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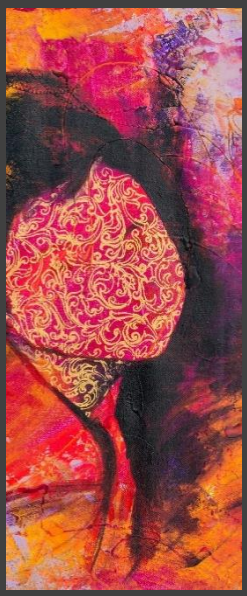

CONSTRUCTING FEMALE CITIZENSHIP IN TRANSITION

Women's activism and education in Myanmar

Elizabeth J. Tregoning Maber

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University of Amsterdam

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CONSTRUCTING FEMALE CITIZENSHIP IN TRANSITION

Women's activism and education in Myanmar

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To Angela,
in appreciation of your support
and your dedication to the practice of
socially just education.

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Abbreviations

ADB – Asian Development Bank
CBO – Community-based organisation
CDA – Critical Discourse Analysis
CEDAW – Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CESR – Comprehensive Education Sector Review
CSO – Civil society organisation
EfA – Education for All
GBV – Gender-based violence
GEN – Gender Equality Network
GPI – Gender Parity Index
INGO – International non-governmental organisation
KCSN – Karenni Civil Society Network
KED – Karen Education Department
KWO – Karen Women's Organisation
MDG – Millennium Development Goal
NGO – Non-governmental organisation
NLD – National League for Democracy
NNER – National Network for Education Reform
PoVAW – Prevention of Violence Against Women
SDG – Sustainable Development Goal
SWAN – Shan Women's Action Network
TBC – Thai Border Consortium
TNI – Transnational Institute
TRP – Technical resource person
UIL – UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning
UN – United Nations
UNHCR – The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF – United Nations Children's Fund
UN Women - United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
USDP – Union Solidarity and Development Party
VAW – Violence against women
WCDI – Women Can Do It
WLB – Women's League of Burma
WON – Women's Organisation Network

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Thesis Summary

CONSTRUCTING FEMALE CITIZENSHIP IN TRANSITION

Women's activism and education in Myanmar

I. Introduction

Education practices, as part of socially constructed institutions, can be highly gendered and as such present models of expected behaviour from young men and young women (Dunne, Humphreys & Leach 2006; Dunne 2009). However, such practices also vary significantly across and within contexts and in varied forms of educational space, both formal and non-formal. This research explores the multiple ways in which education practices may construct notions and expectations of female citizenship within the transitioning context of Myanmar, including counter responses from within civil society movements.

There is a growing attention in international development and comparative education towards the role of education in transitional and conflict-affected contexts as potentially creating opportunities to promote greater social inclusion and address inequalities that can fuel grievances (Davies 2010; Leach & Dunne 2007; Novelli & Lopes Cardozo 2008; Lopes Cardozo & Shah 2016). Likewise, development priorities over the last two decades, as reflected in the Millennium Development Goals and now the Sustainable Development Goals as well as initiatives such as Education for All, have highlighted commitments both to expanding inclusive education and to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, reinforcing the associations between these spheres (Salvi 2017; Unterhalter 2015; UN 2016). However, there has been a tendency to oversimplify this relationship, and the historical lack of meaningful attention to the interconnections between such global goals, moving beyond limited notions of access to education, has been heavily critiqued (Kabeer 2005; 2015; Unterhalter 2012; Cornwall & Rivas 2015; Esquivel & Sweetman 2016). While the Sustainable Development Goals seek to promote improved linkages across these spheres (UN 2016), concerns continue to be expressed that the role of education in supporting *transformative* change may again be under-emphasised (Sterling 2014; 2016; Esquivel 2016).

Additionally, despite references to non-formal or 'life-long' learning included in international policy, the role of non-formal education and the contributions of non-state actors to education practices, particularly NGOs and civil society groups, has frequently been neglected in favour of a more narrow prioritisation of schooling (Casey & Asamoah 2016; Stromquist 2015a). Likewise, the role of women's organisations and activist movements in advancing equality objectives has similarly been highlighted as an area requiring greater consideration (Cornwall & Edwards 2014; Stromquist 2015a; 2015b) particularly by international institutions and actors seeking to promote gender equality.

This research therefore contributes to these debates through revealing specific social, cultural and political influences that operate within the context both of education practices and of gender equality/rights-oriented activism in Myanmar, drawing links between these two spheres in advancing notions of gender equality and empowerment. In so doing I also propose a conceptualisation of *activist-educators* as key mediators between international, national and community agendas, suggesting that greater consideration of the complexities of influences that these civil society activists and educators navigate can support more holistic approaches to development goals. A sustained case-study approach is therefore taken to highlight these evolving responses within Myanmar's activist women's movements, also drawing on my own experiences working with civil society and education practitioners within the context since early 2009.

As Myanmar is undergoing political transitions after half a century of authoritarian military rule, and tensions continue through armed conflicts and inter-communal violence (Lall 2016; Walton & Hayward 2014), the changing political dynamics of the last five years provide an opportunity to observe the emergent responses from varied education practitioners as well as civil society movements calling for increased social inclusion. These include demands for formal education reforms and an expansion of civil society capacity engaged in non-formal education, particularly led by women's activist organisations. The research therefore addresses the following two main research questions and their sub-questions:

1. *What roles do differing education practices play in constructing citizenship ideals in Myanmar, and in what ways are these gendered?*

   - *How have practices in education sustained and legitimised women's social subordination?*

- *In what ways are alternative sites of learning presenting alternative models?*

2. *How is women's activism in Myanmar and the Thai border creating alternative spaces for transformative learning during Myanmar's period of political transition?*

- *How are women's organisations responding to shifting constraints and opportunities within the period of transition and what are the consequences of these responses?*
- *What alternative presentations of female citizenship emerge from these learning sites?*

The research adopts a critical feminist approach building on post-structural conceptualisations of space and the possibilities of transformation (Braidotti 2011a; Butler 2004), with the aim of highlighting opportunities to learn from Myanmar women activists' experiences in constructing alternative sites of gendered learning. Specifically, the research draws on Deleuzian notions of space and nomadism (Deleuze & Guattari 2013/1988; Braidotti 2011a) to advance a conceptualisation of learning environments and the position of activist-educators which reveals the plurality of influences which may find their way into sites of learning. Research was conducted during multiple fieldwork visits between 2014 and 2016 following an ethnographic approach which combined semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, site visits and observations with ethnographic discourse analysis (Manor-Binyamini 2011). This took a case-study approach, engaging ten women's organisations leading community education courses that sought to address women's social inequality, and allowed not only for a study of their education practices, content and training texts, but also the perspectives of educators and participants in constructing and experiencing these learning environments. The thesis is subsequently structured into two main sections, Part II (Chapters 4-6) and Part III (Chapters 7-9) that address the dual priorities of the research as reflected in the research questions.

II. Education and Gendered Citizenship

The chapters in Part II explore the varying sites of learning and the gendered presentations that emerge from them, responding to the first research question centring on the role of differing education practices in constructing citizenship ideals.

Theorising Education Spaces: conceptualising spaces for learning and (gendered) citizenship constructions in Myanmar's transition

Chapter 4 develops the conceptualisation of educational spaces that underpins the subsequent chapters of the thesis. Varied education sites, particularly in situations of conflict and transition, can play multiple and changing roles, including validating reproductions of state-sanctioned citizenship along exclusive strata, or conversely adopting a more oppositional stance. This chapter explores the dynamics and contributions of differing education practices within the context of Myanmar, with a focus on the ways such practices and the emerging presentations are gendered. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's notions of *striated* and *smooth* spaces (2013/1988), I highlight the differing dimensions of Myanmar's education environments which reveal alternate practices of learning and avenues for expanding inclusion. Myanmar state education practices have largely been found to restrict opportunities for inclusive learning through replicating entrenched social hierarchies characteristic of *striated* space. By initially highlighting the contrasting and seemingly oppositional ways in which varying educational sites have approached learning, moments then emerge in which overlaps become apparent, revealing opportunities for alternative and more inclusive learning practices to find entry points to erode hierarchical social structures which are replicated in institutional schooling. Drawing on examples of practices both in community education and by individual teachers already within formal education, *smooth* learning dynamics may therefore provide opportunities to undo the fixity of hierarchies.

Learning violence and shame: gendering violence and the body in Myanmar's formal education spaces

Chapter 5 explores gendered practices in formal schooling, as experienced and voiced by young Myanmar women of varied religions and ethnicities reflecting back on their recent education experiences. I draw a link between the subordination of female students which is inscribed in formal education practices and the legitimisation of violence against women within Myanmar society more broadly. In particular, three dimensions of gendered practices are revealed which contribute to the promotion of reticence and shame: the physicality of positionings in educational spaces; the materiality associated with women's bodies; and the silencing of young women's voices. These learning practices, themselves examples of structural and symbolic violence, are found to enable and sustain patterns of direct violence against women as

embedded in social inequalities and gender hierarchies. The chapter ends with an additional focus study which presents the desires for alternative school environments expressed by young women in a focus group discussion, revealing teaching methodology, relevance of curriculum and practical activities including participation in sports as key priorities for the young women.

Cross-border transitions: navigating conflict and political change through community education practices in Myanmar and the Thai border

Political oscillations in Myanmar and Thailand, between militarisation and democratic reform, have prompted a rapid renegotiation of the alignments, goals and priorities of non-state education providers, both international and community-based, along the two countries' border. Chapter 6 explores the responses to shifts in political environment, including the reorientation of donor funding and an increasing emphasis on repatriation, which have affected community education practices within Myanmar and amongst the refugee and migrant communities along the Thai border. Extending the theorisation of smooth and striated space to place emphasis on the nomadic experiences within cross-border movements (Braidotti 2011a), community learning sites on the Thai border are found to draw from multiple points of contact to create distinct learning environments, often constructed in opposition to Myanmar schooling. However these sites are also subject to diverse influences and are shifting prioritisation with the current processes of political change, resulting in increased emphasis on preparation for return to Myanmar.

III. Feminist Learning and Activism in Transition

The implications of the gendered nature of learning practices in maintaining women's social subordination are met with counterpoints and contestations in the learning environments constructed by women's activist organisations. The chapters in Part III therefore extend the analysis of the gendered nature of learning spaces to explore how women's organisations have mobilised community learning as a means of challenging gender inequalities within Myanmar, responding to the second research question of how women's activism is creating alternative spaces for transformative learning.

Conceptualising spaces for women's activism in conflict and transition

Chapter 7 extends the theoretic conceptualisations of space and nomadic subjectivity to the position of women activists and the activist learning

environments they are (re)constructing. Women's civil society organisations occupy a distinctive position in mediating between varied community, state and international priorities, which are accentuated through the changing dynamics of situations of conflict and transition. The experiences of displacement and disruption that emerge from situations of turbulence can increase the points of contact that activists encounter adding opportunities for alternative learning that can support activist agendas. However such situations can also increase the hostility and risk that activists are confronted with. Through a conceptualisation of the nomadic subjectivity of feminist activists in navigating these varied influences, the strategies and learning practices that activists employ also reveal the often hidden affective consequences of their positions.

Finding feminism, finding voice? Mobilising community education to build women's participation in Myanmar's political transition

Chapter 8 explores changing positions within women's activist movements, in particular an emerging engagement with 'feminism' as a concept and term, as articulated by Myanmar women activist-educators. I suggest that this emerging identification as feminists amongst activists is illustrative of a dissatisfaction with the depoliticisation and decontextualisation of women's equality goals evidenced through interactions with some international organisations, and also reflects the nomadism of activist-educators in constructing alternative enactments of feminist education. The chapter concludes with a second additional focus study of feminist leadership training, highlighting the potential disjuncture between the content of leadership training programmes and the expressed needs of female current and aspiring leaders.

(Re)Constructing Empowerment: challenges and alternatives in transporting women's empowerment training

Women's empowerment training is a common feature of initiatives across development contexts, delivered by international and local organisations alike and often following a training of trainers (ToT) approach intending to amplify reach. While the scope of individual courses does vary, much of the material being used is found to present homogenised and linear representations of men and women that are infrequently contextualised to local contexts, raising concerns over the potential replication of shallow representations of gender identities, roles and relationships. However, such representations do not remain uncontested with local women's organisations challenging the

constructions of international training practices to create alternative avenues for empowerment through learning. Chapter 9 highlights the challenges activist-educators have faced in trying to replicate empowerment training and presents two case studies of alternative empowerment courses designed in response by two women's organisations which highlight emphasis on sexuality and women's bodies, experiences of violence and highly localised content such as the implications of federalism for ethnic states and the environmental impact of extractive industries.

IV. Conclusions & Implications

Understanding the enactments of community education highlighted above as a form of activism that explicitly aims to counter the models of learning presented in formal state education systems, indicates the persisting gendered challenges that exist within education systems even when enrolment figures may suggest equality. Alternative learning environments led by women activists and community educators from civil society organisations are seeking to construct a different presentation of female citizenship, particularly focusing on notions of empowerment, political and community participation, and leadership. As these learning environments are unbounded by the necessities of prescribed subject learning, curriculum texts and assessment they present significant variety in their priorities and approaches, indicating opportunities to contextualise notions such as empowerment, which remain problematic in development discourse (Cornwall & Rivas 2015). These creative, activist learning environments are found to reflect the varied experiences of women activists and educators who draw on multiple points of contact, including with international training material, to adapt, repurpose and reformulate notions such as empowerment. Such reorientations are found to include the prioritisation of sexuality and women's bodies, experiences of violence, more relational understandings of (in)equality, identity and religion, political engagement and relationships with the State.

Attention to these alternative priorities therefore indicates opportunities not only to advance and contextualise understandings of gender equality and empowerment within development agendas, but also priorities within education reforms to promote more inclusive and transformative learning environments. These findings reinforce calls for more inclusive approaches to development that place emphasis on social, relational and ecological inclusiveness in order to make progress in achieving sustainable development for all (Gupta & Vegelin 2016; Pouw & Gupta 2017). It is

suggested that recognising the roles and expertise of activist-educators in contextualising concepts as well as building closer alliances with women's activist organisations who are designing and delivering their own education and training practices provides a starting point to support more targeted, inclusive and participatory efforts to support gender justice.

Part I: Introducing the Research

"[M]arginality has become a powerful space."
(Hall 1997, 183)

Chapter 1

Introduction to the research

_____

This research seeks to explore the multiple and varied ways in which education practices may construct notions and expectations of female citizenship within the transitioning context of Myanmar including attention to both formal education practices within state schooling and non-formal education practices amongst community-based and civil society organisations. In so doing, emphasis is given to the ways activists and community educators within the women's movements in Myanmar make use of education and training practices to create alternative spaces for transformative learning which contrast with current educational experiences as expressed by young women within formal schooling environments. The research adopts a critical feminist approach building on post-structural conceptualisations of space and the possibilities of transformation, with the aim of highlighting opportunities to learn from Myanmar women activists' experiences in constructing alternative sites of gendered learning. These creative, activist learning environments are found to reflect the varied experiences of women activists and educators who draw on multiple points of contact, including international material, to adapt, repurpose and reformulate notions such as empowerment, indicating a relevance for international development actors and institutions seeking to implement equality goals.

This chapter provides an introduction to the research, starting with a brief overview of the focus of the study and its context. While Chapter 2 provides a more detailed exploration of Myanmar's conflict dynamics, processes of political transition and the position of education and gender considerations within these, the aim here is to briefly introduce the broad context of the research. My position within the context of study and motivation in undertaking the research is then highlighted, followed by a discussion of the rationale and relevance of the research, leading to the research questions which shape the study and analysis. After an explanation of the key terms that recur throughout the thesis, the chapter concludes with an outline of the structure of the thesis, including a summary of the status of the articles which are collected within the body of the text.

1.1 Overview

Varied education sites, particularly in situations of conflict and transition, can play multiple and changing roles, including validating reproductions of state-sanctioned citizenship along exclusive strata, or conversely adopting a more oppositional stance (Davies 2010). This research seeks to explore the dynamics and contributions of differing education practices within the context of Myanmar, with a focus on the ways such practices and the emerging presentations are gendered. I highlight the differing dimensions of Myanmar's education environments which reveal alternate practices of learning and avenues for expanding inclusion. In so doing, I highlight how alternative learning dynamics may provide opportunities to undo the fixity of hierarchies currently reproduced in state schooling practices and allow for greater inclusivity. Such learning environments have been mobilised by women's organisations who are using community education classrooms as a means to share knowledge of women's inequality, rights mechanisms, legal advice, or political engagement, and to foster supportive networks to promote social change. The research therefore takes a dual approach, revealing the gendered practices within education environments and, simultaneously, the activist responses from within women's movements. Ultimately, then, this thesis leads towards advancing understandings of the roles that women's activist movements play in constructing new or alternative learning environments.

My research into these activist educational practices has revealed multiple influences, which holds relevance for the engagement of international agencies and actors in development objectives. 'Empowerment training' is a frequent feature of development initiatives aiming to support gender equality (Batliwala 2007; MacKenzie 2009), and many of the women leading community education sites have participated in such training and draw from the material used. For example, in the context of Myanmar, international organisations offer workshops and courses under such banners as *women's empowerment*, *women's leadership training* and *capacity building*, often in English, facilitated by international consultants and often through a 'train the trainer' approach to cascade learning beyond the course. While the scope of individual courses does vary, much of the material being used is found to present homogenised and linear representations of men and women that are infrequently contextualised to local contexts (see Chapter 9). The fact that many of these activist community educators have participated in international training programmes and make use of the same international training material may be seen as an indicator of success for such initiatives, however it also raises concerns over the replication of (often shallow) representations of gender

identities, roles and relationships. However, representations of course do not remain uncontested (Apple 2012) and the alternative learning sites developed by women civil society activists and educators differ in their contextualisation and approach to addressing issues of gender, violence, women's empowerment, leadership and participation in decision making. Using ethnographic discourse analysis, working with community educators leading courses aiming to address gender inequalities in Myanmar, this thesis explores the ways in which local trainers are adapting, supplementing and rewriting material for their classes that create alternative constructions. By exploring these multiple and divergent processes I aim to highlight broader implications for the role of education and training in (re)constructing gender roles.

1.1.1 Context of the study

As will be further outlined below (see *1.2*), this research builds on several years' experience living and working in Myanmar and the Thai border region. My experiences working within education and development initiatives in the context of study has therefore greatly supported this research and coincides with the period of Myanmar's political transition from authoritarian military rule to elected government. The end of 2010 saw the election of a quasi-civilian government under the leadership of President Thein Sein who, during the subsequent five-year rule, instigated a series of reforms across multiple sectors including opening economic markets, relaxing media censorship, controversial land reforms and the highly contentious education sector reforms (Lall 2016). The election of the National League for Democracy (NLD) in late 2015 in the first openly contested election has signalled an opportunity for democratic transition to advance, however in this current period there is still tension and uncertainty as to the extent of potential transformation. Recent years have also seen a rise in religious conservatism allied with Burmese nationalism which has resulted in violent inter-communal conflicts between majority Buddhist and minority Muslim communities, particularly in the western state of Rakhine (Walton & Hayward 2014). Political transitions have not seen these tensions abated and there are growing concerns over the continued exclusion and displacement of minority Muslim groups in Myanmar's western state of Rakhine, with incidence of violence increasing (OHCHR 2017; Schonthal & Walton 2016).

While the majority of the country are ethnically Burman and Buddhist (see section *1.4* below), leading to a common association of these two identifications with national identity, Myanmar is ethnically diverse with 135 recognised ethnic groups and as many languages (Walton & Hayward 2014, 4-

5). Multiple conflicts with ethnic armed groups have endured for upwards of sixty years over demands for ethnic auto-determination and remain largely unresolved, with active fighting still ongoing in the northern states of Kachin and Shan, while ceasefires are tenuously holding in eastern regions of the country (Walton 2013; Lall 2016). Militarisation has therefore been a feature of life for consecutive generations and has shaped gendered, ethnic and religious experiences of conflict, displacement, livelihoods and political participation as well as experiences in education. Extending from decades of militarisation, the projection of a dominant Buddhist and Burman ideology has been heavy-handedly enforced, particularly through education practices and have further exacerbated marginalisation for minority groups (Walton 2013, 14-16; Hayward 2015; Salem-Gervais & Metro 2012).

Current practices in Myanmar state education are found in this research to continue historical patterns in being highly gendered and sustaining social hierarchies, as articulated by young women who have participated in state schooling, despite the attempts of some individual teachers to promote more inclusive learning practices (highlighted in Chapters 4 and 6). However, alternative learning environments led by women activists and community educators from civil society organisations are seeking to construct a different presentation of female citizenship, particularly focusing on notions of empowerment, political and community participation, and leadership. As these learning environments are unbounded by the necessities of prescribed subject learning, curriculum texts and assessment they present significant variety in their priorities and approaches, indicating opportunities to contextualise notions such as empowerment, which remain problematic in development discourse (Cornwall & Rivas 2015; Kabeer 2001).

1.2 Position and motivation

My work as a teacher, consultant and curriculum writer in Myanmar began at the very beginning of 2009, when the military regime imposed a highly authoritarian presence on the daily lives of citizens, restricting the movement of people, forbidding the unregistered gathering of groups, and responding violently to any perceived subversion of its authority. Having spent the previous few years teaching in international education in North Africa and South America, I originally travelled to Yangon to take up a job with the British Council. The aftermath of Cyclone Nargis, which struck Myanmar in May 2008 had seen a tentative international relief engagement with Myanmar and created a certain amount of space for civil society development initiatives,

largely oriented towards relief and environmental activism. Living in Yangon for the following three years, I designed and delivered a variety of education activities including gender and empowerment training, human rights and citizenship education, interfaith dialogue, community development and project management and teacher training. In this climate, the teaching of any human rights or gender equality issues was highly sensitive and strongly associated with activism and resistance and aligned closely with members of the democracy movement, particularly the NLD lead by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, then under house arrest. Participation in any such programme therefore attached a very real risk to the participants, and also to a certain extent to those trainers who led such courses: many of those I taught as well as Myanmar colleagues had already spent time in jail for political activism or practices of law and journalism that were deemed to be critical of the military junta, and several international colleagues were deported during this period.

My work during this time therefore fostered close working relationships with education and civil society practitioners forged through a shared sense of adversity. Nonetheless, my position then, as now in Myanmar, was one of immeasurably greater security and protection than that of my Myanmar colleagues and students. After the elections of late 2010 and the repositioning of government priorities, these nascent civil society organisations have acquired greater space to operate and although activism is still cautious there is greater opportunity for collaboration and expansion. Leaving my residence in Yangon in late 2011, I continued doing consultancy work in Myanmar and Thailand during the subsequent years, particularly with the refugee and migrant communities along the Thai-Myanmar border, in community development and curriculum writing. I have also continued to be a member and technical resource person (TRP) for the Yangon-based Gender Equality Network (GEN), a network of international and local NGOs and community-based organisations.

These experiences have led to an understanding of the interconnections and overlapping influences that bridge polarised notions of 'international' and 'local' development activities as well as an understanding of the complexity and confusion of such environments. This has supported my motivation in seeking to conduct research that highlights the varied roles, connections and relationships of those working within both education and gender activism. My position and experiences within the region have therefore greatly informed my research, not only in the focus of the study but also in my theoretical positioning and my conceptualisations of the role of activists and educators in contributing to social transformation (see *3.2*). Additionally, my position as a

white, British, female teacher and researcher has implications for the ways in which others perceive and interact with me, as well as my own reactions, understandings and biases. The construction of the research, as further highlighted in sections *3.3* and *3.4*, therefore reflects and responds to my own position within these processes as a foreign researcher within a sensitive and contentious education environment.

1.3 Research focus: relevance and rationale

There is a growing attention in international development and comparative education towards the role of education in transitional and conflict-affected contexts as potentially creating opportunities to promote greater social inclusion and address inequalities that can fuel grievances (Davies 2010; Leach & Dunne 2007; Novelli & Lopes Cardozo 2008; Lopes Cardozo & Shah 2016). Likewise, development priorities over the last two decades, as reflected in the Millennium Development Goals and now the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as initiatives such as Education for All or UN Security Council Resolutions such as 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, or 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security, have highlighted commitments both to expanding inclusive education and to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, reinforcing the associations between these spheres (Salvi 2017; Unterhalter 2015; UN 2016). However, there has previously been a tendency to oversimplify this relationship, and the frequent lack of meaningful attention to the interconnections between these goals, moving beyond limited notions of access to education, has been heavily critiqued (Kabeer 2005; 2015; Unterhalter 2012; Cornwall & Rivas 2015; Esquivel & Sweetman 2016) with concerns being expressed that the holistic role of education in supporting transformative change continues to be overlooked (Sterling 2014; 2016).

Additionally, despite references to non-formal or 'life-long' learning included in international policy, the role of non-formal education and the contributions of non-state actors to education practices, particularly NGOs and civil society groups, has frequently been neglected in favour of a more narrow prioritisation of schooling (Casey & Asamoah 2016; Stromquist 2015a; UIL 2009). For example, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) in its *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education* (2009) underscored the lack of attention given to analysis of non-formal initiatives within the already frequently neglected field of adult learning and education (ALE). The report additionally concluded that despite the 1997 Hamburg *Declaration on Adult Learning and Agenda for the Future* identifying gender equality and the

empowerment of women as one of its ten themes, this has not translated into systematic or cohesive programming and this area has remained under-supported and under-evaluated (UIL 2009, 25). While progress has been identified in the subsequent 2016 *Global Report* particularly in areas of adult literacy and basic skills, issues of gender inequality are highlighted as remaining frequently unaddressed (UIL 2016, 13-14). The observations of the UIL reflect broader obscurities of what achieving 'women's empowerment' might look like (Batliwala 2009; 2011; Cornwall & Edwards 2014; Esquival 2016), particularly in terms of pot-secondary education and who it is that is taken as responsible for delivering empowering education (Stromquist 2015a; Rao & Robinson-Pant 2006). Such monitoring reports continue to frequently neglect the contributions of women's activist movements and organisations both in contributing to education and in advancing equality objectives, which underscores the priority identified by feminist scholars to bring greater attention to these movements (Connell 2014; Stromquist 2015a; 2015b) particularly for international institutions and actors seeking to promote gender equality (Cornwall & Edwards 2014).

This research therefore contributes to these debates through revealing specific cultural and political influences that operate within the context both of education practices and of gender equality/rights-oriented activism in Myanmar, drawing links between these two spheres in advancing notions of gender equality and 'empowerment'. In so doing I also propose a conceptualisation of *activist-educators* as key mediators between international, national and community agendas, suggesting that greater consideration of the complexities of influences that these civil society activists and educators navigate can support more holistic approaches to development goals (Chapters 4 and 7). A sustained case-study approach is therefore taken to highlight these evolving responses within Myanmar's activist women's movements, also drawing on my own experiences working with civil society and education practitioners within the context.

This critical time for Myanmar signalling a radical shift in the political trajectory, additionally presents an opportunity to learn from the processes of transition and the efforts to promote greater inclusion within them. The plural nature of Myanmar's education systems, where state schools, monastic schools, independent ethnic schools, private schools and non-formal community learning sites all co-exist and are overseen by different authorities, leads to multiple and varied experiences of education (Jolliffe 2014; see also Chapter 2). In addition, many have experienced education beyond Myanmar's borders, including in migrant schools and in refugee camp schools on the Thai

border as well as more privileged movements to pursue higher education opportunities in Singapore, Malaysia, Japan, and further afield. In the context of ongoing educational reforms, the need to build bridges between these diverse education practices, particularly in the form of recognition and accreditation, also reveals the varied implications of different learning experiences and their gendered nature.

Due to the authoritarian nature of military rule, censorship of local academia, and the difficulty in obtaining travel permits, particularly prior to 2012, Myanmar has received comparatively little academic attention. Consequently a very small number of academics have undertaken sustained work in the fields of education (see Lall 2011; 2016; Metro 2013; Salem-Gervais & Metro 2012), conflict/peacebuilding (see Petrie & South 2013; South & Lall 2016; Walton 2013; Walton & Hayward 2014) and gender (see Walton, McKay & Mar Mar Kyi 2015; Hedström 2016). There has, for example, been no academic study of gendered experiences in formal education within Myanmar, although civil society organisations are supporting research emerging in this area (see for example GEN 2015a; Rainfall 2017) reflecting the desire for greater attention to gendered education practices within the country. The recent changing dynamics of international involvement has brought more attention from researchers as well as development practitioners, particularly to Yangon, over the last three years, leading to some emerging senses of frustration amongst civil society leaders that their expertise is being side-lined. In particular, attention to historical perspectives and the experiences of undertaking activist work during military rule was expressed by participants in this research as fundamental to appreciating their current positions and the pervasive sense of mistrust. Having worked in Myanmar and the Thai border regions in education, civil society and community development for the last eight years, the relationships that I have sustained during this period have enabled research of this nature to be possible. This indicates the relevance of my current study in contributing to gaps in the available academic literature, as well as pointing to the rationale for my being in an appropriate position to undertake this research (as outlined previously in 1.2).

1.3.1 Research questions

Responding to these observed gaps in literature and research practices, this study therefore addresses the following two main research questions:

1. *What roles do differing education practices play in constructing citizenship ideals in Myanmar, and in what ways are these gendered?*
2. *How is women's activism in Myanmar and the Thai border creating alternative spaces for transformative learning during Myanmar's period of political transition?*

From my previous experiences working in the context and as expressed through the work of women's organisations (as highlighted above, GEN 2015a; Rainfall 2017), practices within formal education have been implicated in replicating cultural gendered hierarchies which contribute to pervasive gender inequality. Starting from this assumption then, when looking at the differing roles of varied education practices in contributing to gendered citizenship constructions, the sub-question is posed:

1. a) *<u>How</u> have practices in education sustained and legitimised women's social subordination?*

Recognising that education reforms currently under discussion may result in future changes in Myanmar's formal state education practices, this first sub-question adds a (recent) historical perspective to education practices through drawing attention to the previous experiences of women in learning environments. Additionally, starting from a position that recognises and acknowledges the work of civil society organisations in mobilising non-formal education as a site of learning alternative to formal schooling (Stromquist 2006), a second sub-question is posed:

1. b) *In what ways are alternative sites of learning presenting alternative models?*

This second sub-question draws focus in the research to the roles of non-state actors in education, which includes but is not limited to the practices of women's activist movements. Attention is particularly given to cross-border movements and the ways in which community education oriented towards refugee and migrant groups may present alternative models of citizenship presentation. In so doing, the question therefore anticipates and leads on to

the second research question which turns attention more explicitly to the role of women's activism in creating alternative spaces for transformative learning. Recognising that women's movements and organisations are subject to multiple influences and that these are liable to change in periods of political transition, an initial sub-question to the second research question is therefore posed:

2. a) *How are women's organisations responding to shifting constraints and opportunities within the period of transition and what are the consequences of these responses?*

Finally, within these educational activities undertaken by women's organisations that are seeking to advance women's equality and promote social transformation, a further, final sub-question is asked:

2. b) *What alternative presentations of female citizenship emerge from these learning sites?*

The two parallel over-arching research questions correspond to the two subsequent parts of this theses, acknowledging that there is a natural dialogue between them. It is also acknowledged that several international organisations deliver more holistic forms of empowerment training, and the intention is not to set up a binary opposition between international and local organisations. Nor is the intention to blindly criticise the involvement of international actors in efforts to support women's equality, but rather to raise questions about the connection between education and empowerment and the ways this might be approached. To this end, attention is directed towards international training texts rather than the practices of individual training workshops facilitated by international consultants or organisations, as these training texts were found to be passed on, shared and reused in a variety of different community education sites and workshops. Consequently, discourses representing varied agendas can find their way into alternative learning environments. Exploring the ways that these discourses are resisted and adapted offers an opportunity to learn from the priorities and experiences of women's organisations that may indicate pathways for goals such as empowerment or equality to be more comprehensively realised.

1.4 Limitations of the research

The heart of the research project has been in exploring the work and experiences of Myanmar women activists in seeking to construct learning

environments which provide alternatives to constraints encountered both within formal schooling and also within international training courses. Focus has therefore largely remained on the process of transmission and the influences that intercede with attempts to formulate these alternative constructions, rather than on attempting to measure the impact of individual courses. While responses from students participating in both formal education and non-formal courses such as young women's empowerment training have been an important element of the research (highlighted particularly in Chapters 5, 6, and the Part II Focus Study), there is evident possibility for expanding the scope in future studies to focus more on the reception and influence of specific training courses for learners. Likewise, the timeframe of data collection periods has meant that opportunities for longitudinal analysis have been limited, also indicating potential avenues for follow-up to the current research.

In addition to a focus on educational practices, the orientation of the research is directed towards women's social, cultural and political participation within the context of Myanmar, and consequently significantly less attention is given to economic dimensions to empowerment. This in part reflects the intention of the research to address notions of women's citizenship that have received little previous research attention, and in part reflects the orientation of the women's organisations' participating in the research who prioritised community education on social and political issues (see *3.4.3*). This may also be reflective of the timing of the data gathering, being conducted in 2014 and 2015 when the approaching elections were a particular concern for civil society movements, as well as reflecting the priorities for women in the largely urban locations where research was conducted (see *3.4.2*). Consequently, issues of women's participation in the labour force, of economic empowerment training or of vocational education do not feature strongly in this thesis and would offer potential avenues for future exploration. Likewise, while the intention of the research project is to have relevance for understanding the roles of different education practices in constructing differing presentations of female citizenship, being highly contextualised there are inevitably limits to the transferability of the study. The research project is very much a product of the particular temporal and spatial conditions that defined Myanmar's processes of political transition in the inter-election cycle between 2011 and 2016. As the political landscape continues to evolve, particularly as the NLD progresses through their first term in office, and while inter-religious tensions are continuing to worsen in western regions of the country, opportunities to further consider the role of non-formal education practices in potentially

promoting inclusion within processes of transition would provide valuable extension.

Finally, certain limitations are also apparent in the construction of the thesis according to the article-based model rather than as a monograph. There have certainly been benefits to adopting this approach, particularly in providing opportunity to receive and respond to feedback from multiple reviewers, which has strengthened the clarity of the writing. Likewise, being able to share publications of a more manageable length than the completed thesis to a wider audience over the course of the writing process has also allowed for greater engagement with readers from both academic and practitioner fields of expertise and also enabled me to respond to comments prior to the preparation of the final thesis. However, inevitably, addressing the varying orientations and priorities of certain journals, as well as constraints in word limits, does result in limitations in the depth of data which it is possible to present in each chapter. I have sought to address this to a certain extent with the addition of two 'Focus Studies' which provide close studies of certain aspects of the data, as well as through two case studies presented in Chapter 9.

1.5 Key terms

The following key terms recur throughout the thesis and represent either terms for which alternative phrasings may also be common or terms that hold distinctive significance within the research study. These are therefore defined here in order to ensure clarity and consistency throughout the subsequent chapters.

Activist-educators

I follow the lead of the women leading civil society organisations in Myanmar who participated in this research and who used the term *activists* to identify themselves and to position their work. Additionally, I use the term *activist-educators* to signify those women who are delivering community education as part of their activist work, as distinct from other educators and teachers who may not identify in this way or actively seek a transformation of gender hierarchies through their teaching. Incidences of educators reinforcing cultural gender norms were also reported and encountered, particularly in encouraging young women to avoid sexual violence by dressing modestly and not engaging in 'risky' activities. Such views, however, were contested by activist-educators who are campaigning for social change as an illustration of continuing social inequality, reflecting the distinctive position these activists occupy.

Burma / Myanmar[1]

Throughout the thesis I use the official country title of *Myanmar*, and the official name *Yangon* to refer to the largest city, rather than the historic names of *Burma* and *Rangoon*. Although the terms *Burma* and *Rangoon* were officially replaced in 1989 they have still been used in common parlance, particularly amongst the communities on the Thai border, and were preferred by the democracy movement who rejected the legitimacy of the military government. However, with the 2010 elections marking an end to official military rule, and even more so since the 2015 elections, *Myanmar* is now widely accepted amongst those within the country as well as by foreign governments and UN institutions as the country's legitimate name.

Burman / Bamar

Following Salem-Gervais & Metro (2012) and Walton (2013), I use the adjective *Burman* to identify the dominant ethnic group in Myanmar, although the alternative name *Bamar* may also be encountered in other sources.

Burmese

Although *Myanmar* is also used as an adjective to denote the official language of the country, to avoid confusion with the country title I use the more commonplace term *Burmese* to refer to the language spoken by the majority of people. This also highlights the association of *Burmese* language with the dominant *Burman* ethnic group, while other ethnic groups, such as the Mon, Karen or Pa-Oh, typically speak their own ethnic languages, of which there are over 100, and may speak *Burmese* as a second, third or fourth language. On the Thai border, displaced ethnic minority communities who have fled violence in their home territories have often tended to resist Burmese language as an imposition by the dominant oppressor, and many have preferred to learn and interact in their mother-tongue, English or Thai.

Citizenship

As highlighted in Chapter 2, the notion of legal citizenship is highly contentious in Myanmar. I therefore employ the term citizenship to imply a broad concept relating to social and cultural as well as political expectations of men and women within the context of Myanmar (Robins, Cornwall & von Lieres 2008; Yuval-Davis 2011a; Crossouard & Dunne 2015).

Civil society organisations (CSOs) / non-governmental organisations (NGOs)

I most commonly use the term civil society organisations (CSOs), in order to reflect the terminology employed by participants in the research. However, I

[1] See also Maber (2014).

recognise that much academic literature refers to organisations that occupy the same position as those engaged in the research as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (see for example Stromquist 2015; Connell 2014). Consequently these terms are used largely interchangeably to denote the organisations considered in this thesis that operate independently of government authority.

Community education[2]

Community education is understood in the context of this research as those non-formal education and training practices that operate independently from the state system of schooling (either Myanmar or Thai). While community schools are also common at primary level in rural and border areas where state provision is either lacking or resisted, this research focuses in major part on those upper- and post-secondary education initiatives that seek to encourage community engagement with an eye to prompting social change. In this sense, community education initiatives are transformatory in their agenda with an emphasis on critical thought development (Ledwith 2001; 2011; Mayo 1999), and are non-formal in their operation beyond the framework of formal systems (Coombs & Ahmed 1974, 8; UIL 2009, 13). As discussed later in the thesis (see Chapters 4, 8 and 9), a number of community education projects are led by women's organisations and consequently connections between community education and women's activism is prioritised. While many of these groups are ethnically aligned, the community education initiatives discussed in the research do not include the parallel ethnic primary and early secondary systems that are seen as an alternative but formal system of schooling (see *2.4*). Additionally, it is recognised that other forms of non-formal education exist beyond what is here considered as community education, such as more institutional forms of vocational training, or pre- or after-school activities (which are less common in the context of Myanmar). The initiatives considered in this study range between peer lead instruction, community learning centres and locally-supported community-based and civil society organisations.

Empowerment & leadership training[3]

As expanded further in Chapter 3, empowerment is a problematic term, and one that has come to be used in a variety of ways within development practice so that its relevance to notions of power and transformation has been diluted (MacKenzie 2009; Cornwall & Rivas 2015). In the context of training activities, there are a number of different terms used to refer to the aims and content of

[2] See also Maber (2016b).

[3] See also Maber (2014).

training programmes that aim to increase women's abilities to achieve greater equality in their social, cultural and political surroundings, the most popular being capacity building, empowerment, and leadership training. In the context of training courses offered in Myanmar, and stemming from a justified historic caution surrounding stating potentially subversive intentions too explicitly in course titles, these terms have at times appeared interchangeable.

Gender violence

Following Parkes (2015) and Dunne, Humphreys and Leach (2006), amongst others, I prefer to employ the term *gender violence* rather than *gender-based violence* to reflect acknowledgement that violence is inherently gendered. However, as many international organisations continue to use the term *gender-based violence* and its shorthand GBV, and these terms are frequently found within training material, I do at times use this phrasing when making reference to such specific programmes.

Global North / Global South

Acknowledging the problematic nature of terms such as *developed* and *developing*, *first world* and *third world*, *global North* and *global South* in reinforcing binary oppositions, I follow the lead of Connell (2007) in employing the latter terms "not to name a sharply bounded category of states or societies, but to emphasise relations" (viii).

International organisations

International organisations are taken here to be those that are not national to the country they are operating in, typically working in multiple regions. Amongst those delivering forms of empowerment training they include UN institutions such as UN Women, UNFPA and UNDP, INGOs such as World Vision and Oxfam, and nationally-affiliated organisations such as the British Council, American Centers or programmes such as the Norwegian government affiliated 'Women Can Do It' (WCDI). Additionally, a variety of individual international consultants provide one off workshops either through these same organisations or independently.

1.6 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is structured in four parts: Part I – Introducing the Research (Chapters 1-3); Part II – Education & Gendered Citizenship (Chapters 4-6); Part III – Feminist Learning and Activism in Transition (Chapters 7-9); and Part IV – Drawing Conclusions. While the chapters of Part I draw from my experiences and observations in the context, they largely do not draw directly from data

gathered during fieldwork. Consequently, Chapters 1 to 3 are intended to introduce the research, its situation and relationship to the context of Myanmar and the Thai border, and to literature in the field of education, gender and development. Parts II and III then provide the central discussion and analysis of the research in relation to the research questions. While there is evidently dialogue between the research questions and across chapters, loosely speaking the chapters of Part II respond to the first research question, drawing attention to education and gendered constructions of citizenship, while the chapters of Part III address the second research question, focusing on the position and actions of women's organisations in creating alternative learning environments. Additional supplementary analysis is provided in two focus studies which conclude Parts II and III: the intention of these focus studies is to provide more detailed discussion of aspects of the data not discussed elsewhere in the chapters and which relate to the discussions throughout the respective section. The final Part IV, draws together the threads of analysis in one concluding chapter, responding to the overall research questions and reflecting on the theoretical and practical implications of the research.

This thesis has been prepared according to the article-based model whereby the majority of chapters in the thesis correspond to articles either published or under review (outlined below, *1.6.1*). The introductory and concluding chapters are therefore intended to demonstrate the links and common threads of analysis across the six articles that make up Parts II and III. Minor revisions have been made to the articles published and under review in order to reduce overlap and repetition. This has generally involved removing descriptions of the context and reducing discussion of methodology, which are instead discussed at length in Chapters 2 and 3. However, brief summaries of methodology and methods remain in each chapter in order to indicate which data the chapter draws from and during which time period. Such adjustments have been made in order to improve the flow and readability of the thesis, but has not constituted a major departure from the original articles.

1.6.1 Status of articles included in the thesis

Chapter 2 and Part III Focus Study: Feminist Leadership Training incorporate text adapted and supplemented with additional research from the published article: Maber, E. (2014) '(In)Equality & Action: the role of women's training initiatives in promoting women's leadership opportunities in Myanmar'. *Gender & Development*. 22(1), 141-156.

Chapter 4 is a minor revision of the article currently under review by *Curriculum Inquiry:* Maber, E. J. T. (*under review*) 'Undoing exclusions / expanding inclusion: conceptualising spaces for learning and citizenship constructions in Myanmar's transition'.

Chapter 5 is a minor revision of the forthcoming article, accepted for publication: Maber, E. J. T. (*forthcoming*) 'Learning violence and shame: gendering violence and the body in Myanmar's formal education spaces'. *Compare.*

Chapter 6 is a minor revision of the published article: Maber, E. J. T. (2016b) 'Cross-border transitions: navigating conflict and political change through community education practices in Myanmar and the Thai border.' *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 14(3), 374–389.

Chapter 7 is a minor revision of the article currently under review by the *International Feminist Journal of Politics*: Maber, E.J.T. (*under review*) 'Conceptualising spaces for women's activism in conflict and transition'.

Chapter 8 is a minor revision of the published article: Maber, E. J. T. (2016a) 'Finding feminism, finding voice? Mobilising community education to build women's participation in Myanmar's political transition.' *Gender and Education.* 28:3, 416-430.

Chapter 9 is an extended version of an article draft: Maber, E.J.T. '(Re)Constructing Empowerment: Challenges and alternatives in transporting women's empowerment training'.

Chapter 2

Context: Myanmar in Transition

Sections of this chapter have been adapted from Maber, E. (2014) (In)Equality & Action: the role of women's training initiatives in promoting women's leadership opportunities in Myanmar. *Gender & Development*. 22(1), 141-156.

2.1 Introduction

In the last six years Myanmar has experienced significant political upheaval after over half a century of authoritarian military rule. In this context of transition and reform, there are new opportunities emerging for previously excluded groups to participate in tentative democratic processes, however the legacy of subordination and disadvantage leaves many ill-positioned to influence the established hierarchies which remain dominant in social and political institutions alike. As the processes of reform are happening rapidly there is a risk that previously marginalised voices are again being overpowered. Similarly, despite increased international attention and a rhetoric of consolidation there has been a lack of substantial progress in reaching lasting peace agreements with the multiple ethnic regions still engaged in conflict with the ruling majority. Conversely, ethnic tensions and sectarian violence have broken out on new fronts over the last five years, leading to the question of how committed the nascent civilian government is to ensuring an inclusive and sustainable Union. This chapter introduces the context of this transition in Myanmar drawing on recent literature as well as my own experiences witnessing these processes from Yangon and the Thai border regions, particularly focusing attention on the dynamics of conflict, women's roles and position in society, and the education system.

2.2 Conflict dynamics & political transitions

2.2.1 Legacies of colonialism and conflict

Under British colonial rule from the mid-19th century to formal independence in 1948, the legacies of colonialism continue to be evident in Myanmar's

education system, language policies, and penal codes, as well as in attitudes both within and outside the country to gender relations (Aung 2015; Crouch 2015). After an uneasy passage to independence, which saw the assassination of independence hero and transitional leader General Aung San (father of current State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi) in 1947 along with six of his cabinet colleagues, conflict continued to mar the nascent independent government (TNI 2013). Although the military claimed absolute power in a coup in 1962, they had already held significant political influence during the years of the caretaker governments since independence (Metro 2013).

Successive military juntas in Myanmar from 1962 to 2011 reinforced an environment of authoritarianism and oppression during which democratic opposition and social activism were highly constrained and fraught with risk. Political militarisation was interwoven with multiple civil wars fought with ethnic armed groups over demands for auto-determination which have persisted since independence in 1948 and which provided a pretext for military domination and control (Metro 2013; TNI 2013). Despite intermittent ceasefire agreements, these multiple conflicts with ethnic armed groups, in some cases enduring for upwards of sixty years, remain largely unresolved, with renewed active fighting ongoing in the northern states of Kachin and Shan, while ceasefires are tenuously holding in eastern regions of the country (Jolliffe 2015). Sexual violence, particularly directed against ethnic-minority women, has been a pervasive feature of these conflicts, and ethnic women's organisations have made use of transnational connections and cross-border movements with Thailand to campaign against military impunity (WLB 2014). As a result of the conflicts in ethnic territories and crackdowns on political opposition parties, tens of thousands were displaced across Myanmar's borders, with refugees and exiled activists particularly establishing themselves over the eastern border with Thailand.

2.2.2 Political transition and reforms[4]

The recent, successive changes in Myanmar's political leadership have reflected a significant, though not altogether complete, shift away from the authoritarian military rule that dominated the country since the military takeover of 1962. 2010 marked a shift in the ruling military's position, with landmark elections held in November of that year. The elections, leading to the

[4] Chapter 6 provides further details of the context of transition and reforms, particularly in relation to education dynamics.

formation of a nominally civilian government in 2011, were the first since the contested elections of 1990 which saw Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) denied power and which prompted a large number of arrests and even greater restrictions placed on civil freedoms. At the time international observers expressed concerns over the military junta's claims that the elections would be contested fairly, and indeed the process was widely derided as undemocratic, with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon summarising the elections as "insufficiently inclusive, participatory and transparent" (UN, 2010). A major objection was the refusal to allow democratic opposition leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to stand in the elections, leading to their boycott by her party, the largest of the opposition, the NLD. Unsurprisingly, the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) secured victory, with President Thein Sein (himself a former military general) taking office in 2011 (UN 2010; Hlaing 2012) and many of the same military political figures reappearing in the newly reformed parliamentary bodies.

However, despite the contentious transferal of power, President Thein Sein began a process of widespread reforms, particularly seeking to expand economic opportunities with international partners (Hlaing 2012). While this economic expansion served the agenda of political and military elites who benefitted substantially from the process (Turnell 2015), the political and social reforms also created opportunities for civil society movements to expand, particularly aided by the relaxing of censorship laws, and exiled activists began to re-engage with government authorities in the hope of influencing reforms (Bächtold 2015). Constraints have nonetheless remained and new challenges emerged. Despite obvious progress, power has still largely resided in the hands of a minority of elite who have an inconsistent record of accepting change. In addition to the continuation of the unresolved ethnic conflicts, there has been a rise in intercommunal violence (highlighted below) inflamed by a rhetoric of ultra-conservative Buddhist nationalism, primarily targeting Muslim minority communities in the western region of Rakhine (Walton & Hayward 2014).

