and the general interest is important to keep citizens active and interested in state affairs. Nobody can only focus on their individual interests, since the general interest influences your own situation. That way, egoism or self interest does not stand in the way of an active participatory society (Kinneging 2004, 38). According to de Tocqueville, voluntary associations created a sphere in which people could organise themselves on a common interest. By organising themselves, the chances of being heard by politicians were much greater. And if the government would not decide in favour of the group,

this group could even try to organise or arrange things themselves, since resources and knowledge also come together in such organisations. Good examples of such organisations are religious organisations, village councils, neighbourhood watches and labour unions (de Tocqueville 1966, 189-190). Here we also recognise educational, communicative and countervailing roles for the civil society.

Many theorists got inspired by the works of de Tocqueville, and his influence grew during the 1950s and 1960s. Theorists of that time were also heavily influenced by the recent history of the Second World War and the current state of affairs of the Cold War. Therefore the focus of political theorists was mostly on stability and not so much on broadening the political participation among citizens. They used a different approach than de Tocqueville but they used his works as a basis for their own theories. Especially the thoughts of de Tocqueville on the democratic culture and anti-revolutionary elements of the civil society caught the attention of some theorists who became very influential. The first of these influential works on political culture is 'The Civic Culture' by Gabriel Almond and Sydney Verba. They performed a comparative study on political culture in Italy, Germany, Mexico, United States and Britain. Their data led them to conclude that in Italy, Germany and Mexico, relationships are characterised by low levels of trust. This was explained by the high degree of partisan fragmentation in those societies and the way political antagonisms were carried into personal lives. This affects the public sphere in which people are less willing to cooperate with each other. In the United States and Britain, the willingness to cooperate among citizens was much higher (ibid., 42-46). Almond and Verba presented a "*rationalist-activist model of democratic citizenship, the model of a successful democracy that required that all citizens be involved and active in politics, and that their participation be informed, analytic, and rational*" (Almond 1989, 16). They showed that only when the right culture was present, cooperation and the development of the civil society would follow, and becoming a stable democracy would be possible. They were pessimistic about the possibilities for the third world to develop as stable democracies. Such a civic culture that was needed was a 'gift of the West', they argued (Howell and Pearce 2001, 45). This pessimistic conclusion leads away from de Tocqueville's ideas which were much more positive on the chances for democracy. According to Almond and Verba, it is key that people cooperate with each other and the most important element of this cooperation is that it is cutting cleavages in society. People from all different backgrounds and all different social groups should cooperate in multiple different settings. This kind of cooperation creates a political culture that would lead to high levels of trust among the citizens. These high levels of trust are essential in order to have a well functioning democracy. In this idea of cooperation several roles for civil society are visible. Most important are the educational roles, like teaching on democratic citizenship, political and

critical skills. This education also touches upon cooperation between people from very different background and people that belong to different social groups.

In the 1990s Tocqueville's ideas were still highly influential as can be seen by the theme of Robert Putnam's book 'Making Democracy Work' (1993). The key question to Putnam was "why do some democratic governments succeed and others fail?" (Putnam 1993a, 3). In his research he went beyond the operation of formal institutions and focussed on the informal institutions in Italy. His research explores the informal institutions and unwritten codes of behaviour and patterns of trust in which formal institutions are embedded. He argues that it is in these informal institutions of everyday life that social capital is generated. Social capital is the kind of social connectedness represented by networks, norms and trust that promote civic engagement. This social connectedness is essential in social and cultural factors that enhance wealth creation. Without trust, for example, people will be less willing to trade with each other, which has a negative effect on the economy of the country. But without trust people are also less eager to pay their taxes, or vote during elections. Therefore social capital is a precondition for a well functioning democracy (Heywood 1997, 208). Putnam argued that it is social capital that ultimately explains the performance of political institutions. The informal institutions Putnam mentions are the voluntary associations like book clubs and bowling groups (which are the central example in the follow-up research represented in his book 'Bowling Alone' (2000)). So again we see the voluntary associations that make up the civil society as key answer to creating a political culture in which democracy can flourish. What is needed is social capital and according to Putnam social capital "*refers to features of social organization, such as trust, norms and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions*" (Putnam 1993a, 167). When horizontal associations and relationships that cut across social cleavages are dominating the informal institutions and codes of behaviour, social capital is built and the chances for a well performing democratic system are good (Howell and Pearce 2001, 47-49). Putnam made institutions a dependent variable, which is shaped by history, and an independent variable, that is affecting political outcomes. His perspective ultimately is concerned with creating effective and strong democratic institutions. He concluded his research with the notion that de Toqueville was right; democratic government is strengthened, not weakened, when a country has a strong civil society (Putnam 1993a, 182). When it comes to countries in the third world, or countries that don't have much experience with democracy, he claims that for these countries "*building social capital will not be easy, but it is the key to making democracy work*" (ibid., 185). So according to Putnam, civil society can create the right political culture by using its educational and democracy building roles. One of the most important aspects for civil society is to teach on cooperation. And cooperation between people will lead to the

creation of networks of reciprocity and the level of trust between people will grow. These norms and values could then also be taken into the rules of the political game.

The classical liberal school of thought sees the civil society as a part of society. This part is populated by voluntary associations that represent people with similar interests. This school of thought focuses on the independence of the civil society from the state. Associations help people to be protected from the tyranny of the majority. But it also helps people to be more involved in politics because general and individual interests are interwoven. Without a well functioning civil society, there would be no well functioning democracy.

2.5 Liberal egalitarian school of thought

A second approach to civil society can be described as liberal egalitarian. This school of thought is also based on the prevailing ideas of the Enlightenment, but puts more emphasis on unequal access to resources and opportunities. This unequal access has an important influence on the health and functioning of the civil society. This insight has been used to build a constructive critique on the neo-Tocquevillian tradition. This critique focuses on the structural obstacles that prevent some groups from articulating their interests (Edwards 2004, 8). Hegel was one of the first theorists to criticize the early ideas of civil society. He agreed that freedom, subjectivity and liberal individuality were very important to people's development. In the end, this development was also important for the greater social order (Garza 1991, 380). He saw individuals pursuing their own selfish ends, but he also saw that livelihood, happiness and the legal status of the individual were interwoven with the livelihood, happiness and rights of all (Duquette 1989, 220). Therefore equal access to resources and opportunities would in the end lead to a situation where more people would be happy and less animosity would be present in society. Civil society is the space where the self-seeking individualists come together and therefore Hegel recognised an essentially capitalist nature in civil society. This capitalist nature resulted in extreme richness and poverty. These consequences were unavoidable, a necessary output of the nature of civil society (Neocleous 1995, 396). Because of this capitalist nature with extreme outcomes, the public authority will have to regulate and control this sphere. Since according to Hegel, the state is the only adequate vehicle of modern ethical life, this is the perfect institution to regulate the civil society. In his works he pointed at the different economic and political interests within civil society that required constant surveillance by the state to remain 'civil' (Edwards 2004, 9). Hegel famously stated in his *Philosophy of Right* that *"the principle of modern states has enormous strength and depth because it allows the principle of subjectivity to attain fulfilment in the self-sufficient extreme of personal particularity, while at the same time bringing it back to substantial unity and so preserving this unity in the principle of subjectivity itself"* (quoted in

Villa 2005, 672). Civil society when regulated properly by the state has its own important educational functions in mediating between the people and the state. By being member of a civil society association, people would profit from the idea of 'learning by understanding', grasping how parts of society function together in an organic way. This was the essence of civic education according to Hegel (*ibid.*, 678). When it comes to roles of the civil society, educational roles are most important to Hegel. Being part of civil society can teach people how the state functions and in what way they can have influence on political processes. He did not see more influential roles, since the state regulated civil society, so the influence of civil society on political processes was very minimal.

The theme of inequalities in society is a theme that many people would immediately connect with Karl Marx, who continued on the works of Hegel. His main critique was that civil society is dominated by considerations of narrow self-interest (Pnatharathananunth 2006, 11). This is exactly the idea that the classical liberal school celebrates because of the public engagement that follows from the combination of private and public interests. Marx follows the idea of Hegel on this, that civil society has an essentially capitalist nature and he also concludes that surveillance by the state is necessary. For Marx this necessity lies in the fact that civil society is persistently on the verge of being torn apart by class antagonisms (Neocleous 1995, 396-397). The class struggles which are central to the history and development of mankind are taking place in civil society. Marx saw civil society made up of private interests as another vehicle for furthering the interests of the dominant class under capitalism. He was the first to make the distinction between political participation and full human emancipation. Both the American and French Revolution established what Marx called an 'essentially artificial equality' within the civil and political sphere. The relationships of inequality and exploitation were left intact (Howell and Pearce 2001, 53). While everybody had the same rights in the political sphere, the civil sphere was still full of inequalities which needed to disappear in order to speak of full human emancipation. In many civil society organisations we still find the idea of full human emancipation. Participation in all spheres of society is a central goal for many social movements and grassroots organisations. Participation is more than taking part in the institutionalised spaces of the formal democracy (*ibid.*, 55), because having the same political rights does not equal having the same amount of influence. The only way these problems could be tackled according to Marx, is by totally transforming civil society. From a collective of self-seeking individuals it would have to be altered into a collective of social individuals where wealth is the universality of individual needs, capacities, pleasures and productive forces (Neocleous 1995, 404).

Another important idea of the neo-Tocquevillian tradition that Marx criticised was the idea that a strong civil society equals a strong democracy. He pointed at the fact that many

social organisations were rather trying to transform and challenge the institutionalised democracy instead of strengthening it (Howell and Pearce 2001, 54). Something Marx also advocated for, by calling out to the working class to unite and stand up against repression from the capitalist elites, in his famous Communist Manifesto (Heywood 1997, 53). Here we recognise countervailing roles for the civil society. Other roles for civil society in political processes can also be found in the works of Marx. Similar to Hegel, educational roles are mentioned by Marx. Civil society organisations can teach people on the functioning of the state. But while Hegel did not see much influence from civil society on political processes, Marx sees that influence and thus he recognised more roles for civil society, roles like communicative roles and countervailing roles. These roles can for example mean creating channels of communication, an open platform for debate, representing groups in society, resisting certain decisions from the government and being a watchdog for their own interests.

The theme of inequalities in civil society was also picked up by Antonio Gramsci who was inspired by the works of Marx. He explored the relations of power and influence between political society (government or the state) and civil society. While the liberal tradition pictured these relations to be free and equal in nature, he saw a hegemonic nature. In these relations some groups in civil society were dominating the decisions that were being taken. The power to manufacture consent was not evenly distributed in society. His strategy to alter this situation was a revolutionary idea to disable the coercive apparatus of the state in order to gain access to political power for all people in society (Buttigieg 1995, 6-7). He was influenced by Hegel and Marx in his view of civil society, but his solution to these problems was more liberal in nature since he did not see any faith in regulation by the state. In his view the rules of the political game were established by the dominant class and are therefore an integral part of what needs to be transformed before the fundamental principles of freedom and justice can be established. The fact that the existence of a coercive state apparatus is needed to ensure compliance with the rules of the game indicates that the liberal state has a non universal character (ibid., 10). In his view civil society was the site of rebellion against the orthodox as well as the site of the construction of cultural and ideological hegemony. This hegemony is expressed through families, schools, universities and the media as well as voluntary associations. Since all these institutions are important in sharing the political dispositions of citizens (Edwards 2004, 8). And one of the first steps to tackle these problems is political education. Education is key to constitute the independence of the masses from the intellectuals (Buttigieg 1995, 20).

In Gramsci's works we see some clear examples of influence of civil society on political processes. Even in his solutions for the problems in civil society he saw a central role for civil society. The growth of civil society, which normally accompanies a growth of

influence of the dominant group, is catastrophic to the subaltern social groups. But it is also the only way in which this problem can be tackled. The most successful strategy is to carefully formulate a counter hegemonic conception of the social order and formulate counter hegemonic institutions. This can only take place in civil society since it is the only place where the needed possibilities for influence are available. The answer thus also lies in the expansion of the civil society (ibid., 31).

The liberal egalitarian school of thought sees the civil society as a sphere which has a capitalist nature. Some groups are more influential than others. This results in a hegemonic nature, not a free nature as the liberal tradition claims. The liberal egalitarians offer the solution of regulating the civil society by the state, in order to create equal opportunities and equal access. This is necessary because all lives are interwoven and so happiness of people is also interwoven. And equal opportunities and access are the answers to the extremes produced by the capitalist nature of civil society, like extreme richness and extreme poorness. At the same time civil society is seen as the sphere of opportunities for emancipation of all people. In that way civil society is seen as the potential good society. This good society is characterised by positive norms and values as well as by success in meeting particular social goals (Edwards 2004, 10). Of course, the details of the good society are subject to a never ending debate on ends and means; and compromises and trade-offs will be necessary to find an answer.

2.6 Critical theorists' school of thought

The third school of thought that is influential in the debate on roles of civil society in political processes is the school of the critical theorists. They combined the ideas of the liberal egalitarian school that expresses domination in civil society with the classical liberal ideas that emphasise civil society's role in guarding personal autonomy (ibid., 9). Jurgen Habermas is one of the main theorists of this school of thought. Unlike the classical liberal and liberal egalitarian schools of thought his focus is not on the people and their individual influence and power (also called 'the subject'). He focuses on public communication, on what happens between these individuals (also called 'intersubjectivity') (Flyvbjerg 1998, 212). The bourgeois public sphere emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, when middle class people came together as a public to debate political affairs with public authorities, through the use of reason (Habermas 1989, 10-11). That way they created a counterbalance against the monarch. Such an ideal of public communication was identified by Habermas as a potential way in which general interests could be rationally discussed. Public debate on general interests was an ideal situation since communicative rationality is the 'central experience' in the life of a human being, according to Habermas. For him interaction with

other people was very important in the life of a human being, without interaction a society could not be possible. People need other people to survive and the rational interaction between people is the key feature that distinguishes us from animals. When it comes to solving collective problems, a debate will develop because of differences of opinion. By discussing the problems and the different views through the use of rational arguments, solutions will be found and policies will be created. That makes the rational interaction or communicative rationality as Habermas called it, the central experience of the political life. Without this interaction there would be no politics and no state and no society. This idea has universal meaning, since human social life is based upon processes for establishing mutual understanding, 'they are universal because they are unavoidable' (Flyvbjerg 1998, 212). Therefore human beings are also democratic beings, since they need each other to solve collective problems. And rational interaction is the only way to come to these solutions. No society can in origin be created without rational interaction and democratic debate.

But Habermas saw problems when the number of people engaged in these debates grew. The inequalities that became visible in the civil society, since people started to organise themselves, took the bourgeois sphere back to the old days of class divisions in which only the upper classes were able to influence political affairs (Howell and Pearce 2001, 56). Because of this transition, negotiations between elites were more influential than the rational-critical debate among the people. When the economic class became more important, the people started to organize in welfare groups. The elites of these welfare groups and the large corporations took the political role of the people (ibid., 57). Ordinary citizens were downgraded to only being consumers. The public opinion was no longer formed by political debate and consensus, but by the private interests of the elites. Rational debate has been replaced by managed discussion and manipulation of influential businesses. The interconnection between public debate and individual participation is damaged (Kellner 2000, 265). What could be an answer to these developments is, according to Habermas, the civil society to regain the terrain of the public debate. This can be done by setting 'in motion a critical process of public communication through the very organisations that mediatize it' (Habermas quoted in Kellner 2000, 265). The civil society is therefore the crucial sphere to gain back the terrain of public communication. This could in the end lead to a democratisation of the major institutions that now are most powerful (ibid.). For Habermas a healthy civil society is one *"that is steered by its members through shared meanings that are constructed democratically through the communication structures of the public sphere"* (ibid.). Only broad-based debate can define the public interest, not dictated by the government or a part of society. Such debates are the very stuff of democracy. Here we see that Habermas refers to communicative roles, but also to countervailing roles in giving reply to decisions

taken by the government and educational roles in teaching people how to debate on community issues.

Another author who has contributed to this school of thought more recently is Evelina Dagnino. Her approach is based on the neo-liberal developments in politics and the results these developments have for the meaning and functioning of the civil society. Because of the shift to more neo-liberal policies, state institutions have started to take less responsibility for the delivery of social services. The central concern of the state becomes the need to adjust the economy by removing barriers to the expansion of the market. This results in the privatization of state enterprises and the transfer of the state's social responsibilities to the civil society. The civil society becomes a supplier to the state and the market of qualified information on social demands. And the role of the state is to provide organisations with the ability to efficiently assume the execution of public policies oriented towards the satisfaction of these demands (Dagnino 2008, 5). This leads society away from the central idea of democracy, which according to Dagnino, is communication. And central in this communication is equality between the participants. According to Dagnino, equality connects civicism, social justice, citizenship and democracy. The conception of politics is centrally based on the idea of participation (*ibid.*, 2). Conflict and debate are central to a democracy and all citizens are encouraged to join the debates on state policies. But the neo-liberal developments lead to the situation where conflict is made invisible. Social issues are reduced to technocratic and managerial issues (*ibid.*, 7). Decisions are taken on the basis of such managed discussion between elites and not on the basis of public communication where all citizens can participate. Again we recognise communicative, countervailing and educational roles for the civil society in the ideal situation.

The critical theorists' school of thought sees civil society as the public sphere. It is the arena for argument and debate as well as for association and institutional collaboration. A public space in which societal differences, social problems, public policy, government action and matters of community and cultural identity are developed and debated (Howell and Pearce 2001, 55). Because of neo-liberal developments new groups of elites have developed who have taken over the public debate. This debate is transformed into a managed discussion where the elites take the decisions. The civil society needs to create a critical process of regaining the terrain of the public communication. Only when equal participation is guaranteed public communication functions as a basis for democracy.

2.7 Roles of civil society in democratisation

A number of different roles of civil society in political processes are discussed in this chapter. Since democratisation is a major political process, all these roles can also be applied to the process of democratisation. Civil society is even by some thinkers seen as essential to the functioning of democracy. The idea of the classical liberal school of thought is that without a well functioning civil society, a democracy would not be able to function. In the first part of this chapter the division in schools of thought has shown where these roles originate from and it is also clear that most roles come forward in more than one school of thought. In this part of the chapter the division will no longer be along the lines of the schools of thought, but according to the different subgroups the roles can be divided in³.

