

International Tutor's Activity Report	
Activity Title	A Farewell to Arms: Making Documentaries about Myanmar's Peace Process
Implementing Organisation	Yangon Film School e.V.
Dates of activity	3 & 4 December 2018
Venue	Yangon Film School, 5 Mya Yadanar Road, Pyithayar Avenue, Yankin Tsp. Yangon, Myanmar
Rapporteur(s)	Dr Khin Mar Mar Kyi, Lindsey Merrison
1. Context / Background <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political / Social / Economic • National / Regional / Global 	
<p>The bid for peace in Myanmar is one of the greatest challenges currently facing the government of Myanmar. Much-maligned and often perceived as an elitist undertaking between the government, the Tatmadaw (Myanmar's military) and a handful of ethnic armed groups, there is much need to shed light on a process from which much of the population feels distanced and even excluded.</p> <p>Although women and youth have long contributed to political change in Myanmar and continue to be drivers of social cohesion and peacebuilding in their communities, they have so far been largely excluded from decision-making.</p> <p>The Yangon Film School (YFS) www.yangonfilmschool.org is Myanmar's only film school. Since its inception in 2005 the School has – in spite of numerous constraints – consistently sought to harness the untapped potential of Myanmar's youth and women by providing solid skills free of charge for almost 200 young people from 14 different ethnicities and all walks of life in Myanmar.</p> <p>The workshop <i>A Farewell to Arms: Making Documentaries about Myanmar's Peace Process</i> aimed to build on the School's previous success by bringing together young research scholars and filmmakers to explore in a workshop the roles of different actors in the peace process. The workshop also aimed to encourage the role of the researcher and filmmaker as cultural actor promoting human rights and social change. The project also sought to encourage free discourse, inter-ethnic and inter-cultural dialogue, as well as dialogue between actors in and experts on the peace process, parliamentarians and people.</p>	
2. Gender Relevance <i>How many women were enrolled on the course and how were they empowered?</i>	
<p>Thirteen women – i.e. 65% of the total number of participants – took part in the workshop. These women came from diverse backgrounds and ethnicities including: Danu, Taung Yoe, Shan, Kachin, Shan-Pa-O, Rakhine and Kayin. Ten of these women have trained at YFS or are</p>	

<p>currently in training at YFS; three women are working for CSOs and youth groups across Myanmar.</p> <p>The large percentage of female participants in the workshop reflects their deep interest in the topic of peace per se and in promoting the inclusion of women, youth and vulnerable and marginalised people in the peace process.</p> <p>The women attending this workshop were empowered as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) by being given an opportunity to enter a conversation about a topic that is central to the country's future b) by taking on the creative lead in each of the four filming-and-research teams formed by the end of the two-day workshop c) by learning new skills: how to research and develop long-format observational documentary; how to prepare a project proposal and budget for a funding application d) by connecting with young activists and cultural actors from diverse parts of the country, strengthening their ability to work in a team to pursue a common agenda/investigation
<h3>3. Objectives</h3>
<p>This two-day workshop brought together a group of the School's filmmakers with experts and researchers in the field of conflict and peace studies, with the aim of inspiring them to develop a number of long-term observational documentary projects following the peace process in Myanmar.</p>
<h3>4. Target Group / Participants</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision makers, young leaders • Number of female and male participants
<p>The workshop participants were fourteen women and six men aged between 23 and 51 from diverse backgrounds and ethnicities in Myanmar including Shan, Pa-O, Kayin, Kayan and Bamar Buddhist and Kachin, Kayan and Kayin Christian.</p> <p>There were 14 YFS students and alumni and six research scholars from across Myanmar. Just over 60% of the participants were under 35, and 50% were under 30 years of age.</p> <p>Almost all of the participants are active in civil society and as such, reflect something of the diversity of youth engagement in Myanmar: they are either working for CSOs such as the Danu Women's Association, resource/data collecting projects in Taunggyi and Lashio, youth groups such as the Taung Yoe Art and Culture Association, environmental groups (Earth Rights) in Kayah or the Yangon Karen Youth Group, and/or in the arts and media, working for local news outlets (Hsenpai News Journal), for the National University of Arts and Culture, for BBC Media Action, or as independent filmmakers, creating their own projects or films for CSOs, NGOs and other clients in the development sector.</p>
<h3>5. Course Design / Methods Used</h3>
<p>The event was divided into two days and was facilitated by academic and filmmaker Dr Khin Mar Mar Kyi and filmmaker and YFS founder Lindsey Merrison.</p>

