

Raising Their Voices: Women's Mobilization in Nepal's Conflict and Transition

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Abstract

When the peace talks were initiated in Nepal in 2006, between the Seven Party Alliance and the Maoists after the decade long People's War (1996-2006), women were excluded from the peace processes, despite their significant contributions in bringing the two conflicting parties to the peace negotiations. As had been the case in many conflict countries around the world, women were excluded from peace talks and decision-making procedures and pushed back into traditional gender hierarchies. Unlike in many other post-conflict societies, women in Nepal refused to be pushed back and excluded by mobilizing themselves and protesting strongly through e.g. rallies and campaigns. I examine what factors influenced women's movements' active engagement in the peace process and in achieving policy changes in the aftermath of conflict, such as a quota of 33% women representation in the Constituent Assembly. The empirical findings, based on semi-structured interviews with women leaders, NGO-leaders, women activists and female parliamentarians, suggest that there had been three important preconditions to women's active mobilization during the peace process: 1) women's organization and activism prior to conflict, 2) committed and conscious women leaders, and 3) women's networks and unity on security related issues. These networks cut across societal divisions and the women's movement actively engaged with key policymakers and state stakeholders, which became a critical part of women's repertoire of actions in contentious politics. Nepal's women's movement demonstrates several generalizable characteristics of a strong social movement which I claim enabled women to overcome post-conflict challenges.

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धन्यवाद

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Introduction

*“Are you not ashamed of this? Look around and see who is sitting around the peace table, only men?
Are you not ashamed of yourselves?”*

A woman inquiring while knocking her fist on the table, intruding a High Level Task Force meeting composed of 12-15 men, when the peace process had been initiated in December 2006, in Nepal (from an informal talk).

Although women had been heavily contributing in bringing the Maoists and government to the peace table in Nepal, they were themselves being excluded from the peace talks as well as the peace process. Once again, as observed repeatedly in many other parts of the world's conflicts, such as in El Salvador, Mozambique, Cambodia, Sri Lanka and many more, women were absent in the formal peace talks and excluded from the political and decision-making processes in the aftermath of conflict. However, women in Nepal refused to be pushed back and silenced. Women in Nepal raised their voices, mobilized themselves, went out on the streets, rallied, banged on doors, and demanded what constitutes essentially their human right, namely, representation in the peace process and decision-making processes.

Based upon the Nepali women's movement's collective efforts, a legal reform and provision ensuring 33% women representation in the Constituent Assembly was included in Nepal's Interim-Constitution. It was a remarkable achievement for the aftermath of conflict. From the outside, the achievement seemed unique in a post-conflict society, in a country where patriarchy and inequality seemed to prevail. Thus, I traveled to Nepal to try to find an answer on what had foregone the Nepali women's movement's exceptional achievement. How had women gone about it? How come that in Nepal women had achieved such a remarkable change, when in many other countries women remained excluded from the peace processes? Part of the answer I came to realize very soon upon my arrival in Kathmandu; the women's movement in Nepal is neither a conflict nor a post-conflict story. Rather it is a story about women wanting to achieve change and an equal society. It is not merely about raising voices for the sake of it; it was, and it is, about women fighting for the equal value of every human being. The inclusion in the peace

process was in many ways just another day of work for the women's movement in Nepal. As I learnt, the women's movement in Nepal had achieved many remarkable legal reforms before, during and after conflict such as reforming the domestic violence bill, women's citizenship rights, enhanced property rights (Abdela 2011), in the light of this, the peace process seemed to just be one achievement out of several.

Women Getting to the Peace Table in Nepal

The Himalayan Kingdom of Nepal, a little landlocked country known to the outside world for its good trekking, mysticism and budget traveling, captured the world's attention in the 1990's when the news reached the international community about the Maoist insurgency or People's War as called by the Maoists themselves. The country had just regained democracy when it entered into what seemed to be never ending political instability. Within only two decades the people of Nepal experienced several government changes and a decade long armed conflict that left more than 14 000 people dead and more than 200 000 people displaced (Ghimire 2010). The Maoist insurgency, had been peasant based and came to rage through the country, especially the remote Mid-western hills. It was a conflict responding to inequalities, the feudal system, gender and caste based discrimination. During the conflict, women from rural areas, especially young women were drawn to join the Maoists for liberation from gender discrimination. It is estimated that in the Maoist insurgency more than 40% of combatants were women (Abdela 2011; Ghimire 2010). Many women had held leadership positions as Cadres (highest leaders in the Maoists) being in the forefront of the insurgency. Despite the Maoists gendered agenda, despite women's inclusion in the armed conflict; women were excluded from peace talks. However, unlike in many other post-conflict societies, the women's movement responded and had significant influence during the peace process and beyond. In this thesis, I aim to understand what factors made women mobilize and effectively bring about changes in the aftermath of conflict. Although the influence of the women's movement is multi-dimensions, I focus exclusively on the political

gains and the political advocacy of inclusion in the peace process by the women's movement in Nepal.

Women, Gender and Conflict Literature meets Social Movement Theory

As I will demonstrate in this thesis, several of the generalizable characteristics of an effective social movement are demonstrated in Nepal's women's movement which are part of the significant explanatory features for women's strong persistence on inclusion in the peace process. My theoretical contribution draws from two different sets of literature with the aim to bring about a brief dialogue from readings between women, gender and conflict literature and the social movement theory, specifically relating to women's movements. The gender and conflict literature is broad, and forms part of the field of Women, Peace and Security Studies, an emerging field in academia (Anderlini 2007). I exclusively depart from the assumptions of writings specifically relating to women's political gains, agency and mobilization for peace e.g.(Anderlini 2007; Rehn and Sirleaf 2002; Moser and Clark 2001; Kumar 2001; Meintjes, Turshen, and Pillay 2001). The common assumption between these and the social peace movement theory is the post-war entrenchment of women, i.e. women being pushed back to their traditional roles, giving up the political gains made during the conflict and peace movements being short-lived in the aftermath of conflict.

Arguably, conflict provides intended and unintended structural opportunities where women may experience various , political, social and economic gains which often are lost in the aftermath of conflict when women tend to be pushed back to the kitchens (Kumar 2001; Manchanda 2001; Meintjes 2001). One of the opportunities where women potentially are empowered is when men are absent which leads women to take on increased public responsibility (Kumar 2001). As a result of these structural opportunities, women take leadership roles and form women's groups and local groups in communities for grassroots peace-building and stability (Meintjes, Turshen, and Pillay 2001). Women often become active agents in their communities

and are vital for peacebuilding during conflict. With regards to the political gains, many women enter the public sphere and gain increased public responsibilities (Kumar 2001).

However, several case studies (e.g. Cambodia, Guatemala, Sri Lanka, and Bosnia and Herzegovina) have shown that in the aftermath women lose their agency and tend to go back to their traditional roles (Kumar 2001). The activism that emerges during conflict decreases significantly to almost entirely in many cases. Mostly, this is demonstrated by the women being absent in peace talks and decision-making processes, e.g. representation in parliament which remains insignificant to very low in these cases. As Meintjes (2001) points out, following cessation of hostilities, it is male belligerent leaders who meet for peace talks where women usually are absent. Although, due to their increased engagement during the conflict women should be expected to participate, they are not unless they are organized prior the peace process (Meintjes 2001). In order for women not to be side lined during the peace process, they need to push a women's agenda.

Clearly, reasons for women's regression in agency in post-conflict are various, and complex as well as context-dependent. For instance, Kumar (2001) provides three explanations for the post-war entrenchment of political gains; firstly, the psychological stress of war that creates nostalgia for traditional order after conflict; secondly, the fatigue that grips women leaders that are exhausted after having burdened both public responsibility and family responsibility; and thirdly, men seeking to do business as usual and reasserting their authority, thus this often leaves no space for women.

The difficulty is to consolidate gains that women have experienced during wartime. According to Machanda (2001), women's activism and mobilization emerging during conflict is often considered accidental and thus not long-lasting, once women's combatants demobilize they have no social practice of mobilization in the aftermath of conflict (Machanda 2001). Similarly, the social movement literature argues that peace movements are short-lived due to the

lack of the natural roots in the social environment and the rather reactive nature of it (Rucht 2003). In addition, women that may be included in the politics of peace, are often then masculinized and excluded from the women's movement as such (Meintjes 2001). The peace movements' interaction with state is commonly bound to the streets and the mass media as interaction with state usually is merely policing the mobilizations with no direct contact between the state such as government officials and policy makers and the movement. Usually, for women's movements during peace, the media is a tool that can make women's agency heard, e.g. through radio shows, street theatres and other creative ways (Rehn and Sirleaf 2002).

Specifically on women's movements¹, Baldez (2003, 2010) identifies three variables significant to women's organization, namely 1) formal and informal networks (which is also Tarrow (2011) and Tilly (2005) emphasize in the broader social movement theory), 2) direct contact to international feminist movement (also Siederis (2001) emphasizes this), and 3) the realignment from democratization processes that make an effective women's movement. Similarly, does (Rehn and Sirleaf 2002) suggest four important features required for women's successful inclusion in the peace process such as safety, resources, political space and access to decision-makers.

It is within this I aim to bring the two literatures together as they seem to be suggesting similar solutions to the problem of exclusion of women from peace processes. In this thesis, I claim that women's organization and mobilization with characteristics of strong social movements may overcome the challenges of women's mobilization in post-conflict societies. For instance, (Turshen 2001) emphasizes the women's role in putting forward demands on inclusion in political and decision-making structures. She also argues that is required more than just a quota and proportional numeric representation, rather it is required coordination and that women and

¹ As I identify as a collection of activists and organizations working towards the common cause of gender equality and raising the women's agenda. The debate about which women are represented are out of the scope of the thesis, and as I will demonstrated, women from all over the country and across sectors form part of the Nepali women's movement.

women's organizations must be aware as well as integrate women at all levels through e.g. capacity training in the grassroots level (Turshen 2001).

Generally recognized characteristics for effective social movements in the social movement theory are power of numbers (Tilly 2004; Porta and Diani 2006), disruptive tactics (Gamson 1990) collective actions/repertoire of actions (conveying beliefs, thoughts, and discourse to the public), large numbers of people mobilizing (i.e. resource mobilization), and political opportunities in which social movements rise (see e.g. (Baldez 2003; Baldez 2010; Tilly 2004; Tilly 2005; Tarrow 2011; Porta and Diani 2006). In particular, Tilly (2004) identifies three features of social movements; campaign (an organized public effort on a certain target authority), the social movement repertoire of action (employment of different political actions, such as demonstrations, rallies, petitions drives, public meetings and statements), and what he calls "WUNC", translating into worthiness (worthy the cause), unity (marching in ranks, matching costumes, singing and chanting), numbers (headcounts, signatures on petitions and filling streets) and commitment (overcoming obstacles and resisting oppression) (Tilly 2004). According to Tilly, it is the combination of the three elements, specifically the combination of the repertoire of action and WUNC that makes social movements effective.