The first of these subgroups is *educational roles* (Hadenius and Ugglå 1996, 1622-1623), the category that is mentioned most often by the theorists discussed in the chapter 2. De Tocqueville, Almond and Verba, Putnam, but also Marx, Hegel and Habermas mention the educational roles a civil society can play in political processes. The category can be split up since education can focus on various parts of a democratic system. Civil society organisations can provide information on decisions the state makes, on the way the state institutions function and on the way these institutions can be influenced. This role is called the information role. It is all about a civil society organisation providing information to citizens on the democratic system (Warren 2001, 142 and World Bank 2009, 17). Civil society associations will provide such information to their members because they use this information themselves to influence political processes. By being a member of such organisations, people will learn about these procedures. De Tocqueville for example referred to this role when explaining how to protect people from the tyranny of the majority. Another part of education is teaching not only procedures but also on the required involvement. In a democratic system people take an important place and they are also expected to participate in the system in order to make it work. Involvement of the people is the key to make democracy function. Therefore people will have to be taught on how to behave, what democratic citizenship implies (Warren 2001, 149). Civil society associations also expect certain things from their members; they expect involvement, putting effort in the functioning of the organisation, thoughts on the future and trust in other members of the organisation. Therefore they will teach their members on involvement in a democratic society. When people are truly involved in the democratic system, more social capital will be developed and the levels of trust among the people will rise. According to Putnam, this is even the very key

³ A large part of this division of roles and analytical model is derived from the research of Jelmer Kamstra, 'What is it that NGOs contribute to democracy?', the case of internationally-sponsored Research and Advocacy Organisations in Ghana', which is yet to be published.

to making democracy work. A third educational role that can be thought of is educating on political skills. In a civil society organisation, internal affairs and future plans are discussed. In debating these issues, people will learn how to argue for their own cause in peaceful means. It will also teach some of the more involved members of an association how to lead a voluntary organisation and how to take responsibility for the decisions taken in this organisation. All of these skills can be enumerated to political skills (ibid., 143 and World Bank 2009, 28), the kind of skills that are also needed to make a democratic system function. You need involvement of people, public debate on political issues and you will need people taking the lead and becoming politicians that take responsibility for their actions and decisions. Besides political skills there are other skills that can be taught by voluntary associations. When decisions are being taken, it is important that members can discuss these decisions. But in order to being able to argue on important issues, it is essential that people have critical skills. In what way can a decision be decently criticized? How do you build an argument that convinces people? And maybe even more important, be critical to decisions that are being taken. Such skills are taught by the experience of debating decisions internally in civil society organisations. These skills are the critical skills (Warren 2001, 154-155 and World Bank 2009, 28). The critical skills are for example important to Habermas when it comes to being able to discuss political affairs, or to Marx when he discusses the needed transformation from the hegemonic society into a more equal society. All the educational roles are very important in authoritarian states and new democracies, where people have not been taught in schools and by their parents how democracies work. It is of great importance that civil society can play this role in teaching people on democracy and the rules that are involved. Only when people are taught on these important elements, the democratic system will have a chance to function in a proper manner.

A second subgroup or category that can be found in the literature on roles of civil society in political processes is the *communicative roles* (Hadenius and Uggla 1996, 1622). Habermas is the most important theorist on these roles but others that also mention communicative roles are de Tocqueville, Marx, Gramsci and Dagnino. Two communicative roles can be distinguished; the first is providing channels of communication (White 2004, 14-15 and World Bank 2009, 51). Civil society associations represent a certain part of society and they will articulate the interests and opinions of this particular group. But in discussing issues with state institutions or members of government, for example when lobbying for their own interests, they will also provide the communication from the state institutions to the citizens. A good example is the media that discuss opinions of citizens or groups in society, but they also present government decisions or opinions to the public. These channels are a two way process. The channels can have positive effect on the functioning of the democracy, since

they provide the government with opinions and issues that are important to the people that are represented by the civil society organisations. In nondemocratic states they can also have a positive influence, since these channels provide the only information for the state institutions on the opinions of the citizens. The input from democratic elections is lacking and therefore these sources of information become even more important. But when there is more input than the state institutions can handle, they can have a negative influence. The pressure on the government can become too large and people will feel unrepresented or not listened to when they do not get a response from the state institutions (White 2004, 14-15). Such a development could lead to the situation where the civil society feels forced to take on other roles, like countervailing roles. The other communication role that is mentioned by the theorists in the previous chapter is creating a platform for open debate. Within civil society associations, but also between civil society associations, a debate can develop on community issues. This debate has been discussed very thoroughly by Habermas and Dagnino. Such a debate is important for people to formulate their opinions, articulate their interests and learn how to critically value decisions and opinions. Providing this platform is crucial in supporting other roles but also a role itself. Communicative roles are important in new democracies. In the transition from an authoritarian towards a democratic system, communication is key. First of all, because the state never before asked for opinions from their citizens, the state will have to be taught on communication. But also because people will not be used to the fact that the state is willing to listen to them and that it is not dangerous to communicate your critical opinion to the state. In authoritarian states these communicative roles can also play an important role, since the input provided is the only input available to the state institutions since input from other channels like popular elections is missing.

The third category that is found in literature on civil society is the *countervailing roles*. Theorists that have mentioned these roles are de Tocqueville, Marx and Gramsci. Civil society associations try to represent the interests of their members and lobby for their cause (Warren 2001, 171 and 181; World Bank 2009, 51) as for example de Tocqueville has described in his works on America. The representation function is one of the clearest roles of civil society organisations. Hegel has mentioned this role when he discusses the capitalist nature of civil society; all groups are representing their own interests. People can be represented by multiple civil society organisations as they are organised on different issues. A member of a football club can also be a member of the socialist party and a member of a book club. Such a person will be interested in grants rewarded to sport clubs, decisions on social welfare and the taxation on books. These are all different interests that he shares with all different groups of people. Therefore all these interests are represented by different civil society organisations. An organisation does not only represent a certain group and certain

interests, it also works for these groups and interests. It can give resistance to the government on particular issues or decisions. They can write critical articles and publish them, organise protests, riots or can even call for revolution. Very clear examples that are mentioned by theorists on civil society is the Communist Manifesto written by Marx and the fact that Gramsci calls the civil society the site of rebellion. All forms of resistance can have major influence on the political situation in a country (Warren 2001, 185 and World Bank 2009, 51). The countervailing power of the civil society counterbalances the power of the state. Of course in authoritarian states, the state will have much more power than the civil society. But civil society does have some power in being able to create resistance and protests. It can also try to influence the political agenda by taking on important issues and starting media campaigns. By taking over some of the agenda setting role of the state, it creates a counterbalance. And in order to be able to give its opinion on a decision taken by the government, a civil society organisation will have to watch the government's decisions closely. All the debates and announcements of state institutions can be important to a civil society organisation, and they will be watched closely. That way a system of checks and balances is also incorporated in civil society, it functions as a watchdog for state institutions (ibid., 14). Because these institutions are being watched, reported on and sometimes even brought to court for wrong decisions, the chances of them doing something illegal or taking decisions that are not supported by any group in society are very small. In order to avoid unrest the support from civil society groups is very important to the state. The civil society creates a check on the functioning of the democracy and protects citizens against a despotic government. Again these roles are very important in new democracies. As with the communicative roles, the state needs to learn how to react on negative responses and protests from the people. And people need to learn that it is okay and even good for the democracy to take on this countervailing role. In authoritarian states of course the influence of the countervailing roles is more limited, since the regime does not necessarily have to do anything with protests from the citizens. At the same time, the countervailing roles are even more important than in democratic countries. It is often the case that civil society organisations are the only group in society that can argue against the government. All governments are looking for a stable and calm situation in their country, because unrest can develop into revolutionary movements that make ruling much more difficult or even impossible. If the regime receives information from civil society groups that major protests and resistance is about to break loose, chances exist that the regime will be changing their mind about the particular decisions that created the unrest. This can be a first step in more influence from the citizens of a country and can therefore influence or initiate a democratisation process.

Civil society can also cooperate with state institutions in order to make democracy function better. These roles we call *cooperative roles* and they can be traced back in the works of de Tocqueville and Gramsci. Some democratic states are not able to execute all decisions they take because of their minimum capacity. This is especially the case with young democracies. Often institutions still have to be built and the experience of the government officials is very limited. In such situations we see that civil society organisations can work together with the state to make it function better, this will also result in more confidence among the people in the state and the democracy. Although there is debate on this point, Dagnino points at the idea that this cooperation results in the situation where social issues are made non-political and technical issues which are not influenced by citizens but only by elites. In cooperation, leaders of civil society organisations are sometimes even asked to take a seat in the government for their knowledge and experience. Cooperation can be executed in two different ways. A civil society organisation can be a subsidiary to the state (Warren 2001, 190). For example in the situation where an organisation provides health care in remote areas, where the state did not manage to build a hospital yet. When no health care would be delivered to these people, the chances of dissatisfaction would be much bigger than when the care is provided by a civil society organisation. De Tocqueville has also mentioned this role when pointing at the independence of citizens from the state. People for example organise neighbourhood watches themselves without relying on the state to take care of their security. Another way civil society organisations can cooperate with the state in order to make the state function better is to take over the coordination of some projects (ibid., 196). When for example a country faces a natural disaster like an earthquake and state institutions don't have much experience with setting up and coordinating a major aid operation and campaign, a civil society organisation with more experience and a better network can take over such a task. State institutions will of course be part of this operation but the lead will be taken by a civil society organisation. These cooperative roles can also be important in authoritarian states, where the state often has a minimum capacity in providing social services to its people. This cooperation can result in more confidence from the state in civil society and the capacities of the citizens. And it can result in closer ties between the civil society and state institutions, which can ultimately lead to more influence from civil society on the state institutions. On the other hand it is obvious that cooperation with authoritarian regimes results in many difficult situations and dilemmas for the civil society organisations.

The last subgroup of roles a civil society can have in democratisation processes is the *democracy building role*. This role has been brought forward by Putnam and Gramsci. Because civil society organisations can influence the political decision processes in a democracy, they can also influence the rules of the political game, since these rules can be

changed by governments. Civil society can in that way have influence on very fundamental elements of the democratic system in a country. The chances of influencing these rules are of course much bigger when the decisions have not yet been taken, as is the case in new democracies. This can be seen as a constitutive role, which can be executed both pragmatic and normative (White 2004, 15). In the pragmatic sense the civil society can lobby for ideas on how to play the game, the rules of politics. It can try for example to influence the decision to organise general elections every four or every five years, depending on their preference. But this role can also be executed in a more normative way. Then civil society organisations focus more on which norms and values are most important to them. Those norms and values can be translated into laws and rules later on. A civil society association can for example try to convince politicians of the advantages of a system of proportional representation or the advantages of multiple layers of democratic institutions. Such an idea can be accepted and still be executed in many different ways. The decision about having multiple layers of democratic institutions doesn't say anything about the influence of these layers or about the way they will be elected. The democracy building role is important in new democracies because people's approval of the new democratic procedures and norms is essential. Only if the majority of the people is in favour of these decisions, the democratic system will have a fair chance of making it in the particular country. Democracy is based on the will of the people and therefore it is very important that the people, via the civil society, have influence on the democratic norms and procedures adopted by the state. This role will only be present later on in the democratisation process, when the regime has already taken the path towards becoming a democracy. When the regime is still highly authoritarian, the democracy building role will not be an opportunity for the civil society to initiate a democratisation process.

2.8 Analytical model

All the subgroups or categories of roles civil society can play in a democratisation process that are mentioned in the previous paragraph can be summarized in an analytical model. This model (see table 1) represents the different ideas on the roles of civil society, as presented by the theorists discussed in this chapter.

Table 1. Roles of civil society in democratisation

Educational roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information • Democratic citizenship • Political skills • Critical skills
Communicative roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Channels of communication

The role of civil society in democratising authoritarian regimes, the case of Burma (Myanmar)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Platform for open debate
Countervailing roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Representation• Resistance• Watchdog
Cooperative roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Subsidiary• Coordination
Democracy building role	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Constitutive role

Part 2. Burma

Chapter 3. Contextual characteristics

In this second part of the research the case of Burma is explored, starting with a chapter that gives the contextual characteristics of the civil society of Burma. Among these characteristics are facts about the country and its population, information on the regime and the structure of society. This chapter also examines the international forces that (try to) have influence on the country. The civil society of Burma is explored in chapter four and chapter five gives an overview of the roles this civil society fulfils.

3.1 Country characteristics

Burma is the largest country in Southeast Asia with its 678,500 km². It has borders with Bangladesh, India, China, Laos and Thailand. Besides those long borders with powerful



Figure 1. Map of Burma

Burma's population is very mixed. An estimated 60% of the 50 million people is Burman. The other 40% are members of the Shan, Karen, Kyaw, Mon, Kachin, and dozens of other ethnic groups (Rotberg 1998, 3). Burma is claimed to be the country with the most different ethnic groups within its borders.

The border areas are famous for their smuggling routes. Burma is one of the biggest poppy growing countries in the world, heroin is one of the main smuggling products that is traded on the black market. It can only be estimated what size the black market is, but experts estimate it to be at least as big as the legal market (ibid., 4).

neighbours, Burma has a 2000 km long coast line bordering the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal (Hulst 2006, 26). The country has an enormous amount of natural resources. The country is afforested; more than 40 percent of the country contains forests. Ninety-five percent of all the ruby and pure jade in the world is found in Burma, other precious stones are also found in the country. Other important natural resources are oil and gas (ibid., 32-33).

In May 2008, the country was hit by cyclone Nargis. Especially the Irrawaddy delta was hit severely, 84,000 people lost their lives and 54,000 are unaccounted for (ICRC 2009, 191). Many more were affected by losing their houses or the spreading diseases. The situation got worse when the military junta, in first instance, refused to let international aid organisations enter the country to help the people in need. At this moment the country is still recovering from the damage the cyclone left behind.

3.2 Contemporary political history and regime characteristics

In 1948 Burma gained independence from its colonizer, Great-Britain. The republic was named “the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma”, with Sao Shwe Thaik as first President and U Nu as first Prime Minister of the country. Unlike most of Britain’s former colonies, Burma did not become a member of the Commonwealth (Donkers and Nijhuis 1996, 83-84). This was decided in order to become a totally independent country, the wish to cut all bonds with their former colonizer was very present in the Burmese society (Guyot 1998, 190).

Democratic rule ended in 1962, when General Ne Win took power with a military coup d’état. Ne Win ruled the country for 26 years and created his own strategy under the title “the Burmese Way to Socialism”. Under this programme almost all aspects of the economy and society were nationalized or controlled by the government. From 1974 on, Ne Win and many of his generals resigned from the military and took civilian posts, creating a one party system. The Burmese Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) was the only party allowed by the newly adopted constitution of Burma (Donkers and Nijhuis 1996, 87-88). Not only were central planning and nationalization part of the grand strategy of Ne Win, external relations were disconnected and a policy of isolation was adopted. Burma closed from the outside world, there were no foreign investments or foreign companies in Burma, even communication with the outside world was difficult.

Since the beginning of the ruling period of Ne Win, protests broke out on several occasions. In 1988 again, protests broke out; this time the protesters were openly asking for more democracy. This was very surprising since most protests used to focus on less political subjects, like the price of rice or gas. Another important difference with other protests was the fact that these protests broke out throughout the entire country. The news of the uprising spread all over the world; the uprising is still famous under the heading of “the 8888 Uprising” (since the largest protests were held on August 8th, 1988) (ibid., 99). Like earlier protests, these demonstrations were also brutally suppressed by the security forces. Thousands of people were killed by the army. General Saw Maung chose the moment to create a military coup d’état and the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) seized power. Although the leader and the name of the party changed, all people involved were supporters of general Ne Win (ibid., 101). The strength of the military forces was expanded and in 1989

the regime declared the martial law. The SLORC also promised to organise the first democratic elections since the democratic period of 1948-1962. In 1989 the regime changed the name of the country from “the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma” to “the Union of Myanmar” (Hulst 2006, 9).

The coup d'état of 1988 is a major turning point in the development of the Burmese army. The SLORC set its priorities to expand and develop the army, or *tatmadaw*, as the army is called in Burma. The armed forces received the highest priority and a strong military relationship was created with neighbour China (Selth 2001, xxxi-xxxii). The *tatmadaw* is now the largest and one of the most well-equipped armies of Southeast Asia. These changes were possible because of the changing policies regarding the economic management of the country. Socialism was abandoned. Following up on some small economic reforms introduced in 1987, the SLORC introduced, shortly after their coup d'état, a law that made foreign investments possible again (Donkers and Nijhuis 1996, 124). In 1990 the Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings (UMEH) was created by the military. This company is nowadays the largest company in the country. Almost all foreign investments are joint-ventures with this company that is in hands of the military. This way the military junta has major control over the economy and receives a large part of the profits made in the country (ibid., 56-57). Another major change was in the relationship between the junta and the *sangha*, the Buddhist priesthood. The monks played an important role during the pro-democracy protests; they participated and helped people to flee into the monasteries. In order to control the monks better in the future, the SLORC introduced a new system in which every monk should be registered (Hulst 2006, 117). The *sangha* became part of the regime. The regime now has the power to control who is joining the *sangha*, which makes it much more difficult for the monks to be part of pro-democracy protests since their identities are known by the regime⁴.

In May 1990 the promised elections were held. The SLORC expected to win these elections and was very confident about the outcome. The military joined under the heading of the National Unity Party. The SLORC was totally surprised to see that the National League for Democracy (NLD), the party of Aung San Suu Kyi won 396 out of 485 seats in parliament (Donkers and Nijhuis 1996, 106). Aung San Suu Kyi has great respect under the Burmese population since she is the daughter of one of the greatest and most famous independence leaders of Burma, Aung San, who was assassinated in 1947. Aung San was also the founder of the Burmese armed forces, which makes the subject even more sensitive to the military junta (Selth 2001, 260). When the SLORC found out that the support for the NLD was huge, even in the military, they were in shock. The NLD was never allowed to take office, as the

⁴ More on the role of religion and the position of the Buddhist monks can be found in paragraph 3.3 and chapter 4.