Day One: *The Peace Process in Myanmar: Who Are the Main Actors?*

On Day One the following experts delivered talks informed by their particular areas of research followed by Q&A sessions with the participants.

Harriet Martin (UK), Head of Communications at the Joint Peace Fund (JPF) and **Moe Moe**, also from the JPF, provided a brief summary of the peace process.

Mary Callahan, Associate Professor, Jackson School of International Studies, author of *Making Enemies: War and State Building in Burma, Conflict and the 2020 Elections in Myanmar* gave an overview of the history of war and peace in Myanmar and the chances for peace as a new election in 2020 looms.

Nay Phone Latt, Burmese blogger and activist, ex-political prisoner, founder of the 'Flower Speech' campaign blog, currently serving as a Yangon Regional MP for Thingangyun Township talked about the need to quell the groundswell of hate speech and negative discourse and the role that artists can play in promoting positive narratives and social cohesion.

Sao Myawaddy, ex-political prisoner, lawyer, writer and prominent peace activist in Shan State talked gave an overview of the shocking depletion of human resources as a result of decades of war and displacement.

Adrian Morrice, Chief Technical Advisor, Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee (JMC) and **Moe Aung** (JMC) described the National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) of 2013 and the role of the JMC.

At the end of Day One, Lindsey Merrison screened and analysed a short documentary *Going Home*, made by one of the workshop participants from Kayah State. In this 20-minute film, the young filmmaker pays a visit to his impoverished native village in Myanmar's Kayah State where he reconnects with his hill-farming family and a way of life marked by privation but rich in tradition that has remained unchanged for centuries. His presence rekindles old arguments between his siblings and his mother, reminding him all too keenly of the sacrifices each of them has made so that he might have an education. This film provided participants with an example of a compelling and deeply personal observational documentary, with the filmmaker as the conduit to another world that is both familiar and yet made strange by his return.

Day Two: *How to Identify the Theme and Protagonist(s) of a Documentary Film?*

On Day Two participants were asked to interview each other and present their interview-partner to the group. The participants then split up into smaller, breakaway groups and eventually formed four five-person filmmaker-researcher teams.

After a brief round-up by the facilitators of some of the themes presented by the speakers and participants on Day One, these teams began to discuss potential themes and protagonists after which they nominated two team members to pitch their ideas to the whole group. The best of these ideas were put forward as the basis of a long-form documentary film project of 60-120 minutes in length.

In the afternoon session *How to Put Your Ideas on Paper: Grantwriting*: led by Dr Khin Mar Mar Kyi and Lindsey Merrison, the groups learned how to develop written applications and budgets using the example of the SOAS P4P grant guidelines.

During the final part of the workshop, an Action Plan was drawn up to establish the next steps:

1. Who will do what, where and when
2. Setting up research 'hubs'
3. Communication between scholars and filmmakers
4. Consolidating research and filmmaking approaches

5. Contributing to the p4p grant application

After the end of the two-day workshop, the four teams spent another two weeks independently researching locations and protagonists and preparing individual filming budgets. These were incorporated into a grant application which was submitted to SOAS on 31.12.2018.

6. Topics Discussed

What were the main topics covered by tutors/trainers and discussed in the group?

In their Joint Peace Fund presentation, **Harriet Martin and Moe Moe** urged participants to read the National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) and reminded them that this document should be viewed as the 'beginning of a road map' rather than the culmination of talks that many mistakenly believe it to be. Part of the reason why the peace process is perceived as failing was the difficulty of defining the process itself: is it about politics, rights or resources? Harriet compared the peace process in Myanmar with others in Cyprus and Columbia which had both failed because the bulk of the population were 'untouched'. She said that the peace agreement in Northern Ireland had worked because the people were involved and 'owned' the peace plan. She urged the participants to:

'Find imaginative ways to connect the Myanmar population with the peace process through film'.