Subsequent elections were held in late 2015, this time under greater scrutiny, resulting in an overwhelming victory for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD. With the NLD taking office in April 2016 there has as yet been little opportunity to gauge the full impact of this transition from military dictatorship to democratic transition. However, the ongoing climate of conflict and increasing religious violence suggests although transition is underway, radical transformation may remain elusive.

2.2.3 Religion and religious tensions

The influence of religion has been prominent throughout Myanmar's political and cultural history and continues to shape the landscape of transition, with religious affiliation infused with constructions of national and ethnic identity. 88% of the 56 million population are estimated to be Buddhist (Department of Population 2016), leading to a frequent association between national identity and Buddhism, reinforced through media and public discourse as well as education practices (Salem-Gervais & Metro 2012; Walton 2013; see also *4.3.1*). Christian communities account for an estimated 6.2% of the population of Myanmar, while Muslim communities constitute a further 4.3% of the population, with the remaining 1.6% of the population identifying as Hindu (0.5%), Animist (0.8%), with another religion (0.2%) or with no religion (0.1%) (Department of Population 2016).

Recent years have seen a rise in religious conservatism allied with Burmese nationalism which has resulted in violent inter-communal conflicts between Buddhist majority and Muslim minority communities, particularly in the western state of Rakhine where nearly 140,000 people in the state alone have been displaced (UNHCR, 2013a). Outbursts of violence have also occurred at locations across the country such as in Meiktila in 2013 where Muslim schools were the target of attack (Walton & Hayward 2014; GCPEA 2014), and remain volatile despite changes in political leadership. While religious violence has historical precedence, tensions have been inflamed by the recent emergence of controversial ultra-nationalist movements, known as the 969 and the MaBaTha, led by a small number of extremist Buddhist monks who claim to seek to defend the Buddhist majority from perceived threat.

Originally a fringe movement, the alarming support that the MaBaTha and 969 have received in recent years has resulted in their amassing startling political influence. The gender implications of this increased religious conservatism are particularly evident in the rapid approval of a package of legislation, originally introduced by these conservative groups, that restricts interfaith marriage, women's religious conversion and child-birth rights, instrumentalising women as vehicles for nationalistic control (Walton, McKay & Mar Mar Kyi 2015). The four laws, together known as the 'Protection of Race and Religion' bills, illustrate the potential for global women's rights discourses to be manipulated to serve alternative agendas. In particular, the bill 'Health Care on Controlling the Population Growth Law' includes provisions to limit birth numbers and mandate birth spacing in communities that are (perceived to be) rapidly expanding. Using a guise of international reproductive health recommendations that women be encouraged to space the birth of their

children for the sake of their physical wellbeing, the law perpetuates an unfounded fear that Muslim communities in Myanmar have higher birth rates than Buddhist communities and provides dangerous provisions to restrict the rights of Muslim women to have children.

The influence of religion on gender norms and expectations of behaviour is recurrent throughout the research, and further explored below and in Chapters 5 and 8. Additionally, extending from decades of militarisation, the projection of a dominant Buddhist and Burman ideology has been heavy-handedly enforced, particularly through education practices, and has further exacerbated marginalisation for minority groups (further highlighted in Chapter 4).

2.2.4 Notions of citizenship

Citizenship is a highly contentious notion in Myanmar (as reflected in Chapter 9), often being understood as associated with legal notions of citizen identity cards. The transportation of the terminology of global citizenship education in international programming can therefore run into contrast with local associations of the term (Arnot 2009; Andreotti 2011). The depth of emotion surrounding attachments to citizenship identities has been brought to the fore in the violent anti-Rohingya sentiments which have grown in prominence in recent years (see for example OHCHR 2017). While detailed discussion of the Rakhine conflicts and legal constructions of citizenship are beyond the scope of this research, nonetheless a brief introduction to the issue here highlights the contentious notion of citizenship in the Myanmar context.

Changes to citizenship laws in 1982 resulted in citizenship being denied to many who had previously been recognised as citizens including ethnic groups which were no longer legitimised, to those whose parents did not both hold citizenship and to those not born within Myanmar. As part of the military junta's attempts to push a unifying rhetoric, the new citizenship laws reverted to pre-colonial, highly subjective definitions of ethnic groups which predated 1823, and offered full citizenship only to those who could prove ethnic and territorial connections to these groups, setting up arbitrary notions of the 'indigenous' and 'authentic' inhabitants of geographical territories (TNI 2014, 5). The Muslim communities in Rakhine known as *Rohingya* were reframed as "Bengali illegal immigrants" (Fortify Rights 2014, 11; TNI 2014, 11), setting up hostilities with ethnically recognised Rakhine Buddhist communities. Without full citizenship status, those whose citizens' rights were revoked by the 1982 act are denied access to university enrolment, land ownership and inheritance.

While it is sometimes perceived that the use of the term *Rohingya* as an ethnic identifier is a recent phenomenon, communities self-identifying as Rohingya predate the 1963 founding of the Rohingya Independence Front after they were barred from political engagement by the military junta (Metro, 2013: 87). The choice to include or exclude the term in the 2014 census proved highly contentious and contributed to violent riots. As has been highlighted:

> A battle of historical narratives thus continues by all sides in the Rakhine-Rohingya clash, all rooted in claims about ethnic origins, presence (or absence) in British-delineated Burma before 1823 and ancestral pedigree. Even in this debate, however, all views converge in their perception of "lu-myo[5]" or "kinds of persons" as a verifiable, fixed and blood-borne lineage tied to ancestral territory. (TNI 2014, 11)

In recent discussions community leaders have recommended disusing the term *Rohingya* as a "conflict control measure" (BNI 2014, 69), which adds to the undermining of legitimacy for those Rakhine Muslim communities self-identifying as Rohingya. The marginalisation of the communities, however, is not new: the military junta began placing restrictions on the communities in 1993, which have remained in place, requiring permission to be granted before Rohingya couples can marry, and in 2005 imposing a 2 child policy for Rohingya in Northern Rakhine and prohibiting childbirth out of wedlock (Fortify Rights 2014, 10).

2.2.5 Refugee & migrant communities on the Thai Border[6]

Further factors influence the complicated mixture of hierarchies, agendas and motives that are vying for position in the shifting social and political landscape. These include the migrant and refugee communities in the Thai border region, which number in the several hundred thousand (UNHCR, 2013b), having fled violence, economic and social restrictions, and who are increasingly being pressured to return, while many former political exiles are voluntarily re-

[5] *Lu-myo* is the Burmese notion of ethnic or racial identity and "is a concept of differentiation rooted in the belief of objective, verifiable, fixed, and blood-borne lineage" (TNI, 2014: 3). *Taingyinthar*, meaning "offspring of the geographical division" (TNI, 2014: 5) is the concept of indigenous, or native to a particular territory. Hence only *taingyinthar lu-myo* are eligible for full Myanmar citizenship under the 1982 Citizenship Act.

[6] See also Maber (2016b).

engaging with the government with the aim of influencing the direction of development.

On the Thai side of the Eastern border those who have fled the violence are sheltered in 9 official refugee camps and unofficially in migrant communities that span the length of the border. These number an estimated 128,480 living in the refugee camps (TBC, 2013a, 16) just over 50% of whom are officially registered with UNHCR. Additionally close to 850,000 legal Myanmar migrants in Thailand who have participated in the limited opportunity for nationality verification and documentation (TBC, 2013a, 19) and a further estimated 1.5 million undocumented migrants are working in Thailand (TBC, 2013, 19), particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

These migrant and refugee communities have provided a key base for women's activist movements and continue to influence civil society campaigning both within Myanmar and beyond. The long-standing presence of activist organisations in the Thai-border region, supported by considerable international assistance, not found at other sites of more temporary exodus from Myanmar such as the China-Kachin border, makes this a distinctive site for activist knowledge production. Many of these communities, particularly those in the refugee camps, are well established having been resident for up to 30 years and consequently women's organisations such as the Kayah Women's Union, the Karen Women's Organisation, the Pa-O Women's Union and the Kachin Women's Association of Thailand, have an established membership base engaged in sustained activism. Likewise, the disruption caused by conflict and displacement has, for some, created access to positions of community leadership that may not have previously been attainable (KWO 2010) and also supported independent education activities.

Ethnically aligned women's organisations[7], many originating in the 1990s, have frequently been associated with the ethnic armed struggles for auto-determination (Hedström 2016), navigating a precarious path between rejecting the frequently violent subjugation of women by the military state and simultaneously renegotiating gender roles within their ethnic traditions (Laungaramsri 2011). Combined with cross-border networks with exile groups in Thailand[8], these women's organisations balanced seemingly non-political endeavours (providing education and healthcare to women and children in conflict) with more overtly politicised campaigns such as reporting on the

[7] Examples of such organisations include the Shan Women's Action Network and the Karen Women's Organisation. See also Maber (2016a).

[8] Although the majority of its 13 member organisations are based within Myanmar, the Women's League of Burma (WLB) itself is based in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

systematic rape and abuse of ethnic women by the military (WLB 2014). Through this position, accentuated by cross-border movements, women's organisations have become accustomed to negotiating transnational and competing local agendas.

Already the changing political landscapes in Myanmar and Thailand have caused shifts amongst the refugee communities, with some voluntarily choosing to return and discussions of wider scale repatriation currently underway (Maber 2016b). Chapter 6 provides a fuller discussion of the cross-border movements between Myanmar and Thailand and the resulting implications for educational practices.

2.3 Women in Myanmar

There has been something of a tendency in Northern-based scholarship to compare Myanmar to its South Asian neighbours with regard to patriarchal dominance and conclude that women in Myanmar are not subjected to significant disadvantage (see for example Steinberg 2013, 189). Such an attitude reflects the need for greater scholarly attention to women's equality movements in Myanmar and the need to expose latent inequalities as well as highlighting strategies to foster a greater understanding of the context. For example, even in James' detailed examination of governance and civil society in the country she concludes:

> Myanmar women do not face social, cultural, and legal barriers to participation in the benefits of development as in some other [Least Developed Countries]. Women in Myanmar enjoy high social status and equality of opportunity with men. (James 2005, 111).

However, such sweeping conclusions are strongly contested by women activists in Myanmar (Miedema, Shwe, & Kyaw 2016; Faxon, Furlong & Sabe Phyu 2015; GEN 2015b), and find little basis for support, betraying the tendency for the plural and multiple forms of women's inequality to be overlooked. Likewise, women are of course vastly different, and the intersections of socio-economic status, ethnicity, religion, age, (dis)ability, and political affiliation, amongst assorted others, all affect women's opportunities, priorities and constraints differently. Such intersections and the implications for women's activism are explored throughout the thesis, with the conceptualisation of the position of women activists expanded in Chapter 7

particularly intending to address this concern of 'which women' may be seen as advocating for others.

2.3.1 Women's rights

At first glance, women in Myanmar have been prominent participants of the labour force in a broad sense and claim an equal share of education opportunities, with female students being well represented in schooling and in tertiary education institutions (JICA 2013; Department of Population 2015). However, women are largely employed in the agricultural sector and in low-status, low-skilled positions, pointing to the hierarchical nature of gender relations (ADB) 2012) and a lack of opportunities for change during militarisation. With the change of government towards a civilian-led model, there are now emerging opportunities for women to take up roles that were previously closed to them, both within political leadership as highlighted below and in society more broadly, with the adoption of the National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (2012–21) appearing to support institutional commitment to this goal.

However, although the 2013 joint UN delegation report praised the "growing number of civil society organizations working for women's empowerment" (UNICEF 2013, 10), they also expressed concern over the limited capacity of agencies to ensure commitments to gender equality are met across the different ministries, and the limited influence exercised by key UN offices particularly without a UN-Women presence in Myanmar, factors that remain unaddressed three years later. This underlines the marked tensions that are evident in Myanmar (as in many other countries) between the political rhetoric employed to fall in line with international standards, and institutional resistance to challenging entrenched gender roles. Additionally, cultural norms which dictate acceptable roles and behaviour for men and women, and privilege men and age give rise to further obstacles and opposition to women's positions of leadership (GEN 2013a; 2015b).

Similar dichotomies are apparent in the legal system. Although women's rights are nominally protected under the 2008 Constitution, in particular the rights to vote and run for public office, there are glaring inadequacies and the legal system offers little in the way of protection against discrimination, violence or inequality embedded in social practice. In particular, women's rights activists have drawn attention to the following points of contention within the penal code:

- there are no specific laws to protect women from domestic violence;

- abortion is illegal (except to save a woman's life);
- marital rape is not criminalised (unless the wife is under 14);
- there is a lack of standardisation of marriage laws (varying by the religion of spouses);
- divorce proceedings preference male partners (with greater restrictions applying to women seeking to initiate divorce);
- there are no harassment laws to protect women in the workplace;
- there is no provision for parental leave (GEN 2013a, 3–4).

The situation is compounded by weak judicial processes, the scarcity of legal training, and the widespread mistrust stemming from the historic manipulation of legal systems by the junta. The 2013 OECD Multi-dimensional Review of Myanmar found perceptions of corruption to be the worst compared to all regional South and South-East Asian neighbours, with women less than half as likely as men to "report having voiced an opinion to an official" (at only 3 per cent compared with 7 per cent for men – still alarmingly low), demonstrating very low levels of civic engagement and trust (OECD 2013, 48). The report also highlights that while legal systems appear to afford women equal rights with men on several fronts (including property ownership and inheritance), cultural practice does not substantiate this particularly across diverse ethnic groups and "if not taken into account, this gap between formal laws and customary practices could limit the effectiveness of policy interventions" (OECD 2013, 40).

2.3.2 Women's political organisation and leadership

As one might expect given women's exclusion from the ruling military regime, women were poorly represented in the Thein Sein government, despite gains in the by-elections held in 2012. Women accounted for 4.6 per cent of the elected parliamentary seats across the Union Assembly (comprising the Upper and Lower House) as well as the state and regional parliaments, and that figure falls to 3.4 per cent of the total appointees when taking into account the 398 seats (across the parliamentary bodies) reserved for military, and therefore exclusively male, appointees (GEN 2012, 1). The victory for the NLD in the 2015 elections has seen Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, as iconic leader for the party, take up position as State Councillor[9], and an increase in female parliamentarians.

[9] Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is barred from holding the office of President in the 2008 Constitution, having been married to a foreign national and having children holding foreign (British) citizenship, in legislation that the military has refused to amend.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has without doubt done much to challenge the male dominated arena of Myanmar politics over the last 25 years, enduring imprisonment and house arrest, and has been an international figurehead for the democracy movement, while also now balancing challenging political shifts. Yet while she is an iconic female leader in the country, her pathway into politics – being the daughter of the military general and independence hero Gen. Aung San – is not easily replicated by those women who may be inspired to follow her lead. This follows a pattern commented on by Lesley Abdela (2000, 16) that trail blazing women are often associated with respected powerful men (such as Benazir Bhutto or Cori Aquino), and picks up Srilatha Batliwala's analysis that "heroines", identified as leading in a more individual style, may be less likely to lead transformatively than those who demonstrate a more shared, collective approach to leadership (Batliwala 2011, 27). Consequently, and as this research largely centres itself within the inter-election period prior to the 2016 inauguration of the new government, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi does not feature strongly in this thesis in discussions of education and activist movements.

Women have historically been prominent members of the opposition and protest movements, and are increasingly mobilised and active in civil society, demonstrating a desire to advocate for women's rights (Hedström 2016). However, in the changing political environment they can find themselves lacking both the skills training to prepare them and the platform to effectively influence policy on a broader scale. Such dichotomies undermine the apparent gains in women's opportunities and perpetuate the dominance of masculine influence. While women have risen quickly to community leadership roles, particularly in situations of conflict or resistance and in informal arenas or those that do not challenge gender norms, it is much more difficult for women to access formal positions and those that attract greater prestige, influence, and/or financial reward. In other words, while there are proportionally high numbers of active female students in civil society groups, women volunteers in the armed militia groups and female teachers, health-care workers, and leaders of women's co-operative groups, there are proportionally very low numbers of women in government, leading civil service departments, or prominent in the (State) military, legal, or business sectors.

Hierarchical social structures which preference men and age make it difficult for women to challenge traditional authority figures, and narrowly defined concepts of acceptable roles for men and women, reinforced through education practices which restrict the pathways open to women, impede women's access to new opportunities. The women leaders interviewed by the

Gender Equality Network (GEN) for their 2013 study of leadership initiatives spoke of the resistance they encountered from others, male and female, to their positions of leadership: "'People don't want to listen to women'" (GEN 2013a, 10). In a society which also reserves great respect for elders, young women experience particular opposition making it difficult for them to gain experience in areas that challenge conventions. Similarly the impact of conflict, ethnic identity, political affiliation and family associations on women's opportunities, which have both helped and hindered women in their current positions, can lead younger women struggling to identify a course of action. While women are increasingly mobilised and active in civil society demonstrating a desire to advocate for women's rights, they can find themselves lacking both the skills training to prepare them and the platform to effectively influence policy on a broader scale.

Nonetheless, there are small but increasing numbers of women taking on more prominent leadership roles, not only at a community level but also at the national level (AGIPP 2015; GEN 2013a), and the growing links between women's organisations, fostered by networks such as the Women's Organisation Network (WON), the Women's League of Burma (WLB), and the Gender Equality Network (GEN), provide an amplified voice and a broader platform from which to support women's influence. These networks play a key role in knowledge and information sharing and provide natural partners for leadership training initiatives. Interestingly, a consequence of the greater operating freedom experienced since the 2010 elections has been that organisations that prior to 2011 took a more subversive, activist approach aligning themselves against the institutional hierarchies modelled by the military government, have since been seeking recognition and legitimacy from the civilian government and in so doing falling into line with the state rhetoric of approved practice. There is an evident risk then that approaches that fail to address the prevailing imbalances in power relations may be perpetuating inequalities, and transferring the onus onto those who are disadvantaged to bring about changes in social institutions where their influence is limited.

As the state has historically been hostile to activism or rights-based endeavours, trajectories into leadership within the women's movement have been plural: some women activists have taken up positions within international organisations, either prior to or as a result of community based work; others have been the recipients of international awards and scholarships to study abroad; others have fled conflict in their ethnic regions or been displaced by economic development schemes; others still have gained prominence through religious institutions. Many of the women activists interviewed in the context

of this research combine elements of these experiences and more, leading to a diversity of contributions which have influenced the research. Attention to these plural pathways into women's activism have therefore informed the basis of the theoretical conceptualisation outlined in *3.2* and subsequently in Chapter 7, by which women activists are understood to draw on multiple and varied points of contact and influence.

2.4 Overview of education dynamics

While further details of Myanmar's varied education dynamics are provided in Chapters 4 and 6, including in relation to education experiences for refugee and migrant communities on the Thai border, a brief overview is provided here to introduce the context of the research. Myanmar's education landscape is characterised by plurality with several different education providers delivering varying forms of formal and non-formal education. At primary level, formal education is provided by the state through government schools under the authority of the Ministry of Education (referred to in this thesis as 'state schooling'), as well as through monastic schools under the authority of the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Lall 2011). Both of these systems use the state textbooks and curricula, with monastic schools providing additional religious instruction. Hostility to the nationalistic agenda prominent in the state curriculum as well as the limited number of government schools in remote and conflict-affected territories has led to the establishment of parallel systems of education by multiple ethnic groups, commonly referred to in Myanmar as 'ethnic schools' under their own authority, often associated with the ethnic armed groups in their controlled territories (Jollife 2014; Salem-Gervais & Metro 2012). These include, for example, the Karen Education Department (KED) and the Mon National Education Committee (MNEC), and design their own textbooks and curricula largely delivered in their ethnic languages (Lall & South 2013). A major current concern for these ethnic schools, as well as migrant schools established on the Thai border (see *6.4*), is the lack of accreditation making it difficult for students to transfer between education systems, and contributing to the high drop-out rates highlighted further below (Higgins et al. 2016).

At a secondary level, there are fewer schooling choices, with ethnic and monastic schools typically not having the resources to extend beyond the primary level (Higgins et al. 2016; MoE 2014, 14). While many of the observations within this research also apply to primary education, the main focus has been on experiences in secondary education, and consequently

analysis focuses on state schools rather than monastic or ethnic schools as the foremost site of young women and men's secondary schooling experiences. A challenge in researching Myanmar's education practices has been the often inaccurate or absent data from official reporting statistics (Hardman et al 2014). Officially, Myanmar appears to demonstrate relative gender equality in terms of enrolment rates in state schools, with the gender parity index (GPI) for primary enrolment given as 0.98 (MoE 2014, 29). However, while census data indicates severe levels of drop out from education for both sexes in rural and urban locations, there is a lack of research to indicate either the gendered nature of experiences within schools across these different environments or the gendered motivations for drop out (Department of Population 2015). The relatively high numbers of girls migrating between states for education compared with boys (Department of Population 2015, 127-8) may indicate a lack of appropriate education opportunities for girls in certain areas, and also potentially a tendency for young women to continue education while young men pursue income generation. Likewise, data indicates significant differences in educational opportunities across the varied states of the Union: while the average literacy rate for the country (those over 10 years old) is reported as 89.5%, the range extends from 98% of men in Yangon Division being literate to 62% of women in Shan State (Department of Population 2015, 136-151).

Although not the major focus of this research, tertiary education has also been affected by political unrest, underinvestment and a lack of resources (Kamibeppu & Chao 2017). In urban areas the student protests of the 1980s and early 1990s led to frequent closures of the universities as they became associated with inciting opposition and civil unrest (Lall 2011). Many of the students, male and female, were subjected to brutal persecution and often imprisonment, and the ability of higher education facilities to function as learning institutions was profoundly undermined. This climate of civil protest initially led by student demonstrators and the wider democratic movement projected some women into positions of leadership – Daw Aung San Suu Kyi being the most prominent example of female leadership to emerge from the 1988 demonstrations – but it was a leadership that was constructed outside the authoritarian rule of the military junta and therefore drew severe repercussions (as evidenced by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's 15 years in custody). Additionally, some women have found themselves disadvantaged at universities as the lack of standardisation across higher education institutions results in highly variable entrance criteria, which have at times involved the use of unfavourable quotas, meaning women can find themselves needing higher grades to secure a place compared to their male peers or can simply be

denied access to certain subjects. This has not deterred women from entering university, with current figures indicating higher enrolment rates amongst women than men (ADB 2012, 1; JICA 2013, ii), but it points to latent inequalities in prioritising male careers and casts doubt over the appropriateness of options available to female students. The undermining of higher education systems is also reflected in the prominence of civil society organisations in delivering post-secondary education initiatives, as is highlighted further in Chapter 8.

2.4.1 Education reforms and international involvement

During the restrictive years of the military regime, control over teacher training, curriculum design, standardised assessment and reporting allowed very little opportunity for outside influence to percolate into the state education system (Hardman et al 2014). Consequently, international education organisations[10], consultants and researchers largely worked with education providers beyond the state, including ethnic schools and monastic schools (which despite being under the authority of the Ministry of Religious Affairs operated with greater independence) as well as non-formal community based initiatives.

International involvement, however, has been more prominent in ongoing attempts to reform education systems since 2011 (Higgins et al 2016; Hardman et al 2014). Revising education policy was a key component of the intended widespread sectoral reforms initiated by the Thein Sein administration, beginning with the Comprehensive Education Sectoral Review (CESR) from 2011-14, however has proved a highly contentious endeavour. Through 2014 and 2015 demonstrations in the streets of Myanmar's major cities were led by students who protested the new National Education Law[11], viewed as not supporting substantial change and maintaining exclusions within education systems (Zaw 2015; Zin 2015), in what they described as a "*rejection of a 'correct way of thinking' in education policy*" (group discussion with student protest leaders during fieldwork period, 2015). These acts of disruption and disturbance were powerful enactments of resistance that sought to undermine state hierarchies. However, highlighting the dominance of state forces in themselves resisting contestation, protesters were subjected to assault and arrest as police forces sought to re-impose control and enforce

[10] These included Save the Children, the British Council and World Education

[11] Several protests were witnessed during fieldwork and resulted in considerable anxiety for many of my research participants, as students known both to me and other educators were detained.

adherence to imposed hierarchies. Opportunities to openly contest dominant norms have remained severely limited, and the consequences of doing so have been evident in the arrest and imprisonment of student activists protesting the National Education Law, journalists, interfaith advocates, political leaders and ethnic opposition leaders alike. While there is hope that the new NLD led government inaugurated in 2016 might go some way to ease social tensions, in the early stages of their tenure there remain considerable obstacles.

The background to the dynamics of education, gender, conflict and political transition in Myanmar introduced in this chapter, while brief, nonetheless provide a contextualisation from which to consider the research study. While further details of these areas will be explored subsequently in more depth in the chapters comprising Parts II and III, the following Chapter 3 turns the focus to outlining the theoretical and methodological considerations that have shaped the research.

Chapter 3

Theoretical position, Methodology and Methods

3.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the theoretical positioning of the research which is used as a basis for further conceptualisation and analysis in the course of the subsequent chapters of the thesis. The chapter goes on to outline the methodological approach that has informed the research practice, followed by a detailed description of the methods employed in data collection and analysis. Finally, the chapter returns to theoretical reflections to consider four thematic focus areas that emerged as prominent during initial fieldwork periods and which recur as threads throughout the chapters of the thesis.

3.2 Theoretical Positioning

The critical feminist underpinnings of my research reflect concerns with gendered practices within education and a desire to promote greater social inclusion and equality more broadly. In this the research occupies a political stance that seeks to highlight opportunities to undo the reification of unequal and exclusionary power structures and encourage a more socially just and inclusive environment for education and for supporting women's participation in community and national leadership, peace processes and reform. The current climate of transition in Myanmar provides an opportunity to explore such processes in the making, through highlighting the existing practices that may be obstructing efforts for inclusive participation and the responses of those working to forge pathways forward.

Following Braidotti (2011a; 2011b), Butler (1990; 2004), Mohanty (1988; 2003) and Spivak (1993), amongst others, in bringing critical feminist and post-colonial perspectives to post-structuralist understandings of plural subject formation and the dialectic relationships of power, my intention is to highlight horizontal connections and avenues for mutual learning, as well as the constraints and consequences of contesting dominant discourses. Referencing Deleuzian motifs, particularly in relation to space and fluidity, my research prioritises the multiplicity implicit in experiences of contesting

inequality and attempting to formulate alternative figurations of power (Deleuze & Guattari 2013/1988). Likewise, the parallels between feminist preoccupations and Deleuzian notions of "difference, sexuality, and transformation" (Braidotti 2011a, 246) and of exchange in contact with the Other (Davies, B. 2010; 2011; Massey 2005; Arnot 2009) resonate throughout my study. Underlining this dual commitment in feminist research, Braidotti summarises:

> Feminist philosophy, just like Deleuze's project, is the critique of the power in/as discourse and the active endeavour to create other ways of thinking: it is the engagement in the process to learn to think differently. (2011a, 257)

Here, Deleuzian images of the zig-zag, simultaneously cross-cutting and bridging divergent fields (Deleuze & Parnet 2002/1987; Mazzei & McCoy 2010, 505; Braidotti 2011a, 17), reflect the intention of my research to be dialectic and responsive to the varied influences that shape constructions of female citizenship as well as Myanmar women's navigation of these influences in transitional space. Likewise, the image also reflects the composite character of the research that seeks to draw connections between fields of study, tracing lines of flight between educational, activist and feminist movements.

The aim of this section is to introduce the theoretical positioning and the fields of study that inform the research and that have shaped the research design. Further details of the application and implications of this theoretical approach are explored through the chapters that make up the subsequent sections of the thesis. In particular, Chapter 4 provides a conceptualisation of educational environments drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's notions of striated and smooth space, highlighting the differing dimensions of Myanmar's education landscape which reveal alternate practices of learning and avenues for expanding inclusion. Additionally, Chapter 7 extends the conceptualisation to the practices of women's organisations and builds a notion of the nomadic subjectivity of feminist activists in navigating varied and changing influences.

3.2.1 Post-colonialism, development and nomadic subjectivity

Reflecting the critical feminist position of the research and researcher, I see processes of knowledge diffusion as interlinked with relationships of power (Spivak 1993; Stromquist 2015; Connell 2014; Chilisa & Ntseane 2010), acknowledging that "power resides first in what is taken to be knowledge" (Davies 2000, 18). Such a position casts light on both formal education

practices, as modes of recognised knowledge dissemination, and alternative learning sites, including women's activist organisations who make use of community education as a tool to construct alternative presentations of gender roles and relationships. In so doing, I take heed of Batliwala (2009; 2007) and Connell's (2014) calls to recognise the experiences of women in the global South and their expertise in generating new forms of knowledge. Batliwala (2007) highlights:

> We need to build a new language in which to frame our vision and strategies for social transformation at the local, national, or global level. I for one intend to do so not by re-reading Foucault or Gramsci or other great political philosophers, but by listening to poor women and their movements, listening to their values, principles, articulation, and actions, and by trying to hear how they frame their search for justice. From this, I suspect, will emerge not only a new discourse, but also new concepts and strategies that have not yet entered our political or philosophical imaginings. (564)

I am mindful of Batliwala's appeal, echoed also by Spivak (1993), to be attentive to the alternative practices and strategies of women's movements within the context of study, however I differ in the exclusive prioritisation of 'poor women's' experiences, preferring to look for multiple enactments of women's resistance to and contestation of hegemonic discourses. Acknowledging Everjoice Win's (2004) critique that development institutions have created a paternalistic construction of (African) women as "always poor, powerless and invariably pregnant" (61), my research prioritises the connections, overlaps and influences that seek a more holistic understanding of women's varied and diverse positions and experiences within society. This priority has therefore informed both my theoretical positioning and my methodological approach, outlined in more detail below (*3.3*).

Such assertions echo Connell's formulation of southern theory as an imperative to recognise endogenous knowledge production, and the direction to "rethink gender from the South" (Connell 2014). As explored in Chapters 7 and 8, the development industry is implicated in reproducing neo-colonial models of engagement, however these models are at times resisted, at others manipulated, by women's civil society organisations which are pursuing their own priorities and agendas while navigating contextualised constraints. Likewise, such movements take place across varied class dynamics, but prominently include middle class women who have responded critically to

assumptions and observed practices after experiences working with development organisations or through study abroad. Here Braidotti's conceptualisation of nomadism (2011a; 2011b) advances understandings of the distinctive position that women activists occupy that may be conceived differently from the more stratified portrayals of class. As expanded upon in Chapters 4, 6 and 7, nomadic subjectivity highlights the plurality of interconnections and influences spanning grassroots community activism, transnational movements and national political manoeuvrings, reflecting a "collectively assembled, externally related and multi-layered subject" (Braidotti 2011b, 210). The nomadic experience therefore implies interaction and movement between and across multiple scales (Gibson-Graham 2002) and also laterally creating dialogues between centre and periphery (Hall 1997, 183-4; Connell 2014). While there are evident echoes of a multi-scalar approach to international development and education policy transfer (see for example Lopes Cardozo & Shah 2016; Rambla 2014; Verger, Novelli & Altinyelken 2012), the focus of this thesis remains largely with the experiences and practices of women's organisations and activists in disrupting and transforming linear pathways of reproduction experienced both within formal education settings and within non-formal training practices. This therefore suggests an alternative perspective of interaction in which pathways of translation and transformation are viewed largely from the prioritised position of these women activists. This nomadism is in part formed in sites of turbulence and disruption, where nomadic subject formation is not a result of simply having changed location but of undergoing shifts in environment and points of contact, which disrupt familiar modes of engagement creating opportunities for new and fluid interactions.

Recurrent throughout my research process has been the revealing of tensions, and in this my theoretical foundations provide no exception. I recognise that having worked as a teacher and development consultant in Myanmar, particularly in curriculum writing and women's empowerment training, I am myself implicated in the diffusion of certain discourses and constructions of gender and educational practices. Likewise, while I strive to be attentive to the experiences, knowledge and positions of the Myanmar educators and activists I have worked with, both as a practitioner and in the context of this research, I remain on the outside of these experiences and my presence as a white British researcher in a post-colonial and conflict-affected context is highly visible. There is a limit therefore to the extent to which I am in a position to voice the concerns of Myanmar women, who are better placed to articulate their own desires and intentions. Consequently, while I wish to

draw attention to the contextualised priorities and new forms of knowledge that emerge from these activist environments, I acknowledge that a tension is apparent as I nonetheless rely on those theorists such as Deleuze and Butler most familiar to me from my academic initiation to frame my research findings. In this, Braidotti's nomadic theory helps me to make sense of my position within my research context. Drawing also from Deleuze, Braidotti's theorisation of nomadic subjectivity draws attention to the multiple points of contact which make up composite experiences and the transnational connections that influence movements. Having lived in Myanmar for several years and worked with several of the same women educators and activists participating in the research, I am part of their many points of contact, and they of mine. In this way:

> Nomadic shifts enact therefore a creative sort of becoming; they are a performative metaphor that allows for otherwise unlikely encounters and unsuspected sources of interaction experience and knowledge. (Braidotti 2011a, 27)

Combining attention to southern theory, recognising the coloniality of dominant gender constructions (Connell 2007; 2014; Wieringa & Sívori 2013), with a recognition of women activists' position in navigating diverse and competing influences reveals possibilities for hybridity and multi-directional learning. Conceived as a dialogue then, southern theory and nomadic subjectivity may allow for a reconfiguration of relationships in which knowledge and practices infiltrating the post-colonial context may be reinterpreted according to new designs, producing new priorities and ways of thinking, while nomadism simultaneously prompts a response from the centre, albeit according to different conceptualisations.

3.2.2 Conceptualising transition, agency and activism

Concerns with discourse, influence and replication as underpinning poststructural understandings of agency and empowerment (Davies 2000; Keddie 2011) resonate throughout my study, and hold particular relevance within the context of transition in which there is potential for a reconfiguration of relationships of power. In the context of historic militarisation and the consistent suppression of civil rights, it is easy to read a heavy-handed approach to power relations that focuses in a linear fashion on the role of the oppressive military regime in limiting the power of the populace, and in particular in restricting access for women to positions of responsibility. While

the impact of militarisation has undoubtedly been significant in constructing dominant, masculinised models of authority, as is evident in the education practices explored in Chapter 5, nonetheless alternative forms of power and resistance (Braidotti 2011a, 11; Foucault 1980; 1983) also proliferate in response. The notion of resistance is therefore intrinsic to the presentation of agency which underpins the study (Butler 1990; Davies 2000; Keddie 2011), whereby willful attempts to subvert oppressive discourses of accepted behaviour (Ahmed 2014) also combine with subtle reformulations and disruptions which may be more covert, intentionally or otherwise (Srimulyani 2013; Wieringa 1995). Additionally, dominant discourses are not static, neither do they remain common in either composition or consequences to all people (Hall 1996; Fiske 1996; Gandin 2015). The processes of undoing stratified hierarchies of power, as explored in further detail in Chapters 4 and 7, therefore involves multiple and shifting responses, through which the outcome is rarely assured, reflecting Deleuzian conceptualisations of agency, as highlighted by Bronwyn Davies:

> For Deleuze agency lay in radical openness to the not-yet-known — the lines of flight that begin with the familiar striations of the already known and then move off, at a tangent, caught up in a line of force, of flight to new ways of thinking and being. (2010, 57-8)

Situations of conflict likewise create both social and physical upheaval which can produce diverging reactions. On the one hand social positions are reified through authoritarian practices that erode alterity. However, on the other this upheaval, particularly in the migrations it engenders through displacement and exile, gives rise to an increased nomadism in the periphery accentuating avenues for contestation. Processes of transition then, particularly turbulent transition resulting from experiences of conflict, produce disruption to order that allows for latent alternative movements to emerge more prominently. In this, turbulence and disruption may create opportunities for reconfiguring social stratification to more inclusive ends (Davies 2014; Zembylas & Ferreira 2009).

Such environments accentuate the opportunities for resistance to translate into a reconfiguration of power relationships. These notions of power within resistance also recall Butler's emphasis on the repetition of performances that can result, inadvertently as well as intentionally, in a reworking of ascribed roles (Butler 1990; 2004). Youdell and Armstrong (2011) highlight this dimension of Butler's theorisation:

> Her work stresses that while the hail of subjectivation is ongoing and potentially multiple and even contradictory, subjects and the discursive repertoires they deploy have to be '*recognizable*' (Butler, 2004: 5, original emphasis) in the discursive terrains in which they are located. While this suggests a subject who is simultaneously made and constrained, it also suggests a subject who can act with intent in these terrains and engage in a performative politics of reinscription (Butler, 1997). (145)

This politics of reinscription, both of the self and others, can therefore find a foothold within transition whereby shifts occur in the discursive terrain and previously marginalised positions *may* be brought within the central frame. The agency of individuals and groups to navigate these shifts reflects this simultaneous position as constrained while also seeking avenues of contestation, forming the question "what possibilities of mobilization are produced on the basis of existing configurations of discourse and power?" (Butler 2011/1995, 46; see also Davies 2000, 16). However, new and multiple competing influences also intercede in this transitional landscape, including through increased internationalisation in trading partnerships as well as development interests, adding further dynamics that complicate repositionings, as will be further explored in Chapter 8.

The tendency to marginalise women's concerns to the private rather than public sphere (Crossouard & Dunne 2015; Butler 1990) has the consequence that (organised) resistance and contestation of marginalisation has largely originated beyond the formal arenas, with women's movements and collective activism providing such alternative sites. Consequently, as Mohanty (2003) highlights:

> Because social movements are crucial sites for the construction of knowledge, communities, and identities, it is very important for feminists to direct themselves toward them. (528)

Stromquist (2006; 2015b) and Connell (2014; 2015) have also drawn attention to the role of women's organisations and NGOs in constructing learning environments from which emerges alternative constructions of female citizenship ideals. Recognising that concepts central to global equality goals such as women's rights, and human rights, are simultaneously "*local and universal and contested*" (Ackerly 2001, 312 emphasis in original), women activists negotiate the pathways between these notions in translating their relevance for their contexts and communities.

While international development organisations have largely overlooked these efforts by women's organisations (Cornwall & Edwards 2014; Stromquist 2006; 2015b) to formulate responses to women's multiple and varied forms of subjugation, they have however targeted women activists and their networks as objects of 'empowerment'. As will be explored further in Chapters 8 and 9, there is an inherent contradiction in the transposition of models of resistance and emancipation from one (dominant) culture to another, and the consequent potential co-opting of civil society movements to serve international rather than local goals. A further note then is devoted to the problematic term of empowerment which has been deployed in multiple ways in development initiatives, both as a linguistic concept and in terms of practical policy (MacKenzie, 2009, 199). Following the conceptualisation as expanded by Cornwall and Edwards (2014), empowerment is understood in the context of this thesis as:

> a process best captured in the metaphor of a journey along pathways that can be travelled individually or together with others, in which the nature of the terrain is significant in determining progress. (7)

The emphasis therefore lies on the practices and processes through which empowerment may be constituted and perceived rather than on any specific, defined outputs. This moves attention beyond singular goals, such as facilitating economic participation in markets, to revealing plural and divergent pathways. Supporting women to influence change in the social institutions that shape their experiences is therefore one dimension of rendering the terrain more favourable (Kabeer 2001; Kabeer & Stark 2008; Batliwala 2011), however the obstacles in working towards this aim are varied. The ways in which notions of empowerment are being contextualised, reformulated and enacted through alternative enactments in education and training contexts are therefore a primary focus of this research, and further explored in Chapter 9.

3.2.3 The role of education in constructing citizenship

Notions of idealised citizenship construction are evident through models presented and enacted in multiple forms in educational contexts (Apple 2012; 2013; Gramsci 1971). While this thesis focuses attention primarily on those areas of educational practice that have not previously received as much critical attention (see Chapter 5), it is worth initially highlighting the work of

curriculum theorists in drawing attention to the fundamental areas of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, whereby:

> Curriculum defines what counts as valid knowledge, pedagogy defines what counts as the valid transmission of knowledge, and evaluation defines what counts as a valid realisation of knowledge. (Bernstein 1971, 48)

Additionally, international influences complicate this transitional environment, not only in relationships between national governments but also in international interventions in education policy and practice through the mandates of INGOs and UN institutions and through global frameworks, including Education for All (EfA) and, prior to 2015, the targets set by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Local, national and international agendas therefore compete in education environments, particularly state primary and secondary systems. Such multi-scalar dimensions of processes of knowledge translation additionally highlight the implications of where power lies and what avenues are available for contestation or resistance (Bonal & Rambla 2003; Chilisa & Ntseane 2010). Education structures therefore reflect broader societal distributions of power and knowledge, where:

> this distribution of different knowledges and possibilities is not based on neutral differences in knowledge but on a distribution of knowledge which carries unequal value, power and potential. (Bernstein 2000, xxi)

Likewise, the infiltration of local teaching practices by international agendas, the spread of ideas and the networks through which policy flows, therefore has a significant impact on shaping practices in the classroom, but also opens up the possibility for adaption and appropriation along the route (Exley, Braun and Ball 2011, 217). Schools may therefore also be sites of struggle and resistance, acknowledging the agency of those within local education systems in manoeuvring amongst and against the officialised reproduction of knowledge, including through:

> the day to day interactions and regularities of the hidden curriculum that tacitly taught important norms and values; the formal corpus of school knowledge – that is, the overt curriculum itself – that is planned and found in the various materials and texts and filtered through teachers; and finally, the fundamental

> perspectives that educators…use to plan, organize, and evaluate what happens in schools. (Apple 2012, 18-19)

This can, of course, work in both directions, either as resistance to attempts to create more inclusive learning environments, or as subverting authoritarian and exclusionary presentations. In this way, "our emotional investments are central to the exercise of power relations inside (and outside) the classroom" (Zembylas 2007b, xiii).

Gendered performances enact and sustain the reproduction of gender in multiple ways across society in "the embodied and embedded, affective and relational structures of our social relations, the mixture of personal and collective, the intimate and the public" (Braidotti 2015, 3). As explored further in the chapters of Part II, education systems are inherently gendered sites of learning (Aikman & Unterhalter 2005). In seeking to explore processes of becoming and the construction of citizenship within a context of conflict and transition, notions of gendered performances inscribed in education practices are therefore of central significance. Understanding that education is central to the construction of hegemony and hierarchical relationships of power (Gramsci 1971; Mayo 2014), schools represent a significant institution whereby the expected codes of gendered behaviour are learned and reinforced and transgressing expectations is therefore liable to incur punishment (Davies, B. 2011; Leach 2000). Classrooms, playgrounds and lunch rooms are therefore sites of gender performances (Butler 1990; Bartky 1990) just as much as familial and broader community settings. In these ways, young women and young men learn behaviour and attitudes that are sustained both within and beyond schools. However, identities are also not unitary, but fluid, composite, and at times contradictory (Hall 1996; Yuval-Davis 1997). Consequently, the ways in which education environments present and represent spaces of inclusion or exclusion based on multiple identity associations has implications for broader notions of (in)equality and the ways violence may be sustained and legitimised within society, not only violence against women but against all those excluded from hegemonic presentations of power (Keddie 2011; Giroux 2003).

Attention has long been brought to the transformative potential of education and critical pedagogies in non-formal as well as formal learning environments (Gramsci 1971; bell hooks 1994; Freire 1993/1977). Sites of learning are therefore understood not just as state schools but also more varied sites of non-formal learning, and directed not only towards children and adolescents but also adults across the span of their lives (Giroux 2011), which

may provide spaces to "uphold forms of education capable of expanding the meaning of critical citizenship and the relations of democratic public life" (Giroux 2003, 9). In the same way, educators are understood not only as those teachers within the formal school system, but also more broadly within the community (Gramsci 1971; Mayo 2014), and play a critical role in shaping learning experiences and in mediating, (re)interpreting and transforming learning discourses (Freire 1993/1977; Apple 2012). In the last few years, growing attention has also been brought to the role of education in conflict and peacebuilding (Novelli & Lopes Cardozo 2008; Davies 2004; Kagawa 2005; Lopes Cardozo & Shah 2016) and the dual nature of education in potentially exacerbating conflict and social inequality or conversely in promoting social justice (Bush & Saltarelli 2000; Davies 2010). The ways in which notions of citizenship and hegemonic ideals are constructed in classrooms and through education policies therefore has particular implications in situations of conflict for potentially exacerbating social tensions. Likewise, in conflict-affected contexts where formal education provision may be compromised and/or resisted as associated with a dominant ideology (Davies 2004; Smith & Vaux 2003), non-formal education practices often proliferate to fill the gaps in education services as well as to contest contentious discourses (van der Linden 2015). Within such movements, including through social activism and civil society mobilisation (Hall et al 2012), non-formal education activities may also serve competing agendas, exacerbating tensions and promoting singular, exclusionary notions of identity, or conversely seeking to undermine hegemonic discourses and promote inclusion and challenge injustices. While this research project has explicitly sought out examples of the latter, it is acknowledged that a great variety of motivations may be encountered in diverse contexts which illustrate less positive intentions for social transformations.

I frame this discussion, and ultimately the title of my thesis, as constructing female citizenship to draw attention to the contested notion of citizenship, that it is not automatic or universally understood, its inherently gendered nature, and also to bring the role of the state within the process of such constructions into discussion (Yuval-Davis 1997; Lister 2003; Crossouard & Dunne 2015). The presentation of hierarchies within education practice therefore reflects:

> the ways in which citizenship is understood as a symbolic identity within specific discursive framings, that can lead to differentiated notions of the 'I', the 'we' and the 'Other'. (Arnot 2009, 10)

Ultimately this leads to questions of what roles and positions are attached to different components of identity (including 'women'), by whom, and how these constructions may be varied and contradictory depending on their source. As will become apparent in the course of the thesis, the state is not the only entity to shape notions of citizenship ideals, and civil society as well as international development actors, amongst others, also influence these constructions and offer alternative formulations (Connell 2014; Giroux 2011), leading to potential contrasts between the citizenship ideals espoused by the state and by civil society (Mayo 2014, 389). Additionally, the period of transition, as highlighted above, offers opportunities for transformation and to reconfigure notions of citizenship. However as is also apparent within Myanmar's transitional landscape, such reframings are not automatically any more inclusive, reflecting the intermingling of "notions of identity, belonging, and difference, as well as social exclusion and marginalisation within and across boundaries" (Arnot 2009, 10). Building from these theoretical reflections that inform the direction of my research, the methodological approach adopted is expanded below.

3.3 Methodological approach

My own position within the research, having previously worked with several of the activists and educators who have participated in the study, has greatly informed my theoretical approach. In addition to having been an educator and gender trainer in Myanmar, I have also designed course material and edited textbooks, in partnership with both international and local organisations. This implication of myself within the diffusion and reiteration of gender constructions has necessitated a certain humility in my research approach, and has also allowed for a shared process of learning in unpacking processes of translation and adaptation.

Attentive to this implication of myself within the research and my position within a post-colonial context, I have sought methodological approaches and methods that are sensitive to the environment of my research study and respond to the priorities that emerged from participants (Smith 2012; Chilisa 2012). This at once maximises the benefits of my existing relationships within Myanmar and amongst educators and civil society activists, while also allowing a space and independence to let these varied and at times competing voices speak for themselves without my overt judgement. In this my approach extends the feminist positioning of my work to be attentive to relationships of power and the varied forms of their enactment (Naples

2003; Staeheli 2004). This includes my position as a researcher as well as my known position as a teacher and teacher trainer within the context, which may be seen to exert influence over participants particularly in focus group discussions or classroom discussions with the young women participating in community education courses. Aware of this position, during these classroom-based research practices I have prioritised methods (further expanded below in *3.4*) which direct attention away from me as an authority, using small group exercises of mind-maps and drawing or creating posters as well as ensuring movement within the classroom, rearranging desks, working around one large piece of paper or handing over responsibility to students to write notes on the board.

In addition, in considering relationships of power within the dynamics of the research I would be misrepresenting many of the high profile activists and policy makers who were interviewed in the course of the research if I implied that power lay only with me. Several participants interviewed occupy positions within the newly elected government, as Members of Parliament, working for ministries or consulted as advisors, while others lead substantial civil society organisations or NGOs, and their agency in being fully able to refuse participation is understood. I am also very aware that activists and educators have many competing demands on their time, and have been generous in supporting and participating in my research endeavours.

These factors, in addition to the feminist priorities of the research, have lead me towards participatory methodologies that have prioritised sustaining relationships so that new information can be shared in a reciprocal manner and feedback sought at multiple points in the process. The research therefore took an inductive approach that prioritised the act of listening on my part and making adjustments to my methods and focus in response. This has been supported through the ethnographic style of discourse analysis incorporated in the methods as well as the sustaining of relationships through multiple meetings over the duration of the research, with additional informal discussions and shared activities complementing semi-structured interview techniques (as further outlined below in *3.4.8*).