I claim the predominant factors influencing the women's movement's *effectiveness* in the peace process and policy change during and after the peace process were internal features related to the organization of the women's movement and its combination of employment of WUNC and the repertoire of action. Specifically, the fact that mobilization began well before the conflict and peace process (Meintjes 2001) and the organizations formed networks for collaborative work which became a precedent to future policy changes. The fact that these organizations emerged before the conflict began (in a time of relative calm) suggests that they have greater institutional capacity, which increases their effectiveness (Gamson 1990; Rucht 2003). As I will demonstrate,

this has been crucially different in Nepal where the women in politics and the women's movement have had important links and collaborations to each other.

Research Design & Field Work in Nepal

In this research endeavor I used an exploratory case study design (by some scholars called heuristic case (George and Bennett 2005)) which has allowed me to develop hypotheses regarding the conditions under which women persisted on the inclusion in the peace process which developed into a mechanism of policy changes. The main advantage of the exploratory case study design has been that it served the heuristic purpose of inductively identifying explanatory factors/variables and allowing exploration of women's strong protest of exclusion from the peace talks. With these explanatory factors, I have been able to trace what influences women's strong movement in Nepal. This approach has equipped me with an understanding of why women were standing up strongly and demanding inclusion in the peace process, and continually putting out demands for an equal society and women's rights, which essentially constitute human rights.

I have employed in depth, semi-structured interviews and general participant observations which suited the inductive approach and the tracing of women's mobilization in Nepal over time. Describing certain events in-depth, and tracing the women's activism allowed a detailed exploration of the mechanisms that facilitated the unique persistence of Nepali women's engagement and influence, as I was able to consider context-specific factors. While there is certainly limited ability to generalize from a single explorative case study, I am briefly engaging with literature on women's movements in other post-conflict societies to understand some of the generalizable aspects of the mechanisms at work in the case of Nepal.

Most certainly, there have been several limitations throughout this research; firstly, I chose to do interviews in English, instead of Nepali which influenced who I chose to speak to. A

challenge has been to accurately illustrate the women's movements in Nepal and the stories I encountered by the persons I interviewed, and I have tried my best to accurately reflect them. I spoke to key persons both within civil society organizations, parliament and persons involved in the peace process. I was highly restricted by the time limitations, thus, this research has been elite-biased in Kathmandu. I gathered second-hand information about how things had gone about at the grassroots level and in the rural areas in Nepal. In addition, the data I collected is subject to recollections of my interviewees. I have tried to verify numbers and information, but as in many conflicts, numbers are estimations and even official reports diverge. However, as I am examining the explanatory features and underlying mechanism of women's protest, it should have minimal impact on the research as such. Moreover, the conditions for Nepal are unique in its case, time and context. However I believe that the women's movements and mobilization could indeed be drawn upon to reflect on other post-conflict societies and peace talks.

Structure of the Thesis

The remaining chapters of the thesis are structured as follows; chapter one traces the women's movement in Nepal, and provides a detailed review of its origin and development up to the peace process. It outlines three main pre-conditions that led the Nepali women's movement to a strong protest for inclusion in the peace process during the aftermath. Chapter two will proceed with the case-specific empirical findings about women's mobilization during conflict. It provides a detailed review of the women's movement's strategic response and political advocacy resisting the exclusion from the peace process. This is followed by chapter three which elaborates more in-depth on the political advocacy mechanism that was developed by the women's movement during the peace process, and which became a precedent to future policy changes demanded by the women's movement in Nepal. Finally, in the conclusion I highlight the explanatory factors to women's strong protest against exclusion from the peace process in Nepal,

which could contribute to the general understanding of future comparative case studies about post-conflict societies.

1. Women's Movements and Political Transition in Nepal

Political changes often provide a window of opportunity for women to mobilize. As commonly argued in the social movement literature, during transition to democracy (Baldez 2010), social movements and the civil society emerges. Similarly, it was the case in Nepal regarding the civil society and the women's movement. It is important to trace back the women's movement's activism to the major structural opportunities and events that may have shaped and been influential to women's movement's activism and rebuttals for inclusion in the peace process a decade later.

The first section will provide an overview of the Nepali women's movement's history. It is then followed by a description of the popular mass movement Jana Andolan I and the restoration of the parliamentary democracy, in which women started formalizing their activities. The chapter presents three pre-conditions that led up to the women's movements' successful policy changes and inclusion in the peace process, namely structural opportunities of the restoration of democracy which allowed women to formally organize (section 1.2 and 1.3), the women's movements' relation to the international community (section 1.4), and finally, the characteristic of conscious and committed women leaders that would not back down during harsh conditions (section 1.5).

1.1. Brief Historical Overview of Nepal's Women's Movement pre 1990's

Women in Nepal have a history of raising their voices and uniting towards a common cause. Nepal's very first women's right organization was constituted almost a century ago in 1917, namely the NariSamiti. This organization became the predecessor to the women's movement against the Rana regime, a monarchical authoritarian regime ruling before 1950. The organization NariSamiti was vocally and strongly promoting women's education and expanded. The woman Chandrakanta Joshi established a girl's school in 1936 (International Institute for Democracy and

Electoral Assistance et al. 2011). Also, women participated in the workers movement in 1947; at the same time an institution called Adarsha Mahila Samaj was established in order to enhance awareness about women's political and social status quo.

Going even further back, before formal institutionalization of the woman's organization, Nepali women started advocating for their rights. It all started with the Nepali woman, Yogmaya Neupane, who at her time in 1936 traveled to Kathmandu to hand over an appeal including 268 demands to the Rana Prime Minister Juddha Sumsher Rana demanding increased rights for women, an end to the Rana-Shah atrocities and inhuman religious practices (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance et al. 2011). These demands were oppressed and Yogmaya was imprisoned. In 1941, four democracy fighters were sentenced to death. Yogmaya and her followers warned they would die if their demands for social justice and reform were not met. Despite Yogamaya's call, the four democracy fighters were hanged, in January 1941. As a last protest in order to shame the Rana Dynasty, Yogmaya threw herself into the flooded Arun River with 68 followers. As the first women's protest of its kind and time in Nepal, the act was the first of many to constitute the beginning of Nepal's women's movement. Moreover, the act fueled the people's resistance to the Rana regime.

In 1947, resolute women gathered to constitute the organization Nepal Mahila Sangh with the aim to raise women's voices against injustice, oppression and inequality of gender. This organization was under the leadership of several women leaders that constituted the first working committee of the organization, amongst others, Mangala Devi Singh, Sahana Pradhan, Sadhana Pradhan. Mangala Singh who was one of the women demanding equal voting rights and was a strong activist, leading a faction of the women's movement for democracy in Nepal (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance et al. 2011). In 1950, women united against the Rana regime for democracy, most organizations were political faction of political parties (Acharya 2010). At that time, women's movement primarily aimed for

democracy(Acharya 2010). Although, during the short term democracy between 1951-1961, the women's organization and political movement split up into factions according to different political ideologies.

After the successful restoration of democracy in 1951, though still led by Ranas from the previous Rana dynasty, women's rights remained absent from the government's agenda. Although women actively participated in the democracy movement against the Rana Dynasty, women were nevertheless excluded from power structures, election and nomination processes, specifically when municipal elections were announced in 1951. Women were refused the right to vote. Consequently, women staged a demonstration and women activists came together in a delegation of 21 women, handing over an appeal for women's suffrage to Prime Minister Mohan Sumsher. The Ranas tried to oppress the women's demand, but women did not back down and ultimately, Prime Minister Mohan Sumsher granted women's suffrage in 1951. One of the first women to be elected in the Kathmandu municipality was Sadhan Pradhan, one of the women activists involved in the early organization. However, women were excluded from the state structure and in the 35-member Advisory Assembly no woman was present. Once again, women raised their voices and demanded women's participation and representation. As a result, four women were included in the second round of the Assembly in 1954. Moreover, during the transition to democracy the first women's college, the Padma Kanya, was established. However, the movement that started at that time around 1950 was severely set back in 1958, when King Mahendra took over state power and the democratic government was resolved again to what became the 30 years Panchayat era (1961-1990).

Towards the end of 1970's though, the Nepali people started to mobilize again with strong involvement of women. During the first World Conference on Women in 1975, inspired by the UN Declaration on Women's Right, women in Nepal started organizing again. For instance, Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh was established in order to bring together women and all leftist parties

and start a movement for civil rights in 1980. The organization had expanded its organizational base through underground activities. In 1980 it celebrated International Women's day by demonstrating against the dowry system, women trafficking and rape. At the same time, the political parties and activists aiming to restore democracy had started to flourish underground. Within the Nepali Congress, one of the major political parties (until present), many women had been in the forefront of its student union (which at that time was dominated by political affiliation), during the time period of 1978-1980. Despite the banning of political parties as the King had decided, the activities flourished underground by students, teachers, professionals and other groups.

For example, in the non-political sector, due to the international world conference on women in 1975, a lawyer, Shilu Singh, constituted the organization called Mahila Kanuni Sewa. It aimed at improving the legal provision and regulations for women, development and prosperity. Following this, during 1987, the Legal Aid and Consultancy Center (LACC) was registered under the Company Act.

Already during the Rana and Panchayat era, women's movement and organizations in Nepal were constituted in small scales. The movements peaked during democratic transition and related to international events (e.g. Women's International Day). Although, politically divided women came together on women's rights and issues, such as fighting for their inclusion in political decision-making processes and being represented in the Advisory Assembly that was formed by the King in 1954 (Acharya 2010). Women were united for issues relating to a better nation, such as the pre-1950 democracy movement, the political movement in 1978-1980, and in a strong movement in the 21st century for peace and protesting women's exclusion from the peace talks.