SLORC refused to step down and remained in power. The official statement of the junta was that the elections were not held to elect a new parliament, but to elect people that would participate in the convention for writing a new constitution (Hulst 2006, 115). This convention started in 1993. Ever since the elections of 1990, the junta strengthened its grip on the Burmese society and the military. It was not until 2003 that the first real steps towards a new constitution were taken.

In 1992 general Saw Maung retired from his office as leader of the SLORC and handed his job over to general Than Shwe. Besides the pro-democracy uprisings in the country, the military junta also found a lot of resistance in areas where minority groups live. Most of these groups had been fighting the regime ever since independence of the country. In order to solve this problem, the regime decided to change strategies and started talking with the minority groups on possible ceasefires in 1993 (Donkers and Nijhuis 1996, 110). Most of the minority conflicts resulted in a standoff or ceasefire in 1995 and 1996 (Rotberg 1998, 4), although some rebel groups still continue fighting the regime. After most these conflicts were brought to a (temporary) end, the SLORC changed its name in 1997 to "State Peace and Development Council" (SPDC) on advice of an American consultancy agency (Hulst 2006, 118).

In 2003 the regime introduced a seven-step 'roadmap' to reform the country constitutionally and politically in order to create a democracy in Burma. It is unclear why the regime decided to take this direction. The pressure from the international community, by using diplomatic and economic sanctions, is expected to have a major influence on this development (Amnesty International Thailand 2010). And even pressure from China is expected to have had influence on this decision (BBC News 2008a). This seems strange since China is also fighting against pressure to democratise. But the main goal for China is to keep the situation in Burma as stable and controllable as possible. Now the junta has presented this roadmap towards more democracy, the expectations are that this will lead to more tranquility and less pressure on the country (TACDB 2010). The main steps of this roadmap are the creation of a convention that had the task of writing a new constitution. This constitution has been accepted by the population through a popular referendum. Now the new constitution is adopted, elections for the government bodies will be held this year. Despite the promise of the regime to use the outcome of the 1990 elections as a basis for forming the convention, there was almost no room for opposition members to take seat in this convention. Even though little resistance was allowed in this convention it took years to draw the new constitution. It was not until 2008 the new constitution was presented.

In November 2005, the junta announced a relocation of the country's capital. The administrative centre of the country moved from Yangon (Rangoon) to Naypyidaw, further up north in the country. Officially the reason for the change was "to ensure more effective

administration of nation-building activities” (Maung Aung Myoe 2006). Other explanations given by researchers include fear of government leaks, a military-strategic move to move away the capital from the coastline, gaining more control over important intersections of highways linking India to Thailand and China to Bangladesh, an act of decolonisation, isolation of the civil servants from the larger population centre or the idea that the decision is made on superstition and astrology (ibid.). What the real reason was to move the capital city up north will probably not be revealed as long as the junta is in power.

In 2007, after an increase of the price of fuel, new large scale pro-democracy protests broke out in the streets of Rangoon. These protests were the largest since the 1988 uprising. Soon also Buddhist monks started to participate in the protests. The first days the government held back, but when the crowds started to grow in size every day, the military stepped in. They smashed down the demonstrations and many people were arrested or even killed (BBC News 2007).

On May 10th 2008, only days after a large part of the country was severely hit by cyclone Nargis, the junta organised a referendum to vote on the new constitution. This constitution turned out to be another way of the junta to hold power. It arranges that 25% of the seats of both houses of parliament are guaranteed for the military. Since a majority of 75% is needed for any amendments to the constitution, these are very unlikely to be passed through the parliament without approval of the military. Even more power is provided for the military since they have the task of appointing the president and two vice-presidents (Human Rights Watch 2008). The constitution also excludes Aung San Suu Kyi from office, since no foreigners, or people married to foreigners can be elected. Aung San Suu Kyi is widow of the Brit Michael Aris, who died in 1999. According to the regime, there was a massive turn-out of 99% and over 92% of the people voted in favour of the new constitution. The opposition and international human rights organisations reported massive fraud and cheating (BBC News 2008c). The constitution also arranges for new elections in 2010, although it is still not clear when exactly these elections will be held since the new electoral law is still to be presented by the junta. The 2010 elections will be the next important step and the next test for the junta to prove their good intentions. This process of ‘democratisation’ is turning out to be rather fake. One of the reasons for setting up such process is showing good intentions to the outside world. With such approach the junta is hoping to remain in power and cope with less pressure from the international arena. They also hope this process will convince more international companies to invest in the country (TACDB 2010).

The state of democracy is very poor at this moment. The political power of the country is in hands of the State Peace and Development Council, a council consisting of 19 officers. This council includes both national and regional officers. A 40-member Cabinet has been

appointed, next to a 14-member Advisory Council (Selth 2002, 59). Regional Peace and Development Councils help to stretch the strength and influence of the national political leaders all over the country. The regional councils have a lot of power. Because of policies of decentralisation the regional and local officers decide on virtually all administrative functions (Englehart 2005, 635-638). In some regions more wealth and profits can be made by the regional officers because of the natural resources and smuggling routes in these regions. That is why a rotating system is used to make sure every regional officer gets his share (Hulst 2006, 32). Most decisions made by the SPDC are based on consensus. At this point in time, this seems to be the only democratic element in Burmese politics.

People live without any real freedom, no freedom to live where they want, no free media, no freedom of assembly, no freedom of education, no freedom of speech. Everything is being watched and controlled by the junta. In order to be able to control everything that is said and done in the country, the junta has an impressive Military Intelligence Service (MIS). People are afraid to say anything that could be interpreted in the wrong way because in Burma, as they say, the walls have ears (Donkers and Nijhuis 1996, 46). For decades now the Burmese people have not been treated well by their leaders. Thousands of people have been killed, imprisoned, moved to other places or forced to participate in slave labour. Repression and aggression are the most used policies in Burma and arbitrariness is a tool commonly used by the military junta. There is evidence of widespread violations of human rights. The democratic opposition is mostly underground and is given no space to manoeuvre. Even though the country has an enormous amount of natural resources, the population does not profit and is often very poor. To cite Maung on the regime characteristics:

“In the context of modern times, the Burmese polity is an authoritarian regime or a pure military dictatorship comparable to what existed for decades in various countries across the world. It is a brutal and illegitimate government that has been governing the country without the consent of the governed in direct violation of Article 21, which mandates “the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government,” and virtually all other articles of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights”
(Maung 1998, 264).

3.3 Structure of society

Population

As briefly mentioned earlier, Burma's population is very mixed. It is estimated that there live 50 million people in Burma (Hulst 2006, 11), about 60 percent of the population is Burman and the other 40 percent is split up among more than one hundred minority groups and mountain tribes (Thomson 1995, 275). Nobody is sure about the exact number of people in

Burma and the division between Burmans and other ethnic groups. The last census was organised in 1931 by the British, there is still a lot of confusion about the right numbers. For example the junta estimates that two million Karen people live in the country, while the Karen people estimate that number at seven million (Donkers and Nijhuis 1996, 66).

The mixed composition of the people of Burma was not a problem until they got into contact with the British. The belief among European leaders was that a country could only include people of one nation. The British rulers of Burma started to categorize and label the minority groups, this way they raised awareness about the mixed composition of the population. The consciousness about nationality started to grow in the central parts of the country. To the mountain tribes the state was as irrelevant as it was before the British came. The British split the country up in two parts; Burma Proper and the hill areas. Burma Proper was under the direct rule of the British rulers, while the hill areas were left to indirect rule (Thomson 1995, 271-273). When the country became independent from the British, the government was looking for the best way to govern the country. The political leadership wavered between a federal system and military-dominated central government. There was a growing influence of the central government in the border areas of the country. The central leadership even tried to 'Burmanise' these minority groups. This 'Burmanisation' was conducted by prohibiting traditional practices. Instead of fleeing to other areas or assimilating, many minority groups decided to rebel against the central government (ibid., 273).

Since the country is ruled by a military junta, the situation got even worse for the minority groups. They are discriminated when it comes to language, culture, education, religion and development. The Burmese government institutions are largely dominated by Burmans. Even the Border Areas Development Programme (BADP) is implemented without consulting the minority groups living in these border areas. In 1962 Burma had twelve newspapers in other languages than Burmese, since 1988, none have survived (Donkers and Nijhuis 1996, 57-59). The rebellion from the minority groups continued for years. Most of the groups didn't sign a ceasefire or agreement with the central government until 1995-1996 (Rotberg 1998, 5) and some groups are still fighting the junta. Some of these groups have been fighting the regime ever since independence of the country in 1948, for example The Karen National Union. More than sixty years later the group is still the biggest threat to the central government. At its peak the army consisted of 200,000 fighters, nowadays a couple of thousand are left (Hulst 2006, 14). The military junta claims that the rebelling minority groups are one of the main reasons why the country is ruled by the military. The rebel groups and pro-democracy fighters bring instability to the country, therefore somebody had to come forward and restore the law and order in the country. That is why, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) that seized power in 1988, was ready to change its name into

the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) after most rebel groups put down their weapons in 1995-1996.

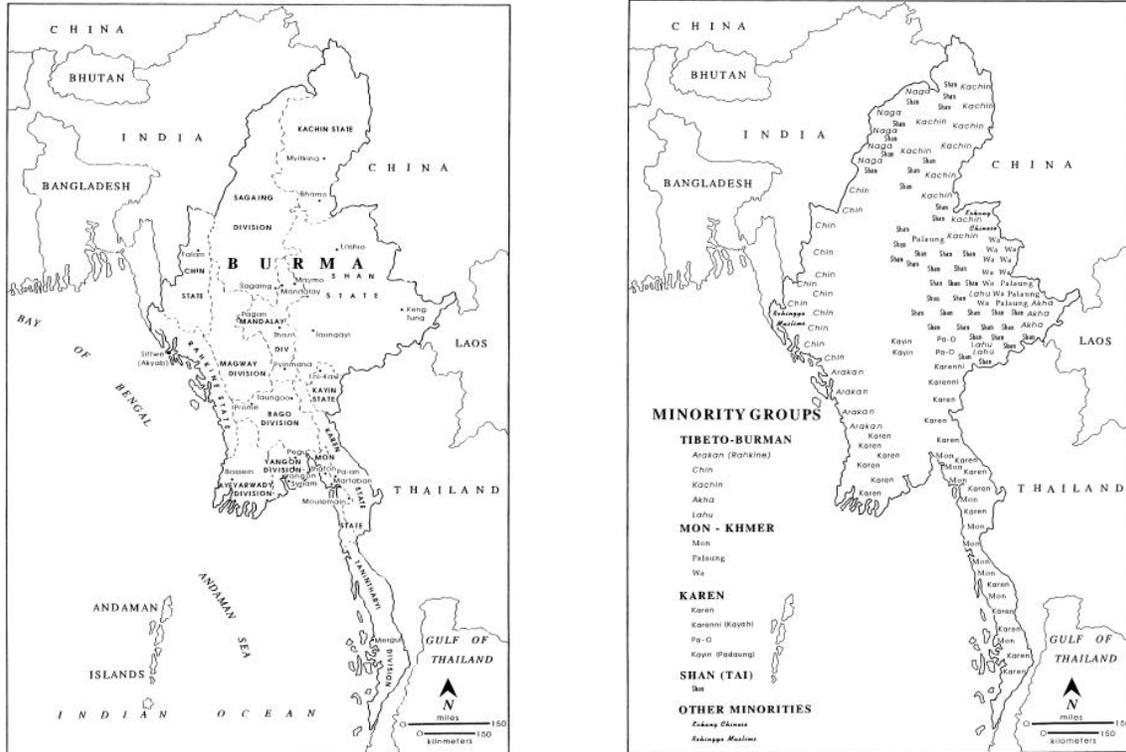


Figure 2 and 3, Political and Demographic map of Burma

Source: Thomson 1995, 276 and 278

The division the British colonial rulers implemented, is still visible today. Since 1974 the country is split up in seven divisions (Sagaing, Mandalay, Magwe, Pegu, Irrawaddy, Rangoon and Tennasserim) and seven states (Kachin, Shan, Chin, Arakan, Karenni, Karen and Mon). The divisions are mostly populated by Burmans, the states are named after the largest ethnic group that lives in the state (see figure 2 and 3). The population of all states and divisions got more mixed over time, because of voluntary and forced relocation of the inhabitants (Donkers and Nijhuis 1996, 66).

Background of ruling elites

Little is known about the backgrounds of the ruling elites. Most come from simple Burman families with no specific bonds to the leadership of the country. All the important positions in the State Peace and Development Council are taken by people who have an impressive military career in which they rose in ranks fast in a short period of time. Most of them only received proper education while serving the armed forces.

Head of State General Than Shwe was born in 1933 in the Mandalay Division and passed his early education at a High School in this division. Before joining the army in 1953,

he worked as a postal clerk. His career in the military started at the Officer Training School in Hmawbi. He rose steadily through the ranks of the army and in 1983 he became commander of the Southwest Region. Only two years later he became Vice Chief of Staff with the rank of brigadier general, a year later he was already promoted to major general and in 1987 to lieutenant general. When the pro-democracy riots broke out in 1988, he was working as chairman of the BSPP's Regional Committee in the Irrawaddy Division. In 1992 he took over the position of chairman of the State Law and Order Restoration Council and continued this job when the SLORC changed its name to State Peace and Development Council. At the moment he serves as Head of State, prime minister, minister of defence and minister of agriculture. He is already in his seventies and expected to seek retirement soon (Irrawaddy 2003). Some people see a chance for changes in the fact that General Than Shwe will soon retire. This could bring about a change in the regime (Holliday 2008, 1053). However, other experts don't expect so much from this change since the general has surrounded himself with people that support his policies and will be able to take his place without major changes (Steinberg 2009).

First Secretary of the State Peace and Development Council is General Khin Nyunt. He was born in 1939 and very little is known about his background. There is some information about his military career. He graduated from the Officers Training School in 1960 and became an important military figure in 1984 when he was recalled to the capital to lead the Directorate of Defence Services Intelligence. During this time he became a close friend of General Ne Win and he had an important role in the suppressing of the pro-democracy protest in 1988. He is now regarded to be one of the most powerful members of the junta. He is known for his moderate position and has met opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi twice on official occasions (Irrawaddy 2003). His high ranked position combined with his moderate views could be positive for the developments towards more democracy, although he is not an advocate for democracy.

Vice Chairman of the SPDC is General Maung Aye, who was born in 1940. He joined the armed forces in 1959. From 1975 on his career in the military is impressive, finally in 1993 he was recalled to Rangoon to become Deputy Commander in Chief. In 1994 he was named vice-president of the SLORC and also holds that position in the SPDC. He is known to be a hardliner and direct political rival of First Secretary General Khin Nyunt (ibid.). If he would become the successor of general Than Shwe as head of state, the SPDC is expected to continue their repressive policies.

Culture

Religion is an important aspect of the Burmese culture. Buddhism has been the official religion of the country since the 11th century. The country is marked by many Buddhist

symbols, in every village you will find a monastery, monks are highly visible and the country is famous for its many pagodas and shrines (Asian Studies 2009). About 89% of the people in Burma are Buddhists. There are several religious minorities like Christians (4%) and Muslims (4%) (Hulst 2006, 22). Christianity entered the country because of the missionaries that were allowed in Burma during British colonial rule. They have not been allowed in the country since its independence in 1948 (Asian Studies 2009). The Islamic faith entered the country via neighbouring countries.

On paper there is freedom of religion in the country, but in practice Buddhism is the only religion that can be practised safely. For Muslims and Christians it is hard to find a job at government institutions, as Buddhists are favoured in many ways. The government sets limits to the practising of other religions than Buddhism. The situation in the Arakan State is worst, this is the state where most Muslims live. They cannot obtain the Burmese nationality and in every village only three Muslims couples can get married every year. Their land is being nationalised and the government moves villages on regular occasion. When protests against the government erupt, the religious minorities are often used to distract attention from these protests. In 1988 the regime set up anti-Muslims riots in Taunggy and Prome and again in 1996 in Shan State. The Muslim population even talks about a religious cleansing. On regular occasions mosques have been destroyed in order to create highways or other infrastructure. Many Muslims have fled the country. The UN estimates a number of 20,000 Muslims is living in refugee camps in Bangladesh (Hulst 2006, 24).

Christians also have problems practising their religion in Burma. Most Christians live in Karen State, where missionaries have been active, but also in Kachin State and Chin State. Places of worship have been target of military actions several times. In Chin State Christians were even forced to become Buddhists by the regime. Christian monuments are destroyed and leaders of Christian organisations have been arrested and put in prison (ibid.).

Although Buddhists are favoured by the government, their life is not easy either. The Burmese Buddhist monks are organised in the *sangha*. The *sangha* has great respect under all Buddhists in the country. This religious institute has been influential in politics for ages. They have also been part of the pro-democracy protests on several occasions. They have played an important role in the uprising in 1988 and in 1990 they organised a march to remember the ones who lost their lives during the 1988 uprising. During this protest march they asked the regime to step down and hand over the power to the winners of the elections of 1990. The military killed two monks by shooting at the protesters. As a protest the monks created a religious boycott on the military. The regime took firm steps, they assaulted 350 monasteries and arrested hundreds of monks (Donkers and Nijhuis 1996, 54). A law was created that allowed only one Buddhist organisation in the country, the *State Clergy Coordination Committee*. The ministry of Religious Affairs is head of this organisation. This

means that every person that wants to be ordained a monk, has to have permission of the regime (Hulst 2006, 25). This way the regime controls the *sangha*. In order to give their struggling monks a free voice to speak, the *International Burmese Monks Organisation* was established after the pro-democracy protests of September 2007. Because such an organisation is not allowed in Burma, their headquarters is based in the US (IBMO 2009). The military still try to portray themselves as good Buddhists, therefore they overload the monks and monasteries with financial and material gifts (Donkers and Nijhuis 1996, 54).

Another important part of the culture is sports. Because of the British influence in colonial years, football became one of the most popular sports in the country. Other sports that are very popular are a Burmese variant on Thai kickboxing and Chinlone. Chinlone is called the national sport of Burma. It is a combination of sport and dance. It is a team sport with no opposing team. In essence it is a non-competitive sport. It is not about winning or losing but on the visual beauty of the performance of the team (Burma Centre Netherlands 2010). Even the sport life is mostly controlled by the regime. The Ministry of Sport sees sport as a very important way to serve the country. It can help propagate the development and achievements of the country, especially in an international context (Ministry of Sport 2010). Lately there has been harsh critique on the performance of the Burmese sport athletes at the Southeast Asian Games. The regime responded by claiming that more effort will be made by the Ministry of Sport to make the standards of sport rise in the country (Irrawaddy 2009c).