3.3.1 Research Questions

Consideration of these theoretical and methodological factors has led me to my research questions which provide a framework for the research and this thesis, revealing the intention to draw links between educational practices, both formal and non-formal, and women's activism in Myanmar. While the research questions and their sub-questions have been discussed in greater

length in *1.3.1*, they are repeated here for expediency and to reflect the methodological approach of responding to issues identified during the early stages of the research:

1. *What roles do differing education practices play in constructing citizenship ideals in Myanmar, and in what ways are these gendered?*

- *How have practices in education sustained and legitimised women's social subordination?*
- *In what ways are alternative sites of learning presenting alternative models?*

2. *How is women's activism in Myanmar and the Thai border creating alternative spaces for transformative learning during Myanmar's period of political transition?*

- *How are women's organisations responding to shifting constraints and opportunities within the period of transition and what are the consequences of these responses?*
- *What alternative presentations of female citizenship emerge from these learning sites?*

3.4 Methods, data & analysis

Ethnographic research was conducted in Myanmar and Thailand through multiple periods of fieldwork between 2014 and 2016 using varied ethnographic methods. These include observations, site-visits, participation in workshops and events, informal discussions and relationship building as well as more formal semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and textual analysis. The eclectic mix of methods used reflects the overall character of the study which aimed to be responsive to the environments and positions of research participants and which values plurality and collaboration creating a shared experience of *bricolage*. Organisations were initially consulted based on pre-existing professional relations, with a snowballing approach taken to then expand the reach of the study. This proved particularly fruitful as women's groups were expanding in the course of the research period in response to the changing political dynamics and as migrant and refugees communities were beginning to make tentative movements towards repatriation resulting in new community groups and organisations emerging.

An overview of the methods used in the course of the research and the data collected is provided in the subsections below. As multiple methods were

used in the course of data gathering, oriented towards the different dimensions of the research, each chapter includes a brief outline of the methods used and the relevant data which inform that chapter. In addition to the structured methods outlined here, the ethnographic nature of the research was also supported by general observation and participation in events, which included report launches, forums and seminars held by civil society organisations, theatre and arts performances, and celebrations held for occasions such as International Women's Day, which supported the study of public discourse in constructing female citizenship.

3.4.1 Stages of fieldwork

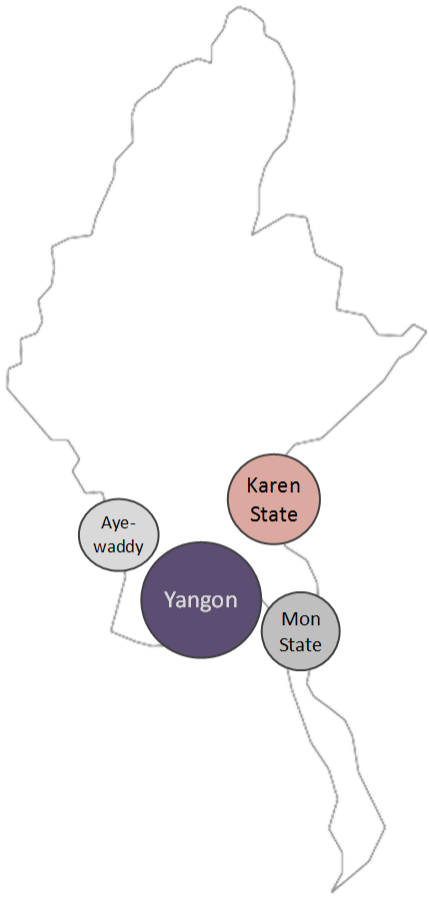
Multiple fieldwork visits were conducted between 2014 and 2016 allowing for the iterative and cumulative nature of the work to emerge. The table below outlines these periods as well as the focus of research activities. The number of interviews (excluding focus group discussions) conducted at each stage of fieldwork is also included. As several participants were interviewed multiple times during the course of the research the total number of interviews conducted is significantly higher than the number of individuals interviewed as outlined in *3.4.5*.

Fieldwork periods			
Dates	Locations	Focus	No. interviews
Jul - Sep 2014	Thai border, Chiang Mai (Thailand); Yangon Region, Mon State, (Myanmar)	Mapping women's community organisations; trial of ethnographic discourse analysis, focus group discussion (1) and interviews; education and development sector interviews; site visits and observations	45
Dec 2014 - Apr 2015	Thai border, Chiang Mai (Thailand); Yangon Region, Kayin State, Mon State, Mandalay Region (Myanmar)	Education sector interviews; ethnographic discourse analysis with case study groups; focus group discussions (4); site visits and observations	57
Jul - Aug 2015	Yangon Region, Ayewaddy Region (Myanmar)	CSO and activists Interviews; follow-up case study groups; focus group discussions (3)	25
Dec 2015 - Jan 2016	Chiang Mai (Thailand); Yangon Region (Myanmar)	Follow-up case study groups and ethnographic discourse analysis; education sector interviews	10
Aug - Sep 2016	Yangon Region (Myanmar)	Validation and sharing findings; final focus group discussion (1)	12

Table 1: periods of fieldwork

The preliminary fieldwork period of July to September 2014 provided the opportunity to map the landscape of community organisations focusing on women's rights and gender equality (outlined below, *3.4.3*), to identify the small number of women's organisations to work more closely with and to trial the process of interviewing and ethnographic discourse analysis. This period established contact with women's organisations which was then sustained throughout the subsequent fieldwork periods, allowing for the ethnographic discourse analysis to capture the longitudinal nature of some of the non-formal education initiatives. Subsequent fieldwork periods additionally focused on the education dimensions of the research through interviews and group discussions (further outlined below, *3.4.6* and *3.4.7*).

3.4.2 Research locations



The main research location was Yangon, being Myanmar's largest city and the site of the greatest number of activist groups, development organisations and education reform initiatives. The majority of interviews and the case study research was therefore conducted in Yangon, with interviews, site visits, observations and focus group discussions also conducted in Mon State, Kayin State, and Ayewaddy Region (*fig.1*). Additionally to the locations where interviews were conducted, many of the community organisations engaged in the research also worked at multiple sites across the country.

Figure 1: Myanmar interview locations

In Thailand, the majority of the research was conducted in Chiang Mai, where several Myanmar-oriented education and activist organisations are based, and on the Thai border particularly around Mae Sot, where many refugee and migrant communities are located (*fig.2*). Three additional interviews were conducted in Bangkok.

While the research was conducted in a limited number of sites, participants were engaged from a broad range of locations and ethnic groups, taking advantage of opportunities when participants would be gathering in Yangon or Chiang Mai. For example, a group discussion with Chin teachers was conducted in Yangon while the teachers had travelled to attend an education seminar. Likewise, students in the focus group discussions conducted in Chiang Mai and Yangon had travelled from their homes across the breadth of Myanmar's states and divisions as well as the refugee camps in the Thai border. In this way, although the engagement of the research can only ever be partial, a diversity of voices and experiences were included in data gathering both on experiences within formal and non-formal education and on women's community-based activism.

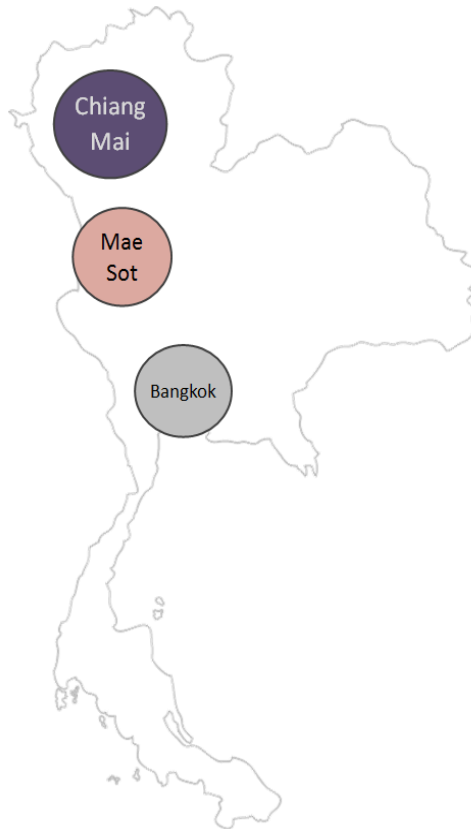


Figure 2: Thailand interview locations

3.4.3 Mapping women's community training

During the preliminary fieldwork period in 2014, a mapping exercise was carried out to identify local organisations that were currently delivering women's leadership, empowerment and capacity building training. This exercise served to create an impression of the landscape of women's community education and training courses during the mid-point of the Thein Sein administration, and also provided an entry point to identify organisations

to work more closely with during the later stages of the research. Data collected included the location of the organisation, the language, duration and focus of training, and the content of training activities. Further details of the mapping process and templates for data collection are provided in Appendix 2.

Data was collected through desk-based and field research, email and 14 in-person meetings & discussions, training centre visits and observations, with the focus being on Myanmar-oriented training delivered by local organisations. Although international organisations were also consulted in the broader profile of the research they were not included in the mapping exercise as data on training activities had already been collected and made accessible through GEN's 2013 *Taking the Lead* study.

28 organisations with education based programmes were identified, meeting the following criteria:

- Stated aim of affecting social change for women
- Myanmar oriented – (local) NGOs, CSOs
- Sustained training programmes, not single workshops

Of these 28 organisations (*fig.3*):

3 were networks with multiple member organisations;

7 were ethnically aligned;

7 were originally set up by international staff and/or associated with international NGOs but now led by with national staff;

14 had been established since 2008 (11 of which since 2012 reforms);

All received international funding.

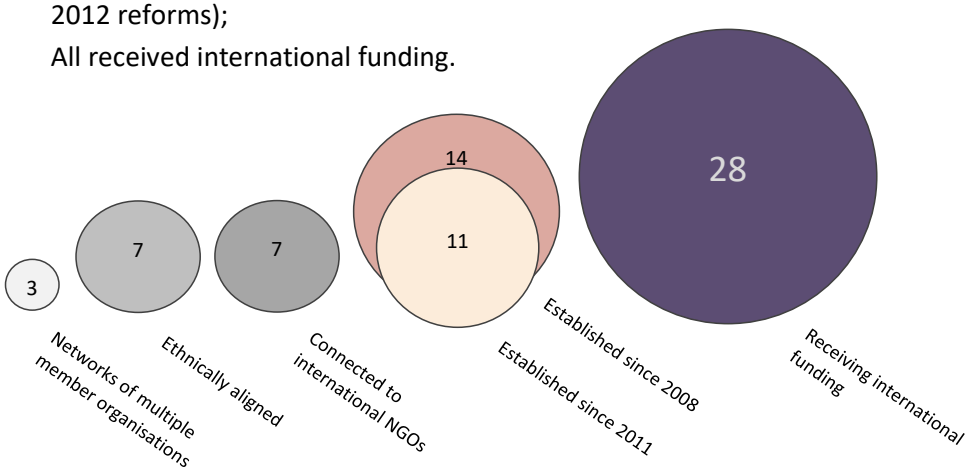


Figure 3: Profile of mapped organisations

Organisations were identified both within Myanmar and within Thailand (*fig.4*), however fewer community organisations were found to be delivering training on the Thai border than had previously been encountered during professional work. The location of the training programmes highlights the dominance of Yangon which has emerged as the centre for activities promoting women's empowerment and leadership since 2012 and also points to the shift in donor funding priorities from Thai border to Myanmar which has affected many ethnic and refugee organisations.

Such information also helps provide background to exploring tensions in working strategies evident between Thai-based organisations & regional Myanmar groups.

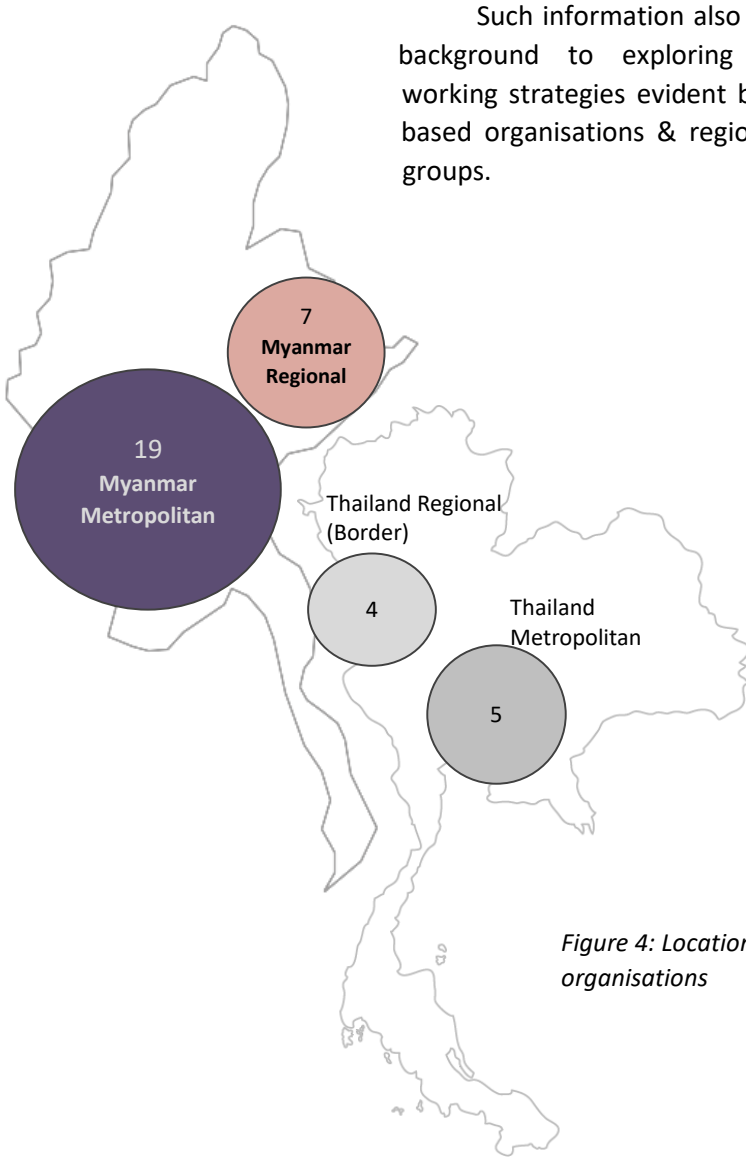


Figure 4: Locations of mapped organisations

Diverging approaches to the language of instruction used in education activities were also evident (*fig.5*), reflecting practical choices, particularly where textual material is written in English, as well as political decisions in the rejection of the national language or in deliberate attempts to render sensitive or controversial educational content less identifiable to potentially hostile authorities. 16 of the courses encountered employed at least some English in their activities often through the textual sources, and 8 of the courses explicitly identified English language learning as a component for empowerment. 12 of the programmes identified were not conducted with the use of English.

Figure 5: Language of instruction used in courses

The data revealed a focus on leadership, political empowerment and political processes, which later became accentuated in the lead up to the November 2015 elections, as well as the prominent focus on entry-level training highlighting the concept of gender and general social inequalities (*fig.6*).

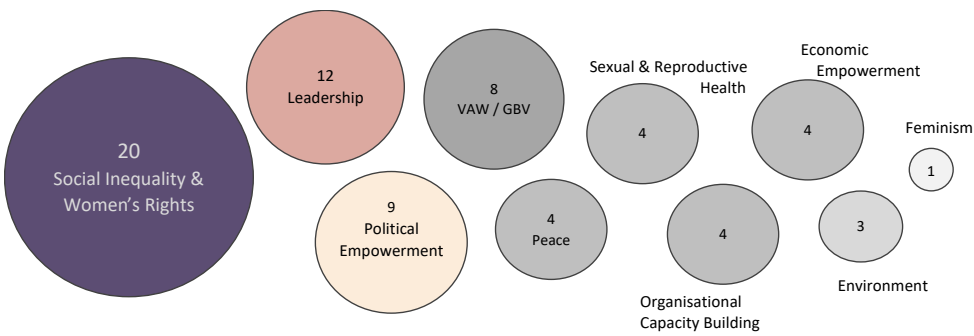


Figure 6: Focus of courses identified in the mapping exercise

While economic empowerment has been a focus in both academic literature and development discourse, few women's community organisations were encountered that prioritised this area for the content of education initiatives. Therefore, following the inductive nature of the research approach economic

empowerment has not featured as a priority area for analysis in this thesis. However, organisations and community groups supporting income generation activities and vocational training were encountered while only a small number of these included broader educational components (those included in the mapping), indicating a potential fragmentation between economic, political and social concerns. The finding also points to fractures in training initiatives along lines of class, where courses have tending to perpetuate training at a certain social level, with greater emphasis on leadership training rather than more varied training responsive to diverse needs. These dimensions are further explored in Chapter 9.

3.4.4 Site visits and observations

Site visits were visits to community schools or organisations where I was given a tour of the classrooms, introduced to trainers and in many cases to the students of classes in progress allowing opportunities for observation (beyond simply an interview being conducted in the director/teachers' office). These visits were conducted with the aim of observing the environment of community schools, the available resources and the dynamics of class participation, and in several cases established initial relationships with teachers and students before later conducting a focus group discussion. Six of the sites were already familiar from previous professional work as a teacher and trainer conducted in the context, while the remainder were visits to new locations either contacted directly or introduced as a result of snowballing. These visits and observations included a focus on mixed education initiatives both within Myanmar and in Thailand. Photos were often taken of the education sites and of activities and material in the classroom with consent (*Photos 1 & 2*), however care is given to protect anonymity in photos used.

Photo 1 (L): Office of a community school visited in Feb 2015

Photo 2 (R): Classroom of a community education programme visited in Aug 2015

Of the 17 site visits conducted in Myanmar, 12 were in the Yangon area, with the remaining 5 in Ayewaddy division, Kayin and Mon States. In Thailand, site visits were conducted in Mae Sot, Khao Lak and Chiang Mai.

Site visits to community education programmes / schools					
Myanmar		Thailand		Total	
Mixed	Women only	Mixed	Women only	Mixed	Women only
11	6	4	2	15	8
Total:	17	Total:	6		
			Combined total:		23

Table 2: number of site visits to community education programmes & community schools

3.4.5 Interviews

Across the research into dynamics of education, transition and female citizenship construction, 113 individuals were interviewed including those from education, development, community based and civil society organisations in both Myanmar and amongst refugee, migrant and exile communities in Thailand. Several individuals were interviewed multiple times and differing stages of the fieldwork and consequently the numbers listed in the table below reflect the number of individuals engaged in the research rather than the number of interviews conducted (as outlined in *Table 1*, *3.4.1*). While the majority of individuals were Myanmar nationals, a number of interviews were also conducted with international staff members particularly at development organisations and INGOs. These interviews with international staff have largely served as information sharing and triangulation, and are not directly quoted from in the course of this thesis unless clearly indicated.

Total individuals interviewed			
Myanmar (national)	International		
85	28		
		Combined total:	113

Table 3: total number of individual interviews and discussions

Amongst those individuals interviewed in the capacity of representing their organisation's work, 52 organisations were represented. While there was often overlap in the orientation and work of organisations, the 42 local organisations that were consulted in the research can be roughly divided into 16 education focused organisations, 16 women's/gender focused civil society organisations,

and 10 broader civil society organisations which included focuses on peacebuilding, disability, health and youth engagement.

Organisations consulted through interviews			
Local (CSOs)			International (INGOs)
Myanmar-based	Thailand-based	Cross-border (dual)	
31	6	5	10
		Combined total:	52

Table 4: number of organisations consulted through interviews

Interviews took a variety of forms, and the term is applied here as a broad encompassing category. As such, the interviews referred to ranged from short (20 minute) informal discussions with both individuals and groups of 2 or 3, to semi-structured interviews of up to two hours. Interviews varied in focus including differing emphasis on activism, professional and personal experiences, educational practices or hopes for reforms amongst others. Consequently, further details of the focus of interviews and group discussions are provided in the research methods summaries of each chapter where appropriate.

For all individuals interviewed in the research, the purpose of my research was outlined verbally and an information sheet was offered (often via email) so that genuine consent could be given. Semi-structured interviews were recorded where consent was given (usually those interview participants more closely associated with the study who were consulted on multiple occasions). As recording was not often encountered by many of those consulted, and given the suspicion and understandable fear that surrounds much equality or rights-based community work less formal discussions were largely not recorded and interviews only with express consent. This was particularly true of interviews conducted in 2014, when participants often expressed reluctance to be recorded. However, during the course of the research period both as the political environment became less constrained and as participants became more familiar with me and with the research process recording became less of an obstacle to participation. For those interview that were not recorded, detailed notes were taken during and immediately after the interview. Several individuals were re-interviewed during the course of the multiple fieldwork visits and those associated with the more in-depth focus areas of the research have been interviewed multiple times allowing for the inclusion of longitudinal dimensions within the research, along with more ethnographic approaches of observation and informal discussions.

Although some individuals, in particular more high profile activists, expressed a willingness to be named in the research, the decision has been made to anonymise all individuals in order to protect the confidentiality of all research participants. When quoting from interview data a description of the professional role of the speaker is included in brackets after the quote, along with a description of the data collection method (i.e. interview, focus group discussion etc) and the year. In Chapters 6 and 9 only, the location of the interview is also included in order maintain clarity in the cross-border dynamics of the research study.

Interview transcripts and notes were coded following an inductive approach rather than through pre-defined coding groups, allowing thematic areas to emerge from the data (explored in the subsequent section of this chapter, *3.5*). This process was initiated after the preliminary fieldwork period and then refined following subsequent fieldwork periods, resulting in several iterations of analysis. As many of the research participants were consulted multiple times throughout the course of the research, this also allowed for emerging themes to be verified with research participants and further questions explored, creating an evolving dialogue through the research process.

3.4.6 Focus group discussions

In addition to interviews, a number of focus group discussions were conducted at varied locations, as illustrated in the table below (with the number of participants given italicised in brackets).

	Focus group discussions			
	Myanmar		Thailand	Total
	Metropolitan	Periphery		
Student Participants	2 (*3; 14*)	2 (*9; 20*)	2 (*9; 14*)	6 (*69*)
Educator/activists	1 (*10*)	2 (*5*; *6*)		3 (*21*)
			Combined total:	9 (*90*)

Table 5: number of focus group discussions

Six focus group discussions were conducted with student participants aged between 16 and 24. Four of these focus discussions involved all female groups who were engaged in community education courses in Chiang Mai and Yangon, while the two group discussions conducted in periphery regions of Myanmar engaged mixed gender groups. Each focus group discussion focused on the experiences of the participants in varied forms of education, including formal state schools, ethnic schools, migrant and refugee schools and also in non-

formal community education initiatives. Additionally, with the single sex groups, discussions focused on gendered learning experiences, including discussions of sex education, and experiences and roles in society more broadly. Participants in the discussion groups came from all of Myanmar's states and regions and included individuals identifying as Buddhist, Christian and Muslim. Data from these group discussions was particularly used to inform Chapters 5 and 6, and details are expanded in those chapters.

Three additional discussion groups were conducted within Myanmar: one with teachers, and two with young activists who were engaged in delivering community or peer education initiatives (one mixed group, one all-female). Discussions with young activists and educators focused primarily on community education as an alternative means of learning, experiences in replicating training and gender relations, while the discussion with teachers focused on experiences of formal education practice in Chin State.

3.4.7 Ethnographic discourse analysis

The incorporation of an ethnographic style of discourse analysis (Manor-Binyamini 2011) in which trainers would talk me through their use of course material, where it had come from, what they found difficult and what they had adapted, complimented the intention to reflect trainers experiences with transmitting texts within their classroom context, beyond simply the textual resource itself. This allowed for a study of discourse reproduced in trainings "from the point of view of people who engage in it" (Manor-Binyamini 2011, 2000). An overview of the textual material collected in the course of the research is provided in Appendix 3.

Analysis was informed by practices associated with critical discourse analysis (CDA), particularly multimodal considerations outlined by Gunther Kress, stressing that *"texts*, socially made, with culturally available resources, realize the interests of their makers" (Kress, 2011, 207, emphasis in original). This emphasis on a "multimodal social semiotic approach" (*ibid*) in which language is only one vehicle for transmitting meaning and in which others, including gaze and movement, hold equal power to influence resonates with notions of nomadic subjectivity in the research context where words and meaning are negotiated through and across multiple languages:

> the notion of design implies for me intensifying awareness of what the resources are and what the potentials are and how they might be used and what the conditions of constraint are and how these

> conditions might be overcome. (Kress, interview, in Rogers, 2011, 14)

Likewise, the research practice was also influenced by Fairclough's concept of intertextuality and frameworks for understanding the plural compositions of discourse, in which *text*, *discursive practice* and *social practice* provide three layers from which to approach discourse (Fairclough, 1992). The element of discursive practice, which incorporates how texts are produced and consumed, and the connection to wider social practices is of particular relevance in seeking to explore the origins of training material and the reproduction and adaptation of concepts and practices across cultural contexts, reflecting the mutually informing relationship in which training texts "shape and are shaped by social practice" (Jørgensen and Philips 2010, 69). Also reflecting the feminist underpinnings of the research which seeks to highlight practices of women's organisations in creating alternative learning environments, it is recognised that "discursive change takes place when discursive elements are articulated in new ways" (Jørgensen and Philips 2010, 76), creating opportunities to learn from the experiences of women activists and educators.

While being influenced by these understandings drawn from critical discourse analysis however, the volume and diversity of textual material encountered in education and training environments renders comprehensive CDA impractical within the scope of the research. Instead, an ethnographic approach to discourse analysis was adopted which supplemented analysis of materials with seeking an understanding not only of how they are used but also the personal and affective responses of trainers to this process. This involved multiple interviews, individual and small group discussions with trainers and, where possible, observations and discussions with course participants combined with a study of the training texts used. As highlighted above, this also prioritised a focus on the experiences of trainers in using and adapting training material, as is explored in greater detail in Chapter 9.

Following the orientation of initiatives identified in the mapping exercise, the focus of this study is on women's political and social empowerment rather than economic empowerment. The relaxing of censorship laws and restrictions on information distribution which has accompanied the changes in governments, including through internet and mobile phone use which was once all but prohibited, has increased access to training material and allowed for engagement with a greater variety of education platforms. Training courses are therefore able to draw on greater variety of training material texts (including video and audio). Across the

organisations and educators consulted, four layers of textual material were found to be evident within the training practices (see also Appendix 3):

a) international material produced in English for international organisations and therefore intended to be used in development contexts;
b) international material produced in English for domestic organisations in the UK, the USA and elsewhere, and therefore not designed for use in development contexts, as well as films and media material beyond specific teaching texts;
c) material produced specifically for use within Myanmar, but developed by international staff and consultants, in English but sometimes also translated into Burmese;
d) local material developed by women's organisations often in participation with their community members, in Burmese and ethnic languages, sometimes also translated into English.

Ethnographic discourse analysis was then conducted with five groups: four training courses offered by local women's led organisations which focused on gender equality and women's empowerment and one course which was designed and delivered by local trainers but in partnership with an international organisation. A lighter study was conducted with an additional five organisations who shared their training texts and participated in discussions and interviews, but did not constitute the more in depth style of ethnographic analysis. Within these ten organisations, 22 trainers and organisation leaders participated in the research as well as 30 course participants engaged through focus group discussions. One course took place in Thailand, five in metropolitan Myanmar (Yangon) and four programmes delivered courses at multiple sites across the country, including Ayewaddy, Kachin, Kayin, Mon and Rakhine States. One organisation was oriented towards people living with disabilities, one towards the Muslim community and two towards Christian communities. Nine organisations were led by women and focused specifically on women's political and social empowerment, and one focused on gender equality and included male as well as female trainers. Further details of case study groups included in the ethnographic discourse analysis are provided in Appendix 4.

3.4.8 Ethical considerations in data collection and analysis

Having been involved in sensitive work in Myanmar since early 2009 during the latter years of military rule, I approached my research project acutely aware of the importance of confidentiality and the potential consequences of revealing sensitive information. With this in mind I therefore took steps to ensure that the confidentiality of all participants in the research, in interviews and focus group discussions, was maintained by using abbreviations during note taking and anonymising data during transcription. The names of organisations have also been protected, except for those such as GEN who maintain a significant public profile through their website and publications and whose research reports are publically available.

As highlighted above, in the course of the research, several of the more high profile activists consulted and interviewed expressed their willingness to be named and identified. However, the decision was taken to anonymise all participants in order to maintain confidentiality across the range of research participants. To alleviate this tension, my intention is to continue working with several of the research participants to co-author future writing and extend the notion of partnership in line with the research methodology. While these projects are still in development, one collaborative writing exercise is highlighted in Focus Study 3 and the quoted text attributed to the named author.

The purposes of the research were explained carefully to all participants, including through translation in the case of the focus group discussions. While the vast majority of interviews were conducted in English, in a handful of group interviews (of colleagues in an education or activist organisation) translation was informally provided by one member of the discussion group. Consent was sought from all research participants, and an information sheet provided (Appendix 1). As the signing of documentation has historically been met with suspicion and introduces concerns over confidentiality, participants are not asked to sign the info sheet but to consent verbally. Additionally during the focus group discussions conducted with course participants, an introduction and translation of the research overview was provided by the normal course teacher to ensure that all participants understood the aims of the research, the voluntary nature of participation and their ability to withdraw at any time. As the majority of those interviewed and participating in discussion groups were contacted and consulted multiple times during the course of the research, frequent opportunities were sought to verify that research participants were still comfortable with the nature of the research. It was explained that participants could cease involvement in the

research at any time and their contributions would be removed, however no participants took this option. As further highlighted below, reflection and feedback on the process of research as well as the writing outputs was sought throughout the research.

3.4.9 Validation and feedback

The iterative nature of fieldwork allowed for sustained contact over the course of the research, particularly with the case study groups included in the ethnographic discourse analysis. Likewise, the pre-existing relationships with several of the research participants, where I had worked alongside teachers and trainers for several years prior to undertaking the research, also supported a close dialogue in the research process which meant that validation could be sought within the course of fieldwork prompting readjustments where necessary. These relationships, supporting the feminist methodological approach, also allowed a certain informality to emerge at moments in the research which served to reduce power imbalances and create pathways for more genuine feedback. While validation was sought throughout the course of the research, the final period of fieldwork in August 2016 particularly aimed to gather feedback and engage participants through sharing writing and findings summaries. The published articles that form the basis of Chapters 6 and 8 have been shared both with those participating in the research and more widely in Myanmar, including dissemination through the GEN monthly meetings and newsletter. In addition, drafts of Chapters 5, 7 and 9 were shared with a smaller number of individuals who participated closely in the research and their feedback incorporated in subsequent drafts.

3.5 Thematic threads

Four key themes of space, time, body, and voice (*fig.*7) emerged during early data analysis as recurrent threads in discussions and observations, resonating with post-structural orientations and feminist analysis. These thematic threads are introduced here and can be traced throughout the subsequent sections of the thesis. The evident relevance of issues of space and timing that were prominent during the initial periods of fieldwork capture notions of the current period of political transition as well as the influence of cross-border movements. Additionally, dimensions of the body and of voice were rapidly apparent as priorities within women's activist movements as well as holding relevance for learning experiences in both formal and non-formal education sites.

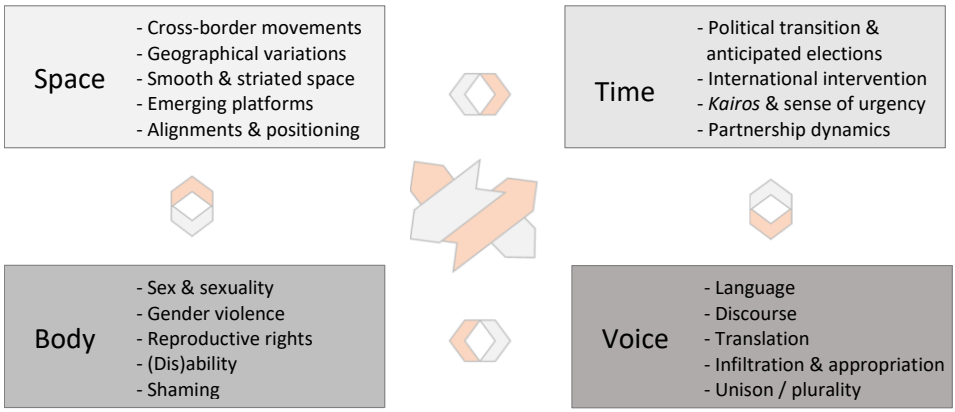


Figure 7: Conceptualising thematic threads – Space, Time, Body, Voice

3.5.1 Space

Space emerged as a particularly prominent theme in the course of fieldwork, which informed the theoretical positioning of the research, focusing predominantly on three dimensions: movement in space, across borders and flows of ideas; educational spaces; and activist spaces. The ways in which these sites intersect and inform each other as well as operating in consort with notions of time, the body and voice therefore features as a central thread of analysis.

The cross-border dimension of the research, conducted in both Myanmar and Thailand, underscored this relevance and the varying influences and points of contact afforded by different spaces. For activists, creating spaces for their work, in both practical senses of shifting locations, being able to participate in events and having access to physical resources, as well as in less tangible ways of drawing transnational connections and building influence, was a current concern and overlapped with notions of timing and positioning in the period of transition. Through the mapping exercise conducted in 2014 and drawing from recent surveys by GEN and WON into the priorities of their member organisations (WON & GEN 2016), it is clear that community education occupies a prioritised space within the women's movements. Such non-formal educational sites featured as a tool to engage women's participation and as a means through which activists were able to disseminate ideas and construct alternative learning environments with distinctively transformatory goals. This was positioned and perceived in contrast to formal education spaces, which for many of the young women engaged in the course of the research had been experienced as problematic and constraining sites.

However, both formal and non-formal sites emerged as spaces where social and cultural conventions might be challenged, if given the opportunity.

As will be discussed in greater detail throughout the chapters (see particularly Chapters 4, 5 and 7), Deleuzian notions of contrasting spaces, the *smooth* and the *striated*, have been central to the research in conceptualising and theorising the interactions between these sites. Smooth space is considered as a fluid and informal environment in which movement is experienced through multiple points of contact, influences and borrowings across multi-directional exchanges (Deleuze & Guattari 2013/1988). This can be a site of turbulence and disruption formulating "the smooth space as a place of disjunction and discomfort, the meeting space of different subjectivities on their different beliefs and experiences" (Gorodetsky and Barak 2016, 87). In contrast, striations are both linear and hierarchical in nature representing furrows or grooves which define and legislate the boundaries of social conventions. Striated space is therefore emblematic of the domain of the nation state, through which citizenship is ordered and order maintained (Livesey 2013). As expressed by Youdell and Armstrong (2011):

> An exploration of space in these terms illuminates the ways that subjects and their identifications are created and challenged, and individuals and groups are given particular kinds of recognition and status, through the organization of spaces and the creation of places for particular purposes. (145)

3.5.2 Time

Timing and timeliness emerged in the research as particularly connected to the period of political transition and the significance attached to the inter-election period of 2011-15 (during which data was collected) creating a sense of urgency in political activist mobilisation. This is also reflective of the notion of *kairos* (Honkanen 2007; Voela & Guaraldo 2016) as emerging from experiences of the past and pointing towards acts in the future. Voela and Guaraldo (2016) summarise:

> *Kairos* refers to those crucial moments where different and distant factors converge in a certain point of time–space to create new opportunities and opening up of possibilities, an unpredictable breach in the otherwise predictable flow of time (Marramao 1992). (319, emphasis in original)

Such conceptualisations also relate closely to Deleuzian and feminist notions of *becoming*, of particular relevance for formational education sites, as non-linear temporal processes of transition and transformation. They likewise fuel the sense of urgency attached to mobilisation in order to take advantage of the moment of disruption, ensuring (or attempting to) that marginalised voices are heard within fora that have previously been out of reach.

Additionally, the importance of history and the legacies of militarisation were prominent in the narratives of women activists, non-state education providers and civil society campaigners alike. These experiences, of having heard hollow rhetoric of change before while exclusionary practices have continued, fuel the mistrust that remains prominent in the current processes of reform and transition. While the victory for the NLD in the elections of late 2015 signalled a moment of renewed hope, it also created a moment of pause, like the holding of breath, in which reforms that were in progress (such as the revision of the education law) have been thrown into doubt. After the acceleration of activist campaigning there is therefore a sense of uncertainty as adversaries have shifted, but the measure of the new opponent has not yet been gauged (Deleuze 2013/1988, 518).

Likewise, the lack of engagement by international actors in this shared history of oppression during military rule, where the majority of international organisations, donors and agencies have expanded work only since 2012, adds further mistrust to the motivations of development agencies. In this, my position within the research has been fortunate and accidental: having lived in Yangon throughout 2009 to 2011 and having worked closely with activist movements and opposition political parties during that time, I could not have imagined the extent to which changes would take place in the subsequent five years, nor the influential positions in which my former students and colleagues now find themselves. However, the strength of relationships forged during shared experiences of constraint has supported a certain solidarity and an honesty which has greatly enriched this research project.

3.5.3 Body

Literal notions of the gendered body as well as the concept of embodiement resonate throughout the research. This reflects a characterisation of "embodiment as both performative and relational" in which "relationality includes dependency on infrastructural conditions and legacies of discourse and institutional power that precede and condition our existence" (Butler 2014, 11). Personal concern with the body emerged from discussions as gendered, sexed, racialized, and subject to variables in age, size and ability, as

well as the rhetorical construction of women's bodies through public and educational discourse. Also in evidence was the fact that "the body … cannot be fully dissociated from the infrastructural and environmental conditions of its living" (Butler 2014, 8). Strong emotions were also attached to discussions of the body, most acutely articulated by young women as the shame and shyness they felt towards their body, particularly in formal education settings (see Chapter 5; Zembylas 2009), and in discussing related issues such as sex or puberty.

The ways in which bodies are ascribed representational symbolism, for example in the prevalence of militarised sexual violence committed against ethnic women in conflict areas (Laungaramsri 2011) was also found to be in tension with women's multiple and persistent experiences of violence (GEN 2015a). Acts of physical violence against gendered bodies also find their roots in the constructed inferiority of women's bodies and the lives which inhabit them. Bodies therefore become inscribed with relationships of power, accentuated through who has access to and can make decisions over the body, and the determination of acceptable places for certain bodies. There are therefore strong interconnections between the body and notions of space and mobility, and being 'a body out of place' (see for example King 2003; Puwar 2004; Ahmed 2007; 2013) is a transgression likely to incur punishment. As Ahmed highlights, "the moments when the body appears 'out of place' are moments of political and personal trouble" (2007, 159). As highlighted in detail in Chapter 5, structural and indirect violence embedded within social institutions, including education systems, support the construction of which gendered bodies are "recognizable, readable [and] grievable" (Butler 2009, xii; see also Butler 2004). In this way, direct violence against bodies perceived to be of less value is legitimised and sustained.

However, "the multiplicity and movement of bodies make possible a politics of becoming (Braidotti, 1994)" (Zembylas 2007a, 25), and the negotiations that emerge from the movement of bodies through spaces also accompany nomadic subjectivity through which new points of contact are forged. These diverse experiences therefore also influence the formulation of new spaces, new articulations and new expressions.

3.5.4 Voice

Drawing attention to the questions of who can speak, who is heard, and in what fora, (Spivak 1988; Apple & Buras 2006), the notion of silencing and of resisting this by '*speaking out*' was prominently highlighted by young women participating in focus group discussions as well as by women activists and

educators interviewed in the course of the research. Silencing was particularly a common theme in young women's formal education experiences (as explored in Chapter 5) and in the community more broadly as young women learned not to speak loudly or forcefully, not to contradict or challenge men, elders, religious or political authorities, as well as the attitude that it was not appropriate for women to discuss certain topics, such as sex or puberty, or engage in political debate. 'Speaking out' was seen as an act of resistance and defiance and included reporting experiences of violence or sexual harassment, voicing unhappiness or a rejection of negative experiences as well as engaging in leadership roles or more political campaigning for gender equality and justice. Just as being 'a body out of place' incurs punishment, so such voiced acts of protest also incur opposition and retribution, revealing consequences for women's activism and political engagement as well as young women's participation in education spaces.

The symbiosis between collectivism and individualism, and tensions in avoiding subsuming difference into universalism, is evident in activist movements where:

> One speaks as a woman in order to empower women, to activate sociosymbolic changes in their condition: this is a radically antiessentialist position. (Braidotti 2011a, 25)

However, such a position also raises questions of whose voices are taken as representative and whose are heard as well as the trust and legitimacy placed in certain voices over others (explored further in Chapter 8). The theoretical relevance of the production of discourse is evident in both educational practices and the rhetoric of women's roles within society replicated through public policy, and include endogenous constructions as well as borrowed discourses from international frameworks and recommendations. The theorising of such practices in public discourse parallels Bernstein's poetic assertion, underpinning so much of his curricula examination, that "to know whose voice is speaking is the beginning of one's own voice." (Bernstein, 2000, p.xxv). The adaptation of learning material and the formation of alternative learning sites potentially creates pathways through which new articulations can be voiced and shared, however, it is also not automatic that this will happen as new contradictory lines of discourse may also intercede. Within these learning environments and in the use of training texts, issues of language and of terminology also feature prominently as additional challenges to navigate, creating both obstacles and potentially new formulations for those who successfully negotiate them.

These thematic threads are conceived of as interwoven throughout the following chapters that make up the analytical discussion of the thesis, with a certain thread at times coming to the fore and appearing more prominently than another but nonetheless continuing to interact across the four dimensions. The chapters of the following Part II and Part III are therefore not intended to address each dimension consecutively, but rather threads can be traced throughout the narrative. Section *10.2* of the concluding chapter again returns to reflect on the interaction of these multiple themes.

Part II: Education and Gendered Citizenship

> *"The first task of the educator is to give up convictions of triumphalist superiority"*
>
> (Spivak 2005, 173)

Introducing Part II

Education practices, as part of socially constructed institutions, are highly gendered and as such present models of expected behaviour from young men and young women (Aikman & Unterhalter 2005). However, such practice also vary significantly across and within contexts and in varied forms of educational space, both formal and non-formal. The chapters in this section aim to explore these varying sites of learning and the gender presentations that emerge from them, responding to the research question:

What role do differing education practices play in constructing citizenship ideals, and in what ways are these gendered?

The chapters further explore the research subquestions:

- *How have practices in education sustained and legitimised women's social subordination?*
- *In what ways are alternative sites of learning presenting alternative models?*

Part II begins with an exploration of the theoretical conceptualisations of education spaces that inform this research presented in Chapter 4 and then further extended in Chapter 6, where it is argued that different learning sites present divergent constructions of citizenship. These constructions are inherently gendered, and have been compounded by responses to conflict and displacement. Chapter 5 further examines practices in formal education which

have contributed to women's continuing social subordination, with a focus on the ways in which violence against women has been legitimised and sustained through practices within schools. Women's marginalisation does not remain uncontested, and consequently the chapters in this section provide the educational perspective which anticipate the counterpoint of women's activist responses provided in Part III.

Initially, the contrast is established between *striated* learning environments (typified by formal, state schooling) and *smooth* learning sites (being less formal and more holistic in their nature). However, rapidly it becomes apparent that these seemingly opposing modes of learning overlap and co-exist, mutually informing each other. A priority of this section is therefore to highlight practices which illustrate this dialogue between different pedagogical approaches and the opportunities to expand more inclusive learning practices within formal learning environments. To this end, the section concludes with a focus study which highlights the desires for different schooling experiences as expressed by one group of ethnically young women during a focus group discussion.

Chapter 4

Theorising Education Spaces: conceptualising spaces for learning and (gendered) citizenship constructions in Myanmar's transition

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This chapter has been adapted from Maber, E.J.T. (*under review*) 'Undoing exclusions / expanding inclusion: conceptualising spaces for learning and citizenship constructions in Myanmar's transition'

4.1 Introduction

Rote learning, mono-lingual instruction, glorification of military violence in classroom texts and the infusion of religion with nationalism may all be features, amongst multiple others, of education environments that are more inclined to reproduce social hierarchies based on gender, ethnicity and religion than promote inclusive learning and a respect for difference (Durrani & Dunne 2010; Davies 2004; Dunne, Humphreys & Leach, 2006). However, exclusionary education practices, which contribute to the construction of which citizens are "recognizable, readable [and] grievable" (Butler 2009, xii; see also Butler 2004), are also contested both beyond and within schooling environments, by individuals as well as by activist groups and organisations, intentionally and otherwise.

This chapter explores how different forms of education present differing learning trajectories which may result in varying experiences of exclusion or inclusion for learners, building a conceptualisation of learning spaces drawing from Deleuze and Guattari (2013/1988). The chapter aims to introduce the plural ways in which education practices construct idealised citizenship, with attention to the gendered nature of these constructions which has implications for gender inequalities as well as intersections with multiple dimensions of identities, including but not limited to ethnicity, religion, language, and (dis)ability. Additionally, in Myanmar exclusions within formal education have both exacerbated and been informed by longstanding conflicts provoking alternative responses from varied non-state education providers. By initially highlighting the contrasting and seemingly oppositional ways in which varying educational sites have approached learning, I go on to explore moments in

which overlaps become apparent, revealing opportunities for alternative and more inclusive learning practices to find entry points to erode hierarchical social structures which are replicated in institutional schooling.

4.2 Conceptualising spaces of learning: the smooth and the striated

In exploring divergent education environments and the construction of citizen ideals, I draw on Deleuze & Guattari's distinction between smooth and striated spaces as a point of departure for learning experiences which offer avenues for contesting social hierarchies. Deleuzo-Guattari conceptualisations of space contrast hierarchical delineations representing *striations*, or grooves, with fluid and amorphous *smooth* spaces which operate in dialogue and at times opposition (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013/1988). To further understandings of this conceptualisation of space, Deleuze and Guattari put forward "a certain number of models, which would be like various aspects of the two spaces and the relations between them" (2013/1988, 562). The initial presentation offered, which has resonance for conceptualising alternative education environments also in recalling Freireian imagery (Freire 2014/1992), is the comparison between fabrics made by weaving and felt. Woven fabrics are conceived according to an ordered pattern having a beginning and an end, a top and a bottom, "there are vertical and horizontal elements, and the two intertwine, intersect perpendicularly" (Deleuze & Guattari 2013/1988, 552). In this way striations are woven into the fabric, progressing from one line of thread to the other, which creates a linear order to its design. Additionally, the woven fabric is boundaried on either side as pre-determined by the loom, illustrating that "a striated space of this kind is necessarily delimited, closed on at least one side" (Deleuze & Guattari 2013/1988, 552). Such a presentation is simultaneously reflective both of the nation state as defined by its territorial borders, and of state education systems as constructing citizenship within an organised, hierarchical framework according to a predetermined agenda. Striations are therefore emblematic of order and control, and are associated with state domination and regulation defining expectations of citizenship (Bayne 2004).

This is contrasted to the production of felt, which is achieved through the pressing together of disparate elements involving "no separation of threads, no intertwining, only an entanglement of fibres" (Deleuze & Guattari 2013/1988, 553). In this way, material is produced which may continually expand in multiple directions and which is composed of "unpredictable juxtapositions that can appear to be contradictory" (Boylan & Woolsey 2015,

69). Felt therefore represents an alternative construction which bears the traces of a more tumultuous and less hierarchical formation. While this allusion is beneficial as a starting point for the conceptualisation of different learning environments, the dichotomy that it suggests between divergent forms of fabrication may belie the overlapping influences and dialogues that take place across and within these varied locales. As Deleuze and Guattari indicate with this first modelling of the contrary spaces, "there are many interlacings, mixes between felt and fabric" (Deleuze & Guattari 2013/1988, 553). Rather than being viewed as polarising, the different characterisations of spaces coexist in dialogue acting simultaneously according to divergent agendas and in reaction to the other (Grosz 2003). A further illustration therefore may indicate the concurrent and overlapping nature of smoothing and striation.

Widely deployed amongst the models offered by Deleuze and Guattari is that of the literally fluid domain of the sea as the epitome of smooth space (Lysen & Pisters 2012, 1). In constant fluid motion, the sea is emblematic of the shifts and changes which occur in smooth space and which erode the fixity of boundaries. However, the sea is also the "archetype of all striations of smooth space" (Deleuze & Guattari 2013/1988, 558) illustrating the processes by which striations may be imposed on smooth spaces through the analogy of navigation and the plotting of directional courses for shipping and trade. Likewise, the virtual imposition of territorial demarcations claimed by sovereign states re-striates the smooth space of the sea, even while the sea maintains its movements unabated. Such a presentation captures notions of the resistance that smooth space offers to encroachment and the potential for unsettling and rejecting the impositions of exogenous legislation. The ways in which smooth spaces may intercede with striations is therefore a primary consideration for advancing a conceptualisation of spaces for learning. Although at times the reach of striations may be boundaried by the borders of the nation-state, they may also span borders through transnational agreements and international frameworks. However, both nationally and internationally, hierarchies and regulation are subject to contestation and destabilisation. Smooth spaces intercede with striations to undo the fixity of striated hierarchy creating sites of turbulence which offer opportunities for reformulation and new experiences through varied points of contact. Smoothing is therefore associated with liminal positions, not only at the margins of state authority but also within institutions through creating disruption between striations, as the two spaces co-exist and inform each other (Grosz 2003).