This demonstrates that very early on women's movements mobilized around broader political concerns and were not limited to gender equality and gender roles only. As I will

demonstrate, this will be an important factor for understanding the persistence of women's movements to engage in the peace process and establish their mobilization as 'worthy'. Although women's movements have deep historical roots, this analysis focuses on the developments in the past 25 years, after the parliamentary democracy was restored to a multiparty monarchic regime. For analytical purposes, I will divide the women's organization into three categories between 1990 and 2014, firstly, organizations that mushroomed after the restoration of democracy in 1991 to address different women's issues (section 1.3.). Secondly, NGO's established as a response to conflict and victims of the conflict, and thirdly, women's networks that emerged due to pressuring security issues such as conflict, peace (chapter two). In addition, these networks worked with an issue-based approach.

1.2. The Popular Jana Andolan I and Restoration of Parliamentary Democracy

In Nepal, a major structural change that enabled women's formal organization, institutionalization and legalization, as perceived by women's leaders, NGO's, women's activist and women's parliamentarians, was the restoration of democracy in 1991. Most formalized and institutionalized women's organization did emerge during the early 1990's. A recurrent event that was emphasized as vital to their work is the Jana Andolan I, a pro-democracy popular movement which appeared in 1990. This was a movement to overthrow the Panchayat system, an autocratic system where political parties were banned, and the King refused to restore the multi-party system. Thus, the people of Nepal gathered, raised their voices, walked out on the streets, and demanded for the King to step aside for the restoration of a democracy.

In this Jana Andolan I mass movement, many women were present, participated, and supported the cause, even women from remote parts of the country, as well as marginalized groups. Thus, women started to actively engage in politics, even outside of the traditional party-politics. This in turn induced women's activism as women did not want to disengage from politics. For instance, political parties also became more open towards women's issues and

political parties started to have patience to listen to certain concerns of women (Pushpa Bhusal , Interview, 2014).

These parties rose up during the Jana Andolan I and it was celebrated when the one-party monarchy was overturned and power was decentralized to the people. However, this was not perceived as enough, as Saloni Singh, President of DidiBahini describes it; democracy in itself lacked the pre-requisite in Nepal of a socially equal society, and to this end, gender equality was a pre-requisite to social equity. Following this idea, DidiBahini (which means elder sister (Didi) and younger sister (Bahini) in Nepali) formed a platform in 1992, for women to gather and discuss the status quo of women. Men and women from different areas and sectors of the Nepali society gathered as well.

When the different parties from the underground rose and at that time formed the new government, it was perceived to be male dominated power politics and women's, as well as marginalized groups', expectations in the new restored democracy were disappointed. However, women that previously had worked informally and underground gained a chance to organize themselves. Reasons identified by my interviewees for this was a more open and democratic society that gave different opportunities to formalize what previously only had been informal work on gender equality. Also, the voice of marginalized groups became vocal to some extent such as Dalit, indigenous, Muslim and other marginalized groups.

Between 1992 and 1996, mainly need-oriented organizations formed, meaning that each specialized in a specific women's need. When the Maoist insurgency began in 1996, they addressed the socio-cultural gaps and divisions in society such as gender inequality. As the Maoists raised social political issues, that also started to raise the issue of marginalized groups, including women. This contributed to women starting to raise their voices in marginalized areas. Women came out of their houses and some even joined the Maoists to become combatants at the frontline, because their agenda of gender equality was appealing, or out of fear. There were

many reasons for women joining but it will not be the aim of this paper to decide what reasons prevailed. Maoists did empower women in the sense that they gave them guns. However, the Maoist movement raised issues of social change that were significant to women's movements. After the conflict the people were also more aware of their rights (Risal, Susan, Interview, 2014-04-23).

1.3. The Mobilization of Women in the 1990's

Women in Nepal have been active and vocal since the 1990's and, as identified in previous section, the popular movement for democracy, Jana Andolan I facilitated this. However, even when political parties were banned as well as any other political activism, women did what they could by being active in their own families and communities until they were able to formalize and institutionalize in early 1990's.

It all started at a very small scale, but women were already active before the restoration of democracy in 1991. For instance, Sharada Pokharel, a life-long activist, said she started questioning the patriarchal norms in her own family and relatives, e.g. why her cousin did not send his daughter to schools. Similarly, the inspiration came from within the family; Sharada Pokharel describes her mother as the deepest inspiration to her activism. Her mother had early on argued with Sharada's father that she and her sisters should be sent to school when her brothers were getting education. Sharada inherited this activism and inspiration that she had learned from her mother, and continued questioning her cousin who did not send his daughters to school. Furthermore, when Sharada studied at University she actively engaged in the student union but as most student unions were affiliated with politics she wanted to run independently for president of the student union. The student unions at that time were a forum for political activism.

Before the 1990's, not only were political parties banned but also the means of infrastructure was limited. However, this did not stop Sharada Pokharel or other women to be active in their own surroundings. They continued mobilizing their neighbors and their communities. Women went from household level to neighbors; from the community level to the district level, and from the district to the national level, coordinating efforts several years later during conflict (see chapter two). Most NGO's that existed before the 1990's were called "Boy Clubs" and very few women had the opportunity to participate (Singh, Saloni Interview, 2014-04-19). During the early 1990's and subsequently to the restoration of democracy women's activism and concerns that had previously only been loose activities started to formalize. Institutionalization of such activities meant registering a NGO, eventually hiring staff and renting office space.

One such organization that evolved after the Jana Andolan I, was DidiBahini, established in 1992, which was an initiative of development experts, both men and women, to discuss women's issues. Eventually, these men and women decided to work for the purpose of political, social, legal and cultural rights which were denied to women. DidiBahini started its activities with a campaign-led initiative for social and gender equality, an initiative led by both men and women. The mission was to bridge the gap between men and women, but also between women themselves, such as rural versus urban, educated versus non-educated, senior Didi's from Junior Didi's across societal divisions (Singh, Saloni Interview, 2014-04-19). The organization placed an advertisement in the local newspaper to have young women and organizations come for a training program. At first, twenty-four organizations were selected to participate as mentoring organizations with one to five years' experience in different sectors. The training entailed three to four important keystones, namely, building solidarity between women's organizations, building mutual support, trust and respect amongst Didi's and Bahini's (Older and younger sisters). The training entailed amongst other development of literacy, familiarity with development terminology, computer literacy and communication skills.

Moreover, the work of DidiBahini also included individual women that had not been institutionalized in their activities, such as women who were isolated in their sector, or a minority in their profession. It organized pot-locks to come together and have a platform for sharing women's concerns . It was done strategically in order to gain insights and learn about the status of women in Nepal.

As these organizations on women's issues started to emerge, it was primarily women from the capital and urban areas with an educated background and structural opportunities that had started organizing at central level to push the "women's agenda", which was the mainstream women's agenda and did not necessarily include the variety of subordinate women's groups. However, due to the Jana Andolan I movement and the open society, marginalized women had also started to raise their voices. For instance, the Feminist Dalit Organization (FEDO) which was established in 1994, aimed to raise the voices of the marginalized women who faced multi-discrimination due to not only gender but additionally caste and class. Especially, Dalit women faced obstacles to education, economic opportunities and social opportunities. According to Mrs. Durga Sob, president of FEDO, the mainstream women's movement that had started to emerge did not address "the little men", i.e. the marginalized women's groups such as Madeshi, Muslim, Indigenous and Dalit women (Sob, Durga, Interview, 2014-04-23). Thus, with this aim of bringing Dalit Women's concerns into the mainstream women's agenda, FEDO was established. Now the organization works in 56 districts out of Nepal's 75 districts with more than 2000 women's groups on the community level. FEDO has branch offices in districts and works thus with the center on policy changes, district level and authorities and the community level with the various women's groups. Over 500 women activists and 60 000 women are affiliated with FEDO (Sob, Durga, Interview, 2014-04-23).

Evidently, the shift from autocratic monarchy to a democratic rule also provided the possibility to shift women's activities from household levels to national level due to a more open

society. The formalization of women's activities provided strong roots, which was a pre-condition for women's movement's successful protest for inclusion in the peace process (Rucht 2003; Meintjes 2001). This was further strengthened by the international influences which provided women new ideas, tools and strategies on how to expand and strengthen their activities, as also rightly identified by Baldez (2003, 2010).

1.4. Nepal's Women's Movements and the International Community

The international community, specifically the international women's movement, was influential to women's movement in Nepal in several ways. The United Nations (UN) organized the first World Conference on Women in 1975 which was followed by the UN Decade on Women (1975-1985). This gave inspiration to Nepal to investigate women's social, economic and political status, followed by the establishment of women's sections in different ministries and women's wings in donor organizations (Subedi 2010). Consequently, the first research on the status of women was carried out, followed by many studies that decade. As a result, Nepal's Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-1985), a development plan concluded by the government for usually a five year period since 1956 (His Majesty's Government National Planning Commission Nepal 2002), addressed women's issues for the first time (Subedi 2010). The following fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing that took place in September 1995 had an even greater impact at a time when Nepal once again just had experienced a political transition and women's movements were institutionalizing. Women participating in the conference became aware of their rights and learned different strategies on how to lobby for women's rights. In addition, international solidarism amongst like-minded women provided strength and inspiration to fight the injustices against women.

Nepal contributed to the Conference in Beijing with a delegation (composed of a government and NGO delegation) of over 300 women, some of the women leaders as well as women from the grassroots levels (the thesis applies the definition of grassroots as rural areas

and communities) and different districts of Nepal participated (Rana, Bandana, Interview 2014-04-30). The international exposure is perceived as important for the women in terms of learning about the pertinent issues related to women, such as violence against women, human rights, the girl child and education. After the Conference women went back into their communities to voice these issues. Moreover, the Conference composed of vibrant women, thinking along similar lines provided mutual strength and inspiration (Ghimire, Durga, Interview, 2014-05-19). Meena Sharma describes it as “if we can see and feel the presence, and feel the solidarity of women’s movement through the world. It really inspires us, encourages and motivates us. For me it is a type of model support.” (Sharma, Meena, Interview, 2014-04-28). The international exposure also provided concrete skills on how to raise their voices, lobby and advocate for their rights (Ghimire, Durga, Interview, 2014-05-19). The agenda resulting from the fourth World Conference on Women included one point dealing with Women and Armed Conflict, which at that point of time was not received as relevant to women in Nepal, as one interviewee expressed; “little did we know at that time” (Rana, Bandana, Interview 2014-04-30). Merely a year later, they realized that even that topic discussed at the conference now unfortunately applied to them.