Economy

The regime holds control over the economy. Although a growing amount of foreign companies is allowed to invest in the country, almost all these investments are joint-ventures with the Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings (UMEH). If you want to be a successful businessman in Burma, a good relationship with the military is essential (Donkers and Nijhuis 1996, 56-57). Burma was once the largest rice exporter of the world, but today these exports are limited. The largest part of the formal economy is based on the natural resources that are available on a large scale. Unfortunately it is only the military and their families that profit from the natural resources the country has. The case of Burma is an explicit example of the fact that abundance in natural resources does not necessarily make a country (and all its people) rich (Maung 1998, xiii).

The regime claims to use an open and market-oriented strategy to transform the Burmese economy. But when exploring the economic policies applied, it can be concluded that as long as the military hold control of both trade and foreign exchanges, this is not true (ibid., 270). Even the black market trade is largely in hands of the military, and there is widespread corruption (Steinberg 2001, 163). Regional military leaders obtain a large share of

their income through the profits they receive because of the illegal transactions they allow. The process of transition from a centrally planned economy towards a more open one is difficult. The risk of increasing inflation from which the poor people will suffer is huge. This could be a source for new large scale unrest, which the regime tries to avoid. In order to profit from foreign economies, the regime has put its focus on exploitation of natural resources (ibid., 137-138). The regime does not build the economy of the country on the talents of the people, but on what nature has to give. The consequence is that the country is missing out on important democratic dynamics. When the growth and development of an economy is based on the talents and work of the people, a middle class develops. This industrial and bourgeois middle class that emerges (Diamond 1992, 108 and 125) often knows the most supporters of democracy. Democracy is closely connected to the values of free trade. Equal rights and participation are central. The industrial middle class that develops because of economic development is independent from the state. Furthermore these people will be the ones that have contacts with people from other countries and are therefore exposed to democratic ideas and values before the rest of the country is (Verkoren 2003, 48). All these factors lead to a group of people that are experienced in working independent from the state and know and appreciate the values of democracy. Because no real middle class will develop in Burma, the development of the civil society will also be difficult. It is the middle class that usually forms the basis of the civil society.

The income of the Burmese regime is based on trade in natural resources, not on taxpaying citizens. A lot of research has been done on the relationship between resources in a country and the likelihood of conflict or democracy. This research has resulted in a lot of empirical evidence of the positive relationship between being rich in natural resources and experiencing civil conflict or less democracy. Ross (2001) for example finds that countries rich in oil are more likely to be run by dictatorial regimes than other countries (Aslaksen and Torvik 2006, 572). This relationship between the presence of natural resources and the chances for civil conflict and more authoritarian regimes is called 'the resource curse'. The fact that the talents of the people are less important to the regime than the natural resources also leads to the situation where the country is missing out on important elements of the 'social contract'. As explained in chapter 2, in this social contract the people promise to give up violence and live a secured life. The monopoly of violence is put in the hands of the state. This means giving up freedom, but also living a more secured life. This social contract is strengthened by the taxes the citizens pay in order for the state to function. But when this important part of the social contract is nonexistent, the social contract becomes less valuable. Because taxation is less important in Burma, the regime will also be less sensitive to demands from citizens. The regime is not encouraged to invest in education and health care. These sectors have high priority in countries that do build their economies on the talents and

work of the people because education and health care are closely related to the productivity of the people. Because of that, Burma is also missing out on the contribution education can have to develop a sense of democratic values among the population (Huntington 1991, 65-67).

The economic problems of underdevelopment and poverty the country faces are totally caused by bad economic management. Because of the policies applied, there are only three groups that can afford private investments; the indigenous and external Chinese community, the Indian community and the high-ranking military officials. The middle class that does exist is therefore largely foreign. The own population does not profit from any economic development. There is a lot of poverty in Burma. On the UN Human Development Index of 2008 Burma ranks 135th out of 179 countries. According to the statistics of the UN 21% of the people live in poverty. On the list of GDP per capita, Burma ranks 163rd out of 179 countries (UNDP 2006).

3.4 International forces

Countries

China is the most important ally of the Burmese military junta, both politically and economically. It supports the junta in staying in power and trades with the military. China is Burma's largest arms supplier (Donkers and Nijhuis 1996, 129). On August 6th 1988, during the pro-democracy riots and protests in Burma, China signed a trade agreement with the military. This was the beginning of an intense relationship that has put Burma under the control of China. The Chinese profit from the cross-border trade in the north of the country and Burma is flooded with Chinese consumer goods. For China, Burma's strategic location at the Indian sea is important for the development of the economy of the southwest of China. The relationship between the two countries was extended on the political level by an impressive number of bilateral visits (Ott 1998, 72-73). There is no pressure from China to open up the country. All in all, China's support for the policies of the junta is of great importance.

The government of India supported the pro-democracy protesters in 1988, it even accommodated refugees in camps near the border with Burma. However, its moralistic and idealistic policies changed in 1993 into a more pragmatic approach, which meant more contact with the military regime. Ever since the relationship got better, there is cooperation in several sectors and both the economic and political bonds are good. India's wish for the country is to become a democracy, but the new strategy focuses on keeping a good relationship with the regime. Strategic, economic and security considerations outweigh India's concern for democracy at this moment (Kuppuswamy 2006). After another brutal crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators in 2007, India put a hold on selling arms to its

neighbour. But with the latest bilateral visit in 2008, the relationship got strengthened again (Mujtaba 2008). From time to time, India has put pressure on the junta, but it seems that this pressure is diminishing.

Thailand is another important neighbour of Burma. Ever since the SLORC seized power in 1988, the approach of the Thai governments can be described as 'constructive engagement'. Only during the two terms of former Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai Thai policies were guided by moral principles instead of economic self-interest. In 1993, Chuan's government allowed the Dalai Lama to visit Thailand and lobby for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi. During his second term (1997-2001), Chuan even refused to pay an official visit to Burma. After 2001, the relations between the countries got better. Newly elected Prime Minister Taksin Shinawatra restored the relationship and focussed on an economic approach. Many NGOs focussing on Burma and working from Thailand, closed their offices and refugees living in the border areas suffered from a lack of aid from the Thai government. In 2006 Taksin was replaced by a military coup. Surayud, the interim leader of the new government put emphasis on national reconciliation and the democratisation process in Burma. But newly elected Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej paid an official visit to the military junta, speaking kind and friendly words about its neighbour. The relation between the two countries has also been heavily influenced by the many refugees living in the border areas. Many NGOs and lobby groups trying to influence policies in Burma work from Thailand. On civil society level, there are many bonds between the two countries (Zaw 2008). From the current government of Thailand, Burma feels some pressure to change its policies. Thailand is still very concerned about the way the conflicts in Burma affect the situation in their own country (Katanyuu 2006, 829). From the many NGOs and refugees residing in Thailand there is a lot of pressure to open up.

Former wartime ruler Japan delivered aid to Burma that, until 1990, was based on an approach best described as 'no questions asked'. This policy was based on the idea that Burma is a country with great economic potential and that one day Japan will profit from the good relationship with the country. After the brutal crackdown on the pro-democracy protests in 1988, Japan suspended its aid programme for only five months. Japan has always tried to show that there is a major difference between an economic relationship with a country and a political one. In recent years the policies have been linked and Japan has approached the regime in a gentle way trying to persuade them to deregulate the economy and stop the human rights violations. These friendly policies are closely linked to the strong Burma-lobby that exists in Japan (Hague 2002). At the same time, opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi is very well-known and popular in Japan. The government has always quietly supported her struggle for more democracy and respect for human rights. Japan's policies are sending out a mixed message (Seekins 2007).

Besides Asian countries, Western countries have also responded to the situation in Burma. The most known critic of the regime is the United States. The policy of the US government is based on moral considerations about the lack of democracy, the violation of human rights by the Burmese regime and the production of and trade in heroin. In 1997 the Clinton administration imposed sanctions on Burma, including a prohibition of new investments. In 2003 new sanctions were imposed by the Bush administration, including freezing Burma's assets in the US, a widened ban on visas for everybody involved in the leadership of the country and a denial of aid from the World Bank and IMF (Bert 2004, 277). It seems that the junta is not so much affected by these sanctions economically. Asian countries were more than willing to step in the economic gap the US left behind. And the junta can now easily blame the US for its economic difficulties. Politically the sanctions and critique seems to have some influence as will be explained in chapter 4. The Obama administration has recently decided to shift the policies towards Burma. The sanctions stay in effect, but they will be accompanied by the policy of direct engagement with the junta. The idea is that a combination of sanctions and conversations on the problems in the country will bring about the most effect. The shift has also come about because the policy of only installing sanctions has Burma driving into the arms of China (New York Times 2009).

Other Western countries are also taking a strong stance against the military regime in Burma. The European Union's main goal is to achieve a legitimate and democratically elected civilian government to be installed in the country. The European Union also uses sanctions to persuade the junta to change things. These sanctions were first introduced in 1996 and extended ever since. The sanctions are aimed at the government of Burma and people and enterprises linked to the regime. The European Union tries to avoid innocent and poor people from being negatively affected by the measures (European Union 2009). The measures include an arms embargo, an export ban from the EU for any equipment that can be used for repression, a visa ban and a freeze on funds held by people involved in the regime, a prohibition for EU companies to invest in state-owned companies in Burma and a suspension of high-level governmental visits to the country (EU Delegation to Myanmar 2009). The European Union is also providing aid to vulnerable sections of the population of Burma through ECHO, the European Commission Humanitarian Aid Department.

International and regional organisations

The United Nations is one of the few actors that has accepted the new name of the country formerly known as Burma, Myanmar. Burma has been a member of this organisation since its independence in 1948. Because it is a member state, the organisation decided to accept the decisions taken by its government on the name of the country. The United Nations are

present in Burma is many ways; UNDP, UNICEF, World Food Programme, International Labour Organisation, UNHCR, UNCHR and the World Health Organisation are the most important organisations of the UN that are present. There is also a Special UN Envoy appointed to influence the political situation, who works on negotiations between the government and the opposition groups. And there is a Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in the country (UNIC Yangon 2009a). Several reports from these organisations show their concern with the situation in Burma on different aspects. In this way the UN is putting pressure on the country to open up. So far the UN Security Council has not implemented any sanctions on the junta in Burma, however, since China vetoed such a decision several times (Reuters 2007).

Burma has been a member of the Association of South East Asian Nations since 1997. The ASEAN wanted the country to join the organisation because of three reasons; to create 'constructive' contacts with the regime in order to moderate its repressive policies, to counterbalance the influence of China on the country (Rotberg 1998, 2) and because of "regional nationalism". The ASEAN represents a success story to the countries of South East Asia, after years of foreign influence they are uniting. The ASEAN represents pride, a growing confidence and creates a sense of regional cohesion. The ASEAN success story could be even greater if all countries of South East Asia would join, that is one of the important reasons why they have accepted Burma as a member of the organisation (Ott 1998, 74-75). The countries of the ASEAN have decided to use a policy of 'constructive engagement'. They have created economic and diplomatic bonds with the country in order to influence the regime in a gentle way (Donkers and Nijhuis 1996, 129). There is pressure from this organisation as well, but this was always presented in a very gentle way. They try to influence the policies used by the regime, but they also want Burma to stay in the ASEAN. But these policies seem to have altered since a couple of years. In 2006 it was Burma's turn to take on the chair of the ASEAN, as this is a rotating system. The US and the EU protested actively against giving the chair to Burma as long as it had not taken any positive steps towards more democracy. In the Asian countries, the critique on this decision was also rising. More pressure was put on the Burmese junta to make the first steps towards more democracy. In December 2005 the ASEAN countries even clearly denounced the regime for the first time in history (Katanyuu 2006, 825). It was then decided that Burma would not take on the position of chairman of the ASEAN. The ASEAN is still holding on to the policy of non-interference. But as this example shows, there is discussion on this point.

Both the World Bank and the IMF have also decided to accept the new name Myanmar, having followed the UN in this decision. The World Bank has approved no new lending for Burma ever since 1987 and the organisation has no plans to change this policy. The country is in arrears to the organisation and is not implementing the necessary economic

reforms. The country still is member of the organisation and the World Bank will still follow its progress (World Bank 2009). There is pressure from this organisation to reform economic policies, since it is not lending any more money to Burma.

International NGOs

International NGOs are working hard to put more pressure on the regime in Burma. There are dozens of reports and other documents from NGOs about the severe situation in Burma. These reports cover the human rights situation or the state of democracy. The junta has been making life difficult for organisations which are trying to work in Burma (Hulst 2006, 109). Also the difficulties international aid organisations ran into when they were trying to help the victims of the cyclone Nargis are widely known. Because of the restrictions the regime put in place, only a few organisations are actually present in Burma. Both Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch are writing reports about Burma and trying to persuade the government of the country to change policies, but they don't have offices in the country. The ICRC and Medecins Sans Frontieres are working in the country with limited room to manoeuvre. All these organisations complain not only about the way the junta treats its people, but are also complaining about the conditions in which they have to work.

As I have elaborated elsewhere⁵, it is remarkable to see that organisations respond differently to the difficulties they run into while working in Burma. The ICRC has decided to stop working in several areas, because of the restrictions the regime has placed on them. The organisation could not guarantee their neutrality and impartiality under these circumstances (ICRC 2009, 191). While these are the very basic principles of the organisation, they saw no other option than to leave. Medecins San Frontieres runs into the same problems, but has taken on a different position. They have extended their contact with the regime, in order to be able to have access to more areas (MSF 2008, 64). This way they are able to help more people with their services. MSF has decided to put their main goal first. That is helping as many people as possible. And the ICRC has put their principles first.

The international NGOs are not only putting pressure on the government of Burma. But they are also trying to put pressure on other countries and international organisations like the United Nations to do something about the situation in Burma.

In this chapter we have seen that Burma is facing military regimes for decades. And two struggles have been central in the contemporary history of the country. The first is the struggle of the pro-democracy movement and the second group that is fighting the regime are the minority groups. The regime controls the cultural activities, religion and the economy.

⁵ Van Enckevort, E. (2009), *Doing no harm? Different strategies in the 'do no harm' framework*, final paper in Master course Conflict and Development, Social Geography, Radboud University Nijmegen

The role of civil society in democratising authoritarian regimes, the case of Burma (Myanmar)

The country is missing out on important democratic dynamics because of the structure of the economy, which make it more difficult for the civil society to develop and have influence on political processes. In the next chapter the civil society that has been able to develop, will be explored.

Chapter 4. The Burmese civil society

In this fourth chapter the focus is on the civil society in Burma. Starting with the history, this chapter further analyses the current situation of the civil society. It examines what kind of organisations are populating the civil society, along which divisions the civil society is organised, and what the relationship is between the civil society and other actors in the Burmese society.

4.1 History of civil society

Traditionally the Burmese society knew many civil society organisations. Villages were organised through a village headman who protected the village against interference from the state with village affairs. Other important examples of the civil society in ancient Burma are religious (Buddhist) organisations at the local level. They organised religious activities like seasonal ceremonies that formed an integral part of the social and religious life. These activities continued during the colonial period. Since the British did not allow overtly political organisations, religion was the natural focus of civil society organisations. Organisations like these continue to exist in the present time and have been supplemented by others, representing other religions like Christianity, Islam or Hinduism. After independence the civil society grew. Professional and other organisations were formed. There was a considerable space between the state and the society in which these organisations could flourish (Steinberg 2001, 105). Many organisations were also created by the ruling AFPFL, like mass organisations as the All Burma Peasants' Organisation and the All Burma Workers' Organisation. These organisations were used to mobilise society for ends the AFPFL had determined (ibid., 106) and can therefore not be considered to be part of the civil society.

After the military coup by Ne Win and his BSPP, a very large part of the civil society died, or rather was killed. Almost all civil society organisations were prohibited and the regime didn't create any mass organisations themselves. All private organisations, including private schools, came under state control (Steinberg 1999, 8). Everything was in hands of the military. Foreign organisations that worked in the country were forced to leave and new visas were very limited. The BSPP even gained control over the Buddhist monks by putting the *sangha* under state control (Steinberg 2001, 107). The same happened with professional organisations; all were abolished or taken over by the military, with military officers running the organisations. The organisation of the state was based on fear. People were afraid of the military officers, and the officers feared the higher officers. That way the regime didn't need any mass organisations to mobilise the people (ibid.). Only very few private organisations were allowed to continue their work, mostly religious and welfare organisations that kept far

from politics or power. The only advocacy groups that existed either became directly controlled by the state, went underground, or started revolts in the jungle (Steinberg 1999, 9).

When the SLORC seized power in 1988, things changed a little. Because foreign investments were allowed on a small basis, businesses started to develop, even though many were also in hands of the military. Because of the multiparty elections that were held in 1990, political parties were also established. Many of these political parties were prohibited after the elections were held, and went underground. Developments were slow but also positive, although the absolute power was still with the military. The control the military had over other civil society actors did not change, but from the outside world more criticism came in. Because of the quite large Burmese expatriate community, organisations and protests started to develop in several countries. The organisations in Burma noticed a growing amount of (financial) support from foreign countries (ibid., 108-109). This major change can be explained by the fact that the international arena found somebody they could identify with and could be projected to be a hero, Aung San Suu Kyi. Her story and her brave behaviour were attractive for many outside Burma (Steinberg 1999, 10), and this attention was greatly strengthened by the fact that the Norwegian Nobel committee gave her the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991.

Another change in policies towards the civil society was the fact that the regime established its own 'civil society organisation'; the Union Solidarity Development Association (USDA). The USDA was founded in 1993 in order to strengthen the support for the ruling elites among the people of Burma. The regime felt this to be necessary after the disastrous results of the elections. The USDA is the front organisation of the regime and civil servants and military are encouraged to join, since they are not allowed to be a member of any political party. Without the membership of the USDA, chances are quite small for somebody to get a job in a state institution. The organisation propagates the views of the military and shows support in rallies all over the country. The USDA has offices in every district and every state (Donkers and Nijhuis 1996, 50). Their objectives are the same as the junta and it is therefore not independent from the regime. There are also many organisations that are connected to the USDA, for example most of the sport clubs in the country (Ministry of Sport 2010). In the definition used in this research, the USDA cannot be considered part of the civil society. According to head of state Than Shwe over 11 million people joined the organisation in 1999 (about 25% of the population) (Steinberg 2001, 111).