4.3 *Striated* formal schooling environments

Applying this conceptualisation of space to learning environments, the structure of formal state schooling can be seen as dominated by striations which define the process of learning from the demarcation of the school calendar, the timetable and subjects to the expectations of behaviour from students and teachers. As highlighted by Youdell and Armstrong (2011):

> the mainstream classroom is striated with the lines of 'proper' studently conduct, teacherly discipline, adherence to the time of the timetable and the demarcation of academic disciplines that it encodes. (149)

Through the delineation of classes by yearly age groups, students typically move through the school hierarchy, progressing from one class to another, as their age increases reinforcing a linear construction of learning development which is punctuated by assessments to monitor and rank progress. Assessment plays a key role in striated learning environments in measuring accomplishment according to predefined codes determined in order to meet the standards of citizenship demanded by the state. Such striations structure the school environment to create a framework for learning in much the same way as the loom allows for the organisation of the woven fabric according to a set pattern. This pattern is further imposed through multiple sources in the school learning environment, in particular through curriculum texts and classroom instruction which present idealised models of citizenship and shape expectations of student current and future performances (Bernstein 2000; Apple 2012; Freire 1993/1970).

Such a presentation of school environments is not intended to be obliquely negative: striations provide a framework for learning according to a preconceived pattern that is in itself without value judgement, and structured learning may equally present more egalitarian models of idealised citizenship. However, in many situations the models replicated through such structures are constructed from highly unequal starting points. In codifying expectations of citizenship these processes may be exclusionary along ethnic, religious and linguistic lines and are also inherently gendered (Durrani & Dunne 2010), setting up the parameters of social hierarchies which define acceptable behaviour for varied young men and young women (Davies, B. 2011). In this way striated school space is not an un-emotional site, rather on the contrary emotions such as pride, shame, resentment or fear are mobilised as powerful forces in constructing the self, the other and the nation (Ahmed 2004;

Zembylas 2009). Situations of perceived threat from 'others', whether through civil conflict, migration, religious extremism, or economic instability, can entrench discourses of exclusion and reify notions of group identity around shared characteristics in opposition to an enemy 'other' (Davies 2004, 88-91; Novelli & Lopes Cardozo 2008; Bush & Salterelli 2000). In nations dominated by totalitarianism, this effect is further exacerbated in state education systems which are susceptible to co-optation by authoritarian governments through processes including teacher education systems, national curriculum design and standardised assessment (Smith & Vaux 2003).

In relating these conceptualisations of educational spaces to practices in Myanmar attention is drawn firstly to the structural conditions under which formal education has been operating contributing to the replication of multiple exclusions, and subsequently to the specific gendered effects of such practices.

4.3.1 Constructing Myanmar citizenship

Legacies of colonialism and over half a century of militarisation have left a lasting effect on Myanmar's education system. As a form of ordering and defining a population according to the terms of the dominant group, colonialism is the epitome of striation and, while the narrative of power may have changed with independence, structures of colonial domination remain strongly inscribed through judiciary systems, state institutions, linguistic supremacy and gender constructions (Butler 2009; Spivak 2008). In state education, as Salem-Gervais and Metro have highlighted, although there was some rejection of colonial ideology in the education curriculum pre-independence, the colonial association of ethnicity and national identity "contributed to the crystallization of a conception of Burmese-ness centered on Burmese language, Burman ethnicity, and Buddhist religion" (2012, 33) which continued to pervade state education throughout military rule. This *Burmanisation* of the school curricula has been a significant grievance for ethnic minority groups who have seen their languages, religions, histories and even geographical territories written out of curriculum texts and school practice (Walton 2013). The dominant narrative in history texts for example remains that of Burman military dominance over ethnic kings, projecting forced national unification through the subordination of ethnic groups and reflecting the military junta's "Three National Causes: "consolidation of sovereignty, non-disintegration of the Union, non-disintegration of national solidarity"" (Salem-Gervais & Metro 2012, 39). The glorification of state military violence has the effect of reinforcing multiple hierarchies based on ethnicity, religion, gender and (dis)ability which are replicated within the

school setting as students who do not correspond to the Burman, Buddhist, male ideal are subordinated within the projected narrative.

As a tool of the authoritarian state, the national education system was significantly undermined as a site of independent knowledge production during the years of the military junta. Classes have consisted of rote learning, prioritising memorisation, replication and deference to authority with strict adherence to conformity while suppressing critical thinking skills (Maber 2014; NNER 2015b; Hardman et al 2014). In this way opportunities for contesting dominant presentations in classes have been severely reduced and taught to be met with punishment. Assessment has played a key supporting role in quantifying learning achievement as measured points along a singular line or trajectory (Deleuze & Guattari 2013/1988, 559), rewarding the strict reproduction of memorised curriculum texts rather than the ability to transfer skills[12]. Likewise, systems of assessment further entrench hierarchies and result in the prioritisation of subjects whereby the grade received in the final standardised national matriculation exam dictates the subject one can be admitted to at university, as well as requiring higher entrance grades for women than for men for prestigious subjects such as medicine and engineering[13]. Such practices not only institutionalise gender inequalities but also point to the intersections of marginalisation for ethnic students working in unfamiliar languages which often result in lower matriculation results and consequently exclusion from higher status tertiary study and professions attracting greater financial reward[14].

Likewise, state schools have served as sites of reterritorialization in extending the reach of state influence in ethnic territories, with centralised teacher recruitment and deployment policies serving to remove ethnic teachers from their local classrooms and deploy Burman teachers in their place. One Karen community teacher interviewed reflected on this process in her region in the east of the country:

> *they don't have a chance to get a local teacher, because the outside teachers from Mandalay, from the middle, the teachers*

[12] The National Network for Education Reform (NNER), a coalition of education practitioners and organisations campaigning for inclusive educational reform, has been particularly critical of current processes of strict summative assessment as well as interrelated issues of language of instruction and assessment (NNER 2015a, 2015b).

[13] The required grades for entrance into each subject are published by gender in local newspapers such as *Kyemon*.

[14] For example, teachers consulted in Chin state estimated that 8% of their students pass the matriculation exam taken at age 16 (teacher, group discussion 2015).

> *came to our area and they teach children but they don't really understand our culture and our situation. Actually it should be local teachers who should teach children*. (Community educator, interview 2016)

While of course individual teachers may vary in their cultural sensitivity, this articulation that Burman teachers may misunderstand the situation and needs of students of different ethnicities highlights the sense of imposition that is felt from encroaching striations that may be resisted and challenged. The use of Burmese as the language of instruction in state schools has similarly been a powerful tool to encode Burmanisation where ethnic minority students typically do not speak Burmese, which further serves to disadvantage those students outside the projected ideal and to reify marginalisation.

However, the manipulation of education systems as an expansionist device has not been without counter-movements. As expanded in Chapter 2, parallel ethnic education systems have been established with support of the ethnic armed groups as a means of providing alternative education more closely aligned with projects of ethno-nationalism (Lall & South 2013). However, while these education sites may contest the narrative of Burmanisation prominent in state school curricula, the alternative models they present may simply substitute Myanmar nation-building endeavours for ethnic nation building and consequently may continue to replicate striated hierarchies, albeit alternate ones (Salem-Gevais & Metro, 2012).

4.3.2 Reproducing violence and gendered hierarchies

Schooling further contributes to the social construction of which lives, and which (gendered) bodies, are "recognizable, readable [and] grievable" (Butler 2009, xii). Focusing particularly on the gendered dimensions of marginalisation, the enactment of "recognizable" gendered subjects (Butler 2004, 5; see also Youdel and Armstrong 2011, 145) is central to striated hierarchies and can be read as performances produced in learning environments not limited to formal schooling but across institutional, community and familial settings (Butler 1990). In this way "gender performativity does not just characterize what we do, but how discourse and institutional power affect us" (Butler 2014, 8). Although greater detail will be provided in Chapter 6 of the ways in which formal education environments contribute to constructing female citizenship in subordination to hegemonic masculine ideals, these notions are introduced here first in brief.

Gender hierarchies are embedded in notions of cultural identity and consequently gender roles are inscribed in the Myanmar school curriculum and in classroom practice (GEN 2015b, 86-97), as one community educator and women's rights activist highlighted: "e*ven the pictures it's very [much] a gender reinforcement, this is a man's role, this is a woman's role*" (women's rights activist and educator, interview 2015). The same educator continued to stress the dominant masculinity that emerges from curriculum narratives:

> *You know [in] most of the textbooks in Burmese literature only the focus is on the patriarchal ideologies, it's very masculine. It's about, you know, the war lords and the war heroes.* (Women's rights activist and educator, interview 2015)

The association of hegemonic masculinity with violence presents an uncomfortable and problematic ideal, not only for young women who are largely written as passive victims within this narrative, but also for young men who are offered narrow models to aspire to. For young men then, deviance from the hegemonic ideal is seen as a failure to enact anticipated performances of male superiority which are encoded in Buddhist notions of *hpon*[15], as the cultural understanding of men's innate power: "Myanmar society thus becomes physically, psychologically, and spiritually stratified by the concept of hpon, signalling a comprehensive permeation of a patriarchal ideology" (Miedema, Shwe & Kyaw 2016, 676). Gender constructions are therefore intertwined with religious notions of the duties and responsibilities of men and women in society (GEN 2015b, 90), and permeate the education system as a perpetuation of paradigmatic "Burmese-ness" (Salem-Gervais & Metro 2012, 33).

Structural violence is therefore a pervasive feature of these education environments, and may be seen as produced by striations which legitimise subjugation in the enactment of hierarchies as "these learned patterns of performance and interaction become reified to form the basis for gender relations within and beyond the institutional boundaries" (Dunne, Humphreys & Leach 2006, 79). In turn, physical violence is enacted as an extension of subjugation which maintains these accepted orders (Parkes & Unterhalter

[15] *Hpon* is the Myanmar concept of male superiority and masculine power which is interwoven with Myanmar Buddhist notions of gender hierarchy. For a fuller explanation of the ways *hpon* is enacted in social relationship see Nwe (2009), GEN (2015) or Miedema, Shwe & Kyaw (2016).

2015, 19; Dunne & Leach 2007, 189). As highlighted by Bronwyn Davies (2011), drawing on Butler (2004):

> Integral to that sedimented world is a moral order that imposes codes of conduct and values that are regarded by those in dominant positions as universal and, as such, not open to question. (282)

Teachers, as figures of authority within the school hierarchy, are responsible for regulating conduct according to the codes of the trajectory and consequently become implicated in the enactment of physical violence as a means of discipline and control. Corporal punishment therefore performs a dual role as an extension of regulation by which order is maintained and as a punishment for transgression, reflecting Parkes' (2015) summary that "through violating bodily integrity, physical violence attempts to wield control, over-determining relations of power seen as under threat" (5).

The glorification of military violence within the curriculum adds rhetoric to the performance of violence as an acceptable means of regulation, which is then subject to replication by students. Bronwyn Davies (2011) has suggested a reconfiguration of bullying not as an illustration of individual pathology but rather as "maintaining the moral order … reiterating the everyday repetitive social practices through which race relations and gender relations are established and maintained" (283). She suggests that:

> the bully, who decides to maintain the fixed order, enters into a state of domination through which others are recognised as lying outside the scope of what can be accepted. (Davies, B. 2011, 283)

Consequently, those seen to be transgressing the norms of expected behaviour, such as expected heteronormativity, are liable to bullying, as was expressed by young gay men and women of their schooling experiences in Yangon (see also Higgins et al 2016).

However, as Butler (2004) also predicts, such presentations of dominance do not remain uncontested and may be resisted and undermined through alternative performances which, intentionally or otherwise, subvert unquestioning positions of power. Tamboukou similarly observes that:

> Education, however, has been also the locus where counter-discourses and counter-practices emerged, to oppose the truth regimes, cultural conditions and social structures that had legitimated and perpetuated women's exclusion. Education is

> thus a site where juxtaposing discourses are framing women's lives, but still a theatre of local struggles and resistance, a transitional space in these lives. (Tamboukou 2010, 683)

The sections below explore the means by which such sites of local struggles might find openings to infiltrate rigid learning environments. Beginning with exploring the smooth dynamics of alternative learning environments, I then go on to highlight opportunities for more inclusive education practices to intercede in formal learning environments.

4.4 *Smooth* learning dynamics

Alternative education practices exist beyond formal schooling environments which offer counterpoints for exploring learning through different formats which may provide opportunities to expand inclusion. Smooth educational sites are characterised as "unbounded, unpredictable and not locked into binding patterns" (Boylan & Woolsey 2015, 65), creating varied and more flexible possibilities for learning. Smooth space is a site of plurality which, like the construction of felt that presses together diverse elements in new points of contact, exposes learners to new and varied points of learning. As expressed by Gorodetsky and Barak (2016) of holistic learning environments:

> smooth spaces may provide the conditions that favor the construction of subjectivities through leaving the familiar territory … the smooth space as a place of disjunction and discomfort, the meeting space of different subjectivities on their different beliefs and experiences. (87)

Such sites may be constructed in opposition to striated learning or they may emerge independently from alternative education goals, such as through informal, community learning or varied mediums such as sports, arts and theatre.

It is important to emphasise that non-formal and community learning sites are by no means immune to replicating hierarchical striations or reproducing exclusions. Reflecting the heterogeneity of liminal positions, multiple actors are involved in delivering diverse kinds of non-formal education, motivated by varied agendas. Being largely without oversite or standardisation, such spaces take on diverse characters and may include religious education, international training courses or vocational preparation, amongst others, designed to replicate predefined learning goals. However, the aim here is to highlight

dynamics that illustrate more smooth dimensions of learning and may offer less hierarchical modes of learning which may reveal opportunities to contest the reproduction of social exclusions within formal schooling.

Operating beyond the regulatory patterns of state schooling, community education spaces are well positioned to take up this role drawing on a variety of learning material and focusing on content that is absent from formal learning environments. In this way non-formal community learning environments may counter striated learning constructions of subordination and authoritarianism echoing asymmetrical movements in which smooth space is "constructed by local operations involving changes of direction" (Deleuze & Guattari 2013, 566) in response to variations in the striated space. In Myanmar, this has particularly included a focus by civil society groups on human rights education, democracy and political learning, or women's rights and gender equality. However, such practices incur significant risk as undermining state authority and control is likely to attract punishment, as one activist and community educator recalled:

> *Even, before 2010 in our country's situation, even the human rights' book we can't put it in public because if we have it we will be arrested by the government. We can't say 'democracy' or 'human rights', we can't say it in public. If we say that in the public it's a trigger and they always follow us, like that*. (Women's rights activist and educator, interview 2016)

The politicisation of learning as a subversive undertaking, however, only added to its appeal for those seeking to oppose militarisation and consequently in Myanmar and amongst displaced communities in the Thai border regions alternative education has taken on a distinctively activist and oppositional character. Now as the processes of political transition are beginning to take hold, there may be opportunities for increased borrowing of learning styles across education environments.

4.4.1 Sites to reconfigure gendered learning

For women's organisations both within Myanmar and amongst the refugee and migrant communities on the Thai border, community education has been a site to construct alternative presentations of female citizenship which contest the inequalities that women experience both within education systems and more broadly within society. Education has typically been viewed as an acceptable domain of women's occupation (GEN 2015b) and consequently women's

organisations have mobilised community education as a platform from which to undo limiting presentations of women's roles in society and expand awareness of women's rights particularly in areas of conflict and displacement, as highlighted by one young activist who had travelled across the border to learn from Myanmar women's organisations[16]:

> *And also in our school, in our education system we don't have a chance to learn gender issues and women's rights and human rights like that. But I thought… I think I was so lucky to arrive at the women's organisation because I got the chance to learn women's rights and human rights and other interesting issues.* (Women's rights activist, interview 2016)

These informal learning environments are sites of multiple resistances, where activist educators contest projections of idealised female citizenry (which may be international as well as national) and encourage practices of mitigation as well as challenging cultural norms (Maber 2016a; Laungaramsri 2011).

An example may be found in the practice of several women's community organisations in developing sexuality education for young women within Myanmar. Sex education is not included in Myanmar state schools beyond its decontextualized biological presentation, typically in biology classes, as one young woman now a teacher recalled: "*I found out [about sex] in biology in 9th Standard when I was about 15. We learned about rabbits*" (teacher, discussion 2016). Women's activist organisations have associated this cultural and educational silencing of discussions around sex and sexuality with young women's reduced agency in consenting to healthy and enjoyable sexual practices and with increasing women's shame and social marginalisation (Chit Su 2015).

Women's organisations however have taken a more holistic approach, emphasising an understanding of a woman's own body to help alleviate the shame that women have learned[17] rather than purely biological functions or the potential negative health consequences of sex. These women's organisations have drawn on multiple sources to create more hybrid and mixed learning environments, which include discussion groups with adolescent or adult women, training community facilitators, the translating of English-

[16] For an expansion of this theoretic framework in relation to cross-border movements, please see Maber 2016b and Chapter 6.

[17] Cultural practices commonly portray menstruation as 'dirty' and 'shameful', that women's clothes should not be washed with a man's or placed higher than theirs to dry.

language books and developing their own independent material (see Chapter 9). One of the women leading this area of training, highlighted the process of developing her own training material as alternatives to practices she saw as not responsive to cultural norms and not serving the needs of women in her community:

> *I wanted to test [the material she was developing] with other women [to see] if they also feel empowered by this. They said 'I feel confident, I feel encouraged, I feel power'. So I started to develop lesson plans.* (Women's organisation leader and educator, interview 2015)

Emphasising getting to know your body and challenging the presentation of objects associated with women such as panties as being inherently dirty and shameful, one trainer working with the material subsequently highlighted the relational approach to sexuality emphasis: "*Sexuality is not only sexuality, this is love, this is related to intimacy, this is related to violence, this is family*" (Women's sexuality trainer, interview 2016). In this way, learning reflects a smoothing and undoing of the fixed boundaries both of subject knowledge (moving beyond the purely biological) and of women's social construction as subordinate and shameful. The material was being shared amongst women's organisations, particularly those based in Yangon, with trainers inviting one another to give guest workshops in their courses and developing joint lesson plans and texts, highlighting the pathways through which such alternative practices can find avenues for infiltration. In describing the process of expanding space for alternative discussions, the organisation director summarised: "*we're pushing out the boundary for social change*" (Women's organisation leader and educator, interview 2015).

As further explored below, the practice of translating English-language material from alternative sources illustrates the challenges of navigating plural influences in alternative leaning spaces, and the overlapping nature of smoothing and striation. Borrowed material may reveal avenues for re-striation, as agendas from different sources are introduced into new environments, as was encountered in creationist textbooks donated to migrant learning schools, and might arguably also be associated with rights frameworks and international monitoring mechanisms. However, the process of translation can also involve critical reflection and adaptation, as in the case of *The Period Book: Everything you don't want to ask (but need to know)* (Gravelle & Gravelle 1997), written by American authors and which provided the basis for one Burmese language translation. The original book itself reflects a disruption in

notions of authority, being jointly authored by Karen Gravelle and her 15 year old niece Jennifer. In its adoption by women's organisations in Yangon, the work has been translated, adapted and re-illustrated to be relevant to the context of young Myanmar women and adolescents. In so doing, the text provides a means of starting conversations, between family members, peers and community educators in an environment where words are lacking to articulate young women's changing body experiences[18].

Through such processes, texts and teaching styles are adapted and reconfigured to encourage alternative smooth learning spaces, in a reflection of Connell's observation that "creative feminist work in the South often involves a critical appropriation of Northern ideas, in combination with ideas that come from radically different experiences" (2014, 527). Disruption and transformation is therefore an inherent objective of these community classrooms, not only for participants but also in the processes by which activist-educators are transforming notions of gendered citizenship and producing alternative manifestations, reflecting:

> the ways in which formal and informal education can be used to undo the structural and symbolic manifestations of violence offering alternative explanations and enactments of different relationships. (Parkes & Unterhalter 2015, 24)

4.4.2 Smooth dynamics of inclusive learning

Being unbounded by standardised assessments, smooth educational sites prioritise the holistic process of learning as an experience, rather than measuring gains according to predefined standards, reflecting Deleuzian conceptualisations:

> In striated space, lines or trajectories tend to be subordinated to points: one goes from one point to another. In the smooth, it is the opposite: the points are subordinated to the trajectory. (Deleuze & Guattari 2013/1988, 556)

As smooth spaces are associated with journeys and *becomings*, there is a natural relation to alternative education environments as potential sites of liberational learning, as a process rather than a measurable outcome. This presentation of a more empowering and participatory learning process recalls

[18] In the very literal sense, Burmese language lacks 'acceptable' words to refer to a woman's vagina (MacGregor 2015).

Freire's rejection of learning as "a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing" (1996/1970, 53). Such a framing requires a dramatic shift from conceptualising the role of teacher as authoritarian, to a presentation of teachers as mediators and co-constructors of knowledge in a shared process of learning. This repositioning of teachers as participants in smooth learning environments also supports their nomadic subject position as intermediaries (Braidotti 2011a). Nomadism is conceived by Deleuze and Guattari as emerging from the fluidity and inherent kinesis of smooth space (Deleuze and Guattari 2013, 478), and therefore is not only enacted through physical movements but also through multiple points of contact and experience. Braidotti's extension of this conceptualisation of nomadic subjects (further explored in Chapter 6) supports moving beyond a linear process of translation from one source to another to combining and mediating multiple points of contact giving rise to the possibility of "a creative alternative space of becoming" (Braidotti 2011a, 7), as illustrated by the practices of certain women's community organisations highlighted above. For learning environments, therefore, the emphasis is placed on creating opportunities to encounter and experience difference, differently, as "[t]he epistemic process understood as a nomadic inquiry is experiential and experimental" (Semetsky 2009, 451).

As illustrated above, a feature of these learning environments may therefore be the borrowing of learning material and textbooks or exercises from multiple and diverse sources which introduces more multiple points of contact. Teachers therefore play a pivotal role in sourcing material and encouraging its interrogation by students but also in creating opportunities for horizontal learning by placing themselves within the frame of discussion. A further example of this process can be found in Rosalie Metro's *Histories of Burma* (2013)[19], a multiple-part source-based history textbook which simultaneously illustrates opportunities for textbooks to prompt greater reflection on multiple perspectives and an alternative presentation of history teaching beyond exclusionary narratives of Burmanisation. The textbook itself is a product of a nomadic process of construction, through which an American academic and teacher working with refugee and migrant communities on the Thai border has sourced primary material from Myanmar to create a sourcebook and exercises which encourage critical reflection of historical experiences of colonialism, conflict and political change (in English, later

[19] I should acknowledge I was one of several copy editors involved in the proof reading of this textbook in 2012.

translated into Burmese). The plural construction of histories becomes of vital importance to create space for divergent attitudes, experiences and understandings that may break with the striated and one-dimensional presentations of the state curriculum and in the process promote reconciliatory relationships between class members of varied ethnicities. The textbook is currently being used by community groups particularly in ethnic territories and has been a complimentary addition to learning environments beyond the state sector as it encourages discussion and reflection on alternative experiences. The textbook also illustrates ways in which smooth learning dynamics may find opportunities to intercede in striated school structures, creating moments of smoothing within and between striations through prioritising horizontal learning and respect for difference within the environment of the history classroom. Although at the moment the structure of state school curriculum and assessment offers little space for such alternative resources, the approach indicates potential pathways to be expanded in the ongoing processes of reform.

A final example may be found in working across multiple languages within classrooms. The fluidity of moving between multiple languages reflects nomadism and plural constructions (Braidotti 2011a) and consequently sits at odds with striation as one Chin teacher reflected: "*Informal education practices can be better than formal as sometimes simply translating Burmese context doesn't work in Chin language*" (teacher, group discussion 2015). Community education is therefore viewed as a site which is more open to discussion, to asking questions and to checking understanding, and thereby more compatible to working across multiple languages. In this case however, the practices of individual teachers within formal classrooms may facilitate moments of smoothing through introducing opportunities for multi-directional language learning. One teacher trainer recounted observing a newly qualified state school teacher who was deployed to Shan State repeating the two phrases she had learned in Pa-Oh language:

> *How do you call it in Pa-Oh? [and] This is called --- in Myanmar. So she learned only that …two phrases and she started communicating with the children.* (Teacher trainer, interview 2015)

In so doing, the teacher not only encouraged Burmese language learning amongst her students but also placed herself within the frame of learning as a student of Pa-Oh language, creating a momentary disruption in the hierarchy of the class. Such practices may be at odds with current educational policy,

with the trainer remarking "*she got this kind of idea [herself], she didn't get it from the training.*" (teacher trainer, interview 2015), reflecting the current institutional resistance to multi-lingual instruction. However the anecdote also illustrates the continued possibilities to undo fixed roles, albeit briefly, which persist even within highly constrained environments.

4.5 Drawing Conclusions: opportunities for disrupting hierarchies

Through highlighting the contrast between smooth and striated learning spaces, it is not suggested that one should automatically be prioritised over the other nor that value-judgements can be universally applied. Rather I hope to indicate that elements of smooth learning dynamics may offer avenues to create more diverse education environments which support greater inclusion rather than exclusionary hierarchical frames. Echoing the conceptualisation of smooth learning practices in alternative education, Zembylas and Ferreira (2009) draw on the Foucauldian notion of heterotopic spaces as "territories of struggle" (2) to similarly highlight the possibilities of undoing hegemonic constructions within education sites:

> For example, the sorts of educational spaces that attempt to subvert dominant normativities in identity formation are spaces that embrace uncertainty, criticality and emotional ambivalence (Zembylas 2006, 2007a, 2008). As such, they can be considered as symbolic sites of an alternative set of values, emotions and beliefs around which educators and students can redefine their identities and the ways they want to be identified. (Zembylas & Ferreira 2009, 2)

The transformative potential of community education environments offers activists not only a space to challenge hegemonic state presentations of gendered citizenship but also avenues to construct new configurations. Through exploring alternative practices of community education groups as well as the practices of individual teachers, instances of smoothing may be witnessed that can hold resonance for formal learning environments, not only in contesting gender hierarchies but in challenging multiple intersecting exclusions based on ethnicity, language, religion or disability, amongst others. Opportunities therefore exist within formal schooling to allow for more inclusive practices through creating space for turbulence that may produce greater mutual understanding (Davies 2014). Such opportunities take advantage of the fact that "[p]ower relies on a mechanism of reproduction that

can and does go awry, undo the strategies of animating power, and produce new and even subversive effects" (Butler 2009, iii). In some instances therefore, smooth space may be characterised as the space *between* striations (Deleuze & Guattari 2013/1988), rather than a distinct oppositional space. In this sense, smoothness and striation exist "only in mixture" (Deleuze & Guattari 2013/1988, 474) and their dialogues can prompt undoings and reformulations of exclusion / inclusion.

However, while smooth space offers opportunities for contestation to give rise to alternative paradigms, it is not automatic that this will happen nor that the resultant re-ordering will be any more egalitarian, as new hegemonic discourses can be just as easily be re-imposed. In this sense, sites of turbulence and disruption may settle back down into the grooves of striation without significant transformation. While single examples of teacher practices illustrate potential pathways for greater inclusion, they are nonetheless dependent on individuals rather than challenging the structural environments of the school. There is therefore a sense of imperative in Myanmar's current processes of political transition and reform to ensure that greater inclusion is addressed within education systems.

Chapter 5

Learning violence and shame: gendering violence and the body in Myanmar's formal education spaces

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This chapter has been adapted from Maber, E. J. T. (forthcoming) 'Learning violence and shame: gendering violence and the body in Myanmar's formal education spaces'. *Compare.*

5.1 Introduction

Formal learning environments are gendered in multiple ways, producing and reinforcing expectations of gendered behaviour, which can perpetuate gender inequalities. My aim in this chapter is to explore the dimensions of gendered learning practices in Myanmar, suggesting that the physical, material and vocal subordination of women within school environments contributes to the sustaining of violence against women in society more broadly. Understandings of gender violence are further complicated in areas affected by conflict, and highly politicised acts of violence such as the systematic abuse of women in conflict areas may obscure the structural inequalities that maintain implicit and direct gender violence throughout institutional, public and domestic settings.

As shall be explored further below, significant research has focused on explicit acts of gender violence that may be experienced within schools, between students, between students and teachers, or on the journey to school (Leach & Mitchell 2006; Parkes 2015). Likewise, research has highlighted the ways in which schooling may support cultures of violence through reproducing militarised, masculine ideals and a glorification of violence, particularly through curriculum texts in subjects such as history (Durrani 2008). However less attention has been given to exploring the processes by which shame and subordination may be learned by female students, and the implications of this learning for supporting gender violence both within and beyond school environments. This chapter therefore responds to the question of how experiences in education may contribute to the legitimisation of gender violence in society more broadly, with particular attention to the teaching of shame as a pervasive tool of subordination.

These processes are explored through the experiences of varied women in Myanmar, where conflict and legacies of authoritarian rule have contributed to entrenching exclusionary practices in education systems. Although Myanmar is undergoing political transition which is accompanied by sectoral reforms, including highly politicised reforms in education, these processes have not yet translated to substantial changes within classrooms. Schools therefore continue to be sites of replicating dominant citizenship ideals rather than sites of social transformation and the undoing of social inequalities.

5.2 Education, gender and violence

Understanding gender to be socially constructed within particular contexts (Butler 1990), it can be recognised that gender is 'learned' in multiple ways (Dunne, Humphreys & Leach 2006; Leach & Humphreys 2007). While this learning occurs across family and community environments, being informed by observed behaviour and media projections amongst others, formal and non-formal education environments also contribute to reinforcing gender roles and expectations of behaviour for young men and young women (Connell 2011; Stromquist 2006; 2015). Reinforcing state productions of idealised citizenship, state schooling and formal education environments therefore play a central role in the transmission of norms and the construction of expected roles of citizens (Apple 2012; Bernstein 2000), with such constructions being inherently gendered. Schools are therefore formational sites where gender and sexual identities are produced (Porter 2015).

Teachers play an integral role in constructing learning environments which may perpetuate gender roles within the classroom or offer spaces to challenge inequalities (Connell 2011). However, without specific training in gender issues many teachers reproduce cultural and social expectations of male and female behaviour, both intentionally and otherwise (Stromquist 2006, 149). As formal education and teacher training systems are typically under-resourced, and even more so in contexts of conflict and political instability, teachers may have received little training and have limited material to draw on. However, even without material constraints in resources, social exclusions and associations of gender constructions with duties and expectations of behaviour can be desired from states seeking to enforce dominant cultural and religious notions of gendered citizenship (Durrani 2008). Across multiple country contexts, nationalist discourses and the stereotypical presentations of men and women in curriculum texts have come under scrutiny for perpetuating narrow and exclusive constructions of citizenship

ideals (Davies 2004; Durrani & Dunne 2010). Beyond textbooks and class material, language, timetabling, pedagogy, codes of discipline are also implicated in the replication of hierarchical social relations in school environments (Apple 2012). The capacity for schools to contribute to social transformation has therefore frequently been undermined (Novelli 2016).

Attention has been increasingly drawn to schools as sites of violence, particularly in situations of conflict (Davies 2004; Parkes 2015). This violence can be understood as direct, physical violence, which might be sanctioned within school systems such as in the case of corporal punishment, or which may occur within school communities amongst students, between students and teachers, and amongst school staff including bullying, sexual violence and exploitation, or which may be directed towards the school community from outside rendering schools as targets of attack (Dunne, Humphreys & Leach 2006). Additionally, violence may be structural and symbolic, enacted through explicit and hidden curricula, pedagogy, classroom practice and language of instruction (amongst others) to reinforce social exclusions and inequalities (Heslop et al 2015; Parkes & Unterhalter 2015, 16). These multiple enactments of violence are inherently gendered (Leach & Humphreys 2007, 53; Parkes 2015, 5-6) and also intersect with other inequalities based on ethnicity, religion, age and (dis)ability, amongst others. The ways in which structural and symbolic gender violence within schools may support and sustain direct gender violence beyond schooling, is therefore a primary consideration.

Butler's (1990) notions of gender performativity are instructive for conceptualising the ways in which education practices encode gendered performances and define socially acceptable behaviour for young men and women, which are regulated through the use of violence, humiliation and exclusion (Butler 1990; 2014; Dunne, Humphreys & Leach 2006; Parkes & Unterhalter 2015, 21). As Butler asserts:

> Gender performativity does not just characterize what we do, but how discourse and institutional power affect us, constraining and moving us in relation to what we come to call our "own" action. (Butler 2014, 8)

Consequently, "violence may be a strategy to maintain the gender order" (Parkes & Unterhalter 2015, 19), which is enacted not only by some men in the wider community but also institutionally in education structures and enforced by teachers regardless of their gender. Additionally, shame has often been associated with experiences of sexual and gender violence, most commonly conceptualised as emotion resulting from assault or victimisation (see for

example Baker 2013; Cunniff Gilson 2016; Feldman 2010). However, as argued here, understanding feelings of shame as learned, "embodied and embedded" (Braidotti 2015, 3) in women's experiences across community and institutional settings and sustained in processes of subordination also enables violence to be committed and to be maintained (Schooler et al 2005). Shame is therefore approached here as an emotional condition produced through the gendered constructions of women's bodies as inferior, as has emerged from discussions with Myanmar women participating in this research. In this sense, the characterisation of shame outlined by Bartky as "a pervasive sense of personal inadequacy" (1990, 85) more closely approaches the learning of shame in educational settings, whereby "the classroom is also a site of its constitution" (Bartky 1990, 90). Such a conceptualisation places emphasis on the emotional experience of education sites whereby "knowledge is not merely something to be 'understood'; it is always felt and responded to emotionally and corporeally" (Zembylas 2007a, 20).

This chapter explores how violence against women in Myanmar becomes legitimised and sustained through and beyond schooling practices that reinforce young women's social subordination. In particular the construction of shame as embodied and embedded through three interlinked dimensions of practices in education is highlighted: the physicality of positionings in educational spaces; the materiality of women's bodies and objects associated with them; and the denial of voice or silencing, including the absence of discussion or with-holding knowledge. I argue that these dimensions of learning shame and subordination enable and maintain violence against women as gender violence becomes normalised in education experiences, and avenues to speak out about abuse or assault are suppressed.

5.3 Research methods

Material for this chapter is drawn from interviews conducted within Myanmar with both formal and non-formal education teachers, gender activists and community workers whose work focuses on reducing violence against women. As access to state schools is highly restricted, more complete interviews were conducted with non-formal educators or activists, many of whom had previously been state teachers and/or attended formal teacher training. Consequently quotes are often drawn from these sources, yet still reflect experiences within state school systems. Additionally, material is drawn from six focus group discussions (FGDs) that were conducted with 54 young adults aged between 16 and 24 focusing on their gendered education and learning

experiences. Four of these focus group discussions were conducted in community education sites with each group size between 9 and 14, three groups being exclusively young women and one being a mixed group of young men and women, of varied ethnicities and religions. One was conducted in Yangon (referenced as Yangon FGD1), one in Pathein (Pathein FGD1, the mixed gender group), and two were conducted in Chiang Mai (Chiang Mai FGD1 & 2) where young women from each of Myanmar's seven states and regions had travelled to participate in a residential school. A further two smaller group discussions were conducted with five young Christian women in Pathein (Pathein FGD2), and with three young Muslim women in Yangon (Yangon FGD2). All of the participants had spent several years in state schooling within Myanmar, and in the case of the Chiang Mai FGDs some had additional experience attending alternative ethnic schools and refugee camp schools. As participants in the research were all over the age of 16, the study focused on looking back over past experiences of education within state schools. However, for many participants, particularly in the focus group discussions, they had finished high school the previous year, and consequently the experiences of schooling discussed include present education practices. Following the methodology of the research (outlined in 3.3), holding all female discussion groups within community education environments where the young women were familiar with each other and with the researcher enabled sensitive discussions of issues of violence, sex and women's bodies to occur in a safe and supportive environment. Group discussions therefore meandered through varied expressions and included varied exercises such as writing, mapping and drawing as well as verbal discussions. The quotes presented here from the focus group discussions are therefore drawn from both verbal and written exercises. A change in speaker within the quote is indicated by the symbol //.

5.4 Situating women's bodies in Myanmar's public space

Myanmar has experienced significant turbulence and insecurity resulting from multiple ongoing ethnic conflicts, recent intercommunal violence and authoritarian rule by successive military juntas from 1962 to 2011. Landmark elections in late 2010 signalled the beginning of tentative and controlled transitions towards democracy which have accelerated with the subsequent 2015 elections in which the democratic opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), took power. The intervening years saw ambitious processes of economic, political and legal reform undertaken by the government, led by the military-affiliated Union Solidarity and Development

Party (USDP) (Bächtold 2015). However, despite a relaxing of authoritarianism, inter-religious and ethnic conflicts remain unresolved and processes of reform have in turn opened up new tensions as social exclusions are reproduced (Walton, McKay & Mar Mar Kyi 2015). Legacies of *Burmanisation* policies, which idealised national unity under the dominance of Buddhist religion and Bamar cultural identity[20], continue to exacerbate religious tensions and influence gender constructions, as further highlighted below.

5.4.1 Politicised constructions of women's bodies

The combination of the social subordination of women and the masculine-dominated militarisation of state leadership have left women excluded from political decision making. Consequently, women's bodies have been constructed on behalf of women in policy discourse and in popular media. Discussions of women's protection or of women's choices in marriage and child birth have therefore largely taken place beyond women's participation. State-run media outlets have for example encouraged women to marry young and have more children, as "early marriage [is] vital to economic development" (Aye 2016), while state-authorised billboards were observed in Mon State promoting women's protection by advising "women shouldn't wear sexy dresses" (billboard in Mawlamyine, observed February 2016). The transferal of responsibility to women to protect themselves and of blame for inciting violence against them is a common refrain, not only in popular media discourse but also enacted in police and ministerial policy decisions (DVB 2016; England 2016; GEN 2015b, 112-138). This was, for example, illustrated by ministerial complicity in police operations that outlawed the sale of contraception, including condoms and the contraceptive pill, during annual New Year (*Thingyan*) festivities under the guise of reducing sexual assaults against women (Saw Myint & Wai Aung 2015; Saw Myint 2015).

Women are contradictorily constructed as simultaneously responsible for the immorality of their bodies while also not deemed competent to make choices over them. Accentuated by the context of conflict and transition, "women's bodies have become battlegrounds both material and symbolic" (Phipps 2014, 2). As such, women have become emblematic of religious and nationalistic identity constructions and women's bodies have therefore been

[20] The majority (89%) of Myanmar are Buddhist, with Christian (4%) and Muslim (4%) minority communities. There are 135 officially recognised ethnic minorities in the country, with the dominant majority group being the Bamar, associated with the military and major political parties (Walton & Hayward 2014)

mobilised as a means of 'othering' religious and ethnic minority groups beyond the Buddhist Bamar ideal (Walton, McKay & Mar Mar Kyi 2015). Women are therefore reified as silent mothers for the idealised nation state, responsible for the propagation of future citizens, while being effaced from political dialogue. This has been most acutely enacted in the parliamentary approval of a package of legislation known as the 'Protection of Race and Religion' laws, proposed by ultra-conservative Buddhist nationalist factions known as the 969 Movement and the MaBaTha. The four bills cover the 'Myanmar Buddhist Women Special Marriage Law', the 'Monogamy Law', the 'Religious Conversion Law', and the 'Health Care on Controlling the Population Growth Law', and include restrictions on Buddhist women's right to marry across faith communities or to convert. The 'othering' of religious minorities, in particular Islam, is enacted through mobilising a sense of threat to dominant identity and of precarity represented through women's victimised bodies (Butler 2004; 2014; Walton, McKay & Mar Mar Kyi 2015, 41). Similarly, running in parallel to the media discourse encouraging (Buddhist) women to have more children, the 'Health Care on Controlling the Population Growth Law' enables mechanisms to limit birth numbers and mandate birth spacing in communities that are perceived to be rapidly increasing, playing into the harmful narrative of male Muslim sexualisation and the perpetuation of Buddhist threat from Muslim expansion. Such policy enactments reflect the intertwining of gender and religious identity constructions and reinforce notions of women's passivity, their inability to make decisions over their own lives and deny their agency and participation in public discourse.

5.4.2 Understanding violence against women in Myanmar

As women are denied agency over their bodies in political and popular media discourses, direct violence against women becomes an extension of women's structural and symbolic subordination. Reflecting the nature of bodies as "socially constituted" (Butler 2004, 20), Laungaramsri highlights Myanmar and ethnic minority women's instrumentalisation:

> Women's bodies in this particular context have been inscribed with relations of power and are made a powerful communicative device for articulating and representing difference. (Laungaramsri 2011, 108)

Systematic violence against ethnic women has been a pervasive feature of the conflicts (WLB 2014), in which women's bodies have become sites of violence

claimed and territorialised by the nation-state, as "a working out of boundaries on the woman's body" (Littlewood 1997, 11; Laungaramsri 2011, 106). Sexual violence enacted on ethnic women's bodies by military forces therefore has the multiple effects of claiming ownership of ethnic women, displaying state dominance, terrorising communities in ethnic territories and humiliating (male) ethnic armed groups. However, as Laungaramsri indicates:

> Women's bodies are not just objects of a violent nation but subjects of lived experience in which violence is felt and suffered. The suffering can be immensely deep as it is difficult for women to imagine how an individual self could possibly become a topography of state violence. (Laungaramsri 2011, 108)

While militarised violence against women has received politicised attention and contestation from transnational activist groups, international solidarity has not been so forthcoming for countering less politicised forms of violence against women such as intimate partner violence, harassment, or sexual coercion. Crafting a division between forms of sexual and gender violence deemed to be domestic and violence committed by military personnel belies their common origins in women's subordination in which gender violence can be understood as "linked in a 'continuum'" (Cockburn & Enloe 2012, 552; see also Meger 2016).

Recent research by women's organisations into the varied forms of direct gender violence experienced by women across Myanmar has highlighted its prevalence and also its interlinked nature (GEN 2015a; Miedema, Shwe & Kyaw 2016). Violence was found to be a common experience, both within domestic relationships and in public spaces, across religious, ethnic and socio-economic groups, constructing abuse as "a normal part of life" (GEN 2015a. 36). The lack of legal avenues to pursue justice for survivors of rape and abuse is amplified in the context of intimate partner violence, as there is no legislative criminalisation for marital rape (GEN 2013; Maber 2014, 144-5). Legal frameworks therefore codify women's unequal position. In contrast to the rapid and unencumbered adoption of the 'Protection of Race and Religion' bills, attempts by women's organisations to formulate a legislative bill on the 'Prevention of Violence Against Women' (PoVAW), have met with resistance and hostility on the part of lawmakers who have challenged the necessity of the legislation (Faxon, Furlong & Sabe Phyu 2015).

Women are therefore simultaneously made to feel acutely aware of and responsible for their bodies, while being able to exercise little control over what happens to them, as others have access to their bodies without their

consent and with impunity. As one women's right's activist highlighted: "*we have to convince young women that your body is yours*" (women's rights activist and educator, interview 2015). However, as will be explored below, formal education experiences are currently not supporting this transformation.

5.5 Constructing gendered citizenship in formal education

Education practices reproduce gender inequalities in multiple ways, including through stereotypical presentations in curriculum texts, classroom practices, roles and duties, pedagogy and teachers' attitudes, and practices of discipline (GEN 2015b, 86-97; Maber 2014). Teaching is commonly viewed as a culturally-appropriate profession for women, and consequently there are large numbers of female teachers in state schools. However, it does not follow that the feminisation of the profession automatically results in more gender-sensitive practices in schools (Stromquist 2006, 149). The sections below explore three dimensions of the ways practices within formal education are perpetuating women's unequal position within society which are less commonly highlighted and which provide the conditions for violence to be replicated and maintained.

5.5.1 Physicality and positioning young women in school space

> *My aunty, she said to me 'you are a woman you should not play with your big brother', and also if your brother complains you or shouts at you, you have to be silent, you have to be quiet because you are woman, you have to be polite. If you walk, you cannot walk dun-dun-dun [bangs table] like that. You have to walk very politely. And also when you speak, you have to speak quietly and if you are laughing you have to make your mouth like that, hee-hee-hee, like that [covers mouth with hand]. You can't laugh out loud like that.* (Young woman peer-educator, interview 2016)

Cultural traditions which shape expected behaviour for young men and women have physical implications in the ways that young women learn to position themselves as modest and unasserting, as the young woman now engaged in community education above highlighted. In familial and community settings such cultural expectations may find avenues for contestation, as in the case of the young woman above whose parents were less restricting than her aunt: "*My father and my mother they didn't put us through stereotypes. I was free to play together with my siblings*" (young woman peer-educator, interview 2016). However, these performances of gendered behaviour become reified in formal

education settings which codify expectations of behaviour through curriculum and timetabling (Stromquist 2006). Consequently, even if individual teachers may be inclined towards flexibility in their expectations of their students, the structure of school practice maintains the reproduction of gendered citizenship, as one female teacher highlighted:

> *This is a cultural construction of gender built into our education. While the boys play football the girls will learn handicrafts and sewing… We are always standardised to be a good mother, be a good housewife*. (Teacher, interview 2015)

In addition to gendered subject learning, classroom duties further inscribe expectations of gender roles, whereby boys are likely to be classroom monitors or prefects and girls are responsible for cleaning the rooms. One experienced teacher highlighted these widespread practices:

> *Girls' role is to clean the classroom before the lessons. And in many schools we still have wooden paintings, so lift up the wooden paintings, boys do it and girls clean the surface and the floor and then boys put them down, because we assume they have more physical power… We all accept that and assume that these are the jobs for boys, these are the jobs for girls*. (Teacher, interview 2015)

Such practices are "key symbols of gender identification and differentiation constantly practised within schools" (Dunne, Humphreys & Leach 2006, 78) which reinforce the performance of gender through individual and collective acts (Butler 1990; Dunne, Humphreys & Leach 2006). During focus group discussions this inequality in the activities undertaken in schools, beyond the formal curriculum, was articulated as a grievance for young women who felt they had been denied opportunities to participate and learn skills that would support leadership roles:

> *In assembly at school only male students can lead, female students don't get the chance. // Even if the male and female students are scoring the same [mark], but if they have to choose a representative to go to another school for competition they choose only male students* (Yangon FGD1, 2016)

Further, more physical dimensions to learning were also held responsible for disadvantaging young women in participating in leadership roles. During one group discussion, young women from Karen State highlighted that learning to

"*be polite and respect elders because of traditional learning*" (Chiang Mai FGD1, 2014) meant that they were disciplined not to make eye contact but to look down when they were speaking to authority figures. They challenged this learned behaviour as being "*not good with foreigners or for presentation skills*" further articulating that "*we miss a lot if we are bowing our heads*" (Chiang Mai FGD1, 2014). In this way behaviour is learned that not only ascribes gendered characteristics to young women, preferencing timidity, but actively disadvantages them from participating in equal conversations or decision making.

During multiple focus group discussions, the division of timetabling was a particular source of frustration for young women, who wanted to participate in sports rather than having their role limited to "*cheerleading*" (Pathein FGD1, 2015) or having to attend parallel classes "*learning handicrafts*" (Chiang Mai FGD1, 2014), with participants in one group expressing:

> *We really want to play football but the teacher doesn't allow us. // Men and women should play together. If we play together, men and women, we have more confidence* (Yangon FGD1, 2016)

In addition to reinforcing the segregation of gendered activities for boys and girls, the refusal to allow girls to play sports in many schools is illustrative of a construction of the bodily physicality of women's subordination. Women's bodies are perceived not only as inferior to men's but potentially contaminating, and consequently if a woman is 'out of place' such as being positioned physically above a man or to his right side, then she is held responsible for reducing his power (*hpon*). *Hpon* is understood as a man's innate masculine superiority and is interwoven with Buddhist gender constructions (GEN 2015b, 34; Miedema, Shwe & Kyaw 2016, 675-6; Nwe 2009). Being a woman is associated with shame and penance and consequently an inherently inferior position, as one activist and educator explained: "*we are women because we did something wrong in our past life. How can we deal with that?*" (Women's rights activist and educator, interview 2016). Such beliefs contribute to the isolation of young women in schools as mixed play or sports activities such as football are seen as inappropriate, as one young woman now working as an informal teacher explained: "*Some thought that if women jump over their heads the men became unlucky*" (community educator, interview 2016). Concern over the protection of a man's *hpon* is also enacted in classrooms whereby the physical positioning of students reflects gender hierarchies, as the same young community educator highlighted:

> *But at school, we had to sit separately, and also most of the women we had to sit on the left side, the men sit at the right side. They believe that if women sit at the right side men became unlucky boys. So women always have to be on the left side. So in class we always had to sit on the left side.* (Community educator, interview 2016)

Classroom practices can therefore reinforce and replicate women's inequality by making visible their ascribed position as inferior. Shame is also ascribed to young women as embodying the potential to reduce *hpon*, and they are held responsible for positioning themselves 'correctly' in order to reduce the harm their bodies may involuntarily cause. Transgressing this tradition may therefore be disciplined in schooling environments, as one woman reflected speaking of her schooling experiences in Shan State: "*But if we stay to the right side the teachers shout at us, in public like shaming, so we feel shy. They didn't allow us to sit*" (young woman activist, interview 2016).