Several women’s organization working on different thematic issues came into existence around the time of the Beijing Conference which had identified 12 critical areas of concerns, such as violence against women, inequality in decision making-levels between men and women (Subedi 2010). Thus, women were inspired at the Conference to address these issues even more vocally than before back home and organizations worked often thematically focusing on one specific issue. For instance, Saathi established in 1992 by Bandana Rana and her friends from University had before the Conference already started to feel the urge to address the issue of violence against women. They were eight women coming together; wanting to do something, so they started to meet and discuss what could be done, and finally they initiated and registered Saathi as a non-governmental organization. Evidently, the Beijing Conference provided a platform to share and discuss strategies on how to address different issues.

In addition to this, international instruments had an impact on women's activism in Nepal. In 1991 the Nepali government had ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) without reservations (Subedi 2010). For women this provided a legal system that established an identity for women in law (Pushpa Bhusal, Interview, 2014-05-01). These instruments that the government started to adopt is perceived by NGO leaders to have set a framework within the state for women's rights to be acknowledged, although it requires women's active engagement and demands for implementation.

For instance, during the Property Right Movement in 1994, two law students, Meera Dhungana and Meera Khanal, filed a petition to the Supreme Court in Kathmandu, stating that the current law entailed discriminatory legal provisions and was against the CEDAW (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance et al. 2011). It referred to the Civil Code of 1963, which had been slightly amended in 1975, the year of the UN Women, due to the women's movement led by professionals inside and outside the government. However, at that time the important issue of equal property rights was left untouched (Acharya 2010).

Thus in 1994, a new attempt was started and the petition was calling for equal rights for daughters parental property inheritance (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance et al. 2011). The Supreme Court responded in their favor and urged the government to change the legal provision. This success gave women strength and inspiration to continue their fight for equal property rights, organizing meetings and programs, forming networks etc. As Durga Ghimire says; "At that time we did not know what works and what does not, what had worked in India we did not know would work in Nepal or not." The women tried several activities: rallied, did inter-actions programs, spoke to parliamentarians, involved human rights organizations and conducted research (e.g. one organization surveyed in 24 districts about the need for daughters' property rights) (Ghimire, Durga, Interview, 2014-05-19). The criticism was

strong at that time against the movement for daughters' property rights. For example, some claimed that women in rural areas did not need property rights, which is why the movement conducted a survey in 24 districts with very positive results in favor of property rights. Another criticism was that these women's organizations had international donors' support and were claimed to only speak for the international donors' agenda. This was of course not true, and women continued demonstrating for their cause of equal rights. Despite these challenges, women were not discouraged.

It took more than seven years and hundreds of rallies had taken place when the Civil Code 1963 was finally amended in 2002, "to provide unmarried daughters with equal rights to parental property" (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance et al., 2011:41). It was a moment of women coming together for a common issue and starting networking (Ghimire, Durga, Interview, 2014-05-19). Moreover, the women's movement has also connected themselves around the globe through the international women's movements.

Another example of using the international instruments was the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 that came to be a strategic tool of use for Nepali women's movement on addressing peace-building and reconciliation. The document, adopted by the United Nations in 2000, outlines the importance of women in peace-building, conflict resolution and sustainable peace (Asian Development Bank 2013). Following the ratification by Nepal, many women's organizations started to educate and conduct trainings on UNSCR 1325 and 1820 in the grassroots communities (Risal, Susan, Interview, 2014-04-23). It was also an important tool for policy advocacy at the central level for greater inclusion of women in the peace process as the resolutions were binding to the government.

Evidently, Nepal's women movement did not act in a national vacuum or isolation; rather it took the opportunities and tools given in the globalized context, using international conventions to fight for their equal rights and joining worldwide movements on women's issues.

For instance, the current National Anti-Rape Campaign that is ongoing in Nepal was heavily influenced by the rape incident in India. Also, the international solidarity amongst women across borders inspired women activists. For example, the current worldwide women's campaign on "One Billion Rising" has inspired the National Anti-rape Campaign in Nepal, and thus also the women's movement in Nepal joined to stand up for justice (Shrestha, Sadhana, Interview, 2014-05-13). So there is strong evidence that international influences supports Nepali women's movements efforts, but in the case study these emerge as supporting factors that would not have likely had such a strong influence without the strong historical background of activism and the developed networks between the women's movements.

1.5. Committed and Conscious Women Leaders

Although women's movements tended to peak when political changes happened in Nepal such as during restoration of democracy and later on during the peace process, the mobilization of women and women's solid activism during the last two decades has not only been driven by political and structural opportunities, but also by their passion, dedication and commitment to achieve change. It was not merely about raising voices; it was, and is, about fighting for the value of every human being, being of equal value. For instance, women's movements participation and activism has gone beyond gender-related issues and engaged in broader political concerns such as the Jana Andolan I & II pro-democracy movements. However, in the term of gender related concerns, women have shown strong leadership and awareness which has been crucial to women's persistent activism.

A leader of a women's movements or organization is described to be required to have a clear vision and a participatory and inclusive approach. Each women leader has an extraordinary turning point in their life, a life change they went through that made them mad and passionate to bring about a change for a better and equal society (Shrestha, Sadhana, Interview, 2014-05-13). According to Ranju Thakur (Member in the current Constituent Assembly for Communist Party

of Nepal – Unified Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML)) it is the willpower that is the ultimate driving force towards achieving change. Change clearly comes from bottom-up processes that may be formalized into a system for achieving changes at policy level as well as grassroots level. Also, committed women leaders working together gave each other strength and support in the fight for women's rights.

One evident example from 1990's until present is Women for Human Rights organization established in 1994 by Lily Thapa (Thapa, Lily, Interview, 2014-05-01). Lily Thapa is one of these women leaders with extraordinary stories that I encountered during my interviews in Nepal. She, as many others, decided to work for a change for single women's situation in the country and committed to the cause of women's rights in different areas and across sectors. Lily dedicated her willpower and hard work to fighting for equal rights for Single Women in Nepal i.e. widows. Lily Thapa uses the word "Single Women" instead of "widow" in order to avoid the stigmatization that has come with the word "widow".

Lily Thapa was born in 1959 in Kathmandu and grew up in a middle class family with opportunities. She finished High School at the age of 13 and started college in India when she was 16. She then dropped out of college to fulfill her father's last wish to see his daughter getting married before he died due to illness. She rushed from India to Nepal and within a week she was engaged in an arranged marriage. They had three sons and lived a good life. Her husband encouraged for Lily to finish her Master studies she had started in India, and so her husband admitted her to the Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu for a Master degree in Sociology which Lily completed in 1990.

In 1992, her husband (a medical doctor for the Nepal Royal Army) was sent on a United Nations Mission as a Peace Keeper to the Gulf war in Iraq. Just before her husband was about to return to Kathmandu, Lily learned that he had been killed. At the age of 29 she had become a widow, alone with her three sons all under the age of 10. She had to go through all the code of

conducts for widows. Lily describes that she experienced for the first time what women struggled with every day in Nepal, and started reflecting on how women were treated in her country. “I had never realized the pain and the harassment of widows, although my aunts had been widows”. There is a Nepali saying that you can never understand a widow’s pain unless you become a widow yourself. Out of her own trauma and grievances she heard about another woman in a similar situation and wanted to help. When she tried to help other people were very critical. The other widow’s mother in-law was not happy with Lily coming in bright colors (in Nepal the bright colors belong to a married women) just after the grievance period and called out to Lily “you prostitute want to spoil my daughter in-law”. Despite this, Lily did not give up and found strength in the will of wanting to help that woman. She persisted on meeting the woman again. After the next meeting, Lily learned how the woman was harassed by her brother-in-law. Lily facilitated for her to receive training and paid for it out of her own pocket. Thanks to this training the woman opened a shop and became a fashion designer and leader herself and eventually hired 10-15 single women. Eventually, she came to earn more than her brother-in-law and was consequently treated differently by her family and in-laws. Due to this incident, Lily realized that economic independence was crucial, because the dependence of a widow facilitates the other problems, such as sexual harassment, verbal violence, physical violence, displacement, property grabbing, lack of employment, and children of single women’s often drop out of school.

Lily started to give scholarships to widows’ children at her school, focusing particularly on army widows. This led the single women’s friends to come as well and women started to gather at Lily’s school each Sunday. It started with what at first were merely 2-3 widows who came together each Sunday to share their experiences and grief. From there, via word of mouth, news spread, and friends of friends gathered which made the platform expand to 45-50 single women coming together each Sunday under leadership of Lily. The platform served as an opportunity of sharing which brought relief, trust and transformation amongst the single women. The women also learned how to speak about the social and economic barriers that they were facing in society.

The group could help themselves solve their problems. These informal meetings every Sunday went on for two years; in the meanwhile Lily's activities had expanded from Sundays to everyday of the week. She gave up her position as the principle of the school to dedicate her time to the single women's group. Another single woman and a true leader that Lily came in touch with during the informal activities was Rita Thapa (Founder for NGO Tewa and Nagarik Aawaz). When Rita heard that Lily was running these meetings she made a suggestion to Lily to register a non-governmental organization. From this sharing platform, the organization Women for Human Rights was formed. However, it was not a smooth progress, in order to register WHR citizenship of ten widows was required to be registered to WHR. However, none of the widows dared to give their citizenship for registration, as they feared what relatives would say about their engagement in the organization of widows as it was a taboo. Women coming to Lily's platform did not tell anyone about it but would say they were going to the market or similar, and they would close the curtains. Thus, Lily turned to her relatives for gathering ten person's citizenships in order to register the platform to a non-governmental organization.

At the same time Rita was establishing Tewa (a philanthropic organization established in 1995). At Tewa Lily learned a lot about the organizational culture when she spent half days there and was invited to become a member of the board. In 1997-98, Lily started to expand her work out to the districts. For instance in 1997, a national conference was held and the word widow was changed to single woman. WHR started making groups in the villages, in the group we would identify one woman as mobilizer and bring them to Kathmandu and train them for ten days. Three women out of each group were trained to become social mobilizers, paralegal volunteers and para-counselors. The three women were educated as agents of change. They had to voluntarily spend 2 hours per week for WHR cause. The social mobilizer had to join 55 times each two hours in a year, to learn how to run groups, be an entrepreneur, how to advocate women's rights. On grassroots level, WHR mobilized single women in 73 districts and over 1050 women in Village Development Committees and municipalities (as of 2011).