4.2 Sectors represented in civil society today

Today the SPDC still holds firm control over the country and watches the civil society organisations closely. They all have to register at the Ministry of Home Affairs. As long as they don't have any political goals they are allowed. In 2003 Burma officially had little over

500 non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Some of those organisations are connected to the USDA, others are independent. Some of the NGOs are even allowed to operate nationwide (Hulst 2006, 67-68). A couple of foreign/international NGOs are also allowed to operate in the country. Although the regime greets them with suspicion, they also realise that they themselves are not able to provide all the basic needs and services to its people. Especially the minority groups suffer from a lack of food, health care and education (Steinberg 2001, 116). The civil society helps the regime to provide all basic services, and with doing that, keeping the people satisfied. There is awareness at the highest level of state authority that state security and stability are based on the health of the civil society of the country. The livelihoods of the people have to improve or at least be kept at a certain standard to keep them happy (James 2005, 55-56). Local and international NGOs mostly focus on poverty alleviation, health care provision, health education and improvement of welfare. They work together with the regime, and this cooperation is believed by these NGOs to be important to effectively change things in the country. The idea is that living conditions can be best improved by cooperation, not by resistance (ibid., 57). The NGOs couldn't do their work if they didn't cooperate with the government and the government would not be able to make any progress in living standards if the NGOs wouldn't be present in the country. Positive steps are taken. Cooperating is more common between NGOs and the regime. Such cooperation also creates channels of communication between the citizens and the regime. These channels of communication are very important in a country where independent media did not survive. But the regime still wants to hold enough control over the civil society organisations. The suspicion towards civil society organisations, especially when they are foreign is still very present at state institutions in Burma today. But as long as there are no obvious political motives, most NGOs are able to work in the country. In 1999 about 17 international NGOs were working in Burma, in contrast to more than 50 NGOs working in the border areas in Thailand, mostly concentrating on the refugees from Burma. Some local and international NGOs cooperate, for example through partnerships (Hulst 2006, 67).

The result of these policies is that the organisations that do exist mostly focus on welfare issues like education, health care and poverty alleviation, but also on environmental issues, agriculture and the Buddhist religion. Economic and political issues are less represented at civil society level, although some political parties are allowed. Some civil society organisations try to work on political issues, like community issues, land rights, women's rights and voter education while new elections are expected this year (Burma Centre Netherlands 2009). The political parties are the most important organisations to take on the issue of voter education (Irrawaddy 2009b). They explain people if they can vote, how they can vote and how to make the decision on whom to vote. Land rights are taken on by local and international NGOs, for example COHRE. Women's organisations that work

throughout the country (Women of Burma, Burmese Women's Union) or focus on one particular minority group (Karen Women's Organisation) work on the education of women's rights. These organisations organise trainings, publish articles, do research and try to mobilise people to stand up for their rights (Women's League of Burma 2010). The NGOs that focus on land and women's rights are also able to teach citizens on the democratic and undemocratic elements of the political system in Burma. When going to court in order to obtain what is rightfully theirs, they will also teach people about the unfair trials and the lack of transparency in the legal system. Such education can also encourage people to take action and protest against the regime. The women's rights and land rights organisations are running into similar problems as political parties who try to operate in Burma. Many members have been arrested, assaulted and tortured because of their involvement. That is why many organisations have decided to move their bases outside of Burma, mostly to Thailand (Women's League of Burma 2007). To stay out of trouble, other organisations try to incorporate these sensitive issues in their other work. Organisations that focus on environmental issues try for example to cooperate with the government in seminars on water management. In such seminars building of dams is for example discussed, with the purpose to convince the government not to move certain villages as was planned (Burma Centre Netherlands 2009). Another good example of how sensitive issues are implemented into the daily work of civil society organisations is the way the Buddhist monks try to link the demands for a better society and the demands for democracy to the ideas and basic elements of the Buddhist religion.

The Buddhist monks were, together with the students, the leaders in the moments of unrest during the last decades. The regime decided to strike back at these two groups and restrict their room to manoeuvre. As came forward in paragraph 3.3, the Buddhist monks who are organised in the *sangha* are controlled by very strict rules. That leads to the conclusion that the *sangha* as an organisation cannot be considered to be part of the civil society of Burma since this organisation became part of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. But that does not imply that the Buddhist monks are not part of the civil society. As individuals they make a great contribution to the civil society and the pro-democracy movement. Indeed, because of their critical voice and brave behaviour during the last decades, they enjoy widespread support among the pro-democracy movement. In order to support and help the monks to still continue telling their stories and fighting the regime, *the International Burmese Monks Organisation* was established in the US after the uprising of 2007. For the Burmese monks seeking the help of the international arena was the only way they could still continue their struggle. Inside Burma it is not possible to work on these sensitive issues. Internally they mostly focus on education in religious virtuous and the organisation of religious activities. If they have the chance to connect the religious rules to the undemocratic elements of the

political system or to the violations of human rights, they will try to incorporate that in their work. Internationally the Burmese monks will keep on mentioning the violations of the Buddhist rules and ideas by the regime more openly. Inside Burma the monks also help people to survive. While the junta is not providing proper basic services, the people turn to the monasteries for help (IBMO 2009). Because religion is very important in Burma, the monks will not disappear and have a kind of secured status. That way they will always be part of and great support for the Burmese civil society. The IBMO supports them by focusing on raising international awareness about Burma's political struggle. The organisation travels the world in order to give the Burmese monks a voice, while they have no freedom of speech in their own country (ibid.).

For the students the situation is very different. They also were one of the leading groups during the biggest uprising in Burmese history, but they are now not officially represented by organisations in Burma. The main reasons are that the regime closed all universities and schools during the first years after the 1988 uprising and that the student organisations (like the All Burma Federation of Student Unions, the Students Democratic Association and the All Burma Student Union) are heavily watched and some are even infiltrated by the regime. The people that were leading the unrests during 1988 are arrested and imprisoned (Donkers en Nijhuis 1996, 56). Some of these organisations do still exist, but they are based in other countries like Thailand and Australia. They probably have good inside information and underground networks with people in the country (Mezzerà 2009), that way they still have influence in Burma.

The group of civil society organisations that works on the most sensitive issues are the political parties and the ethnic organisations. They teach their members on the democratic and undemocratic elements of the system and how to influence political processes. Within these organisations there is often a democratic structure that helps them to teach on democracy. They also work on voter education. Due to pressure from the international community, several political parties have been allowed to operate since the elections of 1990 (Donkers and Nijhuis 1996, 48). Parties that are openly run are the *Communist Party Burma (CPB)*, which is one of the oldest political parties in Burma, founded in 1939. Very little is known about the strength of the party and its support among the people. *The Democratic Party for New Society (DPNS)* was founded in 1988 and it became the second largest party in the elections in 1990 (after the NLD). After the elections many members of the party were arrested and at the moment still about a hundred members are in prison. Because of the restrictions the regime placed on them, they moved their headquarters to the Thai border areas (DPNS 2009). *The Parliamentary Democracy Party (PDP)* was originally founded by the first prime minister of Burma; U Nu. The party is now not only focussing on the political

route, but also on armed resistance against the regime. Its troops are based in the border areas between Burma and Thailand (PDP 2010). As mentioned before, civil society organisations that pick up arms to fight the regime are still considered to be part of the civil society. Such organisations are still representing a group of people that come together voluntarily to defend their mutual interests. And the most famous political party is *the National League for Democracy (NLD)*, the party of Aung San Suu Kyi. It was founded in 1988. After the electoral victory of the NLD during the 1990 elections, the chairman of the party U Tin Oo, together with hundreds of members of the party, was put in prison while General Secretary Aung San Suu Kyi was placed under house arrest (NCGUB 2007). Since 2003 most offices of the party are closed and its members' activities heavily restricted. In 2009 500 followers of Aung San Suu Kyi were beaten to death by the armed forces. The house arrest of Aung San Suu Kyi was prolonged with another 18 months in 2009, which also means she will still be kept imprisoned during the elections of 2010 (NLD-LA 2009). These political parties fulfil several important roles. Besides educating their members on the political system and democracy, they also represent groups of citizens and give peaceful and sometimes even military resistance against the junta. The room they have to manoeuvre is very limited. They have to ask permission to state institutions for almost everything. The NLD has for example lately asked the junta permission to organise political activities, since activities with any sort of political character are forbidden by the regime (Irrawaddy 2009a).

It is not certain what these established parties will decide on the elections of 2010. Many are in doubt if they should participate, especially the parties that won the elections of 1990. Participating means accepting the fact that the results of 1990 are not honoured and it also means making them worthless. You give them up if you participate in new elections. But the parties also know that these new elections might be a new way to gain influence and some power. If they do not participate they could lose all support and it will do damage to their reputation as a challenger of the regime. This is a very difficult dilemma they are facing and it is not sure how they will deal with this (Steinberg 2009).

When it became clear that the SLORC would not take the results of the 1990 elections seriously and would remain in power, many politicians fled to the border areas with Thailand. In December 1990 some politicians proclaimed a government in exile, based on their own mandates and the mandates of their colleagues that were still in Burma. This government is called *the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB)*, named after the old name of the country; the Republic of the Union of Burma. Sein Win, cousin of Aung San Suu Kyi, became prime minister of this government in exile (Donkers and Nijhuis 1996, 106). The NCGUB was officially formed in Manerplaw on 18 December 1990. In 1996, *the Members of Parliament of the Union of Burma (MPU)* was found. It is formed by members that were elected at the 1990 parliament elections but never got the

change to take office. The MPU Congress is the highest decision making body that works as a parliament that supports and directs the NCGUB. It works on raising international awareness of the situation in Burma and to find support from organisations, political parties, and governments for the democracy movement in Burma (NCGUB 2009).

While the next elections are expected to be held this year, more political parties will probably be allowed and established during the coming months. This means a new opening for the civil society of Burma to grow in size. It is not clear if such an enlarged civil society would also mean more influence, but there are some chances for Burma to become a bit more of a pluralist country (Steinberg 2009). What that means for the democratisation process will be discussed in chapter 5 and 6. Not only the democratic opposition is preparing for the planned elections, also the regime is preparing itself. Expectations are that the regime will transform the USDA into a political party in support of the regime (Donkers en Nijhuis 1996, 50). Many see a resemblance with the Golkar in Indonesia, which used to be a military-sponsored social organisation, but was then turned into a political party in support of the regime (Steinberg 1999, 12). But, as with all information on the 2010 elections, nothing is clear yet.

Burma knows many ethnic groups and many of them have organised themselves in ethnic organisations. There are several political parties and ethnic organisations that represent the ethnic minorities in the country. The representation role is therefore very strongly fulfilled by these ethnic groups. They also give peaceful resistance by protesting against decisions taken by the regime. By keeping attention on the decisions taken by the regime, they provide their members with information on political issues and the democratic and undemocratic elements of the political system. Some have their own armed forces to fight the regime, that way they also give military resistance to the regime. The most famous minority organisations are the *Karen National Union*, *Shan State Army*, *New Mon State Party*, *Kachin Independence Organisation*, *the United Wa State Army* (Burma Centre Netherlands 2009a) and *the Zomi National Congress*. In 1995 up to 24 organisations existed that represented minority groups and functioned as real separatist factions (Thomson 1995, 274). Compared to most political parties in Burma these organisations are much older, most of them were founded shortly after the independence of Burma in 1948. There has not only been unrest between the minorities and the regime, but the minorities have also been fighting each other for territory and influence. Many regions where the minorities live can be considered to be warzones (Smith 1999, 25). In these minority areas the civil society is partly organised along ethnic lines. There are for example women's rights groups for the Karen, Shan and the Chinland women.

Several of these minority groups have signed cease-fire agreements with the regime. Ever since, they are regarded as betrayers by the organisations that are still fighting the regime. The regime does believe the cease-fire organisations are still a possible threat for the country (Burma Centre Netherlands 2009a). Among the political parties that won the elections of 1990, there were also several minority parties (Smith 1999, 17). In the aftermath of the elections a bond has been created between the pro-democracy movement and the ethnic organisations. They realised they all were fighting the same enemy. Nowadays we see that ethnic and pro-democracy organisations have organised themselves together, mostly in Thailand. Most of the organisations that represent minority groups are also represented in the Members of Parliament of the Union of Burma.

Sports are an important part of the Burmese society. In Burma football, kickboxing and the national sport of Chinlone are popular (Burma Centre Netherlands 2010). Most of the sport clubs are in hands of the military, or connected to the USDA. Sports are seen as an important way to contribute to the country. The Ministry of Sport stresses the importance of sport for three reasons. The promotion of sports amounts to the defence of the country; success in sports reflects the level and status of the nation's development; and achievements in sports indicate the national prestige and status (Ministry of Sport 2010). There is a very little number of independent sport clubs. Recently the first privately owned football club was established by a businessman who has very close connections with the regime (Irrawaddy 2010). Because of these close connections this organisation cannot be seen as independent from the regime and is therefore no part of the civil society of the country.

Recently the civil society gained more room to manoeuvre in Burma. In May 2008 the country was struck by cyclone Nargis, the worst recorded natural disaster in the history of the country. Almost 2.4 million people are believed to have been severely affected by the cyclone (CPCS 2009, 15). Directly after the cyclone destroyed the Irrawaddy delta and surrounding areas, the civil society stepped in to deliver relief aid. The government acted as well, but because of its refusal to let any international assistance enter the country, there was a lot of frustration in the worldwide aid sector (ibid., 16). Local civil society organisations were able to act immediately and were very valuable in the first days and weeks after the cyclone destroyed the country. It was also an important learning experience for many local organisations. Disaster risk reduction was never an issue to NGOs, but Nargis created new attention for this important topic (ibid., 18). The organisations learned about risks for new similar disasters, in this context a lot of community education took place. Since the devastation was so widespread, the organisations learned the importance of networking and

building relations with each other, but also with the authorities and participating communities. These activities are essential in creating a sense of security among the people they are helping and working with, especially when they are in such a vulnerable position as they were (ibid, 22). Whilst the cyclone brought so much destruction and losses to the country, it also brought a sense of solidarity among the different ethnic groups. Since Nargis, civil society organisations feel there is more room to manoeuvre and have contact with and access to communities. They are not sure if this will change and therefore they feel they need to use this time wisely (ibid., 37). The civil society has expanded and grown since Nargis, both in terms of human and financial resources (ibid., 39). The Myanmar NGO Network (MNN) has been established, an organisation of 20 NGOs working in the country. The first plans were made before Nargis in 2007, but because of the cyclone things sped up (ibid., 41).

4.3 Relation between civil society and other actors

As discussed in paragraph 2.3 the civil society is not the only actor that can influence political processes like a democratisation process. It is therefore of great importance to analyse the contact and the power balance between the other actors and the civil society, in order to get a good idea of the influence of the civil society. The efforts made by these other actors to advance or create a democratisation process are also crucial in the analysis of the Burmese case. The actor that has most influence on political processes is the state. As we have seen all through this research, the state is a huge player in Burma. Almost all power is in hands of the state. And the regime also wants to stay in control. That is why they watch the civil society with great suspicion, especially the foreign organisations. The regime has always been suspicious of foreign interference. But also Burmese organisations have a hard time working under this regime. The regime is so afraid to lose power and control that the supervision of the state has taken on very extreme forms, with the massive intelligence service as the most important asset. But as we have seen earlier, the regime has also started to cooperate some more with civil society actors. This is mainly the result of the development the country is going through. Because of the economic growth the country is going after, and because of the severe situations in some areas regarding the health situation and living standards, the regime decided to change their policies a little. More cooperation is seen between government institutions and civil society actors (Steinberg 1999, 13). All of this is still done in the light of keeping control over everything that happens in the country and with the purpose of avoiding new large scale unrest. If the regime would not cooperate with these organisations, chances are that major unrest would break out because of bad living standards. The regime has bad experience with such major outbursts and is putting a lot of energy in strategies not to let that happen again. The only way to do that is to

cooperate with civil society actors. It not only makes sure more assistance is provided to the people of Burma, it also ensures the regime that they still have enough budget to support their enormous military apparatus, that takes approximately 40-50 percent of the state budget (Steinberg 2001, 118). This seems to be a slow but positive development for the influence the civil society can have on political processes (Steinberg 1999, 13). The development sped up a little because of the situation after cyclone Nargis, when the civil society got more room to manoeuvre, since the regime needed more assistance in that situation (CPCS 2009, 37).

The state institutions in Burma have introduced a seven-step 'roadmap' that is supposed to make the country more democratic and open. It is not clear why the junta decided to introduce such a new course. Speculations on the influence of the international arena, including China, might be true (BBC News 2008a). Almost all steps are taken; creating a national convention, letting them write a new constitution and putting this to the test in a popular referendum. The only step that needs to be taken in order to complete the seven steps is the general elections that are planned for this year. All the previous steps taken in this political process have shown that the regime is not ready to change the political system. The regime did not honour the outcome of the 1990 elections in the composition of the convention. The new constitution knows many undemocratic and authoritarian elements (the content of the constitution is discussed comprehensively in the next chapter). And the referendum is criticised for massive fraud and cheating (BBC News 2008c). All in all it can be concluded that although the regime wants the outside world to believe they have started a democratisation process, they actually did not (this will also be more thoroughly discussed in chapter 5). This political process seems to be a distraction from the real intentions of the junta. Those real intentions can be described as staying in control as much as possible. The civil society tries to influence the state to start a real democratisation process. The democratic opposition has criticised the composition of the convention and decided to boycott this fake process towards more democracy (BBCBurmese 2006). They have launched a campaign to vote 'no' in the referendum on the new constitution (BBC News 2008b) and have rejected the stated outcome of the referendum (ABC News 2008). It is not sure if they will participate in the new elections because they don't want to give up on the results of the 1990 elections. But expectations are that they will use the elections to create massive campaigns against the regime. So far the pressure from the civil society has not had many positive results towards real democratisation.