The emphasis on young men and women's positionings within schools reflects the *Burmanisation* of the state education system which has sought to consolidate Buddhist nationalist identity constructions. Consequently Muslim and Christian students were also exposed to the regulation of their bodies within school, whereas their home environment may not have instilled such concerns, which can also lead to punishments for transgression. Young Muslim women in the Yangon discussion group highlighted experiencing the same policing of their behaviour if they attempted to play with male classmates during break time:

> *sometimes we play together and teachers will scold us, saying girls should not play like this, girls should not do like this. Gender roles are really enforced in school*. (Yangon FGD2, 2015)

In such ways women are reprimanded for their embodiment of guilt and learn that being a body out of place is likely to incur punishment (Ahmed 2013).

5.5.2 Materiality and shaming

> *I always questioned, because our longyi*[21] *and our lower dress is never allowed to dry out in front of the balcony, but my uncle's*

[21] The longyi is the material traditionally worn by men and women in Myanmar, in place of trousers or a skirt, with men's and women's longyis being made of different fabrics

> *longyi was drying out in front of the balcony, so I asked the question why do our things always come to the kitchen or the very dark areas where we have to dry our panties or our longyis. So people explained to me that men never got periods, women get periods and that is a dirty thing, that's why. And I got angry! Why is a period very dirty, it's just blood?* (Women's community organisation leader and trainer, interview 2015)

In addition to physical positionings, women's bodies are also imbued with shame in more material ways within both school and community environments. The characterisation of women's bodies as sources of shame is interwoven with cultural understandings of menstruation as dirty, which education practices do little to counter and may actively perpetuate. As the quote above reflects, women's longyis and underwear are traditionally washed separately from men's, must not be placed higher on the washing line than men's clothing, nor in public view, nor in any place that a man may walk under them. Through such cultural practices, the shame that is imbued in women's bodies as dirty and inferior becomes materially transferred to the clothes that cover them, perpetuating the stigma associated with being a woman: "*It sends the message that women are lower. Daily these messages are given and passed on to kids"* (women's rights activist, interview 2015).

While these messages are pervasive beyond formal education sites, and are most commonly encountered in the home, school environments can reinforce the materiality of women's subordination through perpetuating the conceptualisation of women's clothing as inherently unclean and that items associated with and belonging to women are of less worth. Additionally, the transferal of power or shame through material objects may be employed by teachers as a way to deter interactions between classmates, with one young woman recalling being told by her teacher that "*if you sit on a chair after a boy has sat there you can get pregnant*" (Chiang Mai FGD2, 2015). Such strategies by some teachers to misinform and deny information on sexual practice position them foremost as responsible for maintaining cultural expectations of gender-appropriate behaviour, reflecting the fact that despite the majority of teachers being women, they may not perceive themselves as female allies in navigating the experience of puberty.

The lack of sex education or instruction on puberty in schools, means that there is no standardised content or guidelines for teaching about puberty

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and tied in different ways. Myanmar state school uniforms consist of a green longyi for boys and girls and a white shirt.

and consequently learning about body changes or sex largely comes indirectly from other sources. As one teacher working in the state sector highlighted: "*teachers are not trained. We didn't go through this ourselves so we don't know how to teach it*" (teacher, interview 2015). In the absence of direction, teachers frequently reproduce cultural perceptions of menstruation as unclean, with students reporting having been told they "*should not associate [with classmates] when having your period*" (Chiang Mai FGD2, 2015). One woman, now a women's rights activist, spoke of her own learning experiences and their effect:

> *I thought our menstrual blood was dirty. We will menstruate, don't sleep with boys, you are dirty. This is what we are taught. It makes us lose confidence.* (Women's rights activist, interview 2015)

Girls therefore learn that their bodies are associated with this inferiority identified with menstruation, but may not have access to further information to make sense of body changes or to understand sex, which can make experiencing puberty a particularly challenging time for girls, as one non-formal education teacher highlighted:

> *It's very frustrating. They don't know why their body is changing, they don't want to go to school when they have menstruation or cramps.* (Community educator, interview 2015)

Reflecting these experiences, the young women in focus groups often spoke of not going to school when they were menstruating, citing feeling "*embarrassed and afraid*" and that the "*school hygiene is very bad, toilets are not clean*" (Chiang Mai FGD2, 2015). For several young women, the experience of having stained their *longyi* during menstruation was a source of acute shame and embarrassment, causing them to not want to stand up in class when the teacher asked them, which in turn had provoked punishment and public shaming from the teacher, leaving young women feeling "*very shy to come back to school for a couple of weeks*" (young community educator, interview 2016). These practises contribute to further isolating female students and limiting avenues for support or guidance in understanding experiences related to their bodies.

5.5.3 Silencing and restricting knowledge

> *And also, even when we talk we can't talk freely and loudly. Men they can make noise and they can shout 'aarrh!' like that. But*

> *women no, the teacher didn't allow us in the class, we had to be quiet, 'you are women you have to be quiet' like that. There are lots of stereotypes in schools.* (Young community educator, interview 2016)

Myanmar state education practices, that have prioritised rote learning and authoritarian pedagogies (Redden 2007; Hardman et al 2014), have denied critical thinking skills to all students, male and female, rewarding replication and obedience and discouraging questioning or challenging authority and accepted traditions. However, these education practices that don't encourage speaking up and asking questions are compounded by cultural expectations of gendered behaviour which construct women as passive and submissive. Consequently it is considered a greater transgression for young women to ask questions of their teachers or to talk openly of shameful issues such as sex or puberty. Paralleling the quote cited above, one non-formal education teacher explained:

> *Girls are taught they should not speak out. It's shameful when girls or women speak openly. Mostly girls are worried when they speak openly that they are not being a polite girl.* (Women's community organisation leader and educator, interview 2015)

This silencing was felt as an injustice by some young women, who felt they had been excluded and unfairly treated by teachers in their formal education experiences:

> *We feel like only men are popular in the classroom, and only men have the chance. We want to be popular too. // Teachers discriminate against female students – even if the male student didn't finish his duties the teacher doesn't shout at them, but will shout at the female students.* (Yangon FGD1, 2016)

In areas affected by active conflict, the gendered responses from female teachers towards their students was perceived to be itself motivated by fear of violence, which compounded the differences in behaviour towards male and female students. Two young women from Shan and Kachin States respectively, spoke of experiences during high school:

> *The female teachers don't shout at the male students because they are afraid of them, because one male student had a gun in*

my class. // If the teachers shout at or shame the [male] students they wait till night and beat the teacher. (Yangon FGD1, 2016)

These young women identified the threat of violence towards female teachers on the part of some young men in high schools as further exacerbating the leniency of punishment towards boys while young women were felt to be disproportionately disciplined as they offered little threat or resistance. One of the same students continued: "*when the teacher shouts at the girls we are shy, we don't respond anything*" (Yangon FGD1, 2016). The gender dynamics of fear, violence and silencing, are therefore played out in multiple directions, in which young men are also disadvantaged through the negative assumptions of masculine violence in conflict areas. Likewise, as further explored in the section below, the intersections of gender, religion and ethnicity further compound such dynamics which can institutionalise marginalisation for both male and female students in different ways.

The cultural acceptance of corporal punishment in education, combined with large class sizes and an emphasis on respecting authority, result in discipline and punishment being common features of students' school experiences. Teachers are therefore identified not as potential trusted adults that students might be able to confide in but rather as the enforcers of idealised citizenship. Consequently, the young women in focus group discussions frequently expressed being afraid of their teachers and not wanting to draw attention to themselves in class:

If we did a mistake we were beaten. We are afraid of the teacher. // If I didn't understand the subject I didn't question, all students are afraid [of] the teacher. (Chiang Mai FGD2, 2015)

Young women therefore learn not to speak out or to challenge actions that are committed against them, and simultaneously have few possibilities to find answers to their questions. The lack of sex education combined with shame that young women are taught to feel about their bodies results in a lack of knowledge around sex for which young women have few sources of information. One young woman, herself now a community teacher, spoke of her experiences becoming aware of sex and pregnancy:

Me, I just know about sexual intercourse in grade 9, I was nearly 16. I just found out because I read in a health magazine, and I thought it was wrong. I had never heard about that. I thought that God puts a baby inside a woman. All my friends thought like that. So I brought this [magazine] to my friend and she had also read

> *this in a book and didn't understand. So one of our close male friends came to us and explained. Our male friends had knowledge of this before us. But we are very shy and we didn't have knowledge of this. But they know it.* (Young community educator, interview 2016)

The assumption that girls and young women will talk to each other about sex or body changes was not supported by young women who reported not having avenues for peer learning or sharing experiences, reflecting the pervasiveness of learning silence and shame. The experience was found to be common across religious groups. Despite the view shared by some Buddhists that members of the Christian community were more open to promoting women's rights, this articulation was not expressed by Christian young women:

> *Our community is conservative, you know, very, very conservative. Talking about sex is not good, it's not good to talk with friends, we don't talk either so much about that. Like sex before marriage is… it's very conservative in our community, the Christian community. We grew up in this community so…* (Pathein FGD2, 2015).

Consequently, young women have few resources to draw on to learn about safe sexual practice. This was contrasted with the experiences of young men who are perceived as having greater freedom to discuss more openly with friends, having access to more spaces to do so, and being able to buy and share sexually explicit material, as one non-formal educator highlighted:

> *The boys can access more easily, so they know more than the girls. They talk to each other and can share more easily. Whereas girls don't talk to each other about sex. When they do it's very secret, they don't want other people to know.* (Women's organisation leader and community educator, interview 2015)

The silencing of young women therefore has the dual effect of simultaneously making them less likely to speak out about abuse or non-consensual sexual experiences and also limiting their ability to inform themselves to make safe choices, as the same educator explained of the teenagers she worked with:

> *Sometimes, they know if the boys and girls live together, the girls can get pregnant easily. And they don't know about the disease. They know about HIV/AIDS, but they don't know it's from the sex.* (Women's organisation leader and community educator, interview 2015)

Having fragmented knowledge from varied sources, consequently creates an incomplete understanding of sexual practice amongst many young women, while they are nonetheless held responsible for the consequences. As another former teacher concluded of the social stigma attached to pregnancy amongst unmarried young women: "*they blame it on the sex not the lack of knowledge*" (former teacher, interview 2016).

5.6 Implications for enabling violence

Through positionings in education spaces, young women learn that their bodies are not of equal worth to their male counterparts, and conversely may cause harm in undermining masculine power, coupled with the characterisations of women's bodies as dirty and shameful. Likewise, these positionings are not only experienced by young women, but also observed and participated in by young men who equally learn expectations of gendered behaviour through such schooling practices. The physical and material dimensions of this characterisation enacted in education spaces, render women's shame visible and experienced both collectively through the separation of female students and individually through the humiliation of individual girls. Replicating these physical and material experiences in schools, if women are held to be transgressing expectations of their behaviour or place beyond education settings, they are liable to incur punishment. Consequently, violence against women becomes not just trivialised but vindicated. This final section further highlights the implications of such learned behaviour within society more broadly, connecting back to the subordination of women's bodies in political space, indicating that education practices are replicating a pattern of gender inequality which sustains gender and sexual violence.

While young men are able to access and share learning about sex, for young women the denial of sexual knowledge and body awareness makes it difficult to make informed choices about healthy and enjoyable sexual practice. Several teachers and activists spoke of the proliferation of sexual activity at universities, which was accompanied by frequent anecdotes of unwanted pregnancy, assault and rape, with one teacher lamenting: "*they should have been educated at school, through sex education. They have not been prepared*" (teacher, interview 2015). As highlighted above, young women have few opportunities to learn about their bodies in any positive way and are actively discouraged from doing so: the changes they are experiencing through puberty are encoded with shame and humiliation, they have restricted avenues for non-sexual body interactions (for example through not being allowed to play

sports), are not encouraged to talk to peers about sex or body issues, and have limited or no avenues to talk to trusted adults. As a result, young women are entering sexual activity from an inherent position of disadvantage. In addition, the silencing of women's voices renders it difficult for women to express their refusal, as one student reflected in describing sexual harassment:

> *Boys ask us 'why don't you do something when men do like this?' Because of our culture we don't want to speak out. We just accept*. (Yangon FGD2, 2015)

This silencing further isolates young women and multiplies feelings of shame. The same young woman continued, reflecting on the heightened isolation she felt as a Muslim minority: "*we don't have a chance to speak loud if something happens to us*" (Yangon FGD2, 2015). Having learned not to talk about their bodies or voice their discontent, young women therefore have few trusted avenues to turn to for support, as one community educator highlighted:

> *Some girls don't believe. They don't trust the facilitator much. They only speak out about the worst situations, otherwise they don't. They are shamed and afraid other people will blame them.* (Women's community organisation leader and educator, interview 2015)

Women activists and community educators stressed this challenge when working to secure justice for young survivors of abuse and rape: "*but you can't ask the girl what happened. She doesn't say anything*" (community educator, interview 2015).

Both when considered collectively, as in the case of attempting to enact the PoVAW bill, and individually, through attempting to prosecute individual cases of assault through criminal courts, sexual violence against women has failed to receive institutional attention. One civil society activist, who provides support and legal aid to women who have been sexually assaulted, spoke of the message being perpetuated, echoing the instruction provided in schooling:

> *Because you are a woman you have to be very careful, not to go out at night time, not wear clothes to attract men, behave yourself, don't laugh too loud.* (Women's rights organisation leader, interview 2015)

The same activist continued, underlining the implications of this message and highlighting the transferal of blame to women for acts of violence committed against them:

> *So if you are a woman, you are abused, you are raped, it's normal. No-one cares about it and the blame goes to the victims not to the perpetrators.* (Women's rights organisation leader, interview 2015)

In particular, intimate partner violence is not only seen as a private matter beyond legislative reach (GEN 2015a) but also becomes viewed as an accepted part of household and marital dynamics, as one community educator highlighted in speaking of legal services:

> *Talking about domestic violence at home… They don't see it as a violence… They will say there is no domestic violence because they don't see this as violence.* (Community educator, interview 2015)

The pervasive impact of learning social subordination therefore maintains the conditions for gender and sexual violence as such practices "may be (mis)recognised by their protagonists as normal or acceptable" (Heslop et al 2015, 137). Reflecting the intertwining of structural violence and coercion (Heslop et al 2015, 137), notions of masculine superiority, which are inscribed in the concept of *hpon* and made visible through the physicality of positionings within schools, facilitate the social acceptance of men's sexual entitlement (Faxon, Furlong & Sabe Phyu 2015, 467; Miedema, Shwe & Kyaw 2016). Likewise the absence of legal provisions to criminalise marital rape and the impunity of militarised sexual violence against ethnic women in conflict areas further perpetuate sexual entitlement as a condition of male superiority.

5.7 Conclusions

The combination of learning shame, silence and inferiority in multiple ways through interactions in familial, community and educational settings enables violence against women to become legitimised as a natural extension of maintaining women's social subordination, reinforcing cultural understandings of masculine dominance and disciplining transgression. As corporal punishment is seen as a legitimate form of discipline for overstepping the boundaries of culturally acceptable behaviour within classrooms, violence becomes a normalised dimension of school experience. The pervasive power of formal education settings as instruments of maintaining state order and

idealised citizenship constructions therefore has the effect of extending this influence over young women who may otherwise have supportive family environments and friendship networks from which to question gender inequalities. Such findings point to the significance of revealing the varied and contextualised gendered practices within education systems as a key step in seeking to transform gendered power relations more broadly, which move beyond an uncritical presentation of access to education as in itself likely to contribute to positive social transformations (Kabeer 2005; Novelli 2016).

Echoing research that brings attention to the multiple and subtle ways in which gender hierarchies are learned and replicated (Parkes & Unterhalter 2015; Dunne, Humphreys & Leach 2006), the findings presented here reflect the need to consider the varied forms of violence which are enacted and reproduced within schools beyond and in addition to physical acts of violence against female students. Additionally, young women's experiences of schooling in Myanmar indicate the need to reconsider shame and 'shyness' not simply as emotional responses to experiences of trauma but as a learned emotional condition acquired through the pervasive patterns of subordination which may be repeated in education sites. Feelings of inferiority and shame can therefore be understood as preconditioning and enabling violence, not only resulting from it. Additionally, the silencing of young women's voices in classrooms supports the perpetuation of sexual and gender violence both through teaching young women not to speak openly of sex, their bodies or their emotions, and also through denying avenues of support that teachers and other figures of authority could present. Violence against women is therefore an extension of women's subordination, their shame and their guilt at inhabiting bodies they have learned to be valued less.

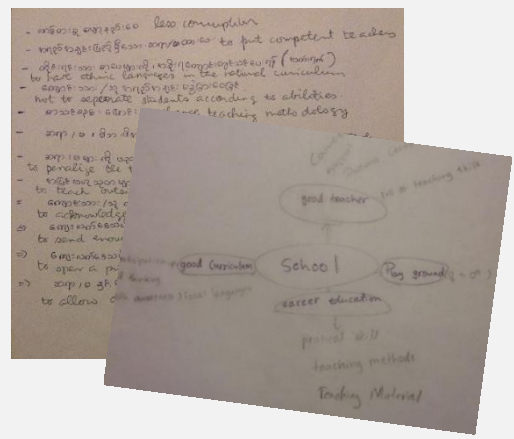
Part II Focus Study:

Desires for alternative school environments

While it is not the intention of the research to set out a uniquely negative view of female experiences in formal education, and the efforts of individual teachers to create more cohesive learning environments are highlighted as positive examples ways to foster greater inclusivity (see *4.4.2*), nonetheless the accumulation of young women's marginalisation within education is prominent. In the (all female) focus group discussions, when asked what they had learned about being a woman in their school experiences, the most common answers amongst young women were "*obedience*" and "*politeness*". Young women participating in the Yangon focus group discussion for example replied:

> *I learnt a true woman has to be polite, weak and a good follower.*
> *// As a girl, I was taught that I must be a good teacher, a good follower, be polite.*
> *// I learnt men have more power than women.*

Intended as an extension to the discussion raised above in Chapter 5, this focus study provides an opportunity to examine more closely through the data not only young women's often negative experiences in school, but also their articulations for the alternatives they would like to see. This section therefore presents the specific expressions of young women in one focus group discussion (Yangon FGD1) of their desires for improved experiences in state education. The group was comprised of 14 young women aged between 19 and 24 from six different ethnic states in Myanmar. The young women had gathered in Yangon to participate in a community education course aiming to empower young women and consequently, although the course was only at its beginning



Photos 3 & 4: Participants notes, focus group discussion, Yangon, 2016

stages, the participants were motivated to work towards improving gender equality in their communities. They were therefore knowledgeable and opinionated about gender inequality and were quick to relate this to their own experiences in education. While within the group some young women had attended multiple, varied forms of education, including ethnic schools, monastic schools and displacement/refugee camp schools, all had completed several years of schooling within the state sector. The fact that all the young women were ethnic minorities has relevance for their critical stance on practices within the state education system and the role of teachers.

Participants were asked to brainstorm the improvements they would like to see in state schools to create better learning environments. This exercise was conducted within a two hour focus group discussion during which several activities were undertaken which explored the young women's experiences in and attitudes towards their education. During this exercise, participants worked in groups of two to write down improvements they would ideally like to see in schooling, writing either in English or Burmese (later translated). The suggestions that the young women identified during this written exercise are indicated here, grouped by three themes that were common throughout the seven groups: teachers and teaching practice; curriculum and subject learning; and other dimensions of school experience. These have been visualised below, with the length of the bar roughly indicating the number of students identifying the issue, a longer bar signifying multiple groups including this issue in their brainstorm. This initial written exercise was then followed by a lengthy discussion during which participants compared their notes and expanded on why they had identified these issues and provided further details. While references to the broader discussions that took place in the focus group discussions are included throughout the Chapters of the thesis, the intention here is to indicate the changes that young women who are motivated to challenge gender inequality are prioritising for education environments, prior to lengthier discussion. All citations quoted here are drawn from the texts and mind-maps made by the participants, unless otherwise indicated.

Teaching

The most numerous improvements indicated related to teachers and teaching practice. While it is recognised that many individual teachers are trying to find ways to improve learning experiences for their students, the young women in this focus group discussion were frequently critical of teaching practices as a whole and highlighted the role of teachers as key to creating more equal and supportive learning environments. Following the frequently encountered view

amongst young adults of teachers as authoritarian (see Chapters 5 and 6), general improvements to teaching methodology stressed more student-centred approaches to teaching and "*allow[ing] discussions between teachers and students*" as well as a desire to "*acknowledge what students already know*". These positions and the perceived distance between students and teachers also connect to the desire to "*have ethnic languages in the national curriculum*" (indicated below), illustrating that resentment may be exacerbated by the lack of multi-lingual communication within classrooms. Likewise, a sense of resentment was illustrated towards poor quality teaching by groups suggesting "*to penalize teachers severely*" or "*to punish teachers and school staff in rural areas for not doing their job*". Additionally, experiences within the classroom were also directly linked by the young women to the need for improved teacher training, including that "*teachers should be trained about child rights*" as well as explicitly gender equality, determining "*if we give training there will be less discrimination"*.

Teaching
Improved teaching methodology (including learner centred approaches & encouraging critical thinking skills)
Teacher training for more competent teachers
Improves teacher-student ratio (more teachers)
Train teachers in child rights and gender equality
Treat male & female students equally (including leadership opportunities e.g. class monitor)
Punish teachers for 'not doing their job'

Table 6: Yangon FGD1 – desired improvements to teaching

Curriculum

Emerging from desired changes to curriculum material and subject learning was a strong notion that formal schooling is not meeting the preferences and interests of these young women, who highlighted the desire for classes to "*teach outside knowledge more*" and, at a high school level, to "*let students choose subjects they are interested in*". Likewise, participants stressed the need "*to put practical stuff in the syllabus*", including better resourcing such as laboratory equipment for science experiments. A more inclusive learning environment was prioritised particularly with relevance to curriculum texts: in addition to the desired use of ethnic languages indicated above, the young women also highlighted the need for "*more pictures, and better quality*

pictures – ethnic students don't understand so pictures help". Equally, greater gender sensitivity in the curriculum was frequently raised. This was expressed as a desire for male and female students to learn the same subjects, as well as changes to presentations within curriculum including representing more women leaders within history textbooks, models that go beyond suggesting young women "*must be a teacher or a nurse*", and explicit inclusion of women's rights or gender equality. While three groups identified the need for sex education within the written design of improved education environments, the topic sparked much agreement in the ensuing discussion, with participants lamenting that at present "*the teacher only teaches that students shouldn't have sex*" and that "*we know the basics but we don't know more.*"

Curriculum
Practical skills in class in addition to textbook learning
Gender balance in curriculum
Sex education, family planning & health awareness
More diverse subject choice (including human rights & gender equality subjects)
Use local languages
More material and resources
Career-relevance
Change exams (not rote)

Table 7: Yangon FGD1 – desired improvements to curriculum

School experience

Also reflecting a common theme in focus group discussions and connecting to a desire for more practical elements in the curriculum, five groups stressed the wish for more time for sports activities within school, for young women to be able to participate in sports along with male students, and for space for playgrounds (particularly for schools in urban environments). Other dimensions of school experience that emerged from the exercise revealed the academic pressure on students, from both teachers and parents, also including the propensity of after-school tuition. This also revealed the wish for schools to act as sites where help could be sought through the provision of counselling and support services. In one case teachers were identified as those who should be trained to provide counselling, also indicating the desire for closer relationships of trust with teachers.

School experience
More sports time and sports available to both male and female students
Less after-school tuition
Counselling & support services
Less pressure from teachers & parents
Less corruption

Table 8: Yangon FGD1 – desired improvements to other aspects of school experience

The exercise indicates not only the intersecting experiences of gender, ethnicity and rural/urban locations which played a role in students' negative experiences in formal education, but also the desire on the part of these young women to formulate more inclusive and varied learning environments. Moreover, these young women were clear on how they envisaged this being achieved, with the role of teachers playing the most significant part in redesigning learning experiences.

Chapter 6

Cross-border transitions: navigating conflict and political change through community education practices in Myanmar and the Thai border

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This chapter has been adapted from Maber, E. J. T. (2016b) 'Cross-border transitions: navigating conflict and political change through community education practices in Myanmar and the Thai border.' *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 14(3) 374–389.

6.1 Introduction

While conflict is still largely unresolved in Myanmar, in the form of both ethnic civil wars and intercommunal violence, the country is edging its way through processes of reform led by a nominally civilian government after over fifty years of military rule. Amongst the most controversial and perhaps the most publicised of these reforms are the dual quests for a nationwide ceasefire agreement and the national education sector plan, both of which remain unresolved in the build up to elections in November 2015. Although there has recently been renewed negotiations between government and opposition groups, the fact that both peace and access to state recognised education have proved elusive for many has contributed to a lack of confidence in the transition by those who feel excluded from the rhetoric of change. As a result, alternative approaches have continued through community education practices that circumvent state authority and prioritise an alternative subject formation. Additionally, refugee and migrant populations that have fled fighting, poverty, persecution and instability across Myanmar's borders are affected by interruptions and limited access to education provision. Alternative education practices have therefore emerged to respond to these varying needs, particularly amongst the enduring refugee and migrant communities in Thailand. This chapter therefore looks more closely at the responses to political change and conflict in community education in the Thai-border region and Myanmar's eastern states bordering Thailand and suggests that the context of this border region and the access to international influences that it allows amplifies this alternative construction within community education. The

question is posed: to what extent do cross-border movements affect community education practices, in what ways, and with what consequences? I begin by proposing an outline of nomadic theory which informs the study which builds on conceptualisations of educational space highlighted above, followed by an exploration of the context of conflict and the environment for education both within Myanmar and along the border. The remainder of the chapter then highlights the practices of those within community education, drawing from the experiences of practitioners and participants in education programmes and organisations to illustrate the varied influences involved.

As discussed later in the chapter (*6.7*), a number of community education projects are led by ethnic women's organisations and consequently their role within community education practices and the potential for these spaces to contribute to endeavours to promote gender equality is also explored. While many of these groups are ethnically aligned, the community education initiatives treated here do not include the parallel ethnic primary and early secondary systems that are seen as an alternative but formal system of schooling. The initiatives considered here range between peer lead instruction, community learning centres and locally-supported community-based and civil society organisations which often make use of adapted international training material.

6.2 Nomadic theory and the smooth learning space

Extending the conceptualisation presented in Chapter 4, this study draws from Braidotti's nomadic theory (2011b) and Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualisations of smooth and striated space (2013/1988) to suggest that sites of community education within displaced groups represent a dual occurrence of smooth space which promotes the formation of nomadic subjects. As outlined above, striated space is characterised by delineation and the hierarchisation of the state which seeks to contain and create boundaries (Deleuze & Guattari 2013/1988; Livesey 2013: 181; Bayne 2004: 302-3). In comparison, smooth space is understood as a more fluid site associated with nomadism and informality, in which hierarchy may be contested (Deleuze & Guattari 2013; Hodgson & Standish 2006): "smooth space emphasises the journey, the line of movement through shifting territorialities" (Livesey 2013: 181). However, these two sites are not to be taken as mutually opposing, but interact and inform each other in dialectic movements "sometimes causing a passage from the smooth to the striated, sometimes from the striated to the smooth" (Deleuze & Guattari 2013: 552).

Borderlands, as sites of refuge, of hybridity and as 'contact zones' (Pratt 1992), are by their nature spaces of flux, the inhabitants of which being confronted with multiple renegotiations of relationships, identities and practices. In Deleuzian terms, this smooth space wedged between striated nation states can be both a site for innovation and ingenuity in response to constraint and also a site of consolidation for alternative constructions. This is a fluid space "constructed by local operations involving changes of direction" (Deleuze & Guattari 2013/1988, 566) and as such priorities for these communities shift as they respond to changes in the striated space which confines them to "confront new obstacles, invent new paces, switch adversaries" (581). These are therefore deeply political spaces (Lysen & Pisters 2012, 1) which are always in dialogue with each other, although they "do not communicate with each other in the same way" (Deleuze & Guattari 2013/1988, 562). Likewise, the spaces cannot be truly taken as separate but are relational, informing each other and reacting both against and in parallel whereby striation may encroach on the smooth and simultaneously be dissolved or remade by it.

Rosi Braidotti extends Deleuzian ideas of nomadism to emphasise a nomadic subjectivity that rejects "a unitary vision of the self" (Braidotti 2010: 408), and instead emphasises the multiple dimensions and influences that affect subject formation. Following Braidotti's vision of a "collectively assembled, externally related and multi-layered subject" (Braidotti 2011b, 210), the nomadic subjects who populate this border space navigate multiple influences and impressions, resulting in reformulations of the identifications and affiliations associated with home, citizenry, residency and culture. Such processes are brought to the fore in education settings where learners are exposed to varied practices and contacts which influence both their learning and their own subject formation.

As previously highlighted, I suggest that community education can be similarly characterised as a smooth site of learning, in contrast to the striated nation-building endeavours of formal state education systems, promoting the formation of such nomadic subjects through the multiple points of contact in relationships within the classroom and in the teaching material used. Learning environments are therefore both the result of a nomadic experience and simultaneously maintain nomadism in teaching practices which sustain this alternative subject construction. The need to react to geographical changes and to constraints in infrastructure can promote simultaneous yet at times diverging responses, both to stabilize and regularise those areas within control (language, curriculum, cultural practice) and conversely to allow for

reorientation and adaptation. Potentially therefore, non-formal or informal education initiatives promoting community development social change may support this inter-relational subject formation through allowing a flexibility and creativity that is sensitive to diverse learner experiences within a shared context of displacement.

For the refugee and migrant communities between Myanmar and Thai state authority nomadic subjectivity has additionally been shaped through impressions of conflict and alignments have been influenced by significant political upheavals in the last seven years, with resultant implications for education providers. These include: refugee camp schools operating at primary, secondary and post-secondary levels through ethnic education committees; migrant learning centres that take the place of state-affiliated formal schooling for migrant communities in the border regions; largely informal vocational learning sites, and post-secondary community education programmes run by community based organisations, women's networks, NGOs or charities, and, increasingly in Myanmar, by individuals returning from the border areas. The weakness of state education in conflict areas as well as its opposition by groups who reject the legitimacy of state control undermines confidence in the value of formal education (Davies, L. 2011). The authoritarian nation building endeavours on both sides of the border have therefore facilitated the creation of an alternative education space by those who do not feel an allegiance with either state model. The additional dimension of international contact and influence, which is much more prevalent in Myanmar's eastern border region than other parts of the country, has contributed to this hybrid learning environment. Consequently, in addition to Myanmar, Thai and ethnic constructions of identity and citizenship, students have been prepared for potential resettlement or scholarship opportunities in the US, Europe and Australia with western models of 'active citizenship' prevailing in teaching material. Similarly, the lack of formal legitimacy in the form of identity documents and citizenship claims reinforces the nomadism of such communities and further troubles the proposed repatriation to an unknown 'homeland'. The point is made therefore that the south-eastern states of Myanmar navigate a distinct experience of learning and subject formation precisely because of the transnational movements which result from the proximity with Thailand resulting in a space of "political and social separateness and otherness" (Laungaramsri 2011, 100). States such as Rakhine, Chin and to a certain extent Kachin that do not benefit from such multi-directional cross-boundary movements, and which are subjected to divergent conflict patterns, occupy an altogether different landscape both in

terms of the immediate constraints posed by insecurity and the opportunities for non-state education provision.

6.3 Research Methods

This chapter draws from data collected from 24 education organisations, of which 7 were based on the Thai side of the border and 17 based within Myanmar. Of these, seven now operate on both sides of the border and eight organisations had either moved entirely or expanded from Thailand to Myanmar since the 2011 inauguration of the civilian government. A total of 55 interviews were conducted across these organisations and more widely, and 12 site visits to community schools were conducted. Additionally, data is drawn from 5 group discussions conducted within community education settings, four with post-secondary course participants and one with teachers. 52 course participants took part in the four discussion groups, two taking place in Thailand and two in Myanmar, with two discussions being all female groups. Owing to the ethnographic approach adopted throughout my research, the interviews included here range from short, informal discussions (of at least 20 minutes) to semi-structured interviews of up to two hours. Data was analysed in two stages: initially the information from community education groups was mapped according to location, target group, language and content of courses; interviews with individuals and discussion groups were then thematically coded based on the recurrent themes that emerged. For educators, issues of education practice and how and why practices are employed (including for example the language of instruction) were prioritised. Amongst the young adult students, focus was given to experiences of education, both formal and non-formal. All data has been anonymised and the only organisations named in this article are those whose information is in the public domain and/or who have consented to be named.

On the Thai side of the border, focus was given to community educational initiatives specifically for Myanmar refugees and migrants as well as organisations that brought participants (either teachers or students for training programmes) to Thailand who would then return to Myanmar on completion of the course. On the Myanmar side of the border, participants included education practitioners, organisations that had relocated from Thailand to Myanmar, and individuals who had returned from the border region and were now engaged in community education work. Teachers and students engaged in the group discussions included those who had undertaken cross-border movements themselves and those who had not. Interviews and

discussions focused on the experiences and movements of participants (educators and students) across the border and the motivations behind these movements as well as the experiences of education, practices within education environments and the way participants felt their education experiences had prepared them and/or their students.

While the research aimed to include a wide range of experiences of education movements and learning trajectories, it is recognised that the data presented here cannot be taken as representative of all experiences. Similarly, the quotations included have been selected to illustrate common themes that were encountered as well as variations in perspective, however unavoidably this will result in some generalisation. Nonetheless, the aim is to highlight how within this context of flux we might better understand the different positions within which education practitioners operate. The focus of this study was on non-formal community education practices and therefore as highlighted above largely did not include formal systems of education in either Myanmar or Thailand. Likewise, attention remained on the construction of Myanmar identities and therefore the research largely did not engage with Thai students' experiences of learning and exposure to contact with refugees and migrants. Such extensions offer fruitful sites for potential future research.

6.4 Repositioning education in politicised territories

Since elections were held in November 2010, Myanmar has been moving from over fifty years of restrictive military dictatorship towards a more democratic model of civilian-led government, although the extent to which the current political context might be deemed democratic is a matter of debate. The elections were unsurprisingly won by the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) who took office the following year under the leadership of President Thein Sein, leading to the common utterance amongst civil society members that the only thing that had changed in government was the rulers' clothes. Nonetheless, Myanmar's *roadmap to democracy*, originally outlined by the military over ten years ago, accelerated in pace with the elections triggering a rapid process of sectoral review and legislative reforms. Although military and intercommunal violence has not decreased since 2011 (Walton & Hayward 2014; Horton 2014; Bhatia 2013) the political shift has triggered a so-called 'opening up' of the country to both international and local, civil involvement (Huang 2013; Hlaing 2012). The subsequent years then have seen rapid increased engagement with the newly legitimised USDP on the part of international governments, donors and private companies, as well as

national opposition parties, civil society and non-state armed groups who see political and economic opportunity in the newly semi-democratic state. This strategic engagement on the part of actors and groups previously (and in many cases continuing to be) opposed to authoritarian state led and military dominated processes, is illustrative of the new climate of concession which is finding some space to temper previously inflexible stances lured by the hope of political and financial reward. So we have seen the lifting of sanctions on the part of the US, Europe and Australia, despite the continued detention and re-arrest of prisoners of conscience; the 2014 Chair of ASEAN going to Myanmar, despite ongoing human rights abuses and intercommunal violence; new ceasefire agreements signed in 2012 with 14 out of 17 of the major non-state armed groups (BNI 2014, 4), despite the lack of movement towards a federalist union; and the NLD manoeuvring to secure presidential candidature for the upcoming 2015 elections, despite a quarter of parliamentary seats still being reserved for military appointees (GEN 2012, 1). The extent to which these concessions are unidirectional in favour of state consolidation is a matter of concern for civil society and ethnic minority rights proponents alike.

The lengthy civil wars and unresolved issues of ethnic auto-determination have been characterised by violently oppressive responses from the state military (*tatmadaw)*, and although new ceasefire agreements have progressed with the change in government there is still a tension between the slow pace of peace agreements, ongoing active combat in Kachin and northern Shan States and the rhetoric of peaceful unification employed in the government's engagement with the international community (President Thein Sein in TBC 2013b, 2; Horton 2014). Similarly there is a growing disillusionment as the ceasefire agreements in the Eastern states (particularly Kayin and Kayah States) have failed to be accompanied by demilitarisation while many areas have seen increasing *tatmadaw* presence consolidated. Such tensions have been evident in hostile community responses to perceived international pressure for those displaced to return (despite UNHCR maintaining that conditions are not yet conducive to large-scale repatriations), with international projects coming under fire for overly promoting a rhetoric of reconciliation as yet unmatched by changes in practice on the ground (KCSN 2014; WLB 2014)[22]. The mix of competing government, international and

[22] For example, a recent Karenni Civil Society Network (KCSN) report heavily criticised the Norwegian and Finnish-sponsored MSPI projects for over-attributing progress towards peace, with communities underlining worsening land confiscations and the increased military presence in resettlement sites which remain a threat to their safety

ethnic agendas therefore creates an uneasy landscape for community education, as distinct from state education provision, which is both subject to these multiple influences and may be complicit in their reproduction (Davies, L. 2011).

Within this climate of shifting alignments, current Myanmar education reform in the shape of the Comprehensive Education Sector Review is a highly politicised endeavour. In a country with 135 officially recognised ethnic groups and several more demanding recognition, ethnic identity plays a significant role in political manoeuvring and can run counter to the espoused discourse of national unity. This has also been further complicated in recent years by the government's reification of ethnic categories, reinforcing ethnic identities as being territorially rooted (TNI 2014). Those communities excluded from these categories, such as the much contested Rohingya, are left without either a territorial home or a legitimised identity construction and therefore further excluded from reform dialogues. As one educator identified, "*labels like Shan, Karen, Bamar create barriers to education. The [notion of] identity, that's the biggest barrier*" (Community educator and activist, interview, Yangon, 2015). Issues of self-determination and representation within the education sector have therefore been central to the conflicts: the singular state curriculum imposed across the country has long been a point of contention and has resulted in parallel education systems operating in certain ethnic states, including Mon and Kayin States (Lall & South 2013). Major concerns include issues of mother-tongue instruction, autonomy of teaching curricula and flexibility to respond to local needs including training and timetabling. However, ethnic educators and exiled activists on the Thai border have felt excluded from the education reform processes, as publicly expressed by the Karen Education Department (KED):"the work that we have been doing over decades does not exist in their knowledge" (Saw Law Eh Moo, KED, interviewed in the *Irrawaddy*, Michaels 2014).

Alternative education systems, including non-formal community education practices, have provided a means of opposition to a ruthless state system of schooling as a manifestation of government authority that has for decades espoused indoctrination and obedience as a tool for maintaining a pliable population, at the expense of critical thinking skills and individual development (Maber 2014, 146). Likewise, for the pro-democracy movements, community education and training initiatives provided a platform to foster

and are more illustrative of the desire to protect economic interests than to foster sustainable peace (KCSN, 2014).

support for democratic change and promote awareness of human rights violations. Particularly at the post-secondary level, community education has therefore historically taken on a wilfully subversive position through the teaching of civic engagement, social justice, human rights, environmental protection and gender equality. From the Thai side of the border, this position has been more overt. In addition to the hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing the destruction of their homes and livelihoods, the Thai border region also provided refuge to many high profile political exiles fleeing persecution in the aftermath of the 1988 student protests, and the successive political crackdowns of the 1990s. These exiles, including pro-democracy 88 Generation activists as well as human rights monitoring groups and women's rights networks along with those political leaders associated with the non-state armed groups, have remained highly politically engaged and have taken advantage of transnational networks and the increased internationalisation through media and telecommunication channels afforded in Thailand. Many amongst them are educators themselves, continuing to teach either through migrant learning centres or informal education groups, and have therefore been active in promoting social and political activism as a dimension of training practice. Such practices have reinforced the association between community education and alternative citizenship ideals which run counter to the government's own. However, as educational reforms are being formulated, this oppositional stance may no longer serve the interests of ethnic education providers and democracy campaigners alike. Strategic choices in the education sector over alignments and geographical positionings therefore mirror those taken in political dialogue.

6.5 Dislocation and a new space for becoming

On the Thai side of Myanmar's Eastern border those who have fled the ongoing violence and civil conflicts are sheltered in 9 official refugee camps and unofficially in migrant communities that span the length of the border. These number up to 130,000 living in the refugee camps (TBC 2013a, 16; UNHCR 2014) just over 50% of whom are officially registered with UNHCR. Additionally, close to 850,000 legal Myanmar migrants in Thailand have participated in the limited opportunity for nationality verification and documentation (TBC 2013a, 19) and a further estimated 1.5 million

undocumented migrants are working illegally in Thailand (TBC 2013a, 19), particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation[23].

Many of these communities, particularly those in the refugee camps, are well established having been resident for up to 30 years and consequently community organisations have an established membership base engaged in activism, as well as an enduring young population in need of educational provision across all age ranges. Others in the migrant sector are more transient and take advantage of the porous borders (or are taken advantage of) to traverse between sites of (perceived) financial advantage. Several authors have previously drawn critical attention to the misassociation of refugees with "dependent victims" (Zeus 2011, 256) and the policies of refugee camp structure that reinforce dependency to the detriment of community development (Oh & van der Stouwe 2008). This article emphasises the additional need to recognise the plurality of refugee and migrant experiences and motivations, and the variety of ambitions that can be found amongst those who have undertaken these journeys. This section highlights the multiple influences that communities along the border experience, many of which are beyond their control, with the aim of illustrating the ways in which a nomadic subject formation is fostered not only by the simple act of movement but in the expanded contact points that this movement provokes. While these experiences vary for different individuals and communities, they share the commonalities of nomadism and affect the goals of community education practices.

Along the Thai border the delineation of refugee/migrant categorisations may seem haphazard and has resulted in varying pathways for education. Those residing in the refugee camps may be registered with the UNHCR, or may not, while those beyond the official camps are deemed migrants while usually fleeing the same conflicts and persecution as those within. For many, particularly since the cessation of major third country repatriation programmes (Kaspar & Saw Yan Naing 2014), the need to find employment, however insecure, has prompted a move away from the temporary shelters which restrict independence of movement and livelihoods. Some ethnic groups, such as the Shan, have in the past been denied refugee status in Thailand despite their forced displacement and instead been deemed illegal migrants (Laungaramsri 2011):

[23] Given the fluid nature of the refugee and migrant communities and the difficulties in accurate monitoring, these figures are liable to variation.

> *For Shan we don't have any official refugee camp, so the children either have to go to the Thai school or the community school, but the Thai school doesn't allow them to go so they go to the community school. And when they finish from the community school they have no-where to go.* (Community educator, interview, Chiang Mai, 2014)

Additionally, ethnic identities and conceptual territorialisations for both the Shan and the Karen span the geographical boundary of Myanmar and Thailand and consequently allies and tensions may be found in parallel communities (Purkey 2010). Such distinctions between refugee and migrant, legal and non, direct the trajectories of learners of all ages: prior to 2012, for those young registered refugees who had hoped for third country resettlements, English language and international cultural exposure were broadly prioritised, while options for formal tertiary education were restricted on the assumption that young people would be able to take advantage of these opportunities once resettled in the USA, Australia or Europe (Zeus 2011). For those in the migrant sector schools, emphasis was often placed on learning Thai language and vocational skills that would support opportunities within the border towns, but similarly limited access to Thai tertiary education systems through interruptions in schooling and the limited possibilities for accreditation available through the migrant learning centres (Nawarat 2014; Purkey 2010). As one border community educator highlighted:

> *These young people, some are born on the border so they have no documents, no papers so they have nowhere to go [to school]. So these schools' objective is to provide education for those who won't be able to go to higher education in Thailand.* (Community educator, interview, Thai border, 2014)

The nomadism of individuals and communities without legal recognition in the form of identity documents and citizens' rights is then further reinforced by the lack of access to formal schooling systems. Since 2005 the Thai government had made attempts to promote alignment in the migrant learning centres that serve the primary and secondary education needs of transitory communities along the border, so that students might ultimately be able to transfer to Thai institutions (Nawarat 2012). Learning centres however have varied in their enthusiasm to this alignment, with teachers, many of whom have been politically engaged in advocating for democratic change in Myanmar, being seen to be more "interested in creating a new public knowledge for Burma"

(Nawarat 2014, 873) than to commit to delivering Thai state lesson plans. A priority of learning in the migrant sectors remains the construction of Myanmar-focused subjects, despite some efforts to align with Thai state institutions to allow some transfer between them.

In higher education, similar tensions in (re)positioning are evident. Efforts to support locally-led formal education institutions within refugee settings beyond the secondary level have not always met with support, as they are largely seen to represent a manifestation of ethnic nation-building in opposition to Myanmar and Thai state authority (Zeus 2011, 265). International partnerships, however, have gained traction in recent years with the Melbourne-based universities of ACU, Deakin, and RMIT offering combined distance and on-site diplomas in social sciences or 'Liberal Studies' (ACU 2013; Purkey 2010). These international interventions are seen as more palatable to outside audiences (donor and state alike) and hence more transferable, by circumventing the politicised associations of ethnic autonomy.

Consequently, in the two decades prior to 2012 many young people over the age of 16 found themselves with very limited possibilities for continuing education while simultaneously facing few prospects for secure employment (Oh & van der Stouwe 2008). Post-secondary community education, with its emphasis on community development and project management instruction, has provided an alternative space to build confidence for such young people, simultaneously providing a daily preoccupation to ease the monotony and uncertainty for those in confinement as well as supporting greater independence through encouraging (what is intended to be) transferable skills-building (Thako 2014). In so doing, such education programmes promote an adapted curriculum that reinforces the hybrid character of nomadic subjectivity:

> *These schools' objective is to provide education for those children who won't be able to go to higher education in Thailand. So in that school they have developed a lot of modules, but mainly it's taught in English. They teach English and social sciences, in English. But one of the subjects they have in Burmese in human rights. For human rights subject they teach in Burmese because the teacher is able to explain more and explain in the context of Burma than the foreign teacher.* (Community educator, interview, Chiang Mai 2014)

The issue of language as well as cultural exposure is a key feature of this learning environment, where refugee and community schools attract

international volunteers who contribute varied expertise, most typically in areas of social science with a distinctly ideological agenda:

> *On the border side in the refugee camps, for the Karen and the other ethnic groups as well, they have been taught in English so they are more flexible to use English than Burmese. So in the past 10 years the training has been running in English, and people who want to enter the course they have to have some kind of English level. For the material, there's a lot in English, but to run the training there are only a few staff available.* (Community educator, interview, Chiang Mai 2014)

> *And also because on the border we are more exposed to other country's situations and systems and there's a lot of models there we can learn, that's also part of it.* (Community educator, interview, Thai border 2014)

The influence of international actors and agencies complicates this space inserting a new raft of political agendas: so on the border we find right-wing American religious associations donating textbooks promoting creationism; celebrities, such as Angelina Jolie and Lilly Cole, visiting refugee camps and schools; private European donors demanding reduced teacher salaries as a condition of funding. However, once the moral benefits of supporting an alternative to the military junta appear to reduce, so too does funding along the border[24] as donors have shifted to increasingly funding projects within Myanmar.

Nonetheless, the inclusive possibilities of community education as operating outside linear boundaries of state practice as well as the attraction of international support have proved an appealing draw, particularly for those young adults who have experienced disruption in their formal schooling. While the vast majority of refugees are fleeing active fighting, the broader impacts of conflict also provide motivations to take flight. Some young people have sought out residence in the refugee camps precisely for the education opportunities they offer and the possibilities of continuing studies abroad. As one Karen refugee recounted:

[24] Many migrant community centres have seen vast reductions in funding, with many reporting only being able to budget six months into the future. Such shifts away from border funding have affected all social sectors, with the Mae Tao clinic seeing a complete withdrawal of funding by AusAid/DFAT (Mae Tao Clinic, 2013).

> *I became a refugee because I heard you could study [in the camp] and go to America. Actually I wanted to study a degree in America, because our education system is not very good. But I wasn't lucky. When I got there they had stopped relocations. So I stayed and studied there.* (Former refugee, interview, Karen State, 2014)

Such movements are not limited to those traversing the border: one Thai man from Mae Hong Son recounted travelling to Mae La Oon camp to take advantage of the English language classes on offer to refugees there, ultimately spending three years living in the refugee camp before returning to work in Chiang Mai. Others have been attracted to the camps to teach Thai language. While such subjects are a very small number in the camps, nonetheless the effect is to add greater diversity to the points of contact experienced. Additional variations are evident within the refugee experience itself, with one refugee, now a teacher, highlighting the effects on aspirations of differing experiences of confinement:

> *Growing up in the refugee camp is like being blind. There are two types of blind people: those who are born blind, and those who went blind later in life. Those who were born blind do not know colour, they do not dream. Young people who have grown up in the camps do not know how to dream.* (Community educator, discussion, Karen State 2014)

One of the goals of education in this context is therefore to encourage a sense of future, which is perceived to be aided by the use of material on active citizenship, community development and project management and human rights (Larlee 2014). As one teacher described her motivation for teaching such material: "*I would like to make their minds more broad*" (community educator, interview, Chiang Mai, 2014).