At policy-level the issues of single women were incorporated in the government's 10th Five Year Plan (2002-2007) and 11th Five Year Plan (2008-2012), including the three years Interim Plan of Nepal, due to WHR's work on amending legal provisions that was discriminatory against single women in Nepal. For instance, some of the legal provisions that WHR could alter were that women no longer had to provide 50 000 Nepali Rupee (NRs) to men that would marry a widow, widows needing the consent of the son to hand over ownership of property, widows having to remain in chastity to inherit the property, women obtaining permission for passport only by male family member's consent. The issues of widows were also incorporated in the National Action Plan (NAP) on UNSCR 1325 and 1820. The NAP itself had been a women's achievement (see chapter three for elaboration).

The WHR organization's hard work is an evident example on how women in Nepal mobilize, network and come together working for changes on both national and grassroots levels. For example, Lily was also chosen by the Tewa organization's current Executive Director as an Ashoka Fellow.

1.6. Chapter conclusion

In this chapter I have identified three explanatory factors of significance for why women in Nepal protested strongly against women's exclusion in the peace process. Firstly, the women's pre-established institutions and infrastructure before conflict was crucial in order for women actively voicing their concerns and addressing gender inequality during and after conflict, such as property inheritance rights. It had developed institutional capacity (Gamson 1990) and was naturally rooted in the social environment in Nepal for over a decade before the exclusion from the peace process (Rucht 2003). Secondly, the committed and all more conscious women leaders' willpower for changes was another important factor. Women did not only aim to raise their voices for the sake of it, but they sought for change and abolishment of injustices. And thirdly, women coming together for issues; networking from central to grassroots' level. Networking is a

key process to women's effective policy changes in Nepal as will the following chapters demonstrate (Chapter two explains women's networks and unity, and chapter three elaborates on the mechanism that was developed for effective policy changes due to women's movement for peace). These three factors identified in the Nepali women's movement are essential pre-conditions for women demanding inclusion in the peace process. As Turshen (2001) also identified, women must be aware, coordinate their efforts. The combination of women being conscious about changes and supports by solidarity amongst women worldwide through feminist networks can play an important role in challenging patriarchy (Baldez 2010).

2. Women, the Maoist Conflict and the Peace Process in Nepal

The structural opportunities gained during conflict in terms of social, economic and political gains, seemed to have fueled and advanced women's pre-established activism, thus contradicting the general argument of postwar retrenchment in the gender and conflict literature, i.e. women being pushed back to the kitchens, and being relieved of their public responsibilities. The aim here is not to evaluate whether women were pushed back to traditional gender roles or not, rather focus is on *how* women's mobilization for peace made them raise women's collective voices through networks composed of organizations, activists and politicians and enabled them to have political influence. The aim of peace was a central matter that united women from different backgrounds, ideologies and ethnicities into a strong and vocal women's movement for peace.

The first section in this chapter presents the women's situation during the armed conflict, related to women and children being the most vulnerable and affected groups of conflict. However, it also presents the side so often neglected, namely, women's agency in peace building. This is then followed by a section on how women united and mobilized for peace during conflict despite differences in political ideologies, ethnic lines and various beliefs along the stratified society. The main argument presented is that critical junctures of imminent threats against women's security united women beyond their own personal and organizational interests. In the final section, I elaborate how the building of networks had become a strategy for resisting the exclusion from the peace process.

2.1. Women's Victimhood and Agency during Conflict

Women were central to the conflict, both as agents in the conflict as combatants in the Maoist insurgency (40% were estimated women) as well as peace builders on the ground in grassroots communities, but also as victims of the conflict. When the Maoist insurgency broke

out in 1996, women and children were particularly affected by the conflict. However, many women on the grassroots level went from victims to agents.

On the grassroots level, women were forced to survive between state armed forces (Royal Nepal Army) and non-state armed forces (Maoists); they had to learn negotiations as a matter of survival. Many women became single mothers, and unintentionally the breadwinner of the family when husbands and sons were killed or disappeared². These women had to “push back their veils” and learn how to negotiate for their families’ survival. Similar to other conflicts (Kumar 2001), the economic and social activities that had previously been limited for women, expanded during conflict when women had to take over after men, such as seeding the fields. Consequently, women started organizing in women’s groups as a matter of finding strength and comfort. Also, many women started advocating for peace to put a stop to the violence.

There seems to be a shared perception that the Maoist conflict had an impact on gender issues in terms of challenging the socio-cultural values and the patriarchic mentality. Many women on the grassroots levels where the conflict had been the most present, had gained awareness of gender related rights as the Maoist movement had addressed some of these. Also, the Maoist inclusion of gender issues in their political agenda appealed to many young women in the rural areas that joined for liberation (Abdela 2011). It is said that during the Maoist insurgency “women went from the kitchen to carry guns” (Risal, Susan, Interview, 2014-04-23). It is not in particular viewed as positive for women to carry guns, but it challenged traditional gender roles and patriarchic norms. “Women could do anything” (Risal, Susan, Interview, 2014-

² This is similar to the phenomenon of labor migration of young men to foreign countries to earn money, which became a current issue in Nepal after the conflict. The effects and impacts on men’s disappearances from the household are similar but due to different reasons.

4-23) if they were given opportunity. This is what the Maoist insurgency demonstrated, even if unintentionally³.

While I expected that the conflict would be a defining point that shifted or even disrupted the work of women's movements, I was surprised to find that the leaders of these movements did not emphasize its centrality. Clearly organizations that emerged in order to respond to the needs of conflict victims, with a specific focus on women and children, conveyed the conflict as central to their mission. However, in general, NGO's and women's movements established their work before the conflict and continued their work during and after conflict. The conflict fueled the women's organizations work, but the pre-established organizations worked continuously despite the conflict raging through the country without any significant changes to their vision and mission. Many NGO's continuously worked, and even though staff was kidnapped by the Maoists during conflict, it did not impact their missions. The persons that I interviewed had their visions and missions clear to themselves and even during conflict they would pursue their goals, even in the most affected conflict areas. During the interviews it was emphasized the policy changes they had achieved during and after conflict, but with little reference to the conflict neither as the cause nor as an obstacle. The hindrances that were mentioned were rather related to the mindset of patriarchy, and the conflict even tried to break the patriarchy which then in the aftermath was still present.

Many of the areas in which women organizations worked were controlled by the Maoists during the conflict. However, Maoists reacted positively towards women's organizations work in districts (based on interviews with Durga Ghimire, Meena Sharma, Shobha Shrestha and Lily Thapa, April and May 2014) The Maoists asked what we do and replied; "Ah, ABC-Nepal, you do good work", and allowed the organization to do its work in peace (Ghimire, Durga, Interview,

³ It is beyond this research's aim to delve further into whether the Maoist had foreseen that women should gain more opportunities, but fact is that their agenda was indeed gendered and called for gender equality. For more information regarding this please see e.g. (Lohani-Chase 2008).

2014-05-19). Similarly, the staff of the organization Women for Human Rights was kidnapped on several occasions, and was lectured on the Maoist agenda during the kidnapping. “They were very happy with the work we did” and “they almost convinced me to become a Maoist after two hours lecturing” (Thapa, Lily, Interview, 2014-05-01). The Maoists had identified and analyzed many societal divisions, and they were happy with the work that WHR was performing. For example, WHR went into the grassroots levels to mobilize women and raise awareness of their rights as single women by promoting single women could wear red color dresses (which is not a custom for widows in Nepal). “We demonstrated wearing red, and brought red scarfs and red ticas (a religious mark worn on the forehead within Hinduism), and they [Maoists] liked that” (Thapa, Lily, Interview, 2014-05-01).

The women leaders that I interviewed perceived the social change that the Maoists promoted as positive as the agenda also included many of the women’s issues that the women’s organizations dealt with (Abdela 2011). The Maoists had a 40 point agenda including women’s issues (Rawski and Sharma 2012), e.g. confronting violence against women and property inheritance rights for daughters (Ghimire, Durga, Interview, 2014-05-19). The Maoist insurgency did not seem to interrupt the work of the women’s organizations per se, as the conflict as such was not mentioned frequently during the interviews about women’s movements work, other than that they on occasions were questioned on what they did in the local communities where they worked. The Maoists brought about a change in the sense that they showed women ‘can do’ that gave a boost to the women’s movement that had started to flourish. Although women’s movements work was supported by the Maoists on grassroots level, the means and strategy the Maoists had pursued to convey their political agenda was not perceived as positive by any means by the women’s organization, as many innocent people were killed, children lost their parents, women their husbands and many disappeared during the conflict. So I identified a complex relationship between the Maoists and the leaders of the women’s movements that was neither entirely positive nor negative.

Clearly, women were victims to the Maoist conflict, but as I emphasize, they were also agents of change during the conflict, as a matter of survival as Kumar (2001) and Meintjes (2001) have argued. In Nepal, in the grassroots communities, many women had to take on an active role and take over when men were absent shouldering both economic and public responsibility in the community as a matter of survival between the two armed forces. By taking on these leadership roles women organized into local groups and community groups. They also received capacity training to form women's groups and take leadership roles in their villages and communities, by women's organizations from Kathmandu. Despite, the armed conflict, the women's organizations from Kathmandu continued their work, vision and goals independently from the conflict, it did not shift the women's movements work significantly, other than that organizations of course started to respond to conflict victim's needs. However, training in the field was continued despite the harsh conditions the conflict brought upon the women staff such as kidnappings and interrogations in the field by the Maoist.

In summary, while the conflict forced women out of traditional roles, as was the case in many other conflicts (Meintjes, Turshen, and Pillay 2001), this happened parallel to continued activism by women's organizations who began their work long before the conflict began. The conflict, therefore, was not the source of women's mobilization and this helps explain why the mobilization continued after the conflict ended. Further, a unique characteristic of the Nepali conflict was that the Maoist ideology also supported the cause of the women's movement to some extent.

2.2. Uniting for Peace: How Women built Networks

Women activists and women's organizations unite not merely for gender related issues, but for issues that are critical to security, specifically women's security such as armed conflict. Two such critical junctures (Pierson 2000) that made women unite despite their differences before,

during and after the conflict, was firstly, an incident on rape and violence against women, and secondly, the decade long armed conflict which affected women and children greatly.