The second group that is mentioned in paragraph 2.3 is the civil society itself. It is important to consider the relationships among the different civil society actors. Together they could stand stronger. In the past we have seen more animosity between the civil society actors

than today. A good example of that animosity is the way the NLD viewed the local and foreign welfare NGOs. The NLD approached the activities of these NGOs with three negative views (Steinberg 2001, 118). First, the publicity the state can generate because of the presence of these organisations can help to legitimize the regime. By cooperating and having contact with the regime, they receive legitimisation. This contact can be interpreted as the recognition of the power of the junta. If this power would not be legitimate, the logical result would be that there would be no cooperation with that regime. Second, the military benefit from any organisation that is present in the country, the credit for the development of the country will go to the regime, not to the people that created opportunities to develop. While at the same time the regime can put more energy and resources in the development of the military, since NGOs have taken care of other problems. Third, the economic benefits will only reach the people that are already rich in Burma, the military and their families and some influential business people that have close contacts with the regime. That way development is only an improvement for the rich and not for the poor in the country. This last claim can however be questioned since most of the local and foreign NGOs focus on the poorest people of the country. As we have seen, most organisations work on providing food, health care and education. In any case, since the regime has used NLD's position to claim the party has selfish and unpatriotic motives, this attitude has been modified. Another reason to change policies was because the party was losing popular support with this position. The NLD respects the fact that poverty reduction and delivering basic services as health care and education are important improvements for all people. The party tries to study all organisations that deliver assistance to the country. If it does not benefit the military it is approved by the NLD (ibid., 118-119). The considerations the NLD brings forward are very important thoughts, and highlight the dilemmas all NGOs run into when working in such a difficult environment.

Especially since the uprising of 1988 and the elections of 1990, the civil society organisations have tried to come together and organise themselves in larger groups. Most of these developments have taken place in Thailand, but there is a possibility that these organisations will come back to Burma one day. And it is almost certain that these networks still have very good contacts with underground networks in Burma, and that way still have influence on political processes in Burma (Mezzera 2009). The civil society tries to build as much pressure as possible on the regime to democratise. In recent years the different oppositional groups have started to cooperate, which made their position stronger, not only in their own country, but also internationally. Aung San Suu Kyi is by many regarded as the leader of this broad oppositional movement. But because she is locked up in her house by the regime, it is difficult for her to coordinate this movement (Chinland Guardian 2009). Much has been taken over by the civil society organisations in Thailand and the National Coalition

Government of the Union of Burma. The roles the civil society plays in advancing or creating a democratisation process are discussed in chapter 5.

The third sector that can have influence on political processes like democratisation is the market sector. As became clear in chapter 3, the economy is still largely in hands of the military. Everybody that wants to be successful in business in Burma has to build a strong relationship with the junta. They control the economy and have to approve the foreign investments in the country. Every company that has economic ties with the regime, is either a supporter of the regime or neutral in this conflict. These companies do not have the room to give harsh critique on the decisions the junta makes and most of them will not even be interested in doing that. The natural resources Burma has are very important to the junta, since they offer many chances to improve the economic position of the regime. Natural resources are easy to invest in, because the risks that accompany these deals are relatively small. Natural resources like gas, oil, but also precious stones are not likely to lose a lot of value in a short period of time. Therefore there will always be companies that are interested in investing in the oil, gas and precious stones sectors. Other sectors are currently also attractive to foreign companies and investors, especially because of the cheap manufacturing possibilities Burma offers. This results in the situation where international companies like Total Oil, Chevron, Daewoo, Maersk, Mitsubishi, Siemens and Toyota are investing in Burma (Burma Campaign UK 2010). But a trend of withdrawal is also visible. International companies like Heineken, Philips, Reebok, Levi Strauss and Pepsi Cola have pulled their activities out of the country (Burma Campaign UK 2001), probably influenced by international pressure and considerations of corporate social responsibilities.

The private companies that work in Burma do not have a good relationship with international human rights organisations. They try to convince them to stop doing business in Burma, and to shame them publicly. The organisation Burma Campaign UK publishes a 'Dirty List' with companies that work in Burma. This list also includes company details. The public is asked to call these businesses and ask them to leave Burma. All the companies that are currently investing in Burma have been asked to pull their activities out of the country in several ways and for several times. Since they are still investing in the country, it can be concluded that they are not interested in corporate social responsibilities, but are more interested in the economic possibilities the country has to offer. It is not clear what the relationship is between the Burmese civil society organisations and these private foreign companies. There is probably very little contact, since otherwise more would have been reported on these contacts. Because Burmese people can only start a successful business when they have close contacts with the junta, there is no pressure from the local market

sector to democratise the country. The international market does have some influence, but this will be discussed below because this is no internal pressure but international pressure.

The last sphere that can have influence on political processes like democratisation is the international sphere. As concluded in paragraph 2.3 neighbouring countries, the major political powers in the world and region, the regional and international organisations the country is a member of and the organisations that try to influence the political situation in the country (White 2004, 16) are all part of this sphere. The relationship between these different international actors and the civil society is also influencing the position of the civil society. As we have seen in chapter 4, the civil society receives good support from the international sphere. Many influential countries have supported their activities. Even countries that have not been so critical to the regime like Japan and India have also supported the civil society. Other countries have focussed their support mostly on the civil society, like the government of the US. In this country, a wide range of NGOs have developed that try to help the Burmese civil society. Similar developments can be found in neighbouring countries where many refugees from Burma live, especially in Thailand. The most support the civil society organisations in Burma receive is from civil society organisations in other countries.

Another way in which the civil society receives support from the international arena is by the pressure that is put on the regime. As is explained in chapter 3, several countries have decided to implement sanctions in reaction to the situation in Burma. The pressure that is established because of these sanctions and the rejecting position of many countries has resulted in the fact that several organisations (mostly political parties) have been able to survive. After all that is happened between the National League for Democracy and the regime, you would expect this organisation to be prohibited. But because of the support for Aung San Suu Kyi and her fellow activists, the regime felt forced to not prohibit the NLD. That kind of developments shows that the international arena, together with the local civil society can achieve important steps towards political change. Representatives of the United Nations, US and the European Union have met Aung San Suu Kyi several times to speak about the situation in Burma (UN 2006, Guardian 2009 and NewEurope 2009). And they have also sent out statements on the house arrest of the opposition leader (UNIC 2009b).

As mentioned in chapter 2, international economic considerations can also be an incentive to start a democratisation process for a government. The civil society in Burma has always been a supporter of the economic sanctions. Aung San Suu Kyi has always been very much opposed to tourism or economical investment in the country (Donkers and Nijhuis 1996, 45). Burma faces harsh economic sanctions from both the US and the EU. The gap these two world powers have left behind economically is filled by Asian countries. Especially the economic bond with China is very strong. Other Asian neighbours have chosen a policy

of 'constructive engagement' towards the Burmese junta. Therefore economic sanctions are only imposed by Western countries. Because of the differences in approach between the Asian and Western countries, the economic sanctions are not impressing the junta at the moment. There are enough alternatives to continue with the international trade that is so important for the Burmese economy. This might be different when countries would act together and speak with one voice. They could for example refuse companies to invest in Burma. But in the political power game, this is not expected to happen.

4.4 Conclusion

At this moment there is a small civil society in Burma. The regime holds very firm control over the organisations and their activities. The room to manoeuvre is very small. But the civil society organisations have managed to work on several very important issues in Burma. Health care, poverty alleviation, education and environmental issues are the central issues. But also more sensitive issues like women's rights, land rights, voter education and politics are covered by NGOs and political parties. They do research, publish articles and reports on their websites and organise trainings and other activities to educate and motivate people. Some organisations try to incorporate sensitive issues in their daily, less sensitive work. The political parties work openly on political issues, but their room is even more restricted than the room of other civil society actors.

The student organisations and the Buddhist *sangha* used to represent very strong and important parts of the Burmese civil society. After the 1988 unrest and 1990 elections, their activities and freedom have been heavily restricted by the regime. The ethnic organisations also became less strong. Most of them have signed ceasefire agreements with the regime. The students, Buddhist monks and ethnic organisations are still very active. But they were forced to move their activities to other countries. That makes them less strong and visible in Burma today.

The civil society has a difficult relationship with the state institutions in Burma. Their activities and freedom are very restricted by these institutions. But we also see more cooperation between the two. The cooperation could lead to more influence and power for the civil society. But at the moment the state is very much controlling the political processes. In recent years the different parts of the civil society have managed to cooperate better and create a mutual understanding. This could lead to a stronger civil society, while bringing people together improves the strength and creativity.

The companies that operate in Burma are either in hands of the junta, or they are not interested in the political situation in the country. There is very little contact between the civil society and the market sector. Internationally the civil society in Burma receives the most support. Many governments and international organisations support the work of the civil

society actors. International NGOs try to help out as much as possible, although most of them are not allowed to operate in the country. The international pressure on the regime has had some positive results, especially regarding the position of the NLD. The position of the civil society is weak. But the support of the international arena and the cooperation between the different civil society actors in the country could make things better in the future. Although it will be mostly up to the regime to decide if the civil society actually will get more influence on political processes.

Part 3. Analysis

Chapter 5. Democratisation and the roles of the Burmese civil society

In part one of this research the definition of democratisation has been discussed. In part two the situation in Burma is explored. In this fifth chapter these theoretical and empirical elements will be brought together to conclude on the situation in Burma. Can the current developments in Burma be called a democratisation process? This chapter also analyses the roles of civil society that are brought forward by the different schools of thought in the theoretical framework. The main goal of this chapter is to explore if there is a democratisation process ongoing and which roles are being fulfilled by the Burmese civil society and which are not.

5.1 Democratisation process

In the second chapter of this master thesis, the definition of democracy that is used in this research is discussed. I have chosen to use a rather broad definition of democracy that is given by Thomas Pogge. *“Democracy means that political power is authorized and controlled by the people over whom it is exercised, and this in such a way as to give these people roughly equal political influence”* (Pogge 2002, 146). This definition has two important components, first that all the people have influence on the political process and second that this influence is equally distributed among the people. This definition is valuable since it gives answer to the two most important questions when talking about the concept democracy; ‘who are the people?’ and ‘in what sense should the people rule?’ (Heywood 1997, 68). But while answering these questions it does not prefer any modern model of democracy over another.

A democratisation process means taking a path towards democracy as defined by Pogge. By using this definition, several important steps can be identified that have to be taken before we can call a development a democratisation process. People can only authorize and control political power when they are free to express their ideas and when their political rights are ensured by law. Therefore the granting of basic freedoms and democratic political rights are an important feature of the transition process. The next step is to elect representatives of the people that will form the rule of the country. This means the establishment of popular and competitive elections. Only when these two steps are taken, we can speak of a democracy as Pogge describes (*ibid.*, 81).

5.2 Democratisation in Burma

In order to get to know the rights and duties of citizens of a country, the constitution is the most important source. In 2008 the new constitution of Burma was finalized and adopted.

However this process was highly criticised for corruption and fraud. The Constitution of the Republic of Myanmar (2008) has some important provisions on the basic freedoms of the citizens of Burma. It refers to the 'eternal principles of Justice, Liberty and Equality' (Chapter 1, Art. 6e) and to the right to the 'freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess and practice religion subject to public order, morality and health and to the other provisions in this Constitution' (Chapter 1, Art. 34). Other articles that refer to human dignity and respect for all citizens are article 43 of Chapter 1; 'No penalty shall be prescribed that violates human dignity' and article 348 of chapter 8; 'The Union shall not discriminate any citizen of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, based on race, birth, religion, official position, status, culture, sex and wealth'. So far, these articles seem to guarantee important parts of basic freedoms for the people of Burma. But further on in the constitution, reservations are made on these freedoms. For example the rights of freedom of expressing, assembly, association and development of languages and culture are guaranteed, 'if not contrary to the laws, enacted for Union security, prevalence of law and order, community peace and tranquillity or public order and morality' (Chapter 8, Art. 354). When it comes to human dignity in punishing, the constitution tells us 'The Union prohibits forced labour except hard labour as a punishment for crime duty convicted and duties assigned by the Union in accord with the law in the interest of the public' (Chapter 8, Art. 359) and 'No person shall, except matters on precautionary measures taken for security of the Union or prevalence of law and order, peace and tranquillity in accord with the law in the interest of the public, or the matters permitted according to an existing law, be held in custody for more than 24 hours without the remand of a competent magistrate' (Chapter 8, Art. 376). All the reservations that are made in this constitution can be used by the authorities to cut back on the basic freedoms of the citizens. And because, as we shall see, the power will still be largely in hands of the military, these provisions can be used quite randomly. It has to be concluded that there is no guarantee in this constitution that the people of Burma can enjoy basic rights and freedoms.

When it comes to the democratic political rights, the constitution also makes some interesting reservations. In the first chapter of the constitution the basic principles are explained; 'The Sovereign power of the Union is derived from its citizens and is in force in the entire country' (Chapter 1, Art. 4) and 'Every citizen shall have the right to elect and be elected in accord with the law' (Chapter 1, Art. 38a). But when it comes to the precise explanation of the rules there are, again, several important reservations. 'The following persons shall not be entitled to be elected as the Pyithu Hluttaw (Parliament) representatives: (a) a person serving prison term, having been convicted by the Court concerned for having committed an offence, (...) (g) person himself or is a member of an organisation who obtains and utilizes directly or indirectly the support of money, land, housing, building, vehicle, property, so forth, from

government or religious organisation or other organisations of a foreign country' (Chapter 4, Art. 121). These reservations are of great importance, since they make it impossible for many members of oppositional parties to be elected. Many of these people have been imprisoned after they had taken part in demonstrations or otherwise shown support for the oppositional parties. And many of the opposition parties are also supported by organisations from other countries. Similar reservations are made for people who have the right to vote: 'The following persons shall have no right to vote: (a) members of religious orders; (b) persons serving prison terms; (c) persons determined to be of unsound mind and stands so declared by a competent Court; (d) persons who have not yet been declared free from insolvent; (e) persons disqualified by election law' (Chapter 8, Art.392). Again this means no right to vote for many supporters of oppositional parties. The authorities have a lot of influence on who gets the right to vote. And therefore we can conclude that the citizens of Burma have not been granted democratic political rights in this constitution. The political power is not equally distributed among the people.

The third important part of a democracy is a system of popular and competitive elections. In chapter 1 of the constitution these elections are mentioned; 'The Union shall enact necessary law to systematically form political parties for flourishing of a genuine, disciplined multi-party democratic system' (Chapter 1, Art. 39). Several requirements are set for political parties in this constitution; 'A political party shall: (a) set the objective of non-disintegration of the Union, non-disintegration of national solidarity and perpetuation of sovereignty; (b) be loyal to the State' (Chapter 10, Art. 404) and 'If a political party infringe one of the following stipulations, it shall not have the right of continued existence: (a) having been declared an unlawful association under the existing law; (b) directly or indirectly contacting or abetting the insurgent group launching armed rebellion against the Union or the associations and persons determined by the Union to have committed terrorists acts or the association declared to be unlawful association; (c) directly or indirectly receiving and expending financial, material and other assistance from a foreign government, a religious association, other association or a person from a foreign country; (d) abusing religion for political purpose' (Chapter 10, Art. 407). Once again this means that most of the opposition parties can be prohibited because of their ideas, history and support from other countries. And when it comes to the composition of the two houses of parliament, the constitution guarantees a quarter of all seats to personnel of the Defence Services (see Chapter 4, Art. 109 and Art. 114). Article 436b of chapter 12 makes sure that no amendment to the constitution will be accepted without the consent of the military while 'Provisions other than those mentioned in Sub-Section (a) shall be amended only by a vote of more than seventy-five percent of all the representatives of the

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw'. Again we see that the military keeps control and that there is no equal distribution of political power in Burma.

It is clear, then that the constitution makes many reservations when it comes to the freedom and rights of the people, the democratic political rights of the people and the popular and competitive multi-party elections. These reservations make it impossible to conclude that this constitution really lays a democratic basis for the new political system in Burma. Even when basic freedoms are guaranteed by the constitution, the citizens have no absolute guarantee that these freedoms will be granted to everyone. As long as the military will be so powerful in Burma, they will be able to act on their own ideas and thoughts, without consulting the constitution. Also because in Burma people have no guarantee to a fair trial in court since the judicial branch is not independent from the executive branch. Today people are still being arrested for being in the wrong place at the wrong moment, or for wearing the wrong colour of shirt (Houtman 2009). Arbitrariness is a tool that is very often used in the country, which takes all guarantees for freedoms and rights away (Donkers and Nijhuis 1996, 46).

Few in Burma are under any illusion about this reform process. It is clear that the main effect of this new constitution is to entrench *tatmadaw* power behind a façade of democracy (Holliday 2008, 1047). But at the same time there are new developments in the country. People experience that more room is created for civil society actors to develop their organisations and activities. New political parties will also be created for the upcoming elections, both pro and anti government parties. These developments may bring a little more pluralism to the Burmese society and more debate. More pluralism could lead to a democratisation process, although Burma has a very long way to go as we have seen in this chapter. We can say that at this moment the improvements are way too small to call this process a democratisation process (Steinberg 2009). The perspective of Burma is, at the moment, not one of democracy. The political power in Burma will not be controlled and authorised by the people, but to a very large extent still by the military. Some people will be able to influence political affairs by voting and some by being elected. But this will not change the fact that the military will still be in control. The military will have more power than other people and that way we cannot speak of roughly equal political influence. Now it is concluded that we cannot speak of a democratisation process in Burma, it is important to see which roles the Burmese civil society is able to fulfil. The focus will be on the question if the civil society will be able to start a democratisation process itself. The roles that are discussed in the theoretical framework are central in this analysis.