6.5.1 Alternative experiences of learning

During focus group discussions on both sides of the border, current young adult participants in community education courses (focusing on community development and youth leadership) emphasised the acknowledgement of and space for difference provided through participatory teaching methodologies in comparison to the authoritarian practices which pervade Myanmar state schools. Traditional learning practices as experienced through state schooling were characterised as producing formulaic, identikit citizens, capable of obediently replicating a predetermined, validated response:

> *It was only rote learning, with no critical thinking. // The government sets training for teachers and the teacher [repeats] to students. Students become literate, but there is no new thinking, we do not discover.* (Course participants, group discussion, Chiang Mai, 2014)
> *There's still a lot of negative discrimination [for ethnic students].* (Course participant, group discussion, Delta, 2015)

Likewise, the relationship between teacher and students was likewise characterised by fear, violence and a clear hierarchy of authority:

> *All students are afraid of their teacher* (Course participant, group discussion, Chiang Mai, 2014)
> *Students are not confident in themselves, they depend on one or two other people.*
> *Only a few students have confidence, so only a few students are elevated. // Students are always afraid and they are shy.* (Course participants, group discussion, Delta, 2015)

By contrast, community-based non-formal courses were highlighted as promoting respect for difference and providing space for discussion and debate between peers, including the freedom to disagree and contest singular authority. Interaction with teachers or facilitators was viewed as friendly with course content open for negotiation and adaptation:

> *We can discuss and ask questions, express ourselves freely. // We can be friendly with the teacher, and we can be the teacher too.* (Course participants, group discussion, Chiang Mai, 2014)

Training participants also drew attention to the singular source of information available through schooling (the state curriculum) in comparison with the variety of source material made use of in their courses, commenting "*We never learn these subjects [citizenship and human rights] in school*" (course participant, group discussion, Chiang Mai, 2014).

Conceding that enthusiastic responses may be expected from those engaged in active training courses, nonetheless the perception that such education practices provide an alternative to unsatisfactory prior experiences is evident. While current processes of education reform within Myanmar aim to break down such dogmatic practices and ultimately update teaching styles and pedagogies, the process is lengthy and subject to much contestation. Less formalised community education meanwhile is seen as more responsive to

diverse learner needs, as well as more connected to international trends in teaching methodologies and material (for better and for worse[25]).

With community education itself being viewed as a more learner-sensitive education experience, the added position of these practices on the Thai side of border allows for increased contact across multiple groups and greater ease of access to material. While there has always been contact across these two sites, the current climate of transition is drawing these communities into closer proximity, the consequences of which are explored further below.

6.6 Educational transitions

As highlighted above, Thailand has provided a location where Myanmar pro-democracy movements, human rights groups, women's organisations and alternative education providers have established themselves from within and beyond the displaced communities. This smooth learning site has therefore been associated with activism and efforts to promote social change:

> *I think the activists along the border also have a very important role to play because during the past 10 years we have been doing capacity building and lobbying and training, all this competency and women are more confident because we have been trained on the border for many, many years.* (Female activist and community educator, interview, Chiang Mai, 2014)

Consequently, many of these organisations have facilitated transits in both directions across the porous border. While the flow of information has always been multi-directional, there has historically been an assumption that the information travelling from Myanmar was largely testimonies of abuse, while Thailand provided the space for sharing knowledge (both internal and external) and learning skills, fomenting ideas and then formulating strategies (including education designs), that were then filtered back into Myanmar. Several civil society organisations, both those operating in Myanmar and in Thailand, have over the last decade brought participants (both students and trainers) out to Thailand for training, in order to take advantage of greater freedom of access to internet, learning material and training support, fewer restrictions on civil

[25] Marie Lall (2011) highlights the interventions of international organisations in shaping teaching practices in Myanmar, drawing attention to the widespread promotion of child-centred approaches to learning amongst cross-national networks as it at times meets with resistance amongst Myanmar practitioners who are concerned over the erosion of traditional cultures of respect for authority.

society advocacy and also reduced operating costs. This has included Myanmar-based post-secondary community education providers sending teachers to Thailand for internationally-supported curriculum and management training, who then return to dispersed regions in Myanmar. Such courses or workshops that bring participants to Thailand from varied regions of Myanmar create a space for contact across diverse ethnic groups where interregional travel within the country would be more challenging and attract greater attention. By placing all in a position of dislocation from familiar territory, attitudes and assumptions may lenify, diffusing potential confrontations. Whereas previously such physical transits tended to be from Myanmar to Thailand, now increasingly trajectories are found in the opposite direction. So community organisations in operation in Thailand and along the border region are now travelling to Yangon for seminars, workshops, networking and publicity events. These movements largely remain directed towards the metropolitan centres of Yangon and Mandalay, and are in part a reflection of the international and donor communities 'shifting base' to Myanmar from the periphery.

However, additional cross-border movements are also being made with more permanent aims. As refugee communities begin to make tentative plans for potential large-scale resettlements, small numbers are returning to the eastern states of Myanmar to position themselves in anticipation of such a move. While Myanmar has experienced incremental movements away from military dominance towards gradually more plural civilian dialogue, Thailand has witnessed the opposite trajectory. Having been subject to 12 (successful) military coups in the last century, the most recent took place in May 2014 with the military wresting power from the battered Pheu Thai government (HRW 2014). The exchange of power, however, looks set to be more durable in this instance with the military consolidating their position and announcing their intention to withhold elections for at least another year. Uncertainties arising from the political changes in Thailand have been evident, particularly as the new Thai Prime Minister and former general Prayut Chan-ocha met with Snr-Gen Min Aung Hlaing, head of the Myanmar army, to discuss issues of Myanmar repatriations (Saw Yan Naing 2015). Head counts conducted in the refugee camps by the Thai military in mid-2014 and greater restrictions in movement beyond the camps have increased anxiety and in an education context meant that some students have been unable to take up positions offered in community education courses beyond and across the border regions. Concurrently, reductions in monthly food rations within the temporary shelters (UNHCR 2014) have reinforced the precarious nature of

refugee residency and driven many to seek informal work in the border zones beyond the camps.

The change in political rule in Thailand has thus increased the sense of tenuous settlement and has further nudged border educators to look to Myanmar as the most likely site for their students to enact their futures. The last two years have seen a recalibration from it being in the best interests of students to align with Thai state curriculum to allow for pathways of transition in Thailand, towards renewed desire to align with the Myanmar state system in anticipation of return (Nawara 2014). Consequently new discussions around accreditation (for all qualification holders – at school, vocational or professional levels) are now increasingly intended to engage opportunities to return to Myanmar under more favourable conditions. However the prospect of resettlement has communities on both sides of the border concerned:

> *If they want to come back, what will be there for them?* (Education planning advisor, interview, Yangon, 2015)

> *People are talking about whether to send the refugees back, but the main problem is whether the place they are staying is safe enough for them to go back. So the organisations from this side understand very well that even though there is ceasefire, fighting is still going on and people are still moving.* (Community educator, interview, Thai border, 2014)

Refugee groups have consistently made clear their mistrust in the Myanmar government's peace processes (Hui 2013; KCSN 2014; UNHCR 2014). Nonetheless, as conditions in Thailand become less favourable, voluntary resettlements have been slowly increasing (although remain in very small numbers) as those from both the refugee and migrant communities along the border are choosing to return either to their original home communities, to designated resettlement sites (UNHCR 2014) or to urban centres across the country. This is accompanied by evident anxiety over accreditation and recognition for alternative learning experiences, particularly for those returning:

> *Actually from the government there is no plan for that. There's only one or two cases where [returning students] can continue their studies post-secondary [in the formal sector].* (Education advisor, interview, Yangon, 2015)

Consequently a number of young community education practitioners, who have been trained through refugee and migrant learning centres as well as the internationally supported community development programmes on the border, are returning to establish youth education facilities, particularly around the main cities of the eastern states (Hpa-an, Loikaw and Mawlamyine in particular). An assumption underlying preparatory efforts to support repatriation is that all members of the refugee communities will want to return to at least their states if not their villages of origin. However, many of the young people taking part in training courses on the border, who have invested in their education while in exile, express a desire to continue their studies in the metropolitan centres that offer more numerous pathways for their educational development and anticipated professional career:

> *These youth come back with different skills, they don't want to work in the rubber fields. They have soft skills.* (Education practitioner, discussion, Yangon, 2015)

This often means preparation for overseas study in the form of language classes and proficiency examinations, in order to be able to access subject options, such as international development, which are not provided in Myanmar tertiary systems. For some, then, who have been exposed to more fluid and broad ranging learning options and styles, the limited and strictly delineated continued learning options now presented to them, which restrict those with non-linear trajectories, are sufficient motivation to take flight. In other words, nomadic subject formation cannot be easily undone.

While internally many are arguing that the recent and ongoing reform processes are in fact resulting in relatively little substantial change (Lall 2015), there is a clear perception amongst these community educators that opportunities have emerged within Myanmar and that space now exists to openly teach community development and promote youth civic engagement[26]. Since 2012, these initiatives have begun to grow and include a strong focus on peer-led instruction as well as social enterprises in forms such as a youth-run café or resource centre, which bring together those returning from the border, and further afield, with those who have remained in Myanmar. The juxtapositions where individuals exposed to varying learning experiences overlap reveal evident contrasts in the priorities of their contexts. Most

[26] This is due in part to the relaxing of censorship and also the process of legislative reform more broadly. It should be noted however that this perspective refers to Myanmar's eastern states and not the western Rakhine region where intercommunal violence has resulted in greater restrictions and subordination of minorities.

notably, teachers and peers alike on both sides of the border were conscious of the fact that young people educated in the Thai border zones were stronger in English and in social sciences, particularly civics, while those educated in Myanmar systems were stronger in maths and hard sciences. The contrast provides a summary of the divergent education landscapes and resultant subject formations, and also underscores a potential consequence of nomadic (education) space through the haphazard expertise (and lack thereof) of volunteer, inexperienced and international teachers.

Likewise, such transpositions are not without consequences. Several locally-led community development education programmes operating in Mon, Kayin and Kayah States reported that their course graduates most commonly find employment with the local and international NGOs that are setting up operations in the urban areas of these states. Concerns are immediate over the potential NGOisation of community development leading to "intensified hierarchization", the subsuming of locally defined agendas and the prioritizing of paid community work (Costa 2014, 168-9) with one gender activist lamenting that in urban centres there was "*no volunteer spirit anymore*" (Gender activist and community educator, interview, Yangon, 2014). Additionally, the bypassing of state education systems in favour of a self-perpetuating supply of internationalised recruits risks doing little to support essential improvements in state systems while simultaneously deskilling government affiliated sectors. However, the challenges of providing alternative models are tangible where the state has been unwilling or openly hostile in supporting plural identity development. Questions may also be raised over the extent to which this internationalisation is more prevalent in the south east of Myanmar as a direct result of the cross–border movements and its nomadic subjects who provide an appealing working environment for donor-funded development resulting in uneven attention being directed throughout the country.

6.7 Implications for women's movements

With the assumption that such repatriations within Myanmar will likely continue and ultimately be formalised (TBC 2013a, 19; UNHCR 2013b) the question arises not only of skills recognition but also of how the learning experiences and citizenship ideals that these communities have been exposed to might affect their reintegration into a newly democratizing state as participating citizens. However cross-boundary trajectories are shaping social negotiations in transitioning Myanmar beyond the sphere of repatriations.

Likewise, for relocating organisations, new strategies of working are required. As such practices vary, a final example is drawn below from the women's organisations who have played a key role in promoting community education for social change as an illustration of contrasts that have been evident in both working styles and subject formation.

The feminisation of education, seen as a culturally appropriate occupation for women, resulted in many women activists having gained experience as teachers either in state schools or in the alternative education systems supported by ethnic opposition groups. For women activists, community classrooms were therefore a natural environment for campaigning for gender equality, mentoring young women and raising awareness of women's subordination enacted both through the practices of the military and authoritarian state and through cultural and religious traditions. As a result of the enduring social marginalisation of women, particularly within conflict, women's organisations were often viewed as apolitical within their communities (Laungaramsri 2011) and consequently were able to garner space for social work particularly amongst the young and in these traditionally feminised spheres of education and training, with little acknowledgement or oversight. Organisations were therefore able to gather and share information on what are evidently highly politically charged issues, including the state-sanctioned, if not to say actively promoted, use of rape and sexual violence against women in the armed conflicts (WLB 2014).

Nonetheless, within Myanmar prior to 2012 such learning environments were highly constrained and as a result, exposure to non-formal education seeking to promote gender equality and women's rights was more easily attainable over the border in Thailand. From the Thai side of the border this campaigning has historically been more politicised, taking advantage of the relative civil freedom of Thailand to engage in vociferous transnational activism. For some young women, including the activist quoted below, seeking out knowledge on women's rights and gender equality was in itself a motivation to take flight:

> *it's around 100 organisations that work for human rights and women's rights and different kinds of issues based in Mae Sot border. They always, every month, they organise a women's exchange, a youth exchange, so you can participate in that and we've got the chance more to learn human rights there. Even Mae Sot, under Thai government control, but you have more chance to learn human rights*. (Women's rights activist, interview 2016)

The border regions presented an opportunity for women's activism in supporting an environment of contestation where fixed definitions of gendered subject positions could be undone. These learning environments were also characterised by exposure to new material and discourses, thanks in large part to the availability of resources in Thailand and the presence of international organisations in the border regions, as training texts from varied sources were deployed in women's activist classrooms. As previously highlighted above, the social and physical upheaval that accompanies situations of conflict can result in the reification of social positions, particularly gendered hierarchies, through authoritarian practices that erode alterity. However, this upheaval, particularly in the migrations it engenders through displacement and exile, gives rise to an increased nomadism in the periphery which can offer spaces for the reformulation of gender roles. Nonetheless motivations for and experiences of displacement vary widely (Zembylas 2012, 165; Naples 2009), and opportunities to affect social change remain constrained:

> *In the border I can say it's only women from CSOs who can speak freely and we can practice more our gender equality in the CSO society. I don't think from the women that are not staying in the CSO area, they still have to survive through that discrimination against women, and even in their family, even their job area.* (Women's rights activist, interview 2016)

Likewise, within Myanmar women's organisations operating under the highly constrained environments of authoritarian rule were less able to openly deliver training, and consequently worked in more informal ways to build community relationships, taking a less oppositional stance and offering more individualised support to women seeking assistance, either in response to violence or in seeking leadership roles. Although women still remain vastly under-represented in peace processes, in legislation formulation and in government positions, nonetheless the work that women's community organisations were also able to do within Myanmar away from a political gaze has contributed gradual increases in participation and to their being positioned to now campaign overtly (Lahtaw & Raw 2012).

Recent internationalisation and an increased rhetoric of gender equality at a political level, combined with advocacy efforts on both sides of the border to raise the profile of women's concerns, have created a tentative recognition of the need for gender inclusivity. In the last three years cooperation has flourished between networks on opposite sides of the national

perimeters, which include the Thai-based Women's League of Burma (WLB) and the Myanmar-based Women's Organisation Network (WON) and the Gender Equality Network (GEN), leading one activist to declare "*we've broken that barrier between inside and outside*" (Female activist and community educator, discussion, Chiang Mai, 2015). As community organisations and funders alike have relocated from the border regions to Myanmar, new organisations have also been established, bringing further plurality to activist space with community education and training courses proliferating.

> *The country is moving forward to democracy and also the country is opening up space for both sides to be able to discuss and talk to each other, so the women's groups from this side also have good links now with the Burmese side*. (Female activist and community educator, interview, Chiang Mai, 2014)

The result has been jointly held women's forums, shared workshops and training, and report launches. However, in informal conversations with women leading training courses, it is evident that approaches have not always been mutually compatible. With increasing numbers of community organisations either delivering workshops or relocating entirely from the border regions to Kayah, Kayin and Mon States some local women's organisations have voiced concerns that the overt politicisation of women's issues can deter rural women from participating where there is still a fear of political engagement in militarised areas. The women's groups who have served these communities throughout the last decades have therefore developed subtle mitigation strategies to appease male and military opposition to women's civic empowerment, through building trust and relationships which may be threatened by the greater attention afforded by transnational campaigns.

These varying working practices are illustrative of the negotiations that necessarily take place in overlapping peripheries. While there may be caution or resistance to transposed ideologies, there is also a desire to connect to movements that previously seemed out of reach.

6.8 Conclusions

Paralleling the nomadic space of borderlands, non-state community education operates in simultaneous opposition and relation to the striated Myanmar and Thai state assemblages creating an alternative learning environment which is nonetheless relational. As Braidotti indicates, "margins and centre shift and destabilize each other in parallel, albeit dissymmetrical, movements" (2011a,

9). In the overlapping peripheries of contested spaces incremental movements can be seen in both directions, with relocated citizen ideals extending their reach while being increasingly exposed to striation. In the nomadic space of cross-boundary community education, particularly at the transitional late- and post-secondary age, strategies to subvert this stratification have been evident while also conceding to lenified stances. This nomadic navigation of conflict has therefore resulted in an alternative space for multiple subjectivities and subjects alike, giving way to possibilities for hybridity and "a creative alternative space of becoming" (Braidotti 2011a, 7).

This nomadic space is not however immune from encroachment by state agendas – on the contrary the borderlands are sites of contestations in which subjects are simultaneously claimed and/or delegitimised. This is evidenced in the competing interests in curriculum design and subject choices across migrant learning centres and vocational training sites, where decisions to align with Thai or Myanmar state curriculum or to use alternative material has implications for accreditation and the future direction of educational and professional movements. Navigating the encroachments into these simultaneously disrupted and smooth environments is challenging. The nature of borderlands is in their multiple contact points and intersections of influence, and the possibility for international engagement is explicitly sought out by some community organisations which choose to occupy this space rather than positioning themselves within Myanmar (although their members may). While the constraints are evident for education practices operating in these environments, opportunities are also apparent for alternative modes of subject formation to emerge beyond the boundaries of the state and through the blending of these multiple influences. Beyond the issue of recognition of learning, the kind of education that that students have received has shaped their plans for resettlement. Notions of citizenship formation are central to community education practices as choices are made (both intentionally and not) over the forms of citizenship that want to be represented. This alternative construction results simultaneously in "the unsettling of the old ground and its markers, and the attempt to introduce a range of political practices (democratic and non-democratic) that shape the identity of new polities in the context of its contestation by emerging groups and identities" (Robins, Cornwall & von Lieres 2008, 1073), resulting in the breaking down and reforming of power relations. The implications of these interactions are likely to become increasingly relevant, contingent on the outcomes of the forthcoming elections.

Part III: Feminist Learning and Activism in Transition

"To know whose voice is speaking, is the beginning of one's own voice"
(Bernstein 2000, xxv)

Introducing Part III

The implications of the gendered nature of learning practices in maintaining women's social subordination are met with counterpoints and contestations in the learning environments constructed by women's activist organisations. However, women's organisations are also navigating multiple influences and oppositions which include both national institutions and political transitions and also international development organisations, donors and transnational campaigns. The hierarchies of these influences are illustrative of the ways in which power structures and dominant discourses are replicated where it must be acknowledged that "this distribution of different knowledges and possibilities is not based on neutral differences in knowledge but on a distribution of knowledge which carries unequal value, power and potential" (Bernstein 2000, xxi).

This section therefore extends the analysis of the gendered nature of learning spaces to explore how women's organisations have mobilised community learning as a means of challenging gender inequalities within Myanmar, responding to the research question:

How is women's activism in Myanmar and the Thai border creating alternative spaces for transformative learning during Myanmar's period of political transition?

The chapters further relate to the research subquestions:

- *How are women's organisations responding to shifting constraints and opportunities within the period of transition and what are the consequences of these responses?*
- *What alternative presentations of female citizenship emerge from these learning sites?*

The section begins with extending the theoretical framework in Chapter 7 to conceptualise the position of women activists in contemporary Myanmar as they negotiate multiple shifts in national and international dynamics. Chapters 8 and 9 go on to highlight the ways in which community education practices have been mobilised as a dimension of women's activism and the alternative presentation of female citizenship that is encountered in these settings, focusing particularly on the engagement with and adaptation of concepts such as feminism and empowerment. Additionally, two supplementary Focus Studies highlight the complexities of class dynamics within the women's movements and experiences of leadership training.

Chapter 7

Development and activism: conceptualising spaces for women's activism in conflict and transition

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This chapter has been adapted from Maber, E.J.T. (*under review*) 'Conceptualising spaces for women's activism in conflict and transition'

7.1 Introduction

Women's activism takes multiple forms and is motivated by varied experiences and positions, creating a patchwork of women's responses to gender inequality across the globe (Wieringa 1995; Nazneen & Sultan 2014). Despite these variances, activist movements frequently draw on transnational connections and are influenced by global as well as local pressures, creating certain shared experiences of navigating these competing influences (Naples & Desai 2002). Additionally, situations of conflict can accentuate the variety, intensity and consequences of these competing pressures (Kaufman and Williams 2010). In Southern contexts, international development agencies are additionally implicated in influencing women's movements in multiple ways, including through relationships with national governments, the allocation of funding to civil society organisations, through programming and through delivering training designed to foster women's empowerment and leadership skills (Batliwala 2007; Connell 2014; Stroquist 2015).

This chapter presents a conceptualisation of the position of female activists and women's led organisations in translating and transforming development discourses within Myanmar drawing on Deleuzian notions of space (2013/1988) and Braidotti's articulation of a feminist nomadic subjectivity (2011a; 2011b) that emerges from experiences 'in-between'. In particular I highlight the role that non-formal education practices play in sustaining and advancing social movements as a site where these overlapping influences come to the fore in adapting and repurposing development discourses to create opportunities for transformative learning. I argue that furthering understanding of the roles that women activists and educators play, the strategies they mobilise and the challenges they encounter in engaging communities in dialogues about gender equality and social change offers a step

towards building more meaningful development partnerships that offer opportunities for contextualised knowledge and experiences to inform development practice.

I begin by positioning my discussion within current feminist scholarship on the relationships between women's movements and international development, followed by a brief outline of the context of women's activism in Myanmar. I then present a conceptualisation of the nomadic subjectivity of feminist activists navigating varied and competing influences. This is followed by an application of this conceptualisation by exploring two interconnected dimensions of women's civil society activism in Myanmar: firstly, relationships with the state and the implications of negotiating local, national and international influences; and finally the affective consequences of occupying this nomadic feminist position. While emerging from the broader pattern of research conducted throughout the research process, this chapter draws primarily on interviews with 16 women activists and leaders of women's CSOs in Myanmar and on the Thai border, which focused on their experiences establishing and leading their organisations, how these processes may have changed and the dynamics of working with different community, state and international partners.

7.2 Positioning activism in development

International rights mechanisms and global discourses of gender equality and women's empowerment, such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and now the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), can provide both momentum and leverage for civil society campaigning while also obfuscating the varied social and cultural dynamics of inequalities (Kabeer 2005; 2015; Harcourt 2010). However, while the practices of international organisations seeking to advance development goals have an effect on local women's movements, they are not the only avenue of influence that activists must navigate in seeking to advance women's rights and gender equality. Simultaneously, activists are balancing engagement with national state institutions, religious authorities, national and international legal frameworks with community and familial expectations and responsibilities. The combinations of these shifting and multi-dimensional influences, allies and adversaries necessitate varied responses from women's led organisations who are seeking to promote transformative change for women in their communities (Nazneen & Sultan 2014).

Women's organisations refract international, national and subnational agendas in multiple ways, through advocacy and campaigning to their governments, trying to change laws or enact new ones, as well as serving as sites of support, refuge or community mobilisation at a 'grassroots' level (Stromquist 2015a). These varied interactions and contextualised responses lead to a plurality in the positions and strategies of women's activist organisations (Nazneen & Sultan 2014, 5-6). Women activists leading civil society organisations are consequently positioned as intermediaries in diverse ways navigating between lateral influences, cultural and religious expectations and multiple scales of development. However, the formalisation of women's activism into NGOs and CSOs has also embedded them within bureaucratic processes, accentuated by global development platforms which can introduce tensions and constraints (Kuttab 2014; Naples 2002). Nonetheless, activist organisations are motivated by concerns that affect themselves and their communities even though the enactment of civil society mobilisation may have a distancing effect. In this sense, the space of NGO activism facilitates this intermediary position:

> the gendering of politics and the constructions of the public and private spheres give the NGO form a particular resonance with feminism. The fact that the NGO can move across the boundaries between insider and outsider, official and unofficial, or public and private explains both the proliferation of NGOs concerned with gender issues and liberal feminist investment in the form. (Bernal & Grewal 2014, 9)

As highlighted by Stromquist (2015a; 2015b) and Batliwala (2007) processes of learning and the flow of knowledge are central to these feminist activist spaces to draw allies to their transformative agenda and to challenge its opposition. Through constructing alternative learning environments women's organisations are able to share "knowledge that is pertinent to identifying the conditions of subordination that women experience and exploring how such conditions can be contested" (Stromquist 2015b, 313). In so doing, they not only "move across the boundaries" mentioned above (Bernal & Grewal 2014, 9), but also *between* constraints to expand spaces for contesting inequalities.

Women activists and their civil society movements are therefore important allies of development work for organisations attempting to

implement global objectives of women's empowerment and political participation. However, as underlined by Cornwall and Edwards (2014):

> the international development enterprise has been profoundly neglectful of the role that women's movements, small and large, have in making change happen to bring about greater gender justice and equality. (xi)

Part of the reason for this has been a tendency in development discourse to undermine the agency and plurality of diverse women in countries targeted for development assistance, instead presenting a homogenised view of Southern women's victimisation (Win 2004; Lind 2009; Sharoni et al 2015). This presentation serves the purpose of validating development interventions, legitimising the need for 'empowerment' to be conferred on subordinated subjects, and in so doing closes off avenues for reciprocal learning that might better inform practice and sustain relationships. Consequently, contextualised knowledge generated by community practice or through civil society activities and activism has little opportunity to set priorities for interventions, inform the design of programming or the orientation of development objectives codified in global frameworks (Connell 2014).

This neglect not only overlooks the contributions of women's organisations in facilitating social change but also denies the burden that is placed on women activists and educators in mediating development discourses for their communities. By failing to recognise the existing experience and expertise of women leading CSOs, the coloniality of gender constructions implicit in pre-formed notions of women in the global South risks being reproduced (Connell 2014; 2015). Within the practices of development assistance supplied by international donors, the burden of responsibility falls on local women to contextualise and translate concepts and interventions that have been formulated beyond their consultation (Khurshid 2016). However often this work goes under-recognised and under-rewarded, particularly in training interventions whereby participants are expected to cascade learning to their communities. Equally, the lack of opportunities for reciprocal flows of knowledge means that the hostility and opposition that women encounter from multiple sources when contesting strongly held social norms of gendered behaviour, is frequently unacknowledged.

7.3 Women's collective activism in Myanmar

Women's activism is well established in Myanmar and the border regions, with many women's organisations originating in the 1990s being ethnically aligned and often associated with the ethnic armed struggles for auto-determination[27] (Hedström 2016). As highlighted further below, by focusing on the needs of ethnic women and children in conflict, and attending primarily to culturally acceptable female domains such as education and healthcare, the women's organisations in ethnic regions were able to gradually establish a position for themselves that was less contested while they were viewed as operating in non-political spheres (Laungaramsri 2011). This then provided a platform from which to engage in more overtly politicised campaigns such as reporting on the systematic rape and abuse of ethnic women by the military (WLB 2014) or advocating for women's inclusion in the peace negotiations (Lahtaw & Raw 2012). Women in these movements were therefore navigating a distinct path between rejecting the frequently violent subjugation of women by the military state and simultaneously renegotiating gender roles within their ethnic traditions (Laungaramsri 2011). Cross-border networks of such women's organisations, and transnational connections to women in exile from the civil wars and military oppression facilitated the sense of a shared engagement in this renegotiation and provided a wider base for collective action. Community education was frequently mobilised as a way of sharing information within such networks, often involving cross-border movements, reinforcing the position of community education as occupying an alternative space for the recognition and renegotiation of identities.

With the expansion of both political and activist space, momentum also increased for women's organisations to mobilise for the inclusion of women's concerns within reforms, and to ensure participation in the processes of transition. There is therefore a sense of timeliness which accompanies the conceptualisation of women's activist space to ensure inclusion in emerging transitions that have previously not been accessible and has involved negotiating changing relationships across community, state and international dynamics. This chapter therefore primarily situates its discussion between the election cycles when women were navigating this emerging landscape of political change, during which period data gathering was undertaken.

[27] Examples include the Shan Women's Action Network or the Karen Women's Organisation.

7.4 Conceptualising spaces for activism and positions of nomadic subjectivity

7.4.1 Striations and smooth spaces

In Chapters 4 and 6 I highlighted the relevance of Deleuzian notions of space for education, particularly in the context of cross-border migration, both forced and voluntary. In extending this conceptualisation my intention is also to highlight the relationship between non-formal education environments and activism as complimentary sites for contesting social norms, particularly those that sustain gender inequalities. In this sense, an exploration of smooth space corresponds with feminist intentions to resist and undo the social hierarchies that maintain gender norms and perpetuate women's subordination.

Women's activism, particularly in the context of political transition, conflict and turbulence, is understood as creating opportunities for a *smooth* space which contests and intercedes with the *striated* hierarchies of structured state institutions. Striations are visible as more static and formal iterations of bureaucracy and while they may proliferate are nonetheless reluctant to change, which contrasts with the movement and flexibility that constitute smooth spaces. While smooth and striated space are understood differently they share a dialectic relationship whereby striations may encroach on the smooth, such as through legislative practices that encourage conformity to dominant frames, or smooth spaces may crystallise to reform delineated striations. Equally, smoothing can undermine the fixity of striated hierarchy provoking turbulence which can disrupt boundaries and expand smooth space. In this sense smoothness is associated with undoings, in which the firmly held assumptions of the striated nation state may be challenged, contested and reclaimed.

Of particular interest for exploring spaces of activism is the ways in which smooth and striated spaces may be in dialogue with each other, given that they "do not communicate with each other in the same way" (Deleuze & Guattari 2013/1988, 562). They are mutually co-existing spaces, reacting both against each other and in consort following "the principles of the mixture, which are not at all symmetrical, sometimes causing a passage from the smooth to the striated, sometimes from the striated to the smooth, according to entirely different movements" (Deleuze & Guattari 2013/1988, 562). The ways in which feminist movements therefore may resist and respond to subnational, national or international agendas through varying and at time simultaneous forms of engagement and opposition with state and development institutions reflect these dialectic asymmetries.

7.4.2 Nomadic subjectivity

The implications of these co-constructed spaces are advanced through Rosi Braidotti's understanding of nomadic subjectivity (2011a; 2011b). Deleuze and Guattari situate the concept of nomadism as itinerant figuration within the fluidity of smooth space:

> The primary determination of nomads is to occupy and hold a smooth space: it is this aspect that determines them as nomad (essence). (Deleuze and Guattari 2013, 478)

Braidotti extends this figuration to conceptualise a feminist reading of nomadism as the plural experiences of a "collectively assembled, externally related and multi-layered subject" (2011b, 210) in which "women's condition as other is turned around to be a powerful position of resistance and agency" (Käll 2006, 198). This nomadic subjectivity is informed by multiple points of contact with varied others, including through physical movements across cultural contexts, experiences of displacement, exposure to humanitarian aid, international NGOs or missionaries, diverse educational trajectories and through speaking varied languages. Nomadic subjectivity is therefore both a product of turbulence and a response to stasis which offers opportunities to disrupt dominant social norms that maintain gender subordination:

> Politically, nomadic subjectivity addresses the need to destabilize and activate the center. Mainstream subject positions have to be challenged in relations to and interaction with the marginal subjects. (Braidotti 2011a, 5)

Nomadism is reflected in the position of varied women activists in mediating and translating concepts across boundaries, between global discourses of rights and empowerment, state legislation and the realities of local communities. In contrast to a linear understanding of translation and localisation from one source to another, this conceptualisation of nomadism within activism emphasises the multiple sources, borrowings and contradictions that influence the creating of "a creative alternative space of becoming" (Braidotti 2011a, 7). Activists may therefore be perceived as 'mobile' in the sense that they navigate between these multiple scales of interaction and also between striations of state authority, opening up spaces for contestation and alternative constructions.

While women activists may share a commitment to enacting social change, they are diversely influenced by their varying religious and ethnic

identities, physical abilities, as well as their age and family situation. The diverse implications of a shared position of gender subordination open up avenues for women's experiences to inform their activism in multiple simultaneous directions:

> Both politically and epistemically, nomadic subjectivity provokes and sustains a critique of dominant visions of the subject, identity, and knowledge, from within one of the many 'centers' that structure the contemporary globalized world. (Braidotti 2011a, 7-8)

Creating new, alternative forms of (feminist) knowledge is therefore a central component of contesting gender norms institutionalised by the state and also of resisting globalising discourses which homogenise women's experiences. I contend that recognising the position of these activists and educators, their "ecosophical sense of community" (Braidotti 2011b, 210), and the multitude of influences that they mediate as well as the affective consequences they endure would allow for more effective and more horizontal collaborations.

7.5 Negotiating national and international influence

There is a tension between the imperative of international organisations to work to support women's equality claims and the oppositional position this often requires in terms of state practices, heightened in Myanmar during the years of the Thein Sein administration. Over the last five years, international organisations, and UN institutions, have sought to align themselves closer with state institutions and influence processes of reform, however in doing so they have jeopardised relationships with non-state actors who maintain oppositional stances to the government. This tension is also felt in reverse, by which activists in women's organisations as well as broader civil society groups simultaneously desire to connect with global frameworks that will add weight to their movements while also being mistrustful of the potential appropriation and depoliticisation of their goals. Activists commonly articulated this dual position, oscillating between resentment that international agendas obscured local priorities and a desire for greater support and connections, highlighted here by the director of a women's rights CSO:

> *We know that international pressure to our government is very important. But at the same time the CSOs feel that because they fully support the government they follow the government way,*

> *that's how the CSOs feel about that*. (Gender CSO director, interview 2014)

This mistrust has implications for the ways in which women's CSOs work with both international organisations and with the national government. The transfer of political power from military to elected civilian parties has been accompanied by a shift in funding dynamics as donors cultivate new relationships with state partners and eschew contentious activism in border regions. The consequences of this changing funding landscape for civil society have been felt by women's organisations on both sides of the Thai-Myanmar border, particularly those working on gender based violence, and has directed and constrained their activities, as one women's organisation leader highlighted:

> *We wanted to set up a shelter [for women fleeing abuse] but international donors don't want to fund a shelter so we just raise awareness … Before many CSOs could access international funding, but not now.* (Women's CSO director and trainer, interview 2015)

The same activist explained, "*before we could access them [international funds] without registering, but now we have to be registered to work with UN Women and others*" (women's CSO director and trainer, interview 2015). This shift in international involvement in Myanmar saw funding redirected from an oppositional stance towards the state prior to 2011, which supported many organisations allied with ethnic armed groups including ethnic women's organisations, now to organisations working in partnership with the state. As a consequence new and existing funders, including UN partnerships and the EU, have been reluctant to jeopardise burgeoning relationships with the government by supporting movements perceived as contentious, and have preferred to direct funding only to organisations that have been through a state registration process newly set up in 2014[28]. However, the requirement that civil society organisations be legitimised by the government severely constrains opportunities for activism, as summarised by the director of an ethnic women's organisation who had attempted to navigate the registration process:

[28] The Associations Registration Law was enacted in 2014, to immediate concerns that civil society space was being restricted and monitored (HRW 2013; Morgan 2015)

> *So for my organisation it's very difficult to register for government departments because we have the two sensitive words [in the organisation name] – ['the ethnic group'] and 'women'. And then my colleagues at other NGOs said when they apply for registration if you include 'women' the government will never give the registration. So, like for activists it's very sensitive.* (Women's CSO director, interview 2015)

In this way striations of state regulation have reinserted themselves into activist networks, reflecting the constant interplay and undoing of smooth and striated spaces as sites of turbulence are settled and recolonised. International agencies and donors are then seen as complicit in this process and further reinforce striations by adding to the bureaucratisation of movements that align with development goals. The comment also reflects women's categorisation as 'other', setting up the work to promote women's rights and empowerment as oppositional to state hierarchy. In this way, despite its seeming legitimation through global development discourses, women's rights work remains threatening to the social orders embedded through the striations of the nation state. Rather than promoting activism that might provoke a radical challenge to these orders or framing gender equality as central to reforms, much development work funded through international donor organisations instead reinforces the side-lining of women's activism as periphery. While it is hoped that activism might nonetheless provoke a reforming of alternative orders, the process may lead to compromises that undermine transformative intentions, reflecting Pittman and Naciri's observation that "being able to channel feminist voice effectively – allowing it to be legitimated and recognised by the state and in political society – does not necessarily lead to immediate change" (2014, 119).

In short, many groups attempting to resist authoritarian state regimes are boundaried into practices of engagement that risk legitimising the dominance they seek to contest and restricting women's activism to within predefined arenas which remain subordinate in social hierarchies. A case in point has been the petition to enact a Prevention of Violence Against Women (PoVAW) Law by Myanmar women's civil society organisations. In developing the proposed draft law, women's organisations undertook unprecedented public consultation and hosted community learning events at multiple locations across the country, in order to ensure the violence many women experience is understood and taken seriously both within communities and across legislative structures. However, after the extensive consultation

process, the draft PoVAW law has been successively restricted and depoliticised at each encounter with ministerial committees to a point that activists no longer feel the bill represents their intentions nor challenges the prevailing rhetoric of women's subordination. One activist involved in the formulation of the bill and it's lobbying concluded: "*We are so disappointed with that. We try to push back as much as we can*" (activist and CSO leader, interview 2016).

This process has been in stark contrast to other legal reforms restricting women's freedom to interfaith marriage that were pushed through parliament without debate amid a rise in religious conservatism. The legislative parcel for the 'Protection of Race and Religion', commonly known as the 'four bills', were rapidly passed through Parliament and approved in 2015 after support from ultra-conservative Buddhist factions, and codify state authority over women's choices including marriage between faiths, conversion and birth spacing (Walton, McKay & Mar Mar Kyi 2015). Despite advocating against the bills, activists have been unable to influence their approval, highlighting the different pathways accessible to those at different points in the hierarchy:

> *It's driven by a group of people playing with power…It's not related to their knowledge, it's political. The people that understand, they are not in the position to do these things*. (Activist and CSO leader, interview 2015)

The contrast between authoritarian and consultative legislation preparation reflects the institutional legitimation of violence against women which activists seek to contest through engaging lateral support. Sharing knowledge and learning is therefore an important part of this engagement, which will be further expanded below.

7.5.1 Repositionings

This tension is also a product of the intermediary position of many women leading civil society organisations in working both against and within state institutional practices, and is accentuated within a context of turbulence and political transition. Local civil society and community based organisations are concerned with ensuring the state performs more effectively to support women's rights, including access to justice mechanisms and political representation, and consequently in the period of political transition there is added motivation to cultivate emerging opportunities and seek influence

within formalised arenas. One activist explained her motivation to take up the position of joint-general secretary of the ethnic political party in her state:

> *Also I've got ideas. If I continue working for women's organisations, even if I work for women's organisation, I advocated to ethnic armed groups and political activists from ethnic political parties, like that, to increase women's participation, to adopt policy for women's participation in their party, I advocate. But it's not really successful, so I just changed my strategy, ok I will not advocate them from outside, I participate inside the party and also I am going to adopt the policy for the women. So my women's organisation they support me and they allow me to participate in the political party. Now I just became… the general secretary (3) at the ---- National Party*. (Women's rights activist, interview 2016)

In this way a smooth space may find openings for influence within formalised arenas through the movement of nomadic activists as new avenues open up through the political transition. Movement between institutions, including political parties, legislative bodies, media, or social sectors, increases points of contact and potentially supports the expansion of spaces for women activists to exercise influence and to learn from experiences that can inform strategies for action. Additionally, such movements occur in multiple directions, whereby activists who have gained experience in civil society organisations may seek to stand for office in political parties, as in the case above, or conversely having been party to institutionalised processes may abandon these practices in favour of greater independence and community mobilisation. Civil society groups can therefore not be conceived of as freestanding entities, nor activists as occupying singular positions, but rather as simultaneously resisting and remaking multiple discourses and practices which can result in varied responses. Positions are therefore constantly changing as activists shift strategies, as allies cease to offer support, or as new challenges and new opportunities are encountered reflecting the imperative for those occupying smooth spaces to "confront new obstacles, invent new paces, switch adversaries" (Deleuze & Guattari 2013/1988, 581).

Although seeking to work within state apparatus and political parties may offer opportunities to effect change from within, pushing the boundaries of striations, this is not perceived to be the case for international development, and development institutions have proved a greater challenge in this regard. Activists were commonly encountered who had previously worked for

international organisations particularly as gender or women's empowerment trainers, and these experiences informed their work and training as they adapted and redesigned training in their own community organisations, adding to a dimension of nomadism. However learning was not perceived to flow in the reverse direction, with development agendas characterised as unresponsive to the changing dynamics of local concerns:

> *As you know international NGOs always have their own agendas. I wish if they focus on the real communities, the real people's movements, mobilisation, [then] the development is not very slow. This is my wish. Because they [women in the community] are very active, they have motivation, but they don't have skills, they need technical support. Because there are a lot of issues in our country, a thousand issues, so the internationals can't focus on one issue.* (Women's community organisation leader and trainer, interview 2015)

Confronted with the inflexible position of development institutions, women's organisation leaders have instead sought ways to protect the smooth dynamics of their environments and resist the co-opting of their movements to serve alternative agendas, by defining their own working practices. Several organisations chose not to apply for funding, with one activist joking "*we're very bad at the funding things!*" (Women's CSO leader and trainer, interview 2014), preferring instead to define their own priorities for community work. The director of another women's organisation revealed:

> *We're laying out a way of doing it before we ask the donors for support. If we don't have [our own frameworks] then we have to use theirs.* (Civil society leader and trainer, interview 2015)

By rejecting the administrative infiltration of her organisation, the activist emphasised the importance of women's groups enacting their own pathways in the transitional landscape. In such ways there are opportunities for knowledge to flow back and inform development practices in international organisations should they be receptive to receiving it. However, frequently these opportunities for mutual learning remain unpursued and development practices continue to be unidirectional. Additionally, the rejection of donor funding by some organisations in order to protect independence, results in community activism being undertaken in addition to paid work, often in translation or teaching, which further stretches workloads. There are therefore tensions, in seeking greater independence from state and international

influence and balancing a desire for recognition and acknowledgement of women's rights work.

7.5.2 Solidarity in feminist mobilisation

For some women activists and their organisations, this ambiguous relationship with development institutions has contributed to the appeal of a transnational feminism that is viewed as more overtly political and therefore more resonant with the current priorities for women's mobilisation. As I go on to highlight in Chapter 8, discussions of feminist movements in the US and UK in particular were found in the women's political empowerment training courses being provided by local women's organisations around Myanmar's urban centres. Again reflecting the nomadism of their position, activists and educators made use of books and class material from the US that had been accessed during periods of study abroad, adding an additional layer of discourse to the bricolage of constructing alternative learning environments. These experiences are therefore informing the practices of women's led organisations in mobilising community education as a way to engage women and men in alternative learning environments which seek to promote social change.

Beyond these training contexts, activists have increasingly begun to identify themselves as feminists in the claiming of a transnational activist space that opens up opportunities for connections to broader movements, such as participation in global feminist forums. This space of feminist becomings has provided a context and connections with which to make sense of personal experiences and rejections of gendered oppression. Likewise, for these activists, engaging with feminism provides a sense of solidarity across borders which, as highlighted further below, may provide support for activists who feel isolated as a result of their positions: "*I think those feminism movements really drive us to move forward and to have our own movement*" (women's CSO leader and trainer, interview 2014).

During discussions and interviews with activists and feminist educators, women often recounted similar defining moments as children and young women questioning cultural practices of subordination. Cultural traditions dictate that a woman's *longyi*[29] should not be washed with a man's nor should women's clothes be placed on the washing line above those of men or placed in public view, but should be washed and dried separately in a private

[29]The longyi is the cloth traditionally worn by men and women in Myanmar in place of a skirt or trousers. Longyis for men and for women are made of different material and tied in different ways.

area of the house. In this way shame that is imbued in women's bodies as dirty and inferior becomes materially transferred to the clothes that cover them. However, several women recalled questioning this practice and in some cases challenging it:

> *I always questioned, because our longyi and our lower dress is never allowed to dry out in front of the balcony, but my uncle's longyi was drying out in front of the balcony, so I asked the question why do our things always come to the kitchen or the very dark areas where we have to dry our panties or our longyis. So people explained to me that men never got periods, women get periods and that is a dirty thing, that's why. And I got angry! Why is a period very dirty, it's just blood?* (Women's community organisation leader and trainer, interview 2015)

By taking a stand against such traditional practices, activists are marking out an alternative subject position that resists the gendered orders of culturally constructed citizenship ideals. The same activist, the co-leader of a feminist community organisation, highlighted the process of coming to identify as feminist as an explanation for this position:

> *I found myself feminist very young, even though I didn't know the name feminist, you know … So when I found out about feminism I evaluated myself and I found out I am feminist!* (Women's community organisation leader and trainer, interview 2015)

When asked how she found out about feminism she replied that she had been gifted an introductory book on feminism (in English) by a friend a few years ago. The anecdote reflects the relationships and exposure to alternative sources of learning that women's activist environments support. In this case social class dynamics play a role, in linguistic ability and friendship networks that present opportunities for nomadism in providing contact with new fields of experience. However, while experiences working with international NGOs, education abroad and linguistic diversity may set these activists apart from others in their communities, this is not necessarily to say that they occupy an elite financial position. Indeed many Myanmar women activists live in precarity and, like their male counterparts, have endured hardship, both informing and resulting from their activism, including displacement, imprisonment, verbal and physical attack, and lack of access to funds. Exposure to multiple influences and points of contact consequently sometimes comes through these very experiences of marginalisation that have resulted in exile and alternative

education experiences (as highlighted in Chapter 5). Nomadic learning may therefore take place through diverse experiences of mobility, and accessing this expansive activist space necessitates negotiating the varying local contexts for feminist actions.

7.5.3 Intersections of identity: complexities of class and nomadism

Drawing attention to the collective action of women's movements also calls into question the ways in which the intersections of social disadvantage may be (un/)acknowledged and reflected within such movements, reflecting Yuval-Davis concern that "we cannot homogenize the ways any political project or claimings affect people who are differentially located within the same boundaries of belonging" (2011, 4). The ways in which categories of social difference are "mutually constitutive" (Yuval-Davis 2011, 4) is already apparent in educational settings (Chapters 4 and 6), where gendered experiences of education are also interwoven with issues of ethnicity, religion, language of instruction and (dis)ability. Such considerations also have implications for women's activism, and for the conceptualisation of nomadic subjects advanced here.

Notions of class and privilege can be complex within social positionings in Myanmar. The decades of oppressive military rule have contributed to widespread material disadvantage and many who were university students during the political uprisings of 1988 have endured arrest, torture and imprisonment as a consequence of their participation in democracy movements. There is therefore a clear distancing amongst activists from those elite aligned with the military regime. As one women's rights trainer highlighted during extended discussions, 'elite' women were typically identified as the wives of senior military and political figures:

> Patriarchy doesn't mean only the dominance of men. It also means the dominance of a privileged class. In any society, not only men, but also women with high status - socially, economically, and politically - can take dominant roles. As they are from a privileged group, they won't consider the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized. It is also a form of patriarchal practice. Therefore, even if there is a quota system for women to participate in parliament, if those women are from privileged groups – such as the wives of authority figures and the daughters of crony men - it cannot solve the problems of all women, or the issues for women who are marginalized and have been silent for a long time. It is

> still encouraging the power of patriarchy. (Women's rights trainer, 2015)

Feminist activists therefore identify a clear rejection of elite co-optation of their movements under the guise of women's participation in prominent roles. However, a concern for feminist leadership is that the number of women associated with the pro-democracy and women's rights movements, who are seen as more likely contributors to voicing women's varied and plural concerns, remains very low:

> Women from advantaged groups – who are wives of authorities, daughters of privileged groups and elite – are more likely to become candidate in 2015 election. Who will represent women from ethnic areas, conflict affected areas, women with poor economic status? Who will raise a voice for their suffering? A lot of women in armed conflict areas are being exploited as sexual objects and raped by the armed forces. Which candidate will consider them? (Women's rights trainer, 2015)

This doubt over representation reflects broader notions of authority and difference within women's collective activism. While there may be an understandable rejection of identification with elite social groups, nonetheless the extent to which many women activists might be understood as representative of their communities is subject to limitations. Here, conceptualisations of nomadism help reveal women activists varied positions that illustrate unease with social categories of class.

As the state has been hostile to rights-based endeavours, trajectories into leadership within the women's movement have been plural: some women activists have taken up positions within international organisations, either prior to or as a result of community based work; others have been the recipients of international awards and scholarships to study abroad; others have fled conflict in their ethnic regions or been displaced by economic development schemes; others still have gained prominence through religious institutions. Many combine elements of these experiences and more. Reflecting the polyglot formation of the nomadic subject, they speak their ethnic languages, Burmese, Thai, Chinese or English, and multiple combinations of these[30]. Consequently, they are used to borrowings and overlappings of linguistic signifiers. Indicative in this is the interaction and

[30] See also Maber (2016a).

synergies that come from relationship building within varied contexts, with varied subjects and across varied languages – "the effect of the constant flows of in-between interconnections" (Braidotti 2011a, 17-18). While these women activists may reject an identification as elite, therefore, their experiences of nomadism allows them to span social settings and experiences.