The first identified critical juncture and security threat against women was a tragic incident of rape of a 6-year old girl in 1991 that outraged women's activists and pushed them to unite for collective action. The 6-year old girl had been at the stadium with her relative when she suddenly had disappeared. The girl had been found two days later in Thamel (city center of Kathmandu) where she was found to have been raped. This particular incident was one of many that truly demonstrated the imminent security threat against women and children. Women's activists from different backgrounds united in a forum free from political affiliation, where they decided to work for women's rights. The forum formed the Women's Security Pressure Group (WSPG) in 1991 (Ghimire, Durga, Interview, 2014-05-19). The WSPG was one of the first women's network established in Nepal (Pokharel, Sharada, Interview, 2014-05-12). According to Sharada Pokharel, one of the prominent women leaders, the founding chairperson of WSPG, Sahana Pradhan, who also had led the mobilization of women against the Rana Regime in the 1940's, came to the forum focused on her identity as 100% woman, leaving her political ideology behind in the WSPG forum. Thus, women came together from different backgrounds, both women members from civil society and from political parties' women's wings. Together they unified based on their gender identity and left aside political ideologies (Ghimire, Durga, Interview, 2014-05-19). Importantly, this network existed before the conflict began, which again demonstrates the strength of women's mobilization prior to the conflict.

The second critical juncture and imminent security threat that had made women mobilize in networks was the decade long armed conflict that had started to escalate in early 2000. As a response to the violent conflict, the women's network Shantimalika Women Network for Peace and Justice was formed in 2003 in order to give a voice to women and raising their demands in a collective manner (Risal, Susan, Interview, 2014-04-23) (Shantimalika Women Network for Peace

2010). It was an initiative started by 150 peace building women coming together voicing their demand for peace (Asian Development Bank 2013). For instance, “if Nagarik Aawaz (a NGO established responding to the need of conflict victims in 2001) raised their voice by itself only about that women are not included peace process – nobody would listen” (Risal, Susan, Interview, 2014-04-23). The women’s organization but also other civil society organizations had realized and learnt the importance of working in collaboration in order to strengthen their voice (Kafle, Kapil, Interview, 2014-04-29). Women had realized they should not be fragmented but work collectively (Risal, Susan, Interview, 2014-04-23).

For instance, the women’s movement’s contribution during the Jana Andolan II popular movement in 2006 was remarkable, as women came up with many initiatives to symbolically call for peace such as the “white flower campaign” and “paint for peace”-campaign (DidiBahini 2006). Women artists and youth started a campaign “painting for peace”, by promoting peace amongst the youth. Women activists, wives, Janajati (ethnic) community women, women artists, women members from civil society and women’s ex- army combatants from the Gorkha district all expressed solidarity for peace through symbolic initiatives and rallies. Examples of these were women staging a mass rally with the slogan “Lay down weapons and join if your are our own” and “Stop violence and corporate with the pro-democracy movement” (DidiBahini 2006). Wives from army officers and police gave white flowers to their own husbands and said “Stop it” (Singh, Saloni, Interview, 2014-04-19). Mothers, sisters, and daughters from both sides of the conflict supported the Jana Andolan II. Women from factories, from household levels, female students, “everyone gathered for peace” (Singh, Saloni, Interview, 2014-04-19). Many organizations contributed with aid e.g. in rallies these provided free first aid services, and mobilized everyone (e.g. women from households participated and provided water to the protesters) (DidiBahini 2006). “It was very emotional, it did not matter who was fighting, we said stop. It was an achieving strategy and it helped” (Singh, Saloni, Interview, 2014-04-19). This second critical juncture again demonstrates the ability of the Nepali women’s movement to form

networks across divisions, a feature that is vital for understanding their eventual engagement in the peace process.

As a result of the women's movement's engagement in the Jana Andolan, women's organization and its movements gained increased influence in the peace process, as women's movement's contribution to the cause of abolishing the monarchy was very high (Risal, Susan, Interview, 2014-04-23). The activities that many women had engaged in during the Jana Andolan, such as agenda-setting on women's issues, advocacy and lobbying, women continued marching for their own rights (DidiBahini 2006). In order to resist the exclusion of women from the peace process, another major network was formed, namely, SANKALPA Women's Alliance for Peace, Justice and Democracy. It was first formed informally in 2006, and registered formally as a network in 2011 (SANKALPA 2014). SANKALPA included various women's organizations that came together in a network to ensure the equal representation of women in all decision-making levels. The vision of the network was to make visible diverse groups of women visible in the Constituent Assembly and the peace building process (SANKALPA 2014).

Clearly, the conflict and extraordinary security threats made women unite for peace; a goal beyond individual leadership interests, organizational interests or party politics but for the urgent need for a peaceful nation. The networks that were established set the precedent for cooperation even between people who had not previously cooperated. This then facilitated network-building for future gender-related work, as the peace movement in Nepal held characteristics atypical for a peace movement. For instance, the organizations that formed WSPG, SANKALPA and Shantimalika had all been established before or during the conflict. Thus, they were well immersed in the social environment and had a natural constituency which peace networks commonly lack (Rucht 2003). Furthermore, these networks had a worthy cause, a unity for the cause, numbers in the network and commitment to achieve peace, relating to Tilly's WUNC. The women's movement therefore possessed the characteristics of a strong social movement, which

was vital for enabling its political influence in the peace process and beyond. In addition, the women's movement had contributed heavily in the Jana Andolan II movement and seemingly through that developed a repertoire of action such as the white flower campaign used in the Jana Andolan. This became precedent to the modern repertoire of action of contentious politics which the women's movement started to employ as a strategic response to the exclusion from the peace process (Tilly 2004). Earlier mobilization helped the women's movement establish and adapt repertoires of action that could produce political influence, as I will demonstrate below.

2.3. Uniting for Inclusion: Women's Strategic Response to the Exclusion from the Peace Talks

As expected and as has been in many cases such Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, during the aftermath of conflict, men sought to go back to doing business as usual (Kumar 2001) and exclude women for the purpose of serving basic male dominant power relations (Turshen 2001). Women were excluded from any public spaces and decision-making, also as expected in Nepal's peace talks initiated in 2005 which were male dominated between the belligerent political leaders. While in many other conflicts, women's mobilization peaked *during* the conflict, but demobilized after conflict and returned to pre-conflict roles (Kumar 2001). In Nepal, women responded remarkably to the exclusion from the peace talks, they refused to be pushed back, and instead mobilized for the inclusion of women in all decision-making levels in the aftermath of the conflict. As I will elaborate on in this section, the prerequisites for this was the characteristics of the pre-established activism, conscious women leaders and the networks that had begun to form, which had made it possible for the women's movement to effectively address their exclusion from the peace process and develop repertoire of actions. I will distinguish between "peace talks" and "peace process", the former referring to the male dominated peace negotiations, whereas the later refers to the process *after* the signed Comprehensive Peace Accords (CPA).

Since the early 2000, peace talks had been attempted in Nepal, which repeatedly failed. After the Royal Massacre in 2001, violence rapidly escalated as the Maoists intensified the conflict (Whitfield 2012). In late 2001, a ceasefire was announced by both sides, i.e. government and the Maoists, which collapsed just months later in late 2001. Formal talks were resumed in 2003, dominated by informal talks between the monarchy, the Maoists and civil society, including the women's movement. As a result in 2003, a new ceasefire agreement was reached, which due to a government shift once again failed (Whitfield 2012). Finally, after several failed attempts at peace and cease fire, the King Gyanendran took power in his own hands through a coup in February 2005, cutting phone lines and internet connections. Activists were not allowed to go out of their houses or were arrested, political party leaders were detained, and the Royal Nepal Army was given free hands to crush the Maoists (Sebastian von Einsiedel, David M. Malone 2012). In 2006, during increased protests, the King imposed a curfew and human rights activists broke the curfew. The Maoists and the Seven Party Alliance came together against the monarchy together with the people in the second Jana Andolan in 2006. The women's movement participated, people from all over the country left their homes to take in the streets of Kathmandu (Pokharel and Rana 2013). The King tried to do what he could by stopping cell phone lines and any media infrastructure, isolating the country from the rest of the world (Shrestha, Shobha, Founder for Women, Democracy and Peace-Nepal, Interview, 2014-05-14). However, the people of Nepal mobilized for the final abolishment of the monarchy despite this structural obstacle. Women activists and organizations had also heavily contributed with resources such as logistical and human resources and launching campaigns.

Although women held rallies and demonstrations for peace and demanding cease fire, they were never included in formal peace talks. Also, women had an active role in bringing the opposing sides, the Maoists and the Nepali government, to the table and talk, as they had held dialogues, workshops, used backdoor channels where they had invited both sides to come together and talk. Despite, these efforts, when the 25-point Code of Conduct was issued jointly

by the government and the Maoist in May 2005, they had failed to include any women. After the monarchy was finally abolished, the peace talks resumed and the 12 point agreement was concluded between the Nepalese government's Prime Minister, Girija Prasad Koirala and the Maoist leader, Prachanda in November 2005. But still no women had been consulted during the drafting of the agreement, nor had a woman been included or invited to the negotiation table for peace. The 12 point agreement had been a matter of male dominance and belligerent leaders. The meeting had been held in a little apartment in India between the leaders of the major parties, only men and had been signed in New Delhi (Pokharel and Rana 2013). Women that had fought during the war that had joined the Maoists did sacrifice to the party, and had neither been recognized during the peace talks nor the process. The agenda the Maoists had built on during the insurgency, and the questions they had addressed in the name of poverty, social injustice, the feudal system, and the social inclusion they had aimed for was not practiced by the Maoist party itself during the peace talks. Shortly after the 12 point agreement was reached, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed in 2006 and an Interim government was formed. Again, women were excluded. However, the women's movement protested strongly against this and eventually two women were included in the 15 Committee Member (Abdela 2011). Following this, in June 2006, the Maoists and the seven political parties signed an eight-point Understanding, but still no women had been included in the decision making.

Women were highly dissatisfied with the continuous exclusion from the peace talks and as a response started mobilizing, gathering signatures, standing in front of the city hall demanding inclusion in decision-making levels and specifically the peace process. After the signed Peace Accords, Nepal was going to draft an Interim-Constitution, which was announced to again only be composed of men leaders. Women's organizations gathered in a sit-in rally, strong lobbying and protests in front of the Prime Minister's office for one or two days until it was announced that women were being included in the Interim Constitution Drafting Committee. For instance, the SANKALPA network engaged 11 different women related networks in 2006 and 2007, for

advocating and raising voice for women's representation in parliament (Asian Development Bank 2013). During the sit-in rally, i.e. women just sitting peacefully in the front of the building, despite the restriction of the area, with placates stating their demands, women leaders of different networks and organizations went into the building to talk to the Ministers and political parties about the inclusion of women. This communication and networking in combination with the lobbying and advocacy was crucial for the women's movements' success in women friendly policy changes. This effort already demonstrated that the women's movement had adopted an effective repertoire of action for influencing policy processes, which again shows that the movement was further developed than a newly formed peace movement.