5.3 Educational roles

In chapter 2 of this master thesis, the different roles civil society can fulfil in political processes have been explored. These roles have been derived from the different schools of thought on the roles of civil society that have been discussed in that chapter. The first subgroup of roles is the educational roles, which were most mentioned by theorists on civil society. The first role of this subgroup is the information role. The civil society organisations have to provide citizens with information on the political system to fulfil this role (Warren 2001, 142 and World Bank 2009, 17). In Burma we see that this role is being fulfilled by very different organisations. The political parties are the most important organisations that provide information to their members and other citizens on the political situation in the country. They point out the democratic and undemocratic elements of the system and comment on the decisions taken by the regime. The political parties also work on voter education (Irrawaddy 2009b). Other organisations also work on this role, especially the organisations that focus on women's rights and land rights (Burma Centre Netherlands 2009). The information that is provided with voter education is of great importance during the upcoming elections. People learn if they can vote, how they can vote and how to make the decision whom to vote for. In theory, this information could be used to change the political situation in the country. In practice however, taking part in the upcoming elections does not necessarily entail taking part in a democratisation process. As we have seen in the previous paragraphs, the process started by the regime cannot be labelled as a democratisation process. When teaching people on voting and the political system, the civil society is able to also teach on the undemocratic elements of this political process. This could encourage people to not vote on pro-government parties or take action and protest against the regime.

The women's rights and land rights organisations give people a chance to take more advantage out of the current laws and the constitution. They teach people on their rights and on how to obtain what is rightfully theirs. This information can be a trigger for people to gain more influence by making demands based on their rights. Especially when parts of the constitution are violated by the regime it is possible to fight policies or decisions by going to court. Women's rights organisations for example will be able to use article 348 of chapter 8 of the 2008 constitution; 'The Union shall not discriminate any citizen of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, based on race, birth, religion, official position, status, culture, sex and wealth' (Constitution of the Republic of Myanmar 2008). It is questionable if such cases will result in positive outcomes since the judicial system is not independent from the executive branch of the state. There is therefore no guarantee for a fair public trial (CIA World Factbook 2010). This is also something people can become aware of when working with women's rights and land rights organisations. The awareness of the undemocratic elements of the

system is of great importance for people to understand the real situation in their country. And this could also encourage people to take more action against the regime.

The second educational role the civil society can fulfil is the teaching of civic involvement, or learning what democratic citizenship implies (Warren 2001, 149). The organisations that are best able to teach people on civic involvement are the independent organisations with members among the public. When you are a member of an organisation, the organisation expects involvement and effort from you. And therefore people will learn that being involved in a democratic system not only means voting during elections, but also gathering information, following the news and debating decisions. The people are crucial when it comes to providing input for the government, either positive or negative. Taking these steps in order to show such involvement is what is called democratic citizenship. In Burma, political parties are the only independent organisations that have members. But because of the dangers that come along with membership of these political parties, there are not so many people member of an oppositional party. Other organisations that help to teach people how to be actively involved with society are the religious organisations (Steinberg 2001, 105). But their focus is mainly on religious activities and not on civic involvement, although some elements will be the same. The regime encourages people to be involved in community issues by being loyal to the country and honour its sovereignty. The USDA and sport clubs are obliged to spread awareness of these virtues among their members (Ministry of Sports 2010). But as mentioned before, these organisations are not independent from the state institutions and are therefore not part of the civil society. And the involvement that is taught by the regime is not the same as the democratic opposition teaches. The democratic opposition focuses more on how to behave in democratic systems and what rights and duties come along with democratic citizenship. This role is only fulfilled by a couple of organisations with small number of members among the public. Only these people learn what it is like to function in a democratic environment where the functioning of the system is influenced by the effort you put into the system. This awareness of the importance of involvement of citizens in a democratic system is crucial to influence political processes. Only when people are aware of the involvement that is needed to be part of a democratic system, they will get an idea of what democracy would be like. The democratic involvement is crucial for people to understand what they are fighting for. And it will be hard to have an influence on political processes with such a small scope.

The third educational role that is explored in chapter 2 is the education in political skills. Again, this is mostly done in organisations that have members among the public. In these organisations, like political parties, there will be debates where people learn how to argue for their cause in peaceful means. Leadership skills are also an important part of political skills (Warren 2001, 153 and World Bank 2009, 28). It is once again only the political

parties with their small number of members that are able to educate on political skills. These skills can only be taught to people that are member for quite some time. It is not possible to learn these skills without practising them on a regular basis for some years. They can only be learnt by doing. It will therefore not be easy to teach people on political skills when they are not a member of such an independent voluntary organisation.

The fourth educational role that is mentioned is the education in critical skills. Critical skills are about being critical to the people that take decisions and about the proper way to criticise decisions and opinions from other people (Warren 2001, 154-155 and World Bank 2009, 28). As with civic virtues and political skills, is also goes for critical skills that people learn best when they are a member of a civil society organisation. These skills can also only be learnt by exercise, learning by doing. But the opposition is very small and the oppositional parties have no room to manoeuvre. And there are no independent newspapers or radio and TV stations (Donkers and Nijhuis 1996, 57-59). People are not used to critique the government. Since the opposition is kept in control and is so small, there is almost no education on critical skills ongoing in the country.

Involvement or the implications of democratic citizenship, political skills and critical skills are really important for people to get a sense of democracy. If people have no idea what they are expected to do or how to argue for their cause, it will be really hard for them to imagine what a democracy would be like. If you have never heard any critique on the government which has been in power for years, why should you doubt their decisions and ask for opposition or any political influence. This is especially true for the younger generation of the country, who have never experienced any form of democracy (Steinberg 2009). When they cannot imagine what it would be like, it is also hard to believe in it and to fight for it. Because the civil society is kept in check by the regime it is difficult for the civil society to fulfil the educational roles. All of them are only fulfilled on a minimal level, but not enough to have any significant influence on political processes in the country. The biggest problem is the limited ability to reach people.

5.4 Communicative roles

The second subgroup of roles that came forward when studying the theories of the roles of civil society is the communicative roles. A distinction is made between providing channels of communication and providing platforms for open debate. The first role is to facilitate communication between the citizens and the state institutions. As we have seen there is no independent media in Burma (Donkers and Nijhuis 1996, 57-59). In free societies the media is the most important source of communication between the citizens and the state. But there are other ways to create communication between the state institutions and the people. There

are several examples in Burma of organisations that work with citizens and state institutions at the same time. For example organisations who work on environmental issues. They teach people how to take care of their surroundings; not to take down all trees in order to protect nature and not disturb the water balance. At the same time these organisations cooperate with state institutions or discuss certain environmental problems with the regime. There are for example, as mentioned before, seminars where water management is discussed between authorities and organisations that focus on environmental issues (Burma Centre Netherlands 2009b). The same goes for organisations that work on health care and poverty alleviation. These organisations talk to both the government representatives and the citizens about similar issues. That way they can present the ideas of the citizens when talking to the authorities. And teach the citizens on the views and ideas of the authorities. Of course such channels of communication are less open and have a much smaller scope than communication through independent media. But it is very important that these channels of communication still exist, given the lack of independent media. They help the citizens to get a better idea of the policies of the government. And the authorities to a certain extent know how the citizens that are involved with the work of these organisations think about the policies that are used. We can conclude that these organisations provide the input that is lacking from the existing dependent media. In chapter 2 the downside of such input is also discussed. When there is too much input it is possible that the government cannot handle all the pressure that is put on them. But because there is very little input in Burma, this will not be the case.

Civil society organisations that have contacts with foreign organisations also fulfil the role of channels of communication. They provide information on the decisions from the government to their foreign colleagues in order to raise more attention for the situation in Burma on the international level. That way they also try to develop pressure on the regime from outside the country, or even from other countries or regional and international organisations. Underground contacts are extremely important for the outside world to have any reliable information on the situation in Burma. The media that do exist in Burma are in the hands of the junta and will therefore not be reliable when it comes to information on sensitive issues. When the regime for example decides to take on military action against a certain minority group or rebel army, the number of victims that is reported by the regime is often much lower than the number of victims that is reported by the ethnic organisations or political parties. Political parties are sometimes even able to talk directly to foreign representatives. Especially the NLD has managed to arrange talks with representatives from the UN ,the US and the EU.

The second communicative role is the creation of platforms for open debate. The idea is that in civil society organisations people come together to discuss community issues. What

we see in Burma is that there are platforms for debate within organisations. But these platforms are very much restricted and highly sensitive issues will not be discussed out in the open. The intelligence service has infiltrated many organisations and people are aware of that (Donkers and Nijhuis 1996, 56). For that reason they will not discuss sensitive issues unless they are among people they know really well, for example among their families (ibid., 46). Even in civil society organisations it is really difficult to trust each other. The conclusion is therefore that there are no platforms for open debate in Burma. It is too dangerous to discuss sensitive issues and everybody is afraid of the consequences of such conversations.

There are only very few channels of communication between citizens and the regime. The existing channels of communication also have a very little scope. And there are no open platforms for debate on the political sensitive issues. In chapter 2 we have seen that these communicative roles are key to any political process and especially for creating democratisation processes in authoritarian countries. The fact that these roles cannot be fulfilled by the Burmese civil society is an important weakness of the civil society. The scope of the communication between state institutions and citizens is too small to make a real difference.

5.5 Countervailing roles

The third subgroup of roles the civil society can fulfil is the countervailing roles. The first of these countervailing roles that is discussed in chapter 2 is the representation role. A civil society organisation can represent certain groups of people, especially when that organisation has members among the public. As we have seen with the educational roles, there are not so many organisations in the Burmese civil society that actually have members. The most obvious representation function is fulfilled by the political parties and ethnic organisations. They represent a part of society and their interests. But in Burma it is quite dangerous to be a member of an oppositional party or ethnic organisation. Therefore they don't have many members, with the consequence that these parties and organisations officially only represent a small part of society. This can be used against them when they try to convince the regime of certain ideas. But at the same time, the regime also knows that the support for some of these oppositional parties is much bigger. The 1990 elections showed a huge amount of support among the citizens of Burma for the NLD, the DPNS and parties representing the larger minority groups. Aung San Suu Kyi is still a hero for many people inside and outside Burma. The regime is aware of this huge support. That is shown by the way she is treated; as enemy number one. But it is also shown by the fact that her party is still legally working in Burma. The regime understands that prohibiting this party would bring too much unrest. Political parties are not the only organisations that fulfil the representation

function. Although some welfare organisations may not have members, they do have extensive contact with the people in Burma. The opinions and visions of these people are incorporated in the vision of these organisations. When these associations cooperate with the regime or have meetings with state representatives, the opinions of the citizens are to a certain extent communicated by these associations. So even without having members an organisation is able to represent the parts of society it has extensive contacts with.

The second countervailing role is the role of giving resistance to the government on particular issues or decisions. This can be done by writing articles and publishing them on websites, organising protests, riots or even call for a revolution. Besides these actions on national level, civil society organisations also try to influence the international level. They have contacts with foreign organisations, countries and regional and international organisations. They are all contacted in order to create more pressure on the regime. The Burmese civil society organisations can explain the situation in Burma best and can also explain their ideas about sanctions or reactions from the international level. Another way international civil society organisations try to influence the situation in Burma is by contacting international companies that are located in Burma or are investing in the country. In the past we have seen that there has been quite some resistance to the policies of the regime. The biggest demonstrations have taken place in 1988, 1991 and recently also in 2007. These demonstrations were mostly organised by political parties and there was also great support from the Buddhist monks and ethnic organisations. Several organisations, especially those connected to the minority groups, have even taken on military means to fight the regime. From the international level there has also been quite some pressure on the junta to change their policies. The civil society in Burma has proven able to give strong resistance to the regime. And the regime is also very aware of that. The way they handle civil society organisations recognises the strength of the civil society on this point. There have been very harsh responses to these moments of unrest in the past. As mentioned earlier, the regime tries to control the Buddhist monks by keeping the *sangha* under control (Hulst 2006, 25). All NGOs that want to work in Burma have to register at the Ministry of Home Affairs (ibid., 67-68). Several political parties have been prohibited to continue their work in Burma. And ethnic organisations have been fought and punished for their resistance against the regime. Several cease-fire agreements have been signed with these ethnic organisations (Rotberg 1998, 4). But even with all these measures, the regime has not been able to stop the demonstrations and riots in the country. Obviously giving resistance to the regime is one of the strengths of the civil society in Burma. When the civil society in a country is strong enough, it can even create a balance of power (White 2004, 13). Although we have to conclude that this balance of power is still very much off in Burma.

The last countervailing role is the role of watchdog for state institutions. Civil society organisations can fulfil this role by watching the government's decisions closely and report on wrong illegal decisions or even fight them in court. The checks and balances make chances smaller that the government will take decisions that are illegal or not supported by any group in society (ibid., 14). In an authoritarian country like Burma these checks and balances mean that the civil society will act immediately when they find out that the regime is about to take an illegal step that will have a huge negative effect on the people in the country. This way the regime is checked and its power is balanced because the regime is absolutely alert when it comes to moments of unrest in the country, as we have seen in the past. In Burma we see that the regime only focuses on one question. Will this decision bring so much unrest that it can end up in mass demonstrations and riots again? If it is not supported by the people of Burma, but they won't go to the streets to fight the decision, it is likely this decision will be taken anyway by the regime. The civil society in Burma is watching the decisions of the regime very closely and they are also discussed. Especially by organisations that are not based in the country itself. Most of this discussion will not reach the people in Burma. But such discussions will reach international actors that can have major influence on the situation in the country. Therefore the regime will notice such discussions. The junta is not so much influenced by the reactions of the Burmese civil society, but the civil society does fulfil the role of watchdog.

The civil society in Burma is quite strong in fulfilling the countervailing roles. Political parties and ethnic groups represent quite a number of people in the country. This is also indirectly recognised by the regime. The strongest asset of the civil society is the resistance they have been able to give. The regime is also very much aware of that. In this way the civil society actors try to create a balance of power. But that balance is still very much off in Burma. Still a lot of development is needed in order to call this balance a healthy balance that fits a democratic country. The civil society also watches the regime closely and tries to fight illegal decisions. At this moment the regime is only concerned about keeping the people calm and not so much on the content of the critique that is given on their decisions. But the fact is that the role of watchdog is fulfilled. As we have seen, the fulfilment of these countervailing roles is not enough to initiate a democratisation process. When, maybe over time, a democratisation process is ongoing that is started by the regime, these roles could become even more important as they are right now. In such a process the regime will become much more sensitive to comments and critique. And when this democratisation process is not started by the regime, the fulfilment of the role of watchdog can be important because of the pressure that can be built by the civil society by watching the regime closely. The international community is also influenced by the information published by the civil society on

the decisions that are taken by the Burmese regime. This has developed in quite some pressure on the regime to start the democratisation process.

5.6 Cooperative roles

Civil society can also cooperate with state institutions in order to make the state function better and serve democracy. These roles of civil society are called cooperative roles. The first of these cooperative roles is the role of being a subsidiary to the state institutions. In such a situation civil society organisations work together with state institutions to make sure all tasks of the state are being fulfilled. The idea behind this cooperation is that the state functions better and people get more confidence in the state. This confidence is important in new democracies, where the state still has to win people's trust. In Burma we see that civil society organisations indeed work as a subsidiary for the state institutions. There are several NGOs that work in remote areas that the state institutions do not reach. It is often also the case in Burma that the central state is not interested in these remote areas, since these are the areas where the minority groups live. The state is not interested in making their lives better, since these minority groups are still seen as one of the biggest threats to the country (Hulst 2006, 14). The result in the case of Burma is therefore not as positive as is expected by the theory. The people don't get more confidence in the state institutions, because they know how the junta feels about the minority groups. They have had and still have many bad experiences with the authorities of the country. And there is no democratic state or any process towards such a situation. The state is not planning to take over the tasks fulfilled by the NGOs. And the state is profiting from this situation. Because civil society organisations take over certain tasks from the regime, they have more budget left to spend on the military apparatus. And the civil society organisations also help them to keep dissatisfaction down (Steinberg 2001, 118-119). If the tasks that are now fulfilled by the NGOs would not be fulfilled at all, there would be much more dissatisfaction among the people. People will get angrier when there is no health care or food at all. Compared to the situation where they don't get these services from the state, but only from civil society organisations.

The other cooperative role is to take over the coordination of some projects. This means that big projects or operations, involving both the state and civil society groups, are coordinated by civil society organisations and not by state institutions. We have not seen such a role of civil society organisations in Burma. The most recent and important example of such a large scale project is the relief aid and reconstruction of the country after large parts of Burma were severely hit by cyclone Nargis in May 2008. The government of Burma held very strict control over this operation. It initially refused help from foreign countries. This made it possible for many local civil society organisations to take on an important role in providing first aid. Later on more foreign aid was allowed. The coordination of this operation

was carried out by the government of Burma in cooperation with the UN and ASEAN, which was a very unique cooperation (CCPS 2009, 17). There was a lot of cooperation between the civil society and the regime in Burma during the aftermath of Nargis, but the coordination was clearly in the hands of the regime.

The ways the cooperative roles can be taken on by the civil society in Burma are in line with the controlling policies of the regime. The strategy towards the civil society seems to be that there is cooperation when the regime can profit from this situation. But the regime is in control and wants to keep that control. It is unrealistic to expect that the regime is ready to give away some control by letting civil society organisations take on the coordination of big and important projects in the country. These policies make it really difficult for the civil society to change things in Burma. But because of the cooperation, they may be able to have some influence. And this cooperation gives them a chance to learn about the ideas of the regime. This can serve other roles of the civil society, like communication and countervailing roles. But the cooperation can also bring along difficult dilemmas for the civil society organisations. As we have seen with the subsidiary role, it seems that the state is profiting from the situation where they don't have to put any effort in service delivery to remote areas. They profit by having more budget to spend on the army, and by the fact that the people in these areas will be more satisfied than in the situation where there would be no service delivery at all. But it is also understandable that the NGOs still choose to help these people. Because they also know that the state will not help them when the NGOs would leave.

5.7 Democracy building role

The last subgroup of roles a civil society can have in a democratisation process is the democracy building role. This role is about influencing the rules of the political game, in both a pragmatic and normative way. This role is also called the constitutive role. In Burma a new constitution has been introduced in 2008. The process of writing this new constitution could have been an excellent opportunity to fulfil the constitutive role. After the 1990 elections the regime decided not to honour the outcome and stay in power. The official statement was that the elections were held to create a convention for writing the new constitution. This convention was formed in 1993, but it was not until 2003 that the first steps were taken. In that year the regime introduced a seven-step roadmap towards a more democratic society and political system. The composition of the convention was not in accordance with the outcome of the 1990 elections. There was very little room for the oppositional parties. That implies a lack of representation of the civil society in this convention. The overwhelming majority of the people that took part in this convention were pro-government people. That can also be seen by the result, the constitution that was presented in 2008. The regime has

managed to write a constitution that guarantees them enough power to stay in control. 25% of the seats of both houses of parliament are rewarded to the defence personnel. And 25% of the seats is also the percentage needed to block an amendment to the constitution.