Nonetheless, these same experiences which may engender nomadism, even through hardship and deprivation, create a potentially distancing effect with individuals and communities whose trajectories have not been so varied. Consequently, as further highlighted below, activists and educators returning from the Thai border, although having fled conflict as refugees, have found returning to their ethnic states to engage in community activism revealing of these divisions.

7.6 Affective consequences of nomadic subjectivity

In attempting to undermine the hierarchisation which maintains women's subordination activists face substantial opposition, not only from state authorities but from those across communities and religious institutions who resist challenges to accepted gender orders. Many female activists have consequently been subjected to harassment and intimidation, increasing as internet and mobile phone access has expanded (GEN 2015a). The examples of quite public abuse that these women have been subjected to therefore undermines attempts to reduce the fear and insecurity that is articulated as a reason for not engaging in politics or voicing support for rights campaigns at a more local level. There are therefore affective consequences of occupying this nomadic subject position.

Widespread violence against women and girls takes multiple forms, including intimate partner violence, rape by state military in conflict areas, trafficking, assault of young women during festival periods and rising cases of child abuse. Knowledge of the intricate forms of violence that women experience and the testimonies of abuse is embedded within the women's networks and community based organisations who have long documented cases and published research reports on the prevalence of violence (see for example GEN 2015b; KWO 2015; SWAN 2002; WLB 2014). For these organisations, learning environments within the community focus on counselling skills and providing information and support to access justice mechanisms within a judicial system hostile to women's claims. Nonetheless, even with this more expansive approach to countering violence against women, several women trainers spoke of feeling overwhelmed and helpless

when faced with the nature of abuse, as one trainer expressed: "*sometimes counsellors need counselling, you know?*" (CSO director and community educator, interview 2015). Greater attention is warranted to the emotional burden placed on community educators and gender trainers as mediators of contentious and sensitive concepts, which can be neglected and exacerbated by international organisations seeking to promote training activities. The institutionalisation of violence against women is maintained through striated state reinforcement of subordination, and its enactment becomes part of maintaining orders and hierarchies. Disrupting these ingrained practices therefore requires a radical transformation of gender orders, which is subject to substantial resistance, and the constraints placed on women's activism may limit the potential for such a significant shift.

Likewise, in addition to the hostility and opposition that activists encounter in their advocacy work with the state, activist-educators similarly encounter community resistance to contesting gender norms. One activist who had been trained in the border areas highlighted her experiences delivering training in Myanmar in 2012:

> *I went to the village and I gave training for the women's rights protection laws, you know you have the rights, this law protects your rights, if your husband abuses you you can report to the police or to the lawyer or to the women's organisations, I explained that, but … women complained to me. 'Why do we have to report to the police? It's culture! We have to serve for our husbands. If we don't want to serve our husbands like a servant so you shouldn't get married*!' (Women's rights activist and trainer, interview 2016)

Turbulence is by its very nature upsetting and challenging social, cultural and religious conventions can be provoke emotional responses, reflecting Deleuze and Guattari characterisation of smooth space as "a space of affects, more than one of properties" (2013, 567). In creating learning environments that disrupt conventions, activist-educators have to navigate these affective consequences, which may vary on different sides of the border and necessitate alternative strategies to garner acceptance. The same activist continued:

> *The first time we met that challenge, that even women don't accept our message, so we tried to say in another message indirectly, now they became more understanding and they started to accept this opinion.* (Women's rights activist and trainer, interview 2016)

Cultural expectations of women's roles extend not only to leading activists involved in formal politics but also to female trainers who are similarly required to balance their position within their family and communities, reflected by one young trainer who revealed:

> *Even me, some of my uncles tell me, why are you so interested in politics? You are a woman, if you want to be a teacher, be a teacher, don't be participating in politics like that, they tell me like that.* (Women's political empowerment trainer, interview 2014)

Occupying this blurring that goes beyond what is expected, from a woman and from a teacher, therefore positions women activist-educators as transgressing accepted codes of behaviour which leaves them liable to reprimand and sometimes overt threats. Additionally, the vulnerability of unpaid female community teachers residing in insecure accommodation in militarised areas was underscored in early 2015 when two Kachin volunteer teachers were raped and murdered while working in Northern Shan State. The incident struck a chord with many female trainers, with one expressing: "*for us as a volunteer teacher, we become very fearful to go to the conflict areas*" (women's empowerment trainer, interview 2015). Cross-border movements have likewise been fraught with risk, leaving those pursuing alternative education opportunities equally exposed to risk:

> *I came back to Burma and I brought some young students, women, to start the young women's leadership programme, from Burma to Thailand. On the way the government and the ethnic armed groups are fighting so there were many challenges for me at that time.* (Women's rights activist and trainer, interview 2016)

The turbulence accentuated by situations of conflict, displacement and political transition which may create openings for unravelling exclusion in certain areas therefore also simultaneously exposes women to increased risk of violence, hostility and harassment underlining the diversity of encounters in transitional space.

7.7 Drawing conclusions

Global frameworks such as CEDAW tend to be based on individualised notions of citizenship rights, whereas for many women in the global South relational and familial dimensions of gender equality are primary concerns (Pittman & Naciri 2014, 119; Nazneen & Sultan 2014). Women's CSOs rely on garnering

support and allies in order to be able to apply pressure to facilitate changes, particularly at a state level. While international organisations and donors can be powerful allies in providing this support, it is local communities who sustain women's organisations as the motivation for their activism. However, priorities for women in Myanmar's varied communities, such as land rights, the impact of mining projects or contesting military violence against ethnic women in conflict areas, may be both shared and diverse, and are often oppositional to state and donor agendas. Women activists are therefore negotiating between international rights frameworks and development goals, which present a more homogenous and individualistic notion of women's inequality, and diverse experiences of subordination while mindful of the relational implications within communities. Additionally, navigating shifting relationships with the state, at times oppositional and at times complimentary, requires varied strategies and innovation.

These shifting positionings can be viewed as the conversations between smooth and striated spaces. The smooth space for activism is a fluid and dynamic space which reacts to changing influences and actions from multiple, sometimes opposing, directions. In navigating this space, activists are subjected to multiple influences from international, state, religious and community sources which both invites and creates a nomadic subject formation. A feminist nomadism therefore emerges both as a response to the subordination which women experience through hierarchical state striations and through the multiple points of contact that activists encounter in navigating these striations. Activists of the women's movements therefore make use of a smooth space constructed simultaneously in opposition to and in between the striated endeavours of nation-building, and in so doing maintain nomadic subjectivity (Deleuze & Guattari 2013; Braidotti 2011b; Laungaramsri 2011).

The turbulence caused by situations of conflict and displacement can provide openings for activism in disrupting the reach of state striations. The border regions have provided areas for women's activism to take hold, with a proliferation of CSOs working for women's rights and offering community education environments. Such border areas further accentuate nomadism through linguistic diversity, exposure to new people and new learning environments and an unsettling of conventions. However, such spaces are also vulnerable to violence in the reassertion of hierarchies. Beyond the border regions, activists are also subject to violence and harassment through their work in community education, legal advocacy and political engagement as they threaten accepted social orders. Feminist activism in transitional contexts

therefore involves a constant process of renegotiations through which activists are encountering new allies and oppositions. Recognising this distinctive position that activists and women's CSOs occupy and the challenges they face allows opportunities for international development organisations to learn from their contextualised experiences and potentially forge more effective partnerships in advancing gender equality goals.

Chapter 8

Finding feminism, finding voice? Mobilising community education to build women's participation in Myanmar's political transition

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This chapter has been adapted from Maber, E. J. T. (2016a) 'Finding feminism, finding voice? Mobilising community education to build women's participation in Myanmar's political transition.' *Gender and Education.* 28:3, 416-430.

8.1 Introduction

> *Where is equality? Where is justice? Where is fairness? Where is the voice of the poor, marginalized, and uneducated people?* (Female activist-educator, 2015)

The quote above reflects the views of one woman educator and activist teaching political empowerment, gender equality and women's rights to civil society members in conflict affected regions of Myanmar. This desire to amplify the concerns of her community and ensure voices are heard illustrates the feminist undertakings of many women activists in an environment of nascent transitions. The same activist continued "*I approach [training] from a feminist point of view, not from my race or my religion*." While many international gender training practices present a homogenised and de-politicised construction of womanhood (Cornwall & Edwards 2014:19), this chapter highlights the practices of a small number of Myanmar women's groups that identify as feminist and that offer alternative formats to encourage women's participation in the current reform process. I therefore seek to explore the role of community education within the women's rights movement in Myanmar as a site to support activism and the extent to which the recent increased engagement with the rhetoric of feminism is illustrative of reactions within women's civil society groups. In so doing, I base my discussion on three main premises. Firstly, that in this context adult community education offers an alternative site of learning which has been mobilised by civil society and women's organisations as intended to be both subversive to authoritarian state practices and transformative in its agenda. Secondly, that the women activist-educators who lead community education and training initiatives

occupy a distinctive position through which they are translating, adapting and localising ideas, course content and training texts. These women simultaneously combine experiences from multiple sources and contacts while also mediating international influences. Finally, that in Myanmar these sites have become increasingly politicised and 'feminist' in their position and in the content of education initiatives. From this starting point, I explore the problematic role of international training and the significance of a new local language of feminism that is being employed by women activists. The intention is to highlight the local responses to transnational movements and global agendas, specifically through the adaptation of feminist concepts and terms for Myanmar's current transition period. This chapter emphasises the role of women activists and educators in mediating this process and considers their position as nomadic subjects in constructing their own identifications of feminist approaches to learning and to social change.

8.1.1 Positioning the research in context

Authoritarian rule and active civil wars have rendered Myanmar a turbulent site for social transformations. Despite the constraints and the brutal consequences of opposing authoritarianism, democratic opposition to military rule has supported civil society activism that has propelled activists, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, into positions of leadership. Like their male civil society counterparts, the majority of women activists who are now leading women's organisations and networks have invariably endured the repercussions of their position, from exile to imprisonment, for pro-democracy activism, for ethnic alliances and in some cases for family associations. This adds both to an atmosphere of mistrust in the current rhetoric of change and a sense of caution and fear amongst leaders and younger activists alike. However, political transition has nonetheless opened up spaces for negotiation. Since the process of democratic reform was formally instigated in 2011, after half a century of military rule, Myanmar has witnessed rapid albeit somewhat superficial transformations. Underlying the visual markers of 'progress' (such as the proliferation of mobile phones, newly imported cars, and Yangon's rising skyline) are complex social renegotiations through which historically marginalised groups are seeking to gain a space for inclusion to effect meaningful change amidst the rhetoric of political and economic reform. For the women's rights movement in this context, the multiple networks of local women's organisations are claiming a new space for political engagement through peer education and community mobilisation while navigating evolving

agendas including the increased international attention and available (albeit conditional) funds which have accompanied the transition.

However, there is an increasing disillusionment emerging with the processes of reform and concerns are growing that institutionalised hierarchies are merely being replicated. This context for women's equality movements reflects the timeliness of activism, highlighting the urgency of mobilisation for women in this first cycle of civilian government in the lead up to the elections of late 2015. Although women's organisations in Myanmar and the border regions have been active in seeking to raise the profile of women's concerns for the last twenty years at least, it is only in recent years that widening transnational links have connected women to a global movement and the discourses of international feminisms have found their way into training practices for empowerment and feminist leadership. Movements which have long been political are now being understood overtly as such, and momentum has gained finding a new authoritative space to promote women's political activism, coupled with the desire to 'create something different'. The extent to which community education has been mobilised as a vehicle to generate support for the women's movement is explored here as a key resource available to women activists and educators.

This chapter extends the discussion introduced in Chapter 7, outlining the distinctive position of non-formal community education as a means of knowledge sharing, bringing together a critical feminist perspective to education and development interventions, particularly as they relate to empowerment (Batliwala 2007; Cornwall & Edwards 2014; Stromquist 2015), with a conceptualisation of the nomadic position experienced by the women who are leading women's rights focused civil society organisations and who are responsible for the transmission and transformation of material. In so doing, I draw particular attention to the discourse of empowerment as a desired development goal (Batliwala 2007; Cornwall & Edwards 2014; Stromquist 2015).

For adult learners, community education offers spaces for learning where access to education has been interrupted or restricted and has been mobilised as a site to exchange learning on areas forbidden or unavailable in the highly censored state curricula (including at universities) or media. So post-secondary education and training initiatives frequently adopt a wilfully subversive position to state authoritarianism through the teaching of human rights, women's empowerment and social justice (Maber 2014). Women's led organisations, which have been prominent in leading community education practices in areas of conflict and displacement, have used these sites as means

to promote an understanding of women's inequalities in society and awareness of their rights, amongst female and male community members. Such practices have then been used as a platform to campaign for social change and to advocate for, amongst others, increased participation in the processes of political transition, for legislative reform that recognises women's rights and for women's protection from violence (particularly military violence in conflict areas). These education sites contrast with workshops and training courses delivered by international development and education organisations[31] which are often short term and delivered in English following an abridged 'training of trainers' model that introduces generic rhetoric of gender and women's rights mechanisms. However, many educators in the women's movements have attended these courses and may make use of the concepts introduced while assessing their relevance for their community contexts. Consequently, I suggest that the women leading these activist and educational endeavours which are oriented to women's equality occupy a distinctive nomadic position in mediating internationally informed perspectives on women's rights and increasingly introduce a more overt discussion of feminism. Along the way language and terminology are adopted, circumnavigated and/or repurposed as "site[s] of symbolic exchange" (Braidotti 2011a, 40). However as highlighted in Chapter 7, margins and centres never remain in stasis but "shift and destabilize each other in parallel, albeit dissymmetrical, movements" (Braidotti 2011a, 9). Women activists are therefore encountering new challenges and threats which undermine their efforts to enact social change.

For the purpose of this chapter data is largely drawn from a small selection of interviews conducted in 2014 and early 2015 with 14 women leaders of community-based and civil society organisations which use education as a means of promoting social activism. These women come from

[31] These organisations have in Myanmar included the gamete of international agencies including UN institutions such as UN Women, UNFPA and UNDP, development organisations such as World Vision, Care and Oxfam, nationally aligned education institutions such as the British Council and the American Centre and smaller charitable and religiously associated groups. Women's empowerment training courses have been funded by donor governments including Canada, Norway, UK, Australia, USA and the EU and by funders such as the Open Society Foundation and the World Bank. The purpose of this research is not to expose weaknesses in individuals or specific organisations, so programmes are not identified here, also with the intention of protecting the anonymity of research participants. However, it is acknowledged that not all of these organisations or the interventions they provide are the same and while there are limitations to the international model of women's empowerment individual initiatives do vary and are not automatically assumed to be without benefit.

varying ethnic and religious backgrounds and have experienced varying trajectories to their current positions of leadership. To reflect the dual role that these women occupy, I employ the term activist-educators to represent their position. Additionally, data is drawn from the mapping exercise conducted in mid-2014 with 28 women-led organisations which gathered data on the organisations and the content of courses covered.

8.2 Seeking a feminist education

In the recent years of transition, the space for civil society has considerably expanded leading to an increased number of organisations that attend both to women's rights and to gender equality more broadly (including LGBT and disabled women's groups) beyond an identification with ethnic alliances[32]. However, old and new organisations alike have mobilised community education and training, increasingly as a way to educate others beyond their member base and to highlight the need for gender-sensitive and inclusive approaches to cross-sectoral issues. The sections below explores the ways in which the international community has influenced these civil society movements, beginning with a brief look at the discourse of women's empowerment that is often propagated through INGO training initiatives. It goes on to explore how women activist-educators have responded to exposure to this training and in some cases reacted against it.

8.2.1 From empowerment to feminism

As Cornwall and Edwards (2014, 9) point out, *empowerment* has moved a long way from its feminist underpinnings of the 1990s to now being a ubiquitous term in the context of development interventions and no more so than in the environment of adult education and training courses[33] (see also Batliwala 2007; MacKenzie 2009; Kabeer 1994). The result risks perpetuating a homogenising and depoliticised construction, insufficiently contextualised to

[32] This is in part due to the response to Cyclone Nargis which struck in 2008, with many civil society groups forming to fill the void of inaction on the part of the military government, and then following the relaxing of restrictions by the civilian-led government in 2011.As part of this research project a mapping survey of local organisations delivering women's empowerment training was conducted in 2014. Of the 28 local organisations included, 14 had been established since 2008.

[33] Many such courses are set up along the 'training of trainers' model to 'cascade' replications of a desired goal of emancipated womanhood and suggested steps for her achievement.

the needs and concerns of the women targeted[34], and one which diverts attention from the plurality and the priorities of the women's movements (Ghose 2010; Dunne 2009; Khoja-Moolji 2014). Many of these priorities are more contentious and more oppositional to state authority than is palatable to international donors concurrently engaged in manoeuvring for bi-lateral partnerships and trade agreements in the same countries that are the object of empowerment programmes.

Simultaneously intersecting and paralleling these practices however, are alternative movements within local women's organisations and networks that are mobilizing community education as a platform to challenge both social norms that reinforce women's subordination *and* the oppressive state institutions that give these structure (including military, legal and political bodies) (Ghose 2010). To some extent then, the international language of empowerment has provoked a local language of feminism in response. My aim here is therefore to highlight the work undertaken by women activists and educators in retrieving the feminist origins of empowerment while also exploring an uneasy navigation with feminist discourse itself.

8.2.2 Voices muted, muffled and masked

While international connections are seen as valuable, there is a strong sense that the local space, and by extension local feminism, is distinct, and frequently misunderstood by outsiders, with one activist-educator highlighting: "our women have their own leadership skills but they don't notice that" (female educational civil society leader and activist-educator, 2014). One of the frequent criticisms encountered from Myanmar women trainers is that they get invited to participate in international training events that are perpetually introductory, with no progression to further learning, and they feel insulted by the lack of acknowledgement of their expertise. Several women leading civil society organisations expressed this frustration, suggesting that training initiatives may be misidentifying participants for their workshops and also over attributing the relevance of their content. One leading community educator who develops local language training material and tailors courses on sex and sexuality education for marginalised women, a topic entirely absent from

[34] The image of women as targets of empowerment is deliberate, suggesting the misrecognition of empowerment in development discourse as something that can be *done to* women, rather than a multiple and varied process that women might undertake on their own or with others as suggested by Cornwall and Edwards (2014), Batliwala (2007), Kabeer (1994). The question also naturally arises of which women are being identified as such targets.

standard gender training workshops, expressed exasperation that "*these gender specialists should listen to me and use this sexuality [training material] in their training*" (female civil society director and activist-educator, 2015). Such comments betray the irritation of highly experienced activists and educators leading civil society organisations, and in several cases standing for parliamentary office, with the labels of 'expert' and 'specialist' that are attached to temporary appointments in their countries. Likewise, educators were very conscious of the privileging of these perspectives, not only on the part of the international community but also by national governments and course teachers alike:

> *What [international agencies] do wrong is they introduce a package that we should use here. And what people here do wrong is they need to think and adapt more. They always think international ideas are better than ours so they don't think about our context and how they can adapt.* (Female civil society director and activist, 2015)

The short term and introductory nature of many empowerment, leadership and capacity building courses at an international level is also not responding to the need for more considered, varied and subjective learning environments for adults at a local level. Likewise, another activist-educator emphasised the homogenising nature of standardised empowerment training that does not reflect the diverse constituents of women:

> *All women are affected by women's inequality, however women are different and international training courses aren't reflecting this. Professional women, but not [those] in politics – teachers, health workers, management et cetera are also affected by casual violence and harassment.* (Female civil society director and activist-educator, 2015)

Rather than a deliberate insult, such scenarios highlight the poor model of both gender learning and gender-sensitive practice being projected in international development spheres. Additionally they risk providing a replicated model which traps gender discussions within such neatly packaged boxes under the descriptors of women's empowerment, leadership or capacity building which do not serve the demand for inclusive discussions of gender roles and a shared alliance for social transformation.

A clear doubt was expressed by some of those interviewed who had participated in 'training of trainers' women's empowerment courses offered by international organisations and were now conducting community based training of their own. Speaking of the workshop style of short training initiatives one educator reflected:

> *And also these months, I've been thinking about 'are these trainings really effective?' I've had that question in my mind. Because there has been like a lot of trainings but I don't know, I don't feel like there's a change at all*. (Female activist-educator, 2015)

Such doubts may be common to trainers and educators, where change is rarely immediately visible and where it does occur is longer term and therefore unlikely to be tangibly connected to training input. However, it is noticeable that trainers conducting this model of workshop highlighted this concern rather than community educators who worked more systematically with community members. Speaking of her role as a workshop trainer, one educator who had previously worked for an international agency and was now running her own community education programme highlighted further unintended consequences of failing to provide responsible and context-sensitive training:

> *I conducted lots of gender training [when I worked for the international organisation]. Women like it, men don't like it. So when we leave, they fight.* (Female civil society director and activist-educator, 2015)

Such comments highlight the potentially damaging effects of the lack of continuity in training courses, further articulated by another empowerment course trainer:

> *I think the problem is the follow-up. Because most of the programmes are running with the funding, and then when the funding finishes they finish, just stop. So we can't really follow-up. They might want to do something, right, after the training when they've got all this training, and now what? But we cannot support them and they cannot find other support, financially. We are very limited, you know?* (Female activist-educator, 2015)

Another tension lies in the fluctuating allegiances of donors. In opening up possibilities for political engagement, the move from military rule to

(quasi)civilian-led government has dramatically shifted international involvement in Myanmar, particularly in the support offered to civil society movements. The congregation of political attention and international actors in the urban centres of Yangon and Nay Pyi Taw (and to a lesser extent Mandalay), is leaving organisations in the periphery – the rural, ethnic and border regions that have been erstwhile homelands of movements for democracy, civil rights and peace – simultaneously underfunded and overlooked, as one teacher of women's political empowerment courses highlighted:

> *Because all the things are happening in Yangon and in Nay Pyi Taw, so we don't really see the women coming out from the very rural areas… For example, when I travelled to Kachin State I saw many young women really active in their fellowship programmes and from their church and things like this. But they don't really seem to come out from that atmosphere and that environment you know? I mean nobody hears their voices.* (Female activist-educator, 2015)

Likewise, for some, the push to promote women's political participation and educate voters, while valuable, is obscuring other priorities in the women's movement, the most commonly articulated being livelihoods, land use and gender-based violence. A sense of resignation, if not resentment, is fuelled by the current donor preference for funding election-oriented projects, which amplifies the lack of control that women leading community-based and/or civil society organisations feel in being able to respond to needs identified by the communities rather than by international funders. Even an emphasis on the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which might logically be understood to connect both legal mechanisms and political structures, seems too oppositional to the current international trend of support for the state, leading to a lack of funding for planned projects such as a CEDAW shadow report to document incidents and contexts of violence. This project reflects the commonly expressed desire to reveal "what is really happening here"(female civil society leader, Yangon, 2014) against a feeling that a discourse of positive change is emerging over the top of people's lived realities, again highlighting the frustration that women's experiences and grievances are being subsumed by the totalising rhetoric of 'reform'. International observers, investors and researchers with limited experience of the context, who have multiplied over the last two years, are viewed as complicit in such a reproduction:

> *Like yesterday, one of the [foreign] business persons was at the reception and was asked to say something. He mentioned that he'd been here in 2010 and now he's here and the first thing he notices is a lot of traffic. But he thought that this is because of some change in the economic system. All the Burmese people were smiling because we know that it's not because of economic changes and growth but because of undiscipline… But for him it's a sign of the changing political way and economic growth. It's not.* (Female civil society leader and activist-educator, 2015)

A counterpoint lies in the pathways women activists are forging for themselves. However, these international interventions are not without significance, and after a consideration of the retrieval of feminist discourses, the desired roles for mutual collaboration are further explored below from the point of view of women activist-educators.

8.2.3 Feminism as a concept and term

As in many contexts, feminism is a tricky word to use in Myanmar (Hedström 2016; Wieringa 1995, 2-3). Particularly where English language terms are employed for a variety of strategic reasons including both to emphasise and to obfuscate agendas, the buzzwords of development speak such as gender, empowerment and capacity building have a history of being redeployed. The leader of one women's civil society organisation reflected on this adaptation of terms, noting:

> *'Gender' is quite common usage. Instead of 'women' or 'feminism' people use 'gender', and then when more people use it it's like jargon, it's not [relevant]… Actually the word feminism is very sensitive. Like the government doesn't even like 'women' … and I heard some government officials openly say they don't like activists, they don't like feminism.* (Female civil society leader, 2015)

Within this repurposing of terminology, the concept of feminism and its politicised activist associations therefore occupies a different position to the highly sanitised terms of the development industry. Consequently, it's not uncommon for educators to want to distance themselves from the associations of the term, as was illustrated by one teacher of a women's political empowerment course stating "I'm not feminist, I'm just teaching women's rights" (women's political empowerment course trainer, 2015). In employing

the term, activists are simultaneously connecting to a transnational discourse, while differentiating themselves from the international funding environment which is largely now failing to serve their transformative goals. Accompanying its employment is the suggestion of a transnational activism that connects a much more politicised stance with the nomadic subjectivity that informs a collective commitment to women's participation:

> *Three or four years back, people don't want to say we are feminist, they prefer to say we are activists…because they think [feminism] is a negative for women. So now I heard they are saying that we are feminist, I'm happy for that.* (Female civil society director and activist-educator, 2015)

From an original position of opposition to the authoritarian practices of the military regime, many women's organisations (and CSOs broadly) are navigating a new orientation towards working in partnerships and/or from within the state in an attempt to translate transition into transformation. Clearly, what is important is not whether or not women choose to use a certain borrowed term in relation to their positions and activities, but the evolvement of women's collective action particularly with regard to their orientation with the state that may be reflected in this shift in identification. The question remains of whether this more explicit adoption of the terminology of feminism is reflective of a more prominent interaction with the concept itself. It is suggested here, therefore, that the emerging identification with feminism parallels a desire to re-politicise women's movements generally, and empowerment specifically.

Another clear constraint is the lack of arenas for men and women alike to pursue feminist study. There are no gender studies departments at universities in Myanmar and consequently training courses and workshops provide the only organised means of pursuing gender learning[35]. Women activists are therefore using these spaces to formulate their own articulation of and approaches to feminist action. To a certain extent then, local women's organisations are re-politicising empowerment adding a renewed attention to dynamics of power and patriarchy. Although the terminology of feminism clearly has its origins in an international discourse, it has largely not found its way into the women's movement through the empowerment training material being provided by INGOs, which offer a much less politicised and less

[35] Connell observes this constraint in many Southern contexts whereby NGOs are now the major source of knowledge production around gender (Connell 2014, 535).

contentious vision of women's enactment of social change. Teachers, however, (community-based or otherwise) are responsible for the linguistic and cultural translation of texts in their classrooms (Apple 2012) and consequently we find emerging "complicated stories in the undershadows – stories of local interpretation, enactment, recontextualisation and resistance to global policy solutions" (Exley, Braun and Ball 2011, 216). Trainers teaching women's empowerment or gender equality (including to mixed gender groups) mentioned that despite there being no specific content in their training material on feminism in the majority of their courses, the topic would come up informally amongst participants. Such practices are a reflection of the widening association of women's rights as a movement with political positions and social implications. For others however, feminism has been explicitly incorporated into the training programme:

> *In the training we have to explain what is feminism, what is the patriarchal system… we have to explain clearly what we want to talk about. Justice and fairness and gender equality, we have to go through all these issues*. (Female civil society director and activist-educator, 2015)

The paradox is clear, then, that while the women's movements are seeking a greater link with the international discourse of feminism, the international community is distancing itself from politicised forms of activism in favour of consolidating support for a newly-legitimised object of development. The recent adoption of feminist terminology then is reflective of this changing environment for women's activism which has necessitated a renegotiation of relationships and positions and illustrates a closer alignment with more overtly politicised and transnational stances.

8.2.4 Constructing a feminist education

In the mapping exercise conducted in mid-2014, only one of the 28 women's organisations providing community education surveyed included a discussion of feminism listed in their course outline. However, in the following 12 months groups were found to be increasingly including the topic in their courses. Speaking of why they had chosen to add discussion of the meanings of feminism into political training courses, one activist-educator stated "these are issues that affect all women across the world" (female activist-educator, 2014). Despite objections to international training course practices, international discourses and course content are very much present in the teaching of

community education. These initiatives use the language of empowerment to reach out to women and men across various positions in society, from rural and ethnic grassroots community members, IDP or refugee populations, to students engaged in tertiary education or civil servants. Such training initiatives often promote the dual agenda of fostering a willingness for political engagement while seeking broader cultural shifts and they often make use of translated training material from multiple sources. Reflecting the fluidity of this informal space, concepts have filtered through informal and accidental means that are a product of women's nomadic experience. These points of contact include participation in 'training of trainers' programmes and working for international organisations, being frustrated at the role they play but simultaneously learning from the environment. However, beyond this, women activist-educators are also drawing on their experiences from studying abroad; reading and sharing with online communities, aided by relaxed censorship laws; cross border movements and experiences in the borderlands with their overlapping and competing mix of influences; and also chance encounters facilitated through their familiarity with multiple languages. So one activist described how an unexpected meeting with an Israeli sex therapist sparked her commitment to bring sexuality education to her community.

Educators are therefore seeing an opportunity to draw links between global movements for women's equality and the current struggles of Myanmar women activists. One of the very few community education organisations to explicitly identify as feminist and teach feminist history explained their rationale for including course content on the suffragette movements:

> *our Burmese women think they can [participate in politics] because they are Westerners, because they are foreign women, so I would like to show them how hard in history English women sacrificed their lives for the vote, for the right to vote… So we would like to show how the foreign women tried to get women's rights.* (Female activist-educator, 2015)

The same educator continued to explain the parallels in the Myanmar historical context as well as the challenges in trying to retrieve this form of historical analysis:

> *we tell them about the Burmese women's movement in the colonial time. We don't have a [historical] feminist movement but we have a women's movement, but it's based on the patriarchal sense, on the political freedoms. And we have Burmese women*

> *who also fight for their freedom, freedom fighters, in the Japan times and the British colonial times. So we give them Burmese examples as well. But the problem is we don't have Burmese women's history. There are no documents, just a few, very, very few documents, on Burmese women who fight for their freedom. Because they are marginalised from history*. (Female activist-educator, 2015)

In identifying themselves as feminist and teaching feminist history, these women activist-educators draw a sense of solidarity from what they perceive as a shared commitment to struggle. It is particularly this horizontal approach to learning, and a shared respect and commitment that is desired from international collaborations. Feminist education is of course not merely characterised by course content, but also in approaches to learning. Speaking of the pedagogical practices of both international training workshops and some local initiatives one educator expressed her desire for what she identified as a more feminist approach to teaching:

> *Even though they are asking for women's rights they are not practicing a feminist approach … It's also true in training. Sometimes women's rights activists they take teachers' role, which is higher than the participants. So it's also an approach to training I think. People don't often consider feminism in this power distance. They see it as a different issue*. (Female activist-educator, 2015)

The same educator continued to explain her vision of more equal learning practices:

> *some trainers transfer their knowledge to their participants and the participants have to listen and accept their knowledge in their notebook. To me it's not real learning.* (Female activist-educator, 2015)

The non-formal nature of adult community education is seen as potentially offering a more shared learning environment that practices "*not teaching but rather sharing*" (female civil society leader and activist-educator, 2015).

Many women leading civil society organisations expressed a continuing desire for sharing knowledge and learning with the international community, acknowledging the limitations of their own state education experiences: "*we want to get to know what other people are doing. We have degrees but what*

do we really know? We don't have the capacity to look beyond" (female educator, 2015). In so doing, women are articulating their distinctive view of feminist learning which includes how they want to learn:

> *When we go and learn short courses or masters' it's like teaching not learning. We get very good marks but we don't have the experience of putting the theory into practice … there's a lack of creativity in putting theory into practice*. (Female civil society director and activist-educator, 2015)

Reflecting the desire for greater follow-up to education initiatives previously articulated above, experiences of participating in international training courses can be illuminating but equally easily dissipate, as the same activist-educator expressed: "*we lose the connections. We think 'it's so good, what are we going to do?' But the next day we lose it*" (female civil society director and activist-educator, 2015). Another educator likewise highlighted her disappointment after returning to community activism after tertiary study abroad, reflecting the disconnection between non-contextual learning and the realities facing women in their communities: "*I still can't do anything. I feel very suppressed. I feel very confused*" (female activist-educator, 2015). Again emphasising the different position occupied by community education as opposed to other sites of more formal learning, women educators therefore also articulated the need for community-based training that was tailored to the learning needs of participants:

> *Our education system never teaches us to think. International people need to understand we need to analyse and think and question and they should help local people to think and analyse*. (Female civil society director and activist, 2015)

The women civil society leaders interviewed in the context of this research were therefore clear in the role they saw for international organisations, indicating a desire for support rather than direction:

> *International staff should bring examples from other contexts and instead of duplicating them here they should let civil society think about how they can apply here … Instead of them putting ideas, let the local [people] understand and use it with their own context*. (Female civil society director and activist, 2015)

The identification of obstacles to transformative learning aided activist-educators in formulating a more feminist approach to teaching, which supports Stromquist's observation that "education for gender transformation needs much greater awareness of the relevant content and process of knowledge development and acquisition that can be fostered" (2013, 30).

8.3 Drawing conclusions: nomadic positions within a feminist movement

As has been illustrated above, in Myanmar's transition there is a common dual articulation, on the one hand recognising gains made in the political and, to a limited extent, economic opportunities available to women while also reinforcing the need for social change that is not forthcoming. Such perspectives reflect the need to encourage women's mobilization more broadly, adding support to the call for a "more holistic approach to women's political empowerment that can go beyond the narrow cycle of support to women politicians and instead support women's organizing at all levels" (Cornwall & Edwards 2014, 16). Such approaches are being pursued by women's and civil society organisations, frequently beyond the sphere of international funding, with activists highlighting the need to address the fear of the political that is still overwhelming at a grassroots level. Women leaders' campaigning for support therefore runs hand in hand with community education initiatives, which seek to break down the barrier of the fear of engagement or subversion, not just of political participation but also of challenging gender roles accentuated and reinforced by the authoritarian rule of the military junta. The shifting landscape for women's activism, accelerated through Myanmar's so-called democratization, has reinforced the nomadism of their position, requiring varied responses and, for some, providing multiple points of contact with others.

A more political feminism is newly evident amongst the women's movement, but one that is being redefined and made relevant for the current Myanmar context. This change in discourse reflects a shift in positioning for women activists, but has not found its origins in the generic language of formulaic training courses. Rather, feminist concepts and terminology are being shared amongst women's networks by activists who have encountered them through more varied transnational movements. This filtration and borrowing of ideas is ad hoc and informal, and is reflective of the nomadic subject position occupied by leading women activists. A central implication of identifying this nomadic subjectivity is the analysis it affords the social position

of these women leaders. They cannot be understood as elite, given their marginalised ethnic and religious identities, their persecution by the ruling government and often the lack of financial resources available to them. However, they have clearly experienced different trajectories from many women in the constituencies they serve and are linguistically and academically well positioned both to take advantage of opportunities available through international contact and to challenge its assumptions. They are the activist-elite, and in the case of several of the women participating in this research, have won international awards for their roles.

Experiences of exile, displacement and relocation, and/or of studying abroad and working with/for international organisations, have positioned leading women activists to mediate and translate concepts such as feminism for their contexts. Indicative in these experiences are the interactions and synergies that come from relationship building within varied contexts, with varied subjects and across varied languages – "the effect of the constant flows of in-between interconnections" (Braidotti 2011a, 17-18). Reflecting the polyglot formation of the nomadic subject, these women speak their ethnic languages, Burmese, Thai, Chinese or English, and multiple combinations of these. Consequently, they are used to borrowings and overlappings of linguistic signifiers, and are able to draw on multiple (although sometimes incomplete) sources as they revise the orientation and discourse of the women's movements. Such women activist-educators are therefore adept in bridging influences while responding to shifting community needs, demonstrating what Braidotti identified as "a double commitment, on the one hand, to processes of change and, on the other, to a strong ethics of the ecosophical sense of community – of "our" being in this together" (Braidotti 2011b, 210). The result is a newly refined feminist approach to sharing learning for social change.

Part III Focus Study:

Feminist Leadership Training[36]

Leadership training is a common feature of initiatives seeking to promote women's increased participation targeting community level leadership and well as political leadership at the national level. In 2013, the Gender Equality Network (GEN) conducted a review of leadership training activities and a survey of the expressed needs of women leaders, published in the report *Taking the Lead: An Assessment of Women's Leadership Training Needs and Training Initiatives in Myanmar*[37]. GEN is a growing network of over 100 civil society organisations, national and international NGOs and technical resource persons (TRPs, of which I am one) in Myanmar, established following Cyclone Nargis in 2008 in response to the evident need for coordination in women's protection and emergency response. The network has now extended its focus more broadly to promote gender equality and women's empowerment throughout Myanmar and has conducted several recent studies on women's political participation (2013b), women's experiences of violence (2015a) and cultural norms and social practice (2015b).

One of the specific objectives of the study was to 'identify the leadership skills and leadership capacity development needs of women leaders targeted for training by GEN members' (GEN 2013a, 6). This involved interviews with 43 women leaders across three areas of leadership: members of political parties; local and international NGOs; and local-level community-based organisations (CBOs). The women had varying experiences of training, with some having attended numerous training courses ranging in duration and content, while a few had no previous experience of training (GEN 2013a, 9). GEN developed a women's leadership framework for the study which divided 23 leadership competencies across three categories: Leading Self, Leading Others, and Leading an Organisation, Institution or Community. The 43 participating women were asked to rank the competencies in three areas: those most important in their current leadership role, their own competencies, and those they would like more training in.

[36] This focus study has been adapted from a section in Maber, E. (2014) (In)Equality & Action: the role of women's training initiatives in promoting women's leadership opportunities in Myanmar. *Gender & Development*. 22(1), 141-156.

[37] As a TRP for the network I assisted in the preparation of the report.

Interestingly, in the category of Leading Self, there was a strong correlation found between those competencies identified as most important in their current roles and the women's own current competencies, suggesting that the training these women have received may have had a particular emphasis on confidence building and this prepared them well for their current positions. This fits with the content of most training courses, which emphasise self-esteem building as well as skills such as public speaking or presenting which boost confidence amongst participants. In this category, the top leadership competency identified that where women would like more training was 'coping with negative comments towards me because I am a woman' (GEN 2013a, 31). The women also identified the need for supportive environments – from their organisations, families, and the wider community, signalling the current hostile atmosphere in which women leaders often find themselves operating.

In the categories of Leading Others and Leading Organisations, there was a less clear correlation between the competencies important now and those labelled as personal strengths. This suggests that women need more support in these areas and training courses may need to include greater attention to equipping women to shape organisations and effect institutional change. While communication skills were listed as prominent current competencies, reflecting their inclusion in the majority of training courses, managing conflict and decision making were highlighted as areas with a need for greater training. Interestingly, the skills relating to influencing and affecting change featured less prominently both as competencies and identified needs: this would seem to indicate a practice of leadership that may not be genuinely transformational, as women's current capacity to influence broader institutional change is still limited.

The findings compliment my review of leadership and empowerment training text. At a skills level, 'leadership skills' are actualised as communication and presentation skills and public speaking, in some cases combined with negotiation skills. 'Empowerment' is largely characterised as confidence building and networking with likeminded activists, with activities promoting group work and shared learning. Trainers and participants expressed particular enjoyment of these pedagogical styles that gave them the opportunity to work together in a participatory manner, highlighting the most positive contribution of such training workshops may be not the content they deliver but the environment they create. However, in terms of developing the skills women require to lead effectively in their organisations and communities, trainings are frequently falling short. Additionally, in the material surveyed negotiation skills

exercises tended to assume a male adversary in a business context, which is unlikely to address the experiences of women leaders when confronted with mistrustful community members. As will be explored further in Chapter 9, training is therefore not preparing women for the hostility and resistance that many have faced in reproducing activities and attempting to challenge social norms.

This fits in with concerns expressed by Srilatha Batliwala writing of the need to articulate feminist leadership as "working to transform the relationships of power in society, and to create alternate models of power within their own structures" (2011: 33). Highlighting four areas of focus for leadership training – Power, Politics, Practices and Principles – she sees evidence of a prominent focus on practice amongst leadership training programmes, but fears that considerations of power dynamics and their role in reproducing unequal structures are often lacking from feminist leadership programmes (Batliwala, 2011). Batliwala's research, conducted on behalf of CREA, provides a valuable framework within which to conceptualise feminist leadership training practices and also influenced the design of the GEN study. GEN similarly concluded that attention to power relations and transformative approaches to leadership practice were necessary considerations of course design (GEN 2013a, 21) and also emphasised the importance of networks and supportive environments in facilitating women's participation:

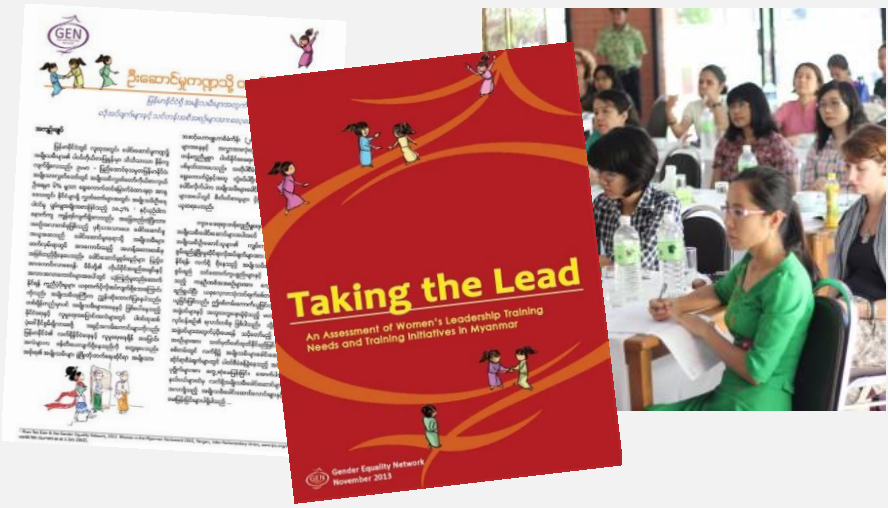
> It depends on people and colleagues. We need mutual understanding and goals. The organization needs to give space, more time to build social relationships and give a clear December 2014 vision, strategy and approach. Training can help. (Female leader interviewed for *Taking the Lead*, (GEN, 2013a: 12))

The survey also highlighted the varying needs of women in different roles, with women leaders in community based organisations expressing different needs from those in NGOs and women in political parties, while training practices frequently do not tailor their workshops to address these differing positions. In particular, the female members of political parties interviewed found their experiences of training too short and not sufficiently detailed, largely covering broad introductory themes (GEN 2013a, 13). This reinforces a need for training initiatives to conduct careful needs assessments and to adapt courses according to the participants involved. In many cases this may require a significant shift in organisation, as frequently courses are developed, funded, and material is sourced before the participants have been identified.

The findings indicate that women leaders see training as an important source of support to supplement and inform their own efforts to impact positive change, and that these initiatives would benefit from expansion to meet these demands. GEN provides a comprehensive set of recommendations for the improvement of training programmes in Myanmar, with the aim of better supporting women from diverse backgrounds and with varying experiences in accessing leadership positions and in leading according to transformative models rather than simply reproducing power relationships. Based on these GEN recommendations and my own observations in my professional work and research, I would highlight the following key considerations:

- those organisations conducting leadership training must conduct thorough needs assessments, tailor course content appropriately, and engage suitable trainers to model participatory approaches;
- women's leadership training should follow a feminist, transformational approach that analyses power imbalances and supports women to lead differently, rather than reproducing unequal structures;
- women leaders need greater support in leading organisations and affecting institutional change: GEN members called for very practical skills training, including strategic planning, organisation set-up, and gender-sensitive policymaking, as well as communication, decision-making, and analytical skills (GEN 2013a, 20);
- training programmes should develop appropriate monitoring and evaluation strategies to be able to adapt more effectively to the changing needs of women leaders;
- for young women seeking to access leadership roles, internships and mentoring opportunities should be considered to facilitate pathways;
- women are demonstrating a desire for continued learning; training should therefore be offered at different levels to avoid repetition of basic concepts and so that women can continue to develop their leadership skills in timeframes that suit them (GEN 2013a, 22).

The final point is of particular relevance to the issues raised in this Section. While there may be a natural reaction to doubt the relevance and utility of many of the training initiatives currently offered, women across varied positions and backgrounds express a desire and motivation for continued opportunities for learning, leading to an attempt in this research to identify more effective strategies for developing relevant learning environments.



Photos 5, 6 & 7 (L-R): Burmese briefing paper, Taking the Lead; English report cover page, Taking the Lead; a GEN meeting. Images from GEN's website: www.genmyanmar.org

Chapter 9

(Re)Constructing empowerment: challenges and alternatives in transporting women's empowerment training

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This chapter has been adapted from Maber, E.J.T. '(Re)Constructing Empowerment: Challenges and alternatives in transporting women's empowerment training' (draft)

9.1 Introduction

This chapter extends the discussions of the limitations found in leadership training practices, to focus on the experiences of Myanmar educators in redeploying empowerment training and in the process constructing alternative perspectives on empowerment. The chapter first reflects on the content of international training material which was found in use in Myanmar through the mapping exercise and through the ethnographic discourse analysis. Secondly, the experiences of Myanmar trainers in redeploying this material is explored, revealing tensions in the process of attempting to replicate empowerment training and workshops. Finally, the practices of women's organisations in constructing alternative courses which seek to promote women's empowerment are highlighted.

Particular attention is given to two dimensions prominent in empowerment training, with contrasting approaches evident from within Myanmar's women's movements. These are: the dual notions of sex and gender, commonly portrayed as biological differences in sex compared with social constructions of gender which are approached quite differently within different courses; and the contrasting characterisation of the relationship between knowledge and empowerment. Two courses, of contrasting lengths and adopting different priorities and approaches, are highlighted as case studies to offer alternative perspectives on the notion of women's empowerment training.

Although gender is understood to be relational, necessitating the inclusion of diverse gender identities (Butler 1990; Davies 2000; Connell 2012; Yuval-Davis 1997), training courses have largely tended to target women,

particularly for empowerment and leadership initiatives but also in the content and focus of workshops delivered under the guise of gender training. Consequently, while I recognise the limitations of reducing gender equality movements solely to women's contributions, this chapter takes as its main focus women's empowerment training as a primary means currently employed to promote gender equality, and alternative responses from local women's led civil society and community based organisations within the context of Myanmar.

The immediate paradox presents itself of whether it is possible to 'teach' empowerment, in what ways it might be 'learned' and whether training courses could provide a means of doing so. This chapter starts from the position that given how common such courses are and the propensity of women's led organisations to continue to adapt and deliver training, research into the broad implications of these practices makes a contribution beyond simply dismissing them altogether. This research therefore does not seek to evaluate the impact of individual courses, but rather to explore practises and experiences as expressed by women activists and educators who have at once participated in training and are subsequently delivering their own.

9.2 Learning empowerment

Global development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, and now the Sustainable Development Goals, have increased international attention to gender inequality and have codified women's empowerment into a universalised and seemingly quantifiable objective (Kabeer 2015; Cornwall & Rivas 2015). Simultaneously, education systems have also been identified within these same frameworks as an assumed avenue for facilitating empowerment (Kabeer 2005; Stromquist 2006). However, the failure of many national education systems to promote transformative social change (Novelli 2016) has been equally evident in persisting gender hierarchies reinforced through formal education practices, coupled with continuing limited access to quality education for many girls and young women (Parkes 2015; Connell 2011). The shortfall of formal education has therefore set the stage for the proliferation of training courses identifying the need for adult women to 'learn' empowerment and leadership skills perceived as missing from previous (sometimes limited) learning experiences. International organisations in particular have taken up this objective, largely bypassing state engagement to deliver their own courses promoting an image of empowered womanhood as a desired development goal. However, there is an immediate concern in

international development actors attempting to construct idealised female citizenry and models of empowerment beyond local experiences (Dunne 2009).

In circumventing state institutions that are complicit in the reproduction of gender hierarchies, onus is placed on women activists to contest gender inequalities. While many activists and educators take up this task with admirable vigour and dedication, the affective burden placed on individual women to enact social transformation exposes them to risk, particularly in spheres where their influence may be limited, as they encounter new forms of opposition. Indicative in this are the nature of relations between multiple actors - donors, development agencies, national governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community groups and activists – and consequently exploring processes of knowledge translation therefore highlights the implications of where power lies and what avenues are available for contestation or resistance (Bonal & Rambla 2003; Chilisa & Ntseane 2010). The argument is made that by listening to the experiences of women activists and educators in translating training experiences for their communities and contexts, development organisations might better understand the role they play in advancing equality objectives and how these undertakings might be better supported.