Consequently, based on women's collective efforts and voices including those of political active women, four women were included out of 16 persons to form the Interim-Constitution Drafting Committee, in order to draft Nepal's new Interim-Constitution. Most of these women had a law background such as Pushpa Bhusal who was one out of these four women chosen for the committee by her political party (Nepal Congress). According to Pushpa Bhusal, the women included in the Interim-Constitution Drafting Committee succeeded to include some radical changes, inter alia, binding articles on mothers' right of transferal of citizenship to her children⁴ and 33% representation in the Constituent Assembly was ensured through the constitution (previously 5%). These four women that actively took part in the drafting of the Interim-constitution had been included due to the strong activism and repertoire of action by women collectively demanding inclusion of women, campaigning, demonstrating and demanding their representation. Further, the mobilization induced the inclusion of marginalized groups of Dalit, Muslim and Madeshis, but only their male counterparts (Bhusal, Pushpa, Interview, 2014-05-01).

Evidently, as expected men wanted to do business as usually in the aftermath of conflict (Kumar 2001). However, the women's organizations that had been pre-established mobilized for

⁴ Before this was enacted in the Interim-Constitution, Nepal had a practice and law that only men could transfer citizenship and their identity to the children. Women were legally deprived of this right.

inclusion in the decision-making processes, which was also why it was not only a peace movement (Rucht 2003). Diverse women's organizations united for a common and worthy cause, committed to bring about peace and being included in the peace process. They went about using different strategies as identified by Tilly's WUNC (2004), they were committed to overcome the obstacle of exclusion from the peace process, they were united in rallies, demonstrations marching in ranks and holding long signed sheets in lines with signatures trying to demonstrate the number of supporters to the worthiness of the cause. The repertoire of action of the women's movement held many dimensions, such as rallies, demonstrations, breaking curfews to resist oppression, forwarded petitions to officials, and campaigned for their inclusion. All typical characteristics for an efficient social movement, but even more so, the women's movement in Nepal had established networks for more than just peace, and had also key contacts to decision-makers (Rehn and Sirleaf 2002). Women's movement complemented with cultivating active relationships with key stakeholders in government, which made it more than a peace movement (Rucht 2003).

2.4. Chapter conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the main case-specific empirical findings showing that women were both victims as well as active agents during conflict. Often conflict challenges traditional gender hierarchies and pushes women to take on leadership roles in their communities (Meintjes, Turshen, and Pillay 2001; Rehn and Sirleaf 2002). In Nepal, the women had taken active role before the conflict and had united into networks due to imminent security threats before and during conflict which became precedent for an effective response against exclusion from the peace process. The women's movements and networks were rooted in society, and thus part of the explanation why mobilization continued beyond the end of conflict, when women tend to demobilize (Turshen 2001). When peace negotiations started in Nepal, only men were sitting around the peace table. No woman was included during the agreements reached, and when

a new constitution was about to be written, women were excluded. However, due to women's collective efforts, mobilization and protests with a developed repertoire of actions in contentious politics they achieved remarkable changes in the aftermath (Tilly 2004). In addition, the networks established for the inclusion in the peace process became a precedent for collaboration on other future gender related issues through the networks of trust built between the women's organizations, women politicians, women's political wings and women's activists (Tilly 2005).

3. Women's Movements' Activism and Policy Changes in Nepal

The women's organizations across different sectors united against security threats as well as for peace, as shown in chapter two. By learning through experience, they developed a mechanism for political advocacy and demanding policy changes at national level. The effective response against the exclusion from the peace process depended on the pre-conditions identified in chapter one: pre-established activism and institutional capacity (Rucht 2003; Meintjes 2001), conscious and committed women leaders, and legally binding instruments and tools. As I will elaborate on in this chapter, the women's movement in Nepal developed a political advocacy mechanism with the characteristics of a strong social movement which was established prior to the peace process which facilitated resistance against exclusion from the peace process, and future policy influence. The first section that follows describes in detail the mechanism and characteristics that the women's movement developed, which allowed strong engagement in the peace process. I highlight how many features of Tilly's (2005) WUNC were applied. Then I highlight two specific features of this mechanism that most significantly enhance its policy effectiveness: the importance of women's movement's active cultivation of their relationship with state actors and policy-makers (section 3.2) and engagement at the grassroots level (section 3.3) (Turshen 2001). This chapter will draw on empirical examples of policy influence from the peace process and later, such as the National Action Plan on the UNSCR 1325 and 1820.

3.1. Engaging for Peace: How Women's Networks developed Mechanisms to Produce Policy Change

The women's movement was learning by experience *prior* to the peace process e.g. during the property rights movement (1994-2002), when uniting for peace and ceasefire, and during to the Jana Andolan II (2006) mass movement. During these experiences, the women's movement realized that working collectively was the mere way of raising their voices effectively, and in order to achieve policy changes. They developed a disruptive form of action that relied on the modern

repertoire of contentious politics (Tilly 2004). This repertoire developed into rather standard practice for the women's movement and actually contains many features of Tilly's (2005) WUNC, which I will outline in this section. The repertoire had benefits for the development and reinforcement of a common unity through gathering and engaging with activists, media attention, and active engagement with policymakers.

Women's movements had systematized mobilization during the property rights movement, as well as through their active participation in the Jana Andolan II. They had developed several steps on how to mobilize effectively. Firstly, there had to be a leader with one clear vision and a participatory approach to a movement, meaning that the leader discusses with others to include everyone. Once this is done, phone calls and e-mails with an agenda would be sent out to the women's leaders and organizations on what was the vision, mission and how to go about it step-by-step. These steps could include e.g. firstly a rally, secondly a sit-in rally, thirdly a concept note, position paper or letter to the ministers and finally a letter to the prime minister. Women's organizations would contact their counterparts and networks both on the national level, but also on the grassroots level, as most had their own networks both in the districts and around Kathmandu. This could lead to a large scale mobilization within only days. For instance, a rally could be called within 3-4 days from when the decision is first taken (Shrestha, Sadhana, Interview, 2014-05-13). Moreover, they conducted round table discussions and disseminate publications on women's issues (Asian Development Bank 2013).

Another example of women's well advanced repertoire of action and persistence of involvement in the peace process was the "Women's Campaign for Peace and Constitution" (WOREC Nepal 2012), that took place between April 2011 to June 2012, which demonstrated clearly the political mechanism the women's movement had developed. The Campaign was composed of five different stages; the first was a campaign including different walkathons, workshops, trainings and demonstrations, hunger strikes, and mass rallies, in the second phase

different lobby and advocacy programs were launched. The third stage involved media attention and attention letters submitted to the different political parties. The fourth phase included networking on local, regional and national level pressuring for a women friendly and timely constitution, and the final phase was yet another series of rallies to create pressure from the streets.

Turning to specifically the dimensions of WUNC; firstly, the mobilization communicated **worthiness** by advocating for socially valuable causes, such as peace and human rights. **Unity** of the movement has already been outlined in chapter two when discussing network formation, but it can further be demonstrated by the engagement of women between the central and grassroots. Rallies were organized in ranks, marching and chanting their demands. During the peace mobilization, also national and local level used to coordinate demonstrations for peace. Each women organization had its own networks at the grassroots level, which they would mobilize and these would respectively protest in their communities for the same cause at the same time as the political advocacy was ongoing at the central level. On central level, those women who had been advocating for legal and policy changes, also advocated for peace. It was a collective effort of a nation's women at all levels, networks and groups of women who advocated for peace together.

Numbers of mobilized women were increased dramatically by the grassroots efforts, which I elaborate on in section 3.3. Within the repertoire of action, it was clear how much effort activists put on both achieving high numbers of participation and communicating those numbers clearly. For example, during rallies, participants form a single file line to make it easier to estimate number of people involved. Another example from the peace and cease fire movement, women walked in long a row with sheets of signatures for which was also signed by the leaders of political parties. The high levels of participation could easily then be communicated in the media, increasing public awareness of the movement's efforts.

Commitment of mobilized women was most evident in their willingness to disrupt when needed to be heard. Seemingly, the women's movement was fueled during political instability and in extraordinary conditions women would even break curfews and restrictions when calling for peace and for inclusion in the peace process. However, it is also important that these violations are used selectively and only when the situation is perceived to demand it. Nowadays, restrictions are not broken unless imminent issues such as in 2010 when several women's activist were imprisoned for advocating a women friendly constitutions the activism is an everyday effort as are rallies. As Rita Thapa mentioned during the National Anti-Rape rally on May 15th in 2014: "This is part of our everyday life".

The approach to mobilization, therefore, clearly draws on several features of strong social movements, as they were identified in the literature. In the remaining sections of this chapter, I consider two of the most vital characteristics of the movement for explaining its policy influence: engagement with policymakers and grassroots organization.

3.2. Engagement with Policymakers

Translating strong mobilization into policy influence is facilitated by direct engagement with policymakers. This was a clear goal of the women's mobilization and they approached this engagement through several channels, which I will outline in this section. The women's movement's interaction with the state, and identifying contact persons who would raise their demands and speak for them in the political forum was an important feature of the repertoire of action. The state is composed of various actors engaging in diverse relationship with the women's movements, in which the women's movement can influence and sometimes alter state behavior in e.g. policy (Rucht 2003; Tilly 2005).

According to Durga Ghimire "networking is important, because only then one can achieve success". A key is to identify who is "your friend" amongst officials and politicians who would

voice the issues of women in their respective forums (Durga Ghimire, Interview, 2014- 05-19). Thus, the networking with politicians and policy-makers are as vital as the networking between women's organizations for a strong voice. Often, the mobilization of women, through rallies, signing campaigns etc. are complementary to meeting with government officials, ministers and politicians. These activities are inevitable interrelated in the women's movement's strategy of achieving change. As highlighted in chapter two, networking between different women's organization, civil society organizations increased the movements' strength, but also the networking and dialogues that the women's movement held with political parties, politicians, and policy-makers were vital to achieve policy-changes.

An example was the movement's successful demand for 33% female representation in parliament. The process that achieved this demonstrated how the movement engaged intentionally with decision makers. Importantly, it also shaped future potential for engagement, as women parliamentarians become contact points. This kind of networking built on women parliamentarians and officials ties to the women's movement by their identity of being a woman, both carrying the long-term goal of gender equality and one individual representing the collective enterprise (Tilly 2005).