Mary Callahan reminded the participants that Myanmar has experienced live warfare for 77 years and that Myanmar's military, which basically views the people of Myanmar as potential enemies, has asserted itself as the 'guardian of the country'. As a result, the army has created deep divisions – not just between the army and the people, but between urban and rural populations, and between the rich and the poor – in a country which it holds together by force. She also pointed out the incompatibility of the peace process and the upcoming elections in 2020; the peace process, she said, seeks to build bridges and develop a relationship of trust between old opponents, whilst the election campaign is about showing up and criticising opponents, i.e. sowing division. 'Politics are based on a 5-year term, whereas peace is a profound and demanding process requiring decades of transition.' This central dichotomy means that the peace process will probably grind to halt.

Predicting 'deadlock' for the years to come, she cited the enduring lack of genuine federalism and devolution as another central fault line as well the absence of a plan for security sector reform: 'The ethnic armed organisations (EAOs) want a new federal system and equality, but the army doesn't want to give the EAOs anything. The NLD doesn't know what to give the EAOs so they are basically part of the system which oppresses the different ethnic groups'. For things to move forward, she summarised, it is crucial for each side – the army, the government and the EAOs – to understand each other's different life experiences. Instead of concentrating on giant peace conferences it would be better for the NLD to do the leg work in hundreds of informal meetings.

'Documentaries are needed to show how much needs to change in the whole country.'

Local MP and blogger Nay Phone Latt talked about the potential for art, 'edutainment' and social messaging to promote behavioural change. Describing his 'Flower Speech' campaign, which was born in the wake of the Rakhine conflict when hate speech became 'a weapon as powerful as arms', he said that being subtle rather than head-on with messaging is key, citing their slogan: 'For everyone to get along, let's control our mouth', which was accompanied by photographs of different people with a flower in their mouth. Although one campaign alone cannot lead to behavioural change, the Flower Speech campaign has led to two positive results: firstly, people are now aware

of what 'hate speech' is and, secondly, the Ministry for Culture and Religious Affairs is currently drafting an 'anti hate-speech law'.

Workshop participant: 'How can we make a film about the military in this country?'

Nay Phone Latt: 'Perhaps you can make a historical film, like the (2017) Korean film, A Taxi Driver'

Having felt that her forty years as a lawyer under Myanmar's military government had been 'kind of a waste' **Sao Myawaddy** was initially happy to be asked to represent Shan EAOs during the peace process. Many EAOs emerged, she reminded the group, as a result of Ne Win's breach of trust in ignoring the Panglong agreement. Things were only made worse however when Myanmar's military added two new clauses to the NCA, one being that States must not separate from the union, and the other that the Tatmadaw be recognised as the country's only military force. Conflict in the country has seen a terrible loss of human resources on both sides, the creation of IDP camps and the deplorable use (by both sides) of people as porters and human shields. Conflict also means loss of economic and educational opportunities; illiteracy is on the rise. Wars are 'difficult, dirty and dangerous', they effect young people psychologically and cause migration and inequality; the families of dead soldiers suffer; women are often forced into prostitution; there is a danger of an Aids epidemic. The peace process has hit a road block and the country needs a greater awareness of its own political history in order to have a future.