Within the context of facilitating learning as a means of empowerment, issues arise in the failure of some international training to recognise this specific position and to design training appropriate to the skills and existing knowledge of women activists and educators with opportunities for mutual learning. Instead, training has a tendency to anticipate a standardised model of participant in need of empowerment and to assume that learning will flow in a single direction. Training that is perpetually introductory and insufficiently contextualised is therefore not responding to the situation of local women activists, community educators and civil society leaders who are already familiar with gender injustices nor is it preparing them to be able to extend activities within their local communities. The ill-fitting design of courses therefore exposes the disconnection between generic global discourses and the highly contextual and multiple, simultaneous priorities of local women's movements, which leads to frustration on the part of women activists.

9.3 Context for training and research methods

Although highly constrained, prior to Myanmar's recent political transition, empowerment training courses did occur, delivered both by international and

local organisations, however they have expanded in number since 2011. Despite ongoing constraints for civil society nonetheless a less restrictive operating environment for contentious rights based programming has emerged, and networks of women's organisations have increased in membership numbers and in profile, allowing for greater cooperation between organisations that were often previously working in isolation. Although women are increasingly mobilised and openly active in civil society demonstrating a desire to advocate for women's rights, they can find themselves lacking the platform to effectively influence policy on a broader scale. Such dichotomies undermine the apparent gains in women's opportunities and perpetuate the dominance of masculine influence, highlighting the danger that women's inclusion is being overlooked in the rapid pace of reform. There is an evident risk then that generic approaches that fail to address the prevailing imbalances in power relations may be perpetuating inequalities, and transferring the onus onto those who are disadvantaged to bring about changes in social institutions where their influence is limited.

Data for this chapter draws particularly from the process of ethnographic discourse analysis conducted closely with five women's organisations in Myanmar and Thailand and with an additional five organisations according to a more light study (as highlighted in Chapter 3). Citations of individuals and training texts therefore largely come from these ten organisations, and the 19 activist-educators and 30 course participants who were consulted in the study. The discussion below begins with a brief overview of the content of international training material from ToT courses found to recur in subsequent training, followed by the responses and perspectives of Myanmar trainers in attempting to replicate and adapt training themselves. Finally, examples are considered from the ways in which local women's organisations are redesigning training content, focusing on dimensions that trainers identified as empowering themselves.

9.4 International empowerment training material

From single workshops to 10-week training packages, courses promoting women's empowerment, leadership, and capacity building abound across development contexts, being provided by international organisations, facilitated by international consultants (myself having been one of them) and/or funded by international donors. Many workshops and courses being

delivered by international organisations[38] are set up along the 'training of trainers' (ToT) model to 'cascade' replications of a desired goal of emancipated womanhood and suggested steps for her achievement. All of the women leading civil society organisations engaged in the course of this research had participated in such courses, and material borrowed from ToTs was found in use in several of the courses studied. Recognising the individuality and autonomy of trainers and educators (Apple 2012; Connell 2011), these training practices and the texts used within them are of course not passively received, but interrogated and at times challenged and contested by local trainers who are ultimately responsible for the adaptation and repurposing of concepts and material, and these counter movements are explored further below.

As introduced in Chapter 8, despite the original feminist underpinnings of empowerment, much attention has been brought to the co-optation of the concept by development organisations resulting in the instrumentalisation and depoliticisation of women's equality claims (Batliwala 2007; Cornwall & Edwards 2014; Kabeer 1994). Consequently in training courses as in development discourses, a homogenised presentation of 'woman' (and indeed 'man') has been critiqued as lacking in localisation both to contextual landscape and to the varying needs of diverse women (Dunne 2009; MacKenzie 2009; Khoja-Moolji 2014).

A closer examination of some of the training material being used under the heading of women's empowerment indicates the limitations of and concerns over generic training material replicated across contexts. Amongst the variety of international training material being used, texts from six international sources including UNFPA, YWCA, Oxfam, Amnesty International, World Vision and Women Can Do It (WCDI) were found to recur, in addition to the textbooks produced by international staff at a Myanmar and Thai based organisation (in English with some Burmese translations available). Of the myriad ToT workshops and training courses that local trainers recounted having participated in most had taken place in Yangon and in Thailand, particularly around Chiang Mai, with some having travelled further afield for such training including to Australia, the Netherlands, Norway and the USA. Training courses had typically lasted between one and five days, and were

[38] Amongst the international organisations delivering forms of empowerment training these include UN institutions such as UN Women, UNFPA and UNDP, INGOs such as World Vision and Oxfam, and nationally-affiliated organisations such as the British Council, American Centers or programmes such as the Norwegian government affiliated 'Women Can Do It'.

delivered by international consultants sometimes in partnership with a local facilitator.

9.4.1 'Empowerment' constructed in ToT material

A survey of the training material provided by the ten groups consulted showed that material borrowed from international training was found to cover two main areas: presenting information on gender inequality and soft skills building. As attention was drawn to training practices for skills building in Focus Study 4, the discussion here focuses mainly on the content, topics and exercises aiming to reveal inequality. Although trainers may contextualise the material, the texts themselves did not provide details specific to the Myanmar context. A challenge remains that in seeking to contextualise generic training material, the agenda has largely already been predetermined of what constitutes inequality and what areas are prioritised as significant for women's empowerment.

Training material typically begins with exercises to explain the difference between sex and gender. This was the case in all the international training material surveyed, as well as a good deal of locally designed material used in courses, outlining the difference between 'sex' as denoting biological differences between men and women and 'gender' being socially constructed norms and expectations of roles and behaviour. Doubts have been raised over the relevance of this trope and its utility in advancing a comprehensive view of gender relations (Davies 2000, 54), particularly when there are no equivalent translations for these concepts in the first languages of course participants (as is the case in Burmese and other Myanmar ethnic languages). In reinforcing male-female binaries there are risks that new exclusions are introduced. Exercises that attempted to reinforce the differences between 'sex' and 'gender' characteristics were found to emphasise the biological functions of women as giving birth and breastfeeding, simultaneously isolating women who may not be able to or wish to perform these functions and reinforcing heteronormative expectations of gender performances. Additionally, three international training texts were found to explicitly state that 'sex cannot be changed', immediately setting up dangerous constructions of transgender and transsexual identities as errant (see for example *fig.8*).

> Sex is biologically founded and constant across time and cultures. The fact that we have different physical features makes up the sex dimension, and a person's sex is not subject to change. The sex dimension is dichotomised into male – female.
>
> Gender is a socially-constructed notion of what is feminine and masculine, thus also the understanding of what it is to be a man or a woman. Gender varies across time and between cultures. Gender is defined by the terms: feminine and masculine
>
> The qualities and characteristics of a person are not dependent on their sex, but different conducts and mindsets are connected to and defined by gender. It is important to be aware of this. Sex cannot be changed but gender roles are constructed, and thus can be changed.

Figure 8: Text from a Norwegian training manual for women's empowerment, WCDI, p.2-3.

This introduction is typically followed by statistics revealing women's global oppression, accompanied by evidence of women's unequal participation in the labour market and in politics. Women's rights, and in particular CEDAW, are also presented, with the emphasis on what they are rather than how these rights may be accessed or mechanisms to report violations[39]. Rounding off the conscientisation process, gender based violence (GBV) is also commonly included as a topic within training material, again focusing on what it is - for example, what constitutes rape - and its prevalence.

Participatory exercises, such as 'work diaries', which involves comparing the listing of men and women's daily paid and unpaid tasks within and beyond the household, offer some avenue for contextualisation to reveal gender inequalities experienced by course participants. However, exercises such as these presuppose women's subordination at a household level and deny diverse household composition. As befitting the construction of Southern women in development discourse (Lind 2009; Win 2004), it is assumed that women are mothers in male-headed households. While this may be the case for many women, equally many households represent much more plural compositions, particularly in areas affected by conflict, displacement and

[39] Although CEDAW is commonly taught in ToT empowerment courses the focus is on conveying understanding of what it is rather than how it might be invoked. As I have highlighted in Chapter 8, projects that actually try to enact CEDAW, such as producing a shadow report on right abuses, struggled to secure funding being viewed as too contentious and oppositional to state interests for many international donors courting the transitional government.

legacies of political persecution. When a 'work diaries' exercise was observed conducted with a young women's political empowerment course, for example, participants responded with a vast range of variation revealing daughters financially supporting parents and extended families, women having moved from rural to urban areas living in hostels, alone or in apartments with friends, women with caring duties and those with none, women living in abusive homes, and those with supportive partners. While there may be emphasis on identifying practices of subordination incorporated within training course material, there is a risk that decontextualized training practices anticipate these areas of subordination within predefined global trends and therefore may overlook more nuanced, interconnected or alternative manifestations of inequality.

Further assumptions about the nature of womanhood abound within textual material, presenting a universalised image of women as heterosexual, working wives and mothers, leaving many young women in particular struggling to find themselves represented within training texts devoid of diversity in socio-economic status, age, religion, sexual orientation, and (dis)ability. Likewise, the singular construction of men as (heterosexual) oppressive aggressors does little to advance a nuanced understanding of gender identity and relationships, and equally misrepresents many Myanmar men's commitments to social change during transitional struggles as well as women's relational experiences. By generalising gender norms and presenting a universalised vision of gender inequality, courses and material have therefore potentially overlooked the localised interconnections which inform and maintain traditional gender roles. Likewise, the image is presented either of women as confident leaders or of women as victims of subordination and abuse, but not of how one might occupy both positions simultaneously, nor of how one might navigate between these and the multiple other positions that women may occupy on the spectrum of their experiences.

9.5 Experiences of redeploying training

Of the women and men interviewed in the context of this research, many were pleased to have opportunities for international contact and, particularly amongst younger women, were positive about participating in international led training. However, invariably they expressed tensions within this participation and although they may have enjoyed the environment of the course itself, encountered challenges in acting upon what they had learned and sharing learning with the wider community, raising doubts over the

appropriacy of some training models. As highlighted in Chapter 8, a frequent lack of follow-up means that organisations are often not aware of the difficulties that participants encounter in attempting to cascade learning, and therefore these experiences are not feeding back to inform the redesign of future courses. Once one-off funding allocations have been used there may be neither the financial resources nor the motivation for follow-up after final reports to donors have been submitted, leading one women's equality activist to lament:

> *Good projects are implemented, but there's no feedback at all. Once the money is gone no-one is interested in what has happened.* (Civil society director, Yangon and Kachin, 2015)

Rather, the coloniality of development relations transfers responsibility for advancing narrow equality objectives to women activists and trainers while relinquishing international organisations' participation in the continued process of learning. While international training courses largely expect that participants will continue to share learning within their communities, there is rarely financial compensation for doing so. ToT models are therefore further contributing to women's unpaid workloads, in addition to familial duties, while simultaneously exposing them to risks and hostility. The sections below explore specific challenges that community educators faced in navigating this process of adapting material for the specific contexts of their education and training programmes, with emphasis on the challenges of translating terminology and concepts and of encountering resistance.

9.5.1 Challenges of translation

As international training and material is largely provided in English, issues of language pose significant obstacles and undermine the relevance of content for participants at the community level. The women attending ToT initiatives have typically been identified to participate due to their ability to speak multiple languages and their existing familiarity with development organisations. Although in this sense they are well placed to translate international concepts for local audiences, nonetheless finding the right words to do so is a challenge where there are frequently no Burmese language equivalents for development terminology and consequently terms are typically deployed in English. However this can alienate participants within communities who are unfamiliar with these terms, reflecting the potentially distancing effect of nomadic subjectivity explored in Focus Study 3. Reviewing the evaluation

feedback she had received from participants in her women's empowerment training course, one local educator highlighted:

> *They said [in the evaluations] some resource persons use many English [words] so they can't understand and they can't catch up*. (Women's empowerment trainer, Yangon, 2015)

The difficulty in finding the right translation points to an underlying challenge in localising concepts, where the meaning of development terminology often remains equally elusive in English[40]. Likewise, where training texts have been translated from English into Burmese, this does not always make them any more comprehensible or useable in a classroom, particularly when the translator may not have been familiar with education needs. One trainer teaching classes to young women from mixed ethnic groups highlighted this challenge where learners may speak a variety of ethnic languages:

> *I also have the textbook in Burmese, but the problem is the language they use for translating is very difficult to understand, so the English is easier to understand. If people want to translate the books from English to Myanmar they should use very simple words instead of using the very high words, because Myanmar is very easy to complicate when you translate it. That's why I use English books.* (Young women's empowerment trainer, Chiang Mai, 2014)

Likewise, beyond only linguistic translation, the difficulty in transposing advocacy strategies across contexts was also highlighted by a trainer adapting women's political empowerment material originating from America:

> *Because America is a developed country, for the advocacy we don't have those kinds of tools or materials in our country, so we have to modify in our context. Like sometimes they suggest us to use texts [sms] in our campaign, but in our country not everybody can use the mobile phone, so it's not useful in our country, so we skip that kind of part and we have to find another way.* (Women's political empowerment trainer, Yangon, 2015)

[40] 'Empowerment' is similarly a much contested term in this regard. See for example MacKenzie (2009) or Cornwall and Anyidoho (2010).

At a local level then, courses require greater time to cover unfamiliar concepts and negotiated linguistic hurdles, and choices may need to be made as to which concepts are considered essential for the objective of training.

9.5.2 Relevance & resistance

The adoption/adaptation of material designed for different contexts can also be problematic, beyond the burden of translation work involved, and can result in the subtle, unintended reinforcement of entrenched prejudice. In three instances[41], training material was encountered that involved case-studies of Muslim women's marginalisation in the Middle East or South Asia. However, rather than fostering a sense of solidarity, there is a risk that transnational examples of Muslim women's oppression can add fuel to the rhetoric of male Muslim threat in Myanmar which is reinforced through public discourse stoked by certain nationalist, ultra-conservative Buddhist groups and legal changes to restrict interfaith marriage.

Likewise, the sensitivity of contesting gender roles, particularly where they are closely allied with understandings of religious duties, is frequently unacknowledged in workshops leaving trainers facing hostility and exposing tensions in approaches. One woman leading a local training programme[42] spoke of a guest trainer who had conducted gender training for one day:

> *They have a very strong religious belief on men's and women's things. So when [the trainer] speaks about men and women are the same status they complain. They think [the trainer] is very outspoken. They ask the question, 'are you a Christian or a Buddhist?' Some participants think she dared to speak out because she is a Christian*. (Women's empowerment trainer, Yangon, 2015)

The perceived irrelevance of concepts, exacerbated by linguistic divides, can fuel this hostility, highlighting the need to adapt content to the priorities of women in different circumstances. For example, while many leading women's rights activists are engaged with CEDAW monitoring and campaigning to hold government bodies to account for inequalities and rights violations, and report positive engagements with CEDAW in training, other trainers have been

[41] It should also be noted that this material was not found being used in the Muslim women's group that was included in the research.

[42] This five day training programme was delivered at multiple locations in predominantly Buddhist communities.

surprised by the rejection of international mechanisms they encounter at a community level. One young woman spoke of her experience cascading training to older women in her community after she had participated in a ToT workshop, which had emphasised the importance of CEDAW:

> *One woman said, 'we can't be leaders because we are women' and another woman said 'we can't be leaders because we are women and we are afraid of the dark. If the violence or something happens, conflicts happen, in the dark we women can't go there. That's why leaders must be men'. Actually CEDAW is nonsense for them I think.* (Women's empowerment trainer, Ayewaddy, 2015)

Despite its standard appearance in training courses, the relevance of CEDAW to the lives of women at a community level is doubted by some local trainers. Particularly in conflict areas, where the rule of law has a tenuous hold, militarised sexual violence against women is common place, and trafficking networks flourish with impunity, international rights frameworks may be viewed as empty at best, as one male trainer working in partnership with an international agency similarly expressed: "*There's not very much that learning about CEDAW can do – how does it help?*" (Gender trainer, Kachin and Rhakine, 2014). The same trainer also highlighted the disconnection between a rhetoric of international rights mechanisms and the precarious situation of groups who are denied citizenship status, which can anger local communities. Speaking of training conducted within displacement camps for Muslim communities in western Rakhine state, the trainer continued: "*In Rakhine State when people learn about their rights they say 'ok, where's my ID card?'*" (Gender trainer, Kachin and Rhakine, 2014). The tension highlights the position of community educators as mediators of knowledge who are then held responsible for the redress of inequalities and power imbalances that are beyond their influence, potentially exacerbating tensions between dominant and marginalised groups.

However a counterpoint can be found in the practices of women's organisations and trainers that have emerged through this process of adapting training content. The section below highlights some of the responses encountered amongst women's organisations, with a focus on what activists and educators have identified as empowering within these learning spaces through their experiences of participating in and delivering training.

9.6 Counter responses from women's movements

While the courses designed and delivered by local educators make use of international training material borrowed from these courses, they are also adapting and supplementing to create learning environments that more directly address the needs of local women and men in confronting unequal social structures that maintain hierarchies and subordination. This section highlights departures from this approach by focusing in particular on two areas prioritised within the training practices of the women's organisations studied: notions of sex and sexuality; and the conceptualisation of knowledge as a means to empowerment. These are supported by two case studies drawn from the process of ethnographic discourse analysis, observations, group discussions and interviews conducted with women's organisations targeting different priorities. The section ends with further reflection on this diversification of what is perceived to be empowering and the relational approaches adopted towards gender equality efforts.

9.6.1 Violence, Sex and the Body

Attention to women's sexuality was incorporated into five of the courses researched, with varying degrees of emphasis and directed towards different age groups, including emphasis on body changes and familiarisation with women's bodies. As also highlighted in Chapters 4 and 5, the need for sex education and knowledge of body changes during puberty, being absent in formal education curricula, was commonly articulated amongst young women (and to a less prominent extent young men) in focus group discussions and interviews, as one young woman highlighted:

> *For most of us, our first menstruation is quite a shock for us. We are shy, we even think it's shameful. I think for men it's ok but for women it's quite difficult to accept puberty*. (Young women's community educator, Yangon, 2015)

Body awareness and countering the shame that women have learned to feel towards their bodies is therefore prioritised in reconceptualising notions of women's empowerment.

While international women's empowerment material typically emphasises the distinction between sex as biological and gender as socially constructed, there is a general absence of discussions of sexual practice, sexual pleasure and sexuality. Additionally, by emphasising the biological function of reproduction in discussions of sex, material constructs an assumption of

heterosexuality which is often sustained through discussions of gender characteristics. By contrast, sexual and reproductive health training is often delivered in isolation from empowerment training, more commonly by health NGOs placing an emphasis on HIV/Aids prevention and contraceptive use. This removal of issues relating to sexual practice from broader discussions of empowerment or gender inequality fails to recognise the interlinked nature of issues of consent and coercion with gender roles and power dynamics. Likewise, in isolating discussions of sexual health within freestanding workshops, the resistance to engaging with sensitive topics from community members described above is also accentuated. One young woman trainer spoke of delivering reproductive health training within her community in Ayewaddy Division after attending a ToT training workshop in Yangon:

> *Given the kind of education they have, it's a bit awkward for them, when we get the feedback, when we have to talk to Mums, they said why are we talking about this, it's kind of embarrassing. And also when I delivered the training here the students were also kind of, they feel kind of awkward hearing about things like that. It's awkward for them. And they think it's not like the education that we had to learn [at school], especially when we give the training with boys and girls mixed, and they are teenagers so they feel a bit embarrassed. And that's our first time. And some, they don't like that kind of education at all.* (Karen community trainer, Ayewaddy, 2015)

As explored in the case study below, certain women's organisations however have taken a more holistic approach, focusing less on the potential negative health consequences of sex and instead emphasising an understanding of a woman's own body to help alleviate the shame that women have learned. This then provides a foundation from which to engage in discussions of consent and coercion, notions of choice and experiences of violence.

Case Study 1: Sex and sexuality education

Two organisations approach sexuality education from a notably different perspective and were sharing the material and lesson plans they were developing amongst other women's education groups. Reflecting the nomadism of activist-educators in drawing from transnational points of contact, one of the women leading this area of training previously worked as a health trainer for an international organisation, and is forming alternatives to

practices she saw as not responsive to cultural norms and not serving the needs of women in her community:

> *Reproductive health is also a need, but what empowers them is the sexuality awareness, it's empowerment dialogue through sexuality education.* (Civil society leader and trainer, Yangon, 2015)

Rather than being sites in isolation, the Myanmar educator-activists developing this training have drawn on working partnerships with international educators, development practitioners and feminist activists, experiences translating training texts from English into Myanmar, and experiences delivering training designed by others. As one trainer recounted of this process: "*When we do the activities [in other training material] we find out what they really need*" (Young women's trainer, Yangon, 2015).

As highlighted in Chapter 5, the lack of sex education in schools in Myanmar is simultaneously a result of the cultural environment which sees any discussion of sex as taboo and also contributes to a lack of awareness of bodily processes such as puberty and menstruation. One trainer developing the material spoke of her own experiences as motivation:

> *The first time I didn't know what it [menstruation] was, I didn't want to tell anyone. I was afraid. Finally I told my Mum and she said this is normal! She said that women are not good because of this.* (Empowerment & sexuality trainer, Yangon, 2016)

Learning about these experiences is therefore seen as an empowering means of countering the association of women's bodies with inferiority, uncleanliness and shame.

> *Sexuality is the backbone, then we talk about gender and power. So we start with menstruation, we are not dirty. Why have we been told this?* (Civil society leader and trainer, Yangon, 2015)

The courses varied in length according to the group, typically lasting two or three days or being spread out over four weekly morning sessions for adult women, or over multiple weekly two hour sessions for adolescents. In addition to running women's empowerment workshops, one of the two collaborating organisations also offered joint workshops to engage men in sexuality dialogue. Describing this process in one class the trainer highlighted:

> *The first day [the men in the class] didn't want to accept we are women talking about sexuality. The first day some men fight – some. Then the second day they were more quiet and then they apologised to us… So women's empowerment and men's engagement are different approaches.* (Empowerment & sexuality trainer, Yangon, 2016)

By tailoring training more sensitively to these experiences, learning from what participants respond to and building up activities through lengthier engagement the trainers had developed a programme of material that could then be shared with others. However, in sharing material a challenge is also encountered to ensure that facilitators are prepared in how to use it, as one trainer working at multiple sites across the country expressed:

> *When we do the puberty topic, the trainers have not seen these pictures, they don't know the vagina, the clitoris, the uterus. And they don't want to look. I harass them! I really push them, they should see*. (Young women's trainer, Yangon, 2015)

For women attending the courses then, and new facilitators alike, attempting to overcome entrenched cultural taboos is a sensitive position to navigate. The process of finding appropriate strategies to build up relationships even within a short time period is supported by the trainers' positions within the community and contrasts with experiences of a foreign trainer delivering a guest session:

> *We based on our culture and practices so they accept it. But from the [foreign trainer], they were shocked. After 2 years we have learned the process*. (Empowerment & sexuality trainer, Yangon, 2016)

By first refocusing greater attention on to women's bodies within training, courses then also sought to address issues of sexual and gender violence and consent. While gender based violence is a common topic included in international training, it largely features through definitions and case-studies from unfamiliar contexts which hold little relevance and reinforce a characterisation of women as passive victims of abuse. However, there is a vast distance between this decontextualisation and the physical, emotional and structural violence that trainers and participants alike of community education classes have experienced, particularly in contexts of conflict and turbulent

political transition. As the organisation leader expressed of the facilitators she was training:

> *Trainers know what is inequality and violence across all the community. You know it's typical Burmese, it's very difficult to talk about gender or sex or women's rights. But they are facing abuse and violence in their home environments. They know.* (Young women's empowerment trainer, Yangon, 2015)

Moving away from a discourse of rights in favour of creating collaborative space for discussion of experiences, feelings and creativity was therefore identified by trainers as supporting empowerment[43]:

> *I don't use 'rights' but treat them like a person. Then they will be able to think and be creative, then no military government will control them*. (Civil society leader and trainer, Yangon, 2015)

A final difference in approach of these courses is also noticeable when reviewing other material attempting to address the pervasive lack of discussion of issues of sexuality and sexual orientation. One textbook in particular, *Gender: Issues and Perspectives*, which was designed specifically for use in the Myanmar context, albeit largely by international consultants (including myself[44]), was found to be used in several empowerment courses. Although the book does not include broader discussion of sex or body changes, it does include a chapter on sexuality which focuses on gender identity and sexual orientation. The inclusion of this chapter is refreshing given the heteronormativity of much international training material, and provides discussion of LGBT identities and homophobia in the context of Myanmar, India and globally. However, in discussions talking through how trainers used this training material in their own classes, educators admitted skipping this chapter and some trainers had strong opinions against the use of terminology in the text, perceiving it to be too controversial and likely to invite opposition from course participants. The result then in many classes was that as the material was perceived to be too confrontational, the issue of sexual orientation was

[43] This also indicates a difference in strategy in training courses developing within Myanmar and on the Thai side of the border, where a discourse of women's rights has been more prominent.

[44] As highlighted in Chapters 2 and 3, I was involved as an editor in the development of this textbook.

simply not discussed, reverting back to a default assumption of heteronormativity.

In contrast, the two courses under discussion here approach sexuality from the starting point of getting to know your body and pleasure, rather than direct discussion of sexual orientation. As the director described: "*Sexual orientation is not a major focus, but a focus on different people like different things"* (civil society leader and trainer, Yangon, 2015). This extended not only to same sex relationships, but also to varied sexual practices: *"In law, anal sex is not normal. So I talk about the muscles and pleasure, and if you like it you like it. But you can say no"* (*Ibid*).

9.6.2 Diversifying perceptions of empowerment and knowledge

A distinction between international material and local practices can therefore be summarised in the contrasting approaches to knowledge. While training material from international sources and the ToT workshops that trainers recounted having participated in largely focused on revealing inequalities, through statistics, definitions, frameworks and reporting mechanisms, women's organisations saw knowledge as a shared process emerging from experiences. For the women attending short training workshops, once they are aware of gender inequalities, as the women trainers occupying this intermediary position are, then there is arguably little to be gained from endlessly repeating examples of inequality. Merely presenting evidence of inequality or discrimination is therefore not sufficient to transform social perceptions of gender roles without being accompanied by explorations of the social barriers to women's participation and strategies to counteract them.

A key feature of training led by local women's organisations is the diversity of focus areas that are prioritised under the heading of 'empowerment', with emphasis being placed on the empowering process of learning. Courses were found to target the details that activists felt will help empower the different women in their communities in ways that are relevant to them, which included attention to disability, sexuality, responses to child abuse or militarised and domestic violence against women as well as political mechanisms or language learning. Identifying these priorities in participation with community members is therefore a key feature of planning training which educators are learning from experience, as one trainer reflected:

> *Sometimes we make the training but it's not very useful for the participants, that's why [now] we make the meetings*

[beforehand] so we can adapt it. (Women's political empowerment trainer, Yangon, 2014)

The following case study highlights how this process of building up knowledge that was considered empowering was achieved in a young women's political empowerment course.

Case Study 2: Young women's political empowerment

This six-month residential training programme in Thailand delivered by Myanmar women educators, targeted political empowerment amongst young women from varied ethnic states in Myanmar as well as those displaced on the Thai border. The ten young women aged between 16 and 22 had travelled from their home states or refugee camps to spend the six months of the course living together in the same house, along with their primary teacher, who had also travelled from Myanmar. Classes were held each day for a couple of hours in the morning, followed by lunch that was cooked and eaten together, with a further couple of hours teaching in the afternoon usually provided by an alternative teacher or guest facilitator. Towards the beginning of the course, I spent a week living in the residential house, sometimes observing, sometimes participating in classes, conducting group discussions, interviews, and participatory exercises, and accompanying the young women on study visits. Later, I returned to conduct follow up discussions, interviews and observations after the course had progressed.

The aim of the course was to empower the young women to be more politically active within their communities and to be better informed to contribute to the work of ethnic women's organisations within their home states. Although the course was nominally taught in English, with predominantly English texts, some international guest facilitators, and additional English language learning components, the informality of the environment meant that

Photo 8: Participants in a women's political empowerment class, 2014

classroom language frequently changed languages across English, Burmese, Karen and Tai (spoken in Shan State).

When asked to brainstorm what they understood empowerment to be the young women provided varied responses largely revolving around soft skills building, reflecting the abstract nature of the concept:

What is Empowerment?	
- Get ideas - Conscience - Consciousness / awareness - Critical thinking - Improves women's leadership - Improving self-confidence - Speaking skills – speaking in detail, importance of word choice	- Promoting ability - Participation skills - Feeling free to criticize - Capacity - Active listening - Decision making skills - Intelligence

Table 9: What is empowerment?

Within the course, however, while soft skills and confidence building were acknowledged as valuable, the main area that was perceived to give these young women confidence was specific knowledge that can inform action, something that is largely missing from the decontextualized training courses at an international level. So, during initial exercises to co-construct the design of the course over the coming months, these young women immediately identified the topics that preoccupied them which included an understanding of federalism and its implications for gender relations and conflict grievances in ethnic states, the environmental damage done by mining, dams and deep sea ports, and practical steps to involve more women in the peace processes as their priorities for learning. Underlining the association of targeted learning with forms of empowerment, one course participant revealed her motivation for participating in the course:

> *Men that have petrol money have power; I want to be a very educated talented woman so that those men will listen to me.* (Young women's empowerment course participant, Chiang Mai, 2014).

Course trainers responded by developing lesson plans targeting these knowledge gaps and inviting other activists to share their expertise in these

specific areas. Describing their approach, the primary trainer highlighted: "*It's like empowering women with knowledge, the focus is on the knowledge*" (young women's empowerment trainer, Chiang Mai, 2014). As also reflected in the case study above, knowledge is associated with empowerment not so much in revealing inequalities of determining what is and isn't categorised as violence under international legislation, but rather in sharing experiences, identifying knowledge gaps and formulating collaborative strategies to address prioritised issues.

Additionally, the environment of bringing course participants together for a prolonged period of study allowed for deeper relationships to form which created a safe environment for the discussion of sensitive and personal issues. As the primary trainer further explained in a later discussion:

> *It's one of the advantages of the environment that they can talk openly about sexuality… Domestic violence is [also] a major issue for the students, many had experienced it and wanted to talk and share about it together*. (Young women's empowerment trainer, Chiang Mai, 2015)

Paralleling the desire expressed by other young women for avenues of support and spaces to voice concerns, pressures or negative experiences as well as questions about sex and sexuality, responding to these personal experiences through building relationships of trust.

9.6.3 Relational approaches to equality and empowerment

Finally, this multi-dimensional conceptualisation of empowerment likewise prioritises a relational understanding of gender inequalities. While many women's led organisations continue to deliver training primarily to women in their community, there has been an acknowledgement of the need to engage with male community members and authorities, as highlighted by one educator working with Karen communities:

> *Men's participation is involved although we want to empower women. You cannot exclude men in this context*. (Community educator, Yangon, 2015)

The construction of independent womanhood that emerges from much generic empowerment material, particularly with regards to women's leadership, does not reflect Myanmar women activists own experiences of leadership which involves negotiating the consequences of not meeting

expectations of duty and challenging inequality. Stressing the importance of a relational approach, the same educator continued:

> *We are talking about gender, we are talking about equality. To be able to be treated equally we need men's support. But when [international organisations] talk about gender we are only talking about women.* (Community educator, Yangon, 2015)

The perspective also highlights the desire to approach gender training as a dialogue in which roles and expectations can be negotiated and contested and this process of negotiation is itself empowering. Seeking small changes in interactions, particularly within the family was therefore viewed as a starting point from which to gain greater space for women's equality claims. As one educator described:

> *When we talk about gender it's really easy. On the desk, it's really easy. But when you practice it it's really difficult for us. It's not only big activities but every moment, small things. When we change who sits where, who talks when, gender matters. If we can make small changes these barriers in the family collapse*. (Civil society leader and trainer, Yangon, 2015)

Creating their own spaces of empowerment is ultimately the preoccupation of the women's led organisations in navigating social transformations. In so doing, they are opening a pathway for learning to potentially flow back and inform the relationship between donor institutions, development agencies and community organisations.

9.7 Implications & Conclusions

Community education and training is a key avenue through which organisations are mobilising to affect social change. Training courses on women's varied forms of empowerment consequently reflect these varying priorities and underline the disconnection between international and local approaches. Focusing greater attention on the ways in which women's organisations are articulating and responding to the multiple priorities they identify also reveals the ways in which these priorities differ from global discourses. While the adaptation of empowerment training is only one dimension of the varied work undertaken by women's organisations, nonetheless the process highlights the position of these activists and educators in mediating influences from multiple sources to define their own actions.

While international training tends to focus on understanding discrimination and revealing inequalities, which ultimately can contribute to a homogenised and reductive portrayal of women as victims of male dominance, local women's led organisations prioritise strategies of negotiation and transformation as well as resistance.

This is not to say that international organisations and ToT practices have no contribution to make in supporting empowerment through learning, but rather that a more reciprocal process would support the design of programmes that could better meet the needs and challenges of trainers. As also emphasised by Connell (2014) and Stromquist (2015), there is a whole body of knowledge and learning that sits behind women's movements from which to learn alternative strategies for women's empowerment and transformation of social norms. However, current practices are maintaining the singular direction of knowledge flows, as one Kachin gender trainer expressed: "*translation is going the wrong way*" (gender trainer, Kachin and Rhakine, 2014).

Part IV: Drawing Conclusions

"*Blurring boundaries without burning bridges"*
(Braidotti 2011a, 26)

Chapter 10

Conclusions & implications

10.1 Introduction

This concluding chapter brings together the strands of the research to reflect on the theoretical and methodological approaches employed in the research and the resulting implications that emerge. Following these initial reflections, responses to the research questions are considered, a discussion of what can be learned from women's activist education practices and priorities and the implications of this research for development studies.

10.2 Theoretical & methodological reflections

Returning to the image of the zig-zag (Deleuze & Guattari 2013/1988; Deleuze & Parnet 2002/1987) introduced in *3.2*, the research has aimed to bring together multiple dimensions in connecting explorations of educational and activist practice and in bridging theoretical positionings and tracing lines of flight between them. This has also extended to traversing disciplinary boundaries: while Deleuze is a familiar theorist within the context of educational research, in development studies such theoretical positioning may be less commonly encountered. Likewise, (Northern) feminist conceptualisations of nomadic subjectivity, while interwoven with notions of globalisation and the shifting roles of nation states, are likely unfamiliar to Southern movements for women's emancipation. Bringing together these perspectives, I have sought to shed light on the nature of resistance and the interactions of diversely positioned actors.

In particular, raising questions of the (potentially) changing nature of female citizenship within a context of political transition draws attention to where such presentations of citizenry emerge and where (and by whom) they may be contested. In this, my research recognises that educational spaces, particularly formal state schools, being the most common site of education experience for young people in Myanmar (UNESCO 2015; Jolliffe 2014), compose a key site through which projections of national citizenship ideals are encountered (Apple 2012; Bernstein 2000; Freire 1993/1970; Bartky 1990, 80-

90). So, analysis in this thesis, particularly in Part II, has focused on *how* expectations of gendered behaviour are enacted within these formal education sites, drawing on Judith Butler (1990; 2004) and Bronwyn Davies' (2000; 2011) notions of performative enactments. Such performances lead not only to reproduction but also to reformulation and contestation (intentionally as well as inadvertently) (Butler 2004). This recognition has sought me to look beyond formal education settings to more explicit sites of contestation. Here, Deleuzian conceptualisations of *smooth* and *striated* space have contributed to revealing the different characteristics of educational spaces that support differing educational objectives and differing relationships with the state, not only through oppositional constructions (for example of formal compared with non-formal education practices) but also by illustrating how smooth and striated dynamics intermingle and react to each other within certain spaces (Youdell & Armstrong 2011). Through highlighting the practices that result in the reinforcement of social hierarchies within formal education within Myanmar, and theorising the opportunities for hierarchies to be undone through moments of smoothing (*4.4*), the research points to opportunities for more socially inclusive education dynamics to take hold within diverse spaces.

Drawing attention not only to the nature of gendered hierarchies, but also to the endeavours of those who seek to transform them places a clear emphasis on the dual role of women's movements in challenging gender inequality broadly, and in making use of learning sites specifically, as has been the focus of Part III. Recalling Gramscian notions of the role of teachers as public intellectuals (Gramsci 1971; Mayo 2014), these activist-educators are attempting to refocus attention on the role of learning in undermining exclusionary hierarchies. Here, Braidotti's conceptualisation of a feminist nomadic subjectivity (2011a) additionally leads towards an understanding of this position of activist-educators in being exposed to and drawing from multiple experiences and points of contact across international, national and community arenas, which subverts the logic of a linear pathway of translation and reproduction across scales of development. This advances notions of women's movements and activists as key mediators in processes of adapting equality goals (Stromquist 2015a), and in so doing reveals fractures and disconnections between the priorities of diversely positioned actors in development practice.

Acknowledging that "women's mobilisation matters to advance gender equality agendas" (Esquivel 2016, 18), these movements are also significant sites for revealing alternative considerations of notions of equality and empowerment. Radical education sites, drawing from traditions of critical

pedagogies, have long been recognised as being highly political and associated with efforts for social transformation (Gramsci 1971; Freire 1993/1970; Apple 2013). Additionally, activist movements are acknowledged as themselves being sites of learning and of transformation (Mohanty 2003; Choudry 2015), and this learning should be considered not only as a process for those within such movements but also as a process of generating knowledge for those beyond as well (Ackerly 2001). This research has therefore explicitly sought to bring together these two considerations to explore *how* women's organisations in Myanmar and the Thai border are making use of community education to simultaneously challenge certain practices within formal sites of learning and to reformulate notions of the expectations and roles of women in the current period of political transition and beyond.

In returning to the themes of the research as they originally emerged from the theoretical and methodological discussions (*3.5*), these overlaps become all the more apparent and extensions can be made to further articulate the complexities of navigating the transitional landscape for Myanmar's young women and activist-educators alike.

10.2.1 Space, movement and the possibility of disruption

In concretised forms, physical positionings emerged as an important spatial consideration, particularly in education environments and strongly connected to Myanmar understandings of *hpon*, through which the positionings of women's bodies and the material objects associated with them are imbued with performative significance and potential to undermine masculine superiority or import bad luck (as highlighted in *6.5.1*). These findings echo those of Dunne and Leach (2007) that gendered space holds particular symbolic significance in schooling contexts and are intricately associated with enactments of gender violence, albeit in contextualised ways (187-8).

Further, as reflected above, Deleuzian conceptualisations of space have supported the exploration of both educational and activist environments bringing attention to the role of the state in maintaining social hierarchies as well as opportunities for undoing the fixity of unequal constructions and reformulating alternative enactments. This attention to smooth space as a site of disruption brings to the fore the multiple and competing influences and agendas in processes of transition, as well as reflecting the further disruption accompanying conflict and cross-border movements. As highlighted by Gorodetsky and Barak:

> Multiplicities are generated and reside in deterritorialized, nomadic, and smooth spaces of experience that have not been reduced into a priori static understandings by the application of accessible representations. In contrast to striated spaces that are grooved, i.e. wandering within them is confined to a priori limited and pre-identified paths, smooth spaces are open ended. Such spaces maintain concurrently the manyness of options for experimentation by avoiding the reduction in the many into discrete components, to a one identity. Nomadic space generates a multiplicity of elements, i.e. it is a complicating process that does not impact the heterogeneity nor hinders the potential of the multiplicities toward future becomings. (2016, 87)

The implications of formulating space in this way is that social hierarchies can be seen as easily reproduced, intentionally or otherwise, through education practices which can lead to the narrow presentation of male and female hegemonic ideals. In this way, "[s]ubjectivity is postulated on the basis of sameness, i.e. as coinciding with the dominant image of thought and representation of the subject" (Braidotti 2010, 410) and consequently difference is equated with inferiority (Davies, B. 2011).

While there is an appeal in working with the alternative and looking for disruptions, there is also a risk of falling into dichotomies that oversimplify the complexities and interlacings of these spaces. Here, critiques of nomadism have also drawn attention to the potential idealisation of marginalised subject positions (Sutherland 2014). I have approached the conceptualisations of space and nomadism as tools to help reveal underlying tensions in practice, and in so doing I have sought an affirmative position to support the identification of pathways forward. In this the intention is not to idealise experiences of displacement or marginalisation, but rather to look for what may be learned through these movements and nomadic subjectivity:

> The point is neither to dismiss nor to glorify the status of marginal, alien others, but to find a more accurate, complex location for a transformation of the very terms of their specification and of our political interaction. (Braidotti 2011a, 6)

10.2.2 Time, temporal transitions and moments of change

The importance of time and timing is underscored by a sense of urgency which was apparent in women's activist movements during the first inter-election

period (see *8.2.2*), and has continued through a sense of expectation in transition as the new NLD government has taken office. This effect of elasticity and expectation recalls fluid notions of time reflected in *Kairos*, or the "time of opportunity" (Honkanen 2007, 4), as placing significance on certain moments as creating opportunities for change. As Voela and Guaraldo highlight in the introduction to the special issue, *If not now, when?* in which Chapter 8 of this thesis originally appeared: "*Kairos* is the unexpected and unpredictable time of change, the 'right time' when something extraordinary happens" (2016, 319).

In this sense the victory of the NLD in the November 2015 elections may be seen as an 'extraordinary' event, and one that has been desired and anticipated since the annulled elections of 1990. Nonetheless, there has remained a sense of constraint and mistrust as periods of transition also by their nature suggest temporality, and consequently experiences in the present are interwoven with legacies of past associations (see for example *7.5* and *8.2*). Despite evident advancements in Myanmar's democratic landscape, changes are necessarily understood within the historical legacies of experienced oppression by Myanmar activists and educators, male and female. It is therefore important for development actors to be able to recognise the experiences of civil society activists and educators in a time continuum where experiences are informed by previous iterations of rhetoric and shallow policy revisions. While it is often implied of Myanmar that there has been little or no reform in the last fifty years, particularly in the education sector, in fact the frequency with which policy has been reformulated during this time reflects the superficiality of these policy changes which have had limited impact in improving education conditions. Such experiences inform the deep mistrust that non-state education providers and civil society activists share in the current processes of reform and can exacerbate frustration with new international involvement seen as naively positive towards the rhetoric of change.

The strong spatio-temporal interconnections evident in conceptualising nomadic subjectivity (Braidotti 2011a, 247) additionally make sense of my positioning in the research. Having been fortunate to have been living and working in Yangon at a time of significant political upheaval and disruption, my continued professional and personal relationships in the country over the course of eight years has allowed for opportunities within the research process that have been greatly beneficial and allowed for a more participatory approach.

10.2.3 Violence, sexuality and the body

Preoccupations with issues of the body, being also closely interwoven with notions of movement and space, have reflected priorities emerging from the research context as well as the broader theoretical underpinnings of the research in which:

> A nomadic body is a threshold of transformations. It is the complex interplay of the highly constructed social and symbolic forces. The body is a surface of intensities and an affective field in interaction with others. (Braidotti 2011a, 25)

However, notions of the body are also found to be interwoven with relational and religious understandings of gender, by which women's bodies are associated with inherent (perceived) guilt and subordination in relation to the masculine ideal, leading to the insinuation of feelings of shame (*6.5.2*). Reflecting divergent constructions of gender and sexuality, similarly emphasised by Nnaemeka (2004) in the context of Nigeria (see also Fennell & Arnot 2008, 530-1, and Oyéwùmi 2005), sexuality is conceptualised less in relation to sexual acts and more in relation to understanding and accepting one's own body. The presentation of empowerment through 'sexuality dialogue' (*9.6.1*) by certain women's organisations in Myanmar therefore constitutes a substantial departure from notions of gender and sexuality presented within international development frameworks (explored further below in *10.6*).

Violence has likewise emerged as a key feature of young women's learning experiences within and beyond formal education settings as well as, in response, a central preoccupation of the women's movements. Gender violence is understood to be both direct and indirect (Dunne, Humphreys & Leach 2006; Parkes 2015) and was found to have been enacted, sustained and legitimised through young women's experiences in state schooling. Notions of performativity (Butler 1990) have supported the analysis of *how* such practices become enacted in education spaces and also point to the opportunities for alternative performances and enactments to emerge, both intentionally and inadvertently.

10.2.4 On voicing and hearing

Emotional dimensions of young women's experiences within schools and more broadly within society bridge thematic focus on the body and issues of voice, and conceptualise learning environments as strongly emotional, or affective,

spaces (Zembylas 2009; Ahmed 2004). The fear, shame and shyness that at once emerge from positionings and performances of the body, are also introspective emotions that limit opportunities simultaneously to learn and also to confide in others about negative, confusing or unfamiliar experiences. Consequently, young women and older activists alike recalled not understanding processes of puberty, menstruation or sex, and not knowing who to turn to for support or guidance (see *6.5.2, 6.5.3* and *9.6.1*). This dimension of the voice and of voicing also leads to the parallel question of who might be listening. The absence of counselling or support services within schools or in the wider community leads to reduced avenues for communication and accentuates isolation that may lead to greater introspection, affecting students (see *6.5.*3) and also activists, whereby the emotional consequences of activist work take their toll on the women's movement (see *7.6*).

The emphasis emerging from activist work on resisting silencing also reflects the prioritised position of discourse within post-structural understandings of agency, whereby women's empowerment and agency is understood as linked to "having access to a subject position in which they have the right to speak and to be heard" (Davies 2000, 66; see also Keddie 2011). Acts of 'speaking out', and in this way being a voice out of place, were seen as acts of resistance and of contestation, at once liable to punishment and to attention (see *6.6*). Collectivity, enacted through multiple, simultaneous acts of speaking out, is therefore seen to support women's activist work, adding weight to plural voices, rather than homogenising their varied concerns (Harvey and Halverson 2000; Mouffe 1993). In this is reflected Braidotti's formulation:

> one *speaks as* a woman, although the subject "woman" is not a monolithic essence, defined once and for all, but rather the site of multiple, complex, and potentially contractictory sets of experiences, determined by overlapping variables such as class, race, age, lifestyle, and sexual preference. (Braidotti 2011a, 25)

Notions of voice, and who is speaking, have also been apparent within the varied education environments included within the research, including within the state sector and the constraints imposed on teachers through nationalistic curricula and the infiltration of international discourses such as empowerment or feminism in training texts in community education environments. Amongst these competing education texts and agendas, women activist-educators are navigating a pathway in articulating their own priorities. Here, the question of

whether those dominant national or international actors are listening is also of relevance.

In this, being mindful of enacting the feminist and decolonising methodologies that also inform my theoretical approach (Smith 2012; Chilisa 2012) my research practice has sought to prioritise the act of listening to further create space for the articulations and priorities from within women's movements to be heard. Through ethnographic discourse analysis, hearing the perspectives and experiences of educators in using training texts, rather than simply textual analysis, as well as participatory exercises in focus group discussions, informal and multiple interviews and discussions with key research participants over the duration of the research, the act of listening has been an essential dimension of this research. It is my hope that in so doing, and in bringing together the varied voices that have contributed to the research, that I have done justice to their concerns.

The following two sections turn attention to bringing together the findings of the research in order to respond directly to the research questions posed. As the research sought to address two main research questions paralleling the dual themes of the research, they are addressed here independently in the first instance.

10.3 Education and gendered citizenship

1. *What roles do differing education practices play in constructing citizenship ideals in Myanmar, and in what ways are these gendered?*

As the chapters of Part II have laid out, differing forms of education, from formal schooling provided by the state, religious institutions, in particular monasteries, and parallel ethnic education departments, to non-formal community schools and (I)NGO training classes and workshops, are motivated by differing agendas which result in varied presentations of citizenship both intentionally and otherwise. Additionally, a wealth of factors further influence these learning environments, including the geographical location of schools, the availability and source of resources (human, material and financial), the training available to teachers, language use, and international involvement. Attention in this thesis has largely been brought to the divergence between learning experiences within state schools and non-formal community-based education delivered by women's organisations as a way to highlight the dialogue between these two learning sites.

10.3.1 Education and the reinforcement of hierarchies

The inherently gendered nature of notions of citizenship (Crossouard & Dunne 2015; Yuval-Davis 1997) becomes particularly revealed within state school practices as simultaneously reflecting ideologies of national identity (such as through standardised curriculum texts) and broader societal norms (such as through teacher practices) (Apple 2012). In seeking to explore *how practices in education sustained and legitimised women's social subordination* (*1.3.1*), it is evident that numerous forms of marginalisation intersect within education practices to create multiple and varied forms of disadvantage (as highlighted in Chapters 4 and 6). Experiences also vary significantly across rural and urban settings in the resourcing available to schools, as well as in the practices of individual teachers, school administrators and township education officers leading to variations in school experiences. Acknowledging these variations in experience, and drawing together analysis from Chapters 4 and 6, the follow specific dimensions have been revealed in the course of the research as contributing to women's feelings of inequality in relation to their male counterparts:

<u>Curriculum</u>

Representations within curriculum texts contribute to creating models of expected roles and duties of men and women, as also highlighted by GEN's 2015 study *Raising the Curtain* (see *Photo 9*). The reinforcement of associations between men and positions of