The success of the 33% women's representation in parliament was achieved by the means of the collective efforts of the women's networks and activists. The networks launched several initiatives such as consultancy meetings with political party representatives, extending invitations to meet the Inter-Party Women's Alliance within the political parties. The network submitted different petitions and position papers to the parties and politicians, in order to ensure that the 33% women's representation in the Constitution Assembly (CA) would be included. Once this legally binding provision was included in the interim-constitution, it became a tool/hook for the women's networks to use for their lobbying towards government, stakeholder and political parties for the implementations of the provision in the 2008 CA elections. Although the

networks had many challenges to overcome, such as getting time with policy-makers and politicians who would make time to listen to them, women organized different campaigns, rallies, and sit-in demonstrations. Several campaigns were initiated by the networks who called upon their members to participate in the different initiatives, which were then covered extensively by the media. For instance, Nagarik Aawaz was a network member and thus participated in the campaigns (Risal, Susan, Interview, 2014-04-23). In the aftermath of conflict in 2010 they organized a 42 days campaign in order to pressure the government to formulate a women's friendly constitution by the time of 2012. Unfortunately, the CA was dissolved before a constitution could be drafted. However, as Susan Risal mentioned, activism is an ongoing process, with the need to reflect on the good things and bad things in order to move forward. In 2007, women's networks gathered and held two large national Conferences with women from the districts to advance their strategy on how to make peace work for women (Abdela 2011).

As another example of active engagement with policymakers, in 2010, part of the peace process is still ongoing for the women's movements work, when women's movement along with the government was able to develop a National Action Plan (NAP) on UNSCR 1325 and 1820 (first country in South Asia who had completed in). It was very inclusive approach, as women from all different sectors, parties, locations, and abilities participated. "We had about 60 consultations in the country, five regional consultations and 2 to 3 national consultations before it was finalized, working together with the government. This we call "our baby" (Singh, Saloni, Interview, 2014-04-19). And we proactively working on help government implementing the NAP by activating districts groups, local peace committees and continuously monitoring. We have a monitoring group NAP. In 2014 midterm evaluations and the civil society organizations are involved in the monitoring process. The strategy is to work with government and political parties, but be a critical ally at the same time (Singh, Saloni, Interview, 2014-04-19).

Evidently, interaction with the state has been an important feature of the women's movement in Nepal. Networking national to local level (Turshen 2001) At the same time these networks and organization established at central level engaged in capacity-building and leadership trainings in the rural areas of Nepal.

3.3. Mobilization of Social Capital: Peace-building at Grassroots Level

While advocacy and demonstrations were going on at national level to influence policies, laws and order, also at grassroots levels women started organizing during and after conflict in so-called women's groups. These mobilizations were many times possible due to the trainings and capacity building that women's organizations from the national level provided at grassroots' level through a variety of activities. Some got help to organize from the NGO's from Kathmandu that would bring resources into the field, hold trainings, workshops and capacity-building activities. For instance, WHR and several other organizations reached out in local villages, and chose women leader's they would train and which in their turn would train and gather the women in the local communities and form women's groups on the ground.

In particular with regard to peace-building, women contributed with capacity in peace-building which many rural districts lacked (Jnawali, Sharada, Interview, 2014-05-13). Women that had become economically empowered during conflict started competing for the same jobs as men. One evident example of this is that women organized and initiated an organization, set up an office, established infrastructure for reconciliation and peace-building where authorities lacked capacities. They started trainings and were also supported by other organizations from central level. These women started to do unconventional jobs for women, such as house painting and they started to get contracts for big projects. Thus, many women increased their economic independence. Up to 2006 nobody was really free or thinking of reconciling, that was not heard of. This organization was consequently recognized by the district development committee which was a significant step to be recognized by local authority (Jnawali, Sharada, Interview, 2014-05-

13). Likewise, some of the women's groups in local districts gained authority and were consulted in many cases.

Another example that Sharada Jnawali (Interview, 2014-05-13) mentions is from one village in the Western parts of the country, in the Gorkha district, where there had been no law and order nor governance. In one of the villages women formed a loose network with some support from some donor agencies. These women began to set up rules in the village community, which *inter alia* was possible due to the lack of local governance and resources of local authorities. Thus, women were allowed to go ahead in order structure up the community and address their issues of concerns. The women had spoken to the recognized local authority, responsible for making rules and enforcing the rules. They said "go ahead and do your thing" because they lacked capacity and were displaced from center to local, and had very little resources to serve the community. This particular village was heavily affected by violence against women, which was induced by alcohol, and a matter of women's security. Thus, the women started to address the issue of heavy consumption of alcohol and thereof induced violence. For instance, they established rules such as not allowing sending a child to buy alcohol or sell alcohol after 8 o'clock at night. These rules were put on posters and spread in the community. In case of violence cases, they were then followed up. This was achieved by talking to the two people involved in a fight and have them talk about it in a community meeting, started counseling, negotiations or debates, which also became a matter of embarrassment for the two fighters. As a result, violence was gradually reduced and men also eventually saw the strength of these women (Jnawali, Sharada, Interview, 2014-05-13).

After the conflict, women started the peace building at grassroots' levels whereas on national level policy changes were advocated. These two parallel processes did connect into a feedback loop on where experiences were shared to national level and central level policies and capacity building trainings were fed back into the grassroots level. The efforts broke the tradition

of women being bound to the household and not even allowed going to the market (Sharma, Meena, Interview, 2014-04-28). Search for Common Ground, one of the organization's that emerged due to conflict and peace-making, works at the grassroots' level with various stakeholders, such as politicians, regional leaders, regional women's networks. The organizations aim was to mitigate the aftermath emotions of revenge, grief and tensions, and work towards reconciliation in the communities.

Thus, the networking approach of women's movement has been vital both on national but also grassroots' level. The inter-linkage between the two is what makes the women's movement strong. Engagement on the grassroots level has been central for training activists, mobilizing high numbers of women for protests, and has been a central source of momentum for the women's movement.

3.4. Chapter conclusion

As this chapter has identified strong characteristics of a social movements such as repertoire of action, WUNC, and campaigning in combination with the preconditions of an established infrastructure, conscious women leaders and networking across different sectors of society has proven to be crucial features of the women's movement in Nepal. As I have demonstrated these were significant features in order for overcome the challenges faced by women in the aftermath of conflict. Due to prior established activism and a systematization of mobilization processes women managed to protest the exclusion from the peace process. The networks and transactional networking (women's movement's interaction with politicians and government officials) were significant explanatory features for the persistence of women's engagement in the peace process. As (Meintjes, 2001:74) outlined, participation of women in party politics in e.g. Mozambique led to the masculinization of women politicians who consequently were shut out of the women's movement. Nepal's women's movement demonstrated clearly they regardless collaborated with women engaged in politics, and some of

those even formed part of the women's movement, such as Sahana Pradhan even if these women were constrained by party politics; they did form part of the women's movement. Nepal had some well-placed women leaders amongst the politicians which were conscious and committed, pushing for the women's agenda in combination with the efforts of the women's movement's lobbying for gender equity and non-discriminatory laws.

Conclusion

Evidently, the women's movement in Nepal heavily contributed to bringing the conflict to an end, calling for peace and consequently demanding their inclusion in the peace process. The engagement of the women's movement in the aftermath of conflict was in a comparative perspective unique; women achieved a remarkable quota of 33% representation in the Constituent Assembly during the aftermath. This was as a result to the women's movement's strong and vocal protests against the exclusion from the peace process. In many other post-conflict societies, women tend to be pushed back to their traditional roles after conflict and being absent from any political and decision-making processes, even though conflict opens up opportunities for women that may result in certain economic, social, and political gains, as well as challenging the traditional gender roles. However, once conflict ends, things often go back to usual way of business as before the conflict and women are facing difficulties in consolidating their gains.

In Nepal this also seemed to be about to happen in the aftermath when the peace process was a male dominated business. However, women in Nepal mobilized for inclusion in the peace process. I have inductively examined what factors made women mobilize and effectively bring about policy changes in post-conflict Nepal. As I have demonstrated, there have been several explanatory features underlying the Nepali women's strong engagement in the aftermath of conflict. I have distinguished between three pre-conditions that have been significant for the women's movement in Nepal, firstly, activism prior to the conflict (institutional capacity and infrastructure in society), secondly, the international feminist discourse providing tools for strategic lobbying such as CEDAW (legally binding instruments used for strategic political advocacy), and thirdly, the committed and conscious women leaders dedicated to the fight for an equal society. Given these conditions and imminent threats against women's and the nation's security, women united during conflict despite ideological, ethnic and political differences. These

momentous issues made women unite based on their identity and the goal of a peaceful nation. Women started to build networks to gain strength and collectively raise their voices for peace and many other issues. These networks cut across different levels of society from national level to grassroots level and community levels, as well as interactions between the women's networks and state actors. Especially significant have been the transactional networks i.e. the women's movement's interaction with the state, politicians and key decision makers. During the peace process women rallied, demonstrated, went on hunger strikes, and conducted workshops, capacity trainings, media outreach, street theatres for raising awareness and many other things. These political activities became precedent to a systematized political advocacy mechanism for achieving policy changes such as the bill for violence against women, enhanced property rights for daughters, and the remarkable quota of 33% in the Constituent Assembly. This mechanism included several characteristics of a strong social movement, such as a well advanced repertoire of action in contentious politics, campaigning and commitment in combination with what Tilly has labelled WUNC (worthiness, unity, numbers and commitment).

While the empirical work of this thesis relied exclusively on Nepal, the finding that characteristics of strong social movements are also central for post-conflict women's movements can travel beyond this case. Thus, I aimed to bring about a debate between the social movement theory and the gender and armed conflict literature, as these above mentioned generalizable characteristics of the Nepal's women's movement could help reflect upon possible necessary features for women overcoming challenges in other post-conflict societies. Evidently, women have to be recognized for their agency, similarly women have to recognize their own agency and use it by not only demanding quotas, but being conscious about gender shifts, seizing opportunities, and working collectively across different sectors of society as the women's movement in Nepal has demonstrated. The women's movement in Nepal has provided a virtuous example on how women may overcome post-war challenges. This study has been conducted in a very short research frame, and there have been many issues I would have wished

to explore which unfortunately fell outside of the thesis scope. I would like to have addressed the women's movements internal differences along political and ideological lines, although united for the nation and common issues. Moreover, I would have wished to engage in some visits to the field in order to grasp an understanding of the grassroots level's peace-building. Indeed, there is much more to be explored, and this study has merely scratched the surface on the women's movement's remarkable work in Nepal which deserves more in-depth exploration and attention.

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