The regime was afraid to have too much democratic influence in the convention that wrote the new constitution. Therefore they decided to manipulate the process of assembling the convention, in order to make sure the democratic opposition would have very little influence on the new constitution. The result is that in both a pragmatic and a normative sense, the civil society has not been able to play its constitutive role. Not in a pragmatic sense because they have not been able to change to exact rules of the political system, for example how many seats the parliament has. And there was no influence in a normative way because the civil society has not been able to introduce important democratic norms and values into the political system. It is very unlikely that a new constitution will be written in the coming decade. Therefore hopes of fulfilling this role in the near future are lost.

5.8 Conclusion

This chapter shows that some of the roles a civil society can have in political processes, are actually being fulfilled by the Burmese civil society. At the same time we have seen that there is no room to fulfil the other roles. In table 2 shown below, the overall outcome of this analysis is shown. The roles that are indicated as 'fulfilled' are the roles in which the civil society actually has managed to influence political processes. Some of the roles are only fulfilled in such a minimal way that it is questionable if the influence on political processes will be very substantial. A good example are the educational roles. Because of the very limited reach the few organisations with members have, the educational roles are only partly fulfilled. These roles have been ticked as 'partly fulfilled'. The last category is made up by the roles that are not fulfilled at all by the Burmese civil society. These boxes have been ticked as 'not fulfilled'.

Table 2. Roles fulfilled by the Burmese civil society

Educational roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information • Democratic citizenship • Political skills • Critical skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partly fulfilled • Partly fulfilled • Partly fulfilled • Partly fulfilled
Communicative roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Channels of communication • Platform for open debate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partly fulfilled • Not fulfilled
Countervailing roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fulfilled

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resistance • Watchdog 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fulfilled • Fulfilled
Cooperative roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subsidiary • Coordination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fulfilled • Not fulfilled
Democracy building role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constitutive role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not fulfilled

We see that of the twelve roles identified in the theoretical framework of this research, only four are totally fulfilled by the Burmese civil society, while five roles are partly fulfilled. The other three roles are not fulfilled at all. This shows the overwhelming control the Burmese regime holds over the civil society. The civil society is able to take on some important tasks, but is also restricted in many ways. The tasks that are not fulfilled by the civil society in Burma are all tasks that would give the civil society too much influence according to the regime. The regime desperately tries to keep control of the political processes ongoing in the country. That is clearly shown by these results. What that means for the chances of starting a democratisation process in Burma is discussed in the next chapter.

Part 4. Conclusion

Chapter 6. Conclusion

Part 3 of this master thesis has shown us that we cannot speak of a democratisation process in Burma. It has also shown that the civil society in Burma is able to only decently fulfil four of the twelve indicated roles. In this concluding part of the research the gathered information and performed analysis are used to answer the research question. Policy implications and ideas for further research are also presented.

6.1 Answering the research question

In the very first chapter of this master thesis the research goals were presented. The theoretical goal was to test and possibly adapt theories on the role of the civil society in democratisation processes. Which of the explored theories fit the situation of Burma? This was the theoretical goal of this research. The empirical second goal was the exploration of the case of Burma. Does the civil society play an important role in creating or advancing a democratisation process? These research goals resulted in the following research question: *To what extent and in what way are civil society actors able to create or advance a democratisation process in Burma and what does this tell us about the relevance of the scientific theories used in this extreme real world case?*

Strengths and weaknesses

The current developments in Burma seem positive at first glance. The regime has introduced a new course that seems to be aiming for more democracy in the country. And the civil society is expanding in the last couple of years. But when studying the results of these developments more closely the situation shows to be less positive. The junta claims it wants to make the country more democratic and open, but the new constitution and the policies of the regime show the real ideal. And that ideal still is to hold as much control over the country as possible. In part three of this research the unavoidable conclusion was that there is no democratisation process ongoing in Burma. The regime tries to convince people of their good intentions, but their real, and less democratic, intentions still show clearly. It seems that they try to diminish the pressure that is put on the country in the international arena. By starting this process they hope to convince the international community of the legitimacy of their power (TACDB 2010). This also means that it would be up to the civil society to create a democratisation process. As we have seen in chapter 5 of this research, the civil society in Burma is able to only fulfil four out of the twelve examined roles. These roles are: representing parts of society, resistance against the regime, being a watchdog over the decisions that are being taken and being a subsidiary to the state in providing social services

to the people of Burma. The roles that are partly fulfilled by the Burmese civil society are: providing citizens with information on the political system and educating people in democratic citizenship, political skills and critical skills. The roles that the civil society actors cannot fulfil are all roles that would take away too much control from the regime. The only exceptions are the countervailing roles. Representing large parts of society and resisting the power of the junta are the strongest assets of the Burmese civil society. These strengths are also recognised by the regime, although with reluctance. The fact that these important roles are fulfilled by the Burmese civil society is mainly a result of the elections in 1990. That was the first time the civil society got the chance to expand and gain strength in a long period of time. Therefore this opportunity was used very extensively. The most important happening at that time was the decision of Aung San Suu Kyi to participate in the elections. She immediately got the attention of many inside and also outside the country. The fact that she won the elections and one year later received the Nobel Peace Prize was a setback for the regime. They tried very hard to minimise the role of the civil society as much as possible. But because of the pressure developed in the international arena due to the fame of Aung San Suu Kyi, the regime's room to manoeuvre was suddenly diminished. They have done everything that was possible to minimise the role of the civil society after this revival of civil society actors. Many organisations were prohibited and Aung San Suu Kyi is locked up in her own home. But the civil society held on to these strengths of representation and resistance and succeeded to be strong in fulfilling the countervailing roles up to this day. It is not surprising that the countervailing roles are the strongest assets of the Burmese civil society. In authoritarian countries the room of the civil society is usually highly restricted, something we have also seen in Burma. This means that the only ways to fight for your own interests and ideas is to go to the streets and protest and to try to convince international powerful actors to support your fight and put pressure on the regime. If the government is not willing to listen to the civil society groups, they will have to use other methods than peaceful debate. Creating unrest is an effective method because every government wants peace and tranquillity in their country. They will have to react to any form of unrest, especially when it reaches the level of nationwide protest. In Burma the junta decided to strike back hard on the demonstrators. But the countervailing roles of the civil society have been established by these moments of unrest. This is where their power lies. On the international level we have also seen that the Burmese civil society has managed to arrange quite some support for their struggle for more democracy. Many countries have been involved in this conflict by asking the junta to free political prisoners, introduce a more democratic system and talk to the democratic opposition. The UN and the ASEAN are also important actors on the international level that have had and still have influence on the situation in Burma. The international civil society has organised itself to convince international companies not to invest in Burma, ask

local political leaders not to have any contacts with the junta and ask the attention of all people around the world for the severe situation in the country. All of these developments are spin-offs of the countervailing roles the Burmese civil society is able to fulfil. They have proved to be very valuable in the development of the policies of the junta, since it is expected that pressure from the international community has led to some changes, like the introduction of the seven-step 'roadmap' to more democracy. Even though we have seen that this is nothing more than a fake process, we see that international pressure has its effects on the regime.

Creating a democratisation process

The roles that can be fulfilled by the civil society do not provide them with enough influence on the political processes in the country to change things. It shows that the regime wants to hold the political processes in its own hands. Therefore we also have to conclude that with only this little influence and these roles to fulfil, the civil society of Burma will not be able to create a democratisation process on its own at the moment. Inside Burma the regime has everything under its control. This situation can be explained because of several factors. First of all, the bond between the citizens and the state institutions is very weak. As we have seen, the state is not relying on income from taxation, but from other sources of income (mostly those received from trade in natural resources). The consequence is that the state is not sensitive to demands from the society. As long as people are kept down and the situation is under control, the government is not interested in critique from the civil society. The other consequence is that by not building the economy on the talents of people, no real middle class has been able to develop in Burma. This has consequences for the development of the civil society, since the middle class is usually the basis of the civil society. This is where usually the most supporters for democracy are found, as explained earlier. To sum up; the regime does not listen to the content of the critique and it is not easy to represent the ideas of the citizens when the basis of the civil society, the middle class, is almost nonexistent.

The second important factor of influence on the current situation is the support the junta receives from China. China is one of the two leading powers in the world today. As long as the regime is supported by such a powerful nation that can support the country both politically and economically, it is very unlikely that things will change. Any sanction that is imposed by other (powerful) countries is compensated by support from the Chinese government. The Chinese businesses are more than willing to step into the gap the economic sanctions from the US and the EU leave behind. And the political support from the Chinese government compensates the political position the West is taking. As long as China supports the country, no resolutions against the Burmese junta will be approved in the UN Security Council. But that does not mean that the international pressure from countries,

regional and international organisations and the international civil society does not influence the situation at all. Some important results have been accomplished by this pressure, for example the legalisation of the NLD and the seven-step 'roadmap'. This last development is even said to be pushed by China, because this country is interested in keeping the situation in Burma stable. As long as people would be under the impression that the junta has good intentions and their power is legitimate, the situation will be stable and controllable (TACDB 2010). Another important result from this international pressure is that the policies of several important international actors are changing. The ASEAN countries are slowly developing a more critical approach towards the junta. Those are positive developments for democratisation in Burma. And therefore building more international pressure could be a way to come closer to democratisation. The civil society is able to fulfil their countervailing roles and influencing the international opinion and reactions is a very important part of these roles. The civil society should try to focus more on this strength.

In order to enforce a democratisation process in Burma, several important factors will have to come together. International pressure has to rise from all sides. If the international community will be able to speak more with one voice, the influence on the regime will be huge. The Burmese civil society is able to influence the international position on Burma and this should be seen as a chance to make changes in the country. This pressure will also bring along consequences for the economic situation in the country. If countries only allow their businesses to invest in and trade with Burma under certain favourable conditions for the local people or the civil society, the regime is forced to change its economic management. When imposing economic sanctions it is important to realise that without any economic development the country will not succeed in making any progress on the political side. Therefore more clever sanctions are needed. A good example of such sanctions is the policy of the World Bank in Chad. Chad was required to adopt a oil revenue management law and starting capacity-building projects in order to still receive support from the World Bank. When the regime introduced a law which arranged more access to profits from oil projects in the country for the government, the World Bank decided to freeze the bank account that was used by the government to collect oil revenues (BBC News 2006). One of the reasons for the junta to start a fake democratisation process is because they want to win over the hearts and minds of the international community. The international companies are one of the most important targets of this strategy (TACDB 2010). Here we see that the regime in Burma is likely to be sensitive to smart economic sanctions. When the junta would not be able to rely so much on the natural resources, it would be forced to work together with the people and therefore also listen better to the demands of the people. This is when a real Burmese middle class can develop, which would probably lead to a larger and stronger civil society. When the regime is more dependent on the people of the country in order to stay in power and cope

with economic challenges and the civil society is able to develop better, than the chances for a democratisation process are much bigger. Because the development of the economy is so important to the developments that can be expected in Burma, the Burmese civil society should focus more on talking to international businesses and companies that are currently working in and trading with the regime in Burma.

Theoretical implications

When we go back to the roles the civil society can fulfil, we can see that the case of Burma has taught us that the combination of all the indicated roles is most important. The civil society in Burma can fulfil some tasks, but not all of them. Because of their lack of freedom only the very minimal roles, except for the countervailing roles, can be fulfilled. And that is not enough. Even in the situation where the civil society is able to fulfil the roles of representation and resistance rather strongly, it is not enough. The fulfilment of all these roles is only possible when the relationship between society and the state changes. The development of the Burmese economy and the development of the approaches from international actors are crucial. Only when the state relies more on the people, and a real middle class is able to develop, the civil society will be able to fulfil more roles. The state will also need the civil society much more. When the economy of the state relies on the talents of the people, the ideas of the people become much more important. Then the civil society has to step in and fulfil roles like education in political and critical skills and providing channels of communication.

Reflecting on the theoretical approaches that have been introduced in part 1 of this research, we see that all schools of thought chose a different approach. The classical liberal school focuses on the independence of the civil society from the state institutions. The role of politics should be reduced in order for the civil society to flourish. The civil society helps people to enjoy their individual freedom and protects them from unwanted interference from the state. The strength of this school of thought in explaining the case of Burma lies within the idea of reducing the role of the state, or rather enlarging the role of the people. In Burma the state has too much control over society. When this control would be diminished over both the economy and as a result over the civil society, then the situation would be totally different. In such a situation the state would need the civil society and therefore give them more room to fulfil their roles. The weakness of this approach in the case of Burma is that it only focuses on protection from intrusion of the state and not on the bond between the citizens and the state. If there is no bond on the economic terrain, there will also be no bond on the political terrain. Then the state does not need the civil society and is therefore able to keep as much control as is most comfortable.

The liberal egalitarian school of thought wants the state to regulate the civil society in order to eliminate the negative results of the capitalist nature of the civil society. Only in this way equal access and opportunities to have influence are created for all people. This will lead to more emancipation and participation. The strength of this approach lies within the idea of emancipation and participation. Only when all people are able to participate in the society, which also means in the economy, the civil society will be able to function best. Because then a fair and balanced relationship will develop between society and the state. In Burma the civil society is regulated by the state, in a very extreme matter. Unfortunately does this school of thought not focus on the question what happens when the regulation is too strong and only works in one way. The civil society in Burma is not able to influence the state institutions. This is because the state is not dependent on the civil society to function. When this dependence would be present the regulation would become two-sided and automatically also less strong. The regulation from the state on the civil society cannot be too strong in a democracy, because the state is also dependent on the functioning of the civil society. Without decent input from the civil society, it will not be able to function well.

The critical theorists' school of thought focuses on debate and human interaction. The centre of political processes is public communication and equal participation in this communication. Rational interaction or communicative rationality, as Habermas calls it, is the central experience of political life. Only broad-based debate can define the public interest, not dictates from the government or a part of society. It is true that there is no effective public debate and communication between the state and the society. And it is also true that this is one of the important elements that are missing. But the theory is not able to explain why this rational interaction is missing. The explanation of too much neo-liberal policies does not fit the situation in Burma. The rational interaction with equal participation is missing, because there is no bond between the state and the civil society. The state is not dependent on the civil society to function.

All three schools of thought have shown to be valuable in explaining the situation in Burma. But none of these approaches can explain the whole situation. The key explanation in the case of Burma lies within the idea of the bond between the society and the state. Interdependence is needed in order to make a democracy function. And that is what is missing in Burma. This situation is largely caused by the way the country is managed economically. And the support the country receives from China on their current policies does not help to change this situation. It can therefore be concluded that none of the schools of thought are able to explain the case of Burma in total. All have their strengths and all have their weaknesses. In short, all should focus more on the bond, or social contract, between state and society in order to explain this particular case. It is not possible to say anything about the overall strength of these theories based on this single research. But it was not the

purpose of this research to make statements about the overall value of these schools of thought.

6.2 Policy implications

As this research shows, the civil society in Burma is in a really difficult position. The current situation is largely caused by the way the country is economically managed. Without an economic bond between the citizens and the state, the state will have an unequal amount of power. As soon as the people can contribute more to the economic situation of the country the bond between civil society and the state will become stronger. It is really difficult for the civil society to change this situation. But when they are aware of the mechanisms that are contributing to this situation, they could try to focus on eliminating these mechanisms. Strategies to convince businesses to stop investing in the country would be a first good step. And countries that are trading with the regime are also good targets in changing the situation. Economic sanctions are a good way to force the regime to change their policies, but they should be focussed on helping the local population and civil society and not on stopping all economic development of the country. International pressure has proven to be successful to push the regime to the first little steps towards different policies. At the same time it is important for the civil society to keep using all the room they have. Especially now new elections are on the way and civil society will possibly get a new chance to expand. All ways that they can make the regime listen to their demands are one step closer to more interdependence. This can be done by all the roles discussed in this research, from countervailing roles to cooperative roles.

The strategies indicated for the Burmese civil society are also important for the international civil society as well as for countries and regional and international organisations. As we have seen, they have also been successful in putting pressure on the regime in Burma. Another important role for these international actors is to keep the attention on situation in Burma. The conflicts in the country are unknown, forgotten or denied by many people. The very first step to make a change is to create awareness. International attention is therefore the important very first step to make a change.

6.3 Suggestions for further research

To follow up on the previous paragraph, my first suggestion on further research is on the lack of research that is done on Burma. On the one hand it is understandable that many people hesitate taking on such research since it is really difficult to get good information on the situation in the country. But on the other hand, it is for a reason that the country is so closed and sealed from the outside world. And that reason is the military dictatorship that wants to stay in power. The less influence there is from the outside, the less pressure there will be on

the regime. In order to discourage the regime, international research is of great importance. More attention should be given to such 'forgotten' countries like Burma. Many people that are not involved in research on security and development issues have no idea what is going on in Burma. I think this research shows that with a little more effort, enough good information is available. And experts are willing to talk to you as long as you put enough energy in finding the right people and contacting them.

We all know that Burma is not the only country that copes with a dictatorial regime. And it is also not the only country that seems to be unknown, forgotten or denied by the international arena and international media. Although it has to be concluded that in the last decade more attention has been given to the situation because of Aung San Suu Kyi and her supporters. But still it is not enough to stop the regime. And not enough to make everybody aware of what is going on in this country. There are cases that have many similarities with the case of Burma, especially in the Middle East and Northern Africa. The civil societies in Syria and Iran for example are involved in a similar fight against the repression from the state institutions. Research in which such cases are compared could lead to useful results. Chances are that the civil society organisations could learn from each other. And lessons could be shared between them.

To complement this research, it would be possible to interview representatives of civil society actors and ordinary citizens of Burma. Their views on the situation could be important in order to complete the picture. The inside information that could be provided in such interviews could possibly lead to more detailed suggestions on policy implications. Unfortunately the resources in time and money of this research did not stretch far enough to accomplish that.

I hope that this research is a useful contribution to the research that already has been done on the situation in Burma and that it creates awareness of the severe situation in Burma among the people that have read this Masterthesis.

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