'I am very happy to help filmmakers try to make sense of what has gone before and to research ethnic minority groups in order to find out what kind of solutions might be possible'

Moe Aung and **Adrian Morrice** of the Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee began their presentation with a number of sobering facts: no fewer than 11 out of 14 states and regions and over a quarter of the population are affected by conflict, and Myanmar has the third largest landmine contamination in the world. Bringing together the government, 21 EAOs and the Tatmadaw, Myanmar's peace process is the most complex in the world. Only inclusiveness and power sharing at a national level will lead to lasting peace. Myanmar's peace process is at least 100% nationally owned and there is 'very little' international intervention. Given the lack of trust it comes as no surprise that representatives from both sides do not always attend meetings. In a bid to create a feeling of equality and give proceedings a peaceful identity, participants are asked to don blue tunics over uniforms to cover up medals and therefore their rank. This enables representatives to communicate with each other, and especially with the public, on equal footing during public consultations. The JMC is bringing former enemies – Myanmar's Police Chief and the ABSDF (Student Army) for example – to the table. Although some progress has been made on conflict resolutions, there has as yet been no political dialogue, this is beyond the scope of the JMC. The pair also acknowledged the enduring culture of fear and tendency to equate masculinity with authority and described how important it is to integrate women into the process.

'With 50K+ followers, our Facebook page has had a revolutionary effect in making known our work to a wider audience.'

In **Q & A sessions** following the presentations, the **participants** agreed that peace was a profound and demanding process requiring decades of transition and social change; however, social change is not currently part of contractual negotiations. Public awareness, the group felt, needs to be targeted. However, notions of who this public is – with many people identifying on multiple levels i.e. with their family, their village, their tribe, their gender, their generation etc. – are as complex as the peace process itself and not helped by those propagating the myth of 'pure blood'. The group also cited the need for inclusivity – women, young people, minorities – as well as equality, diversity, tolerance and respect for the other.

Questions from the participants included:

What are the languages of the peace process, how are local/ethnic languages acknowledged?

How can the media be encouraged to develop greater cultural sensitivity?

What is the role of civil society in the peace process?

Why does the NLD give the impression that it is involuntarily covering up for the military?

How can the official narrative of the military as the saviour of the nation be countered?

We need more forceful messages, like 'Stop the War!'

7. Concrete Outputs

(i.e. number and type of films, exercises, scripts, treatments, other outputs)

The two days resulted in the development of:

- four filmmaker-researcher teams formed to further develop each film project
- four short treatment ideas focusing on several protagonists active at different levels of the peace process
- four filming/travel budgets for the selected locations

Yangon Film School will continue to support the filmmaking teams to apply for funding for the further development and production of these documentary projects with the aim of creating a series of long-term observational documentaries following Myanmar's difficult road to peace.

8. Evaluation

*To measure the effectiveness of this YFS course, please suggest realistic **indicators** for its success*

The most significant outcome of this workshop was the opportunity for researchers, global experts and filmmakers to learn and share, and in particular for local researchers and filmmakers to understand the chances and challenges of the peace process in Myanmar. Based on initial feedback from workshop participants, significant lessons were learned, in particular the two days helped participants to compare the Myanmar peace process with other peace processes, enabling them to widen their vision and to see their own ethnic conflicts through a different and more comprehensive international 'lens'.

It this way, participants were able to understand that 'peace' is a process, and Myanmar is not 'an exception' although influenced by certain local conditions. It also helped boost participants' morale: at the end of the two days, they agreed that the peace process does matter and is key to the country's development.

Participants also expressed their realisation of the complexity of Myanmar's peace process: while most conflict societies deal one or more armed groups, Myanmar has to deal with no fewer than 21

armed groups needing to agree terms and conditions and that it will probably take years, even decades for lasting peace to come to fruition.

Participants also began to realise the importance of focussing on peace as a process rather than on the eventual outcome of peace talks.

In short, sharing knowledge among experts, researchers and film makers from different ethnicities served to enhance learning, to stimulate ideas for continuous innovation of the peace process. The project also helped participants to sharpen their vision to document different aspects of the peace process and make films that will help connect the wider population to this process in an imaginative and moving way.

Course tutors: Lindsey Merrison & Dr Khin Mar Mar Kyi



Date: 17.05.2019

Signature, role

All photos on following pages to be credited to: YFS archive

- 1) Workshop participants getting to know each other
- 2) Lindsey Merrison (left) and Dr Khin Mar Mar Kyi
- 3) & 4) Filmmakers and researchers discuss topics for films in break-out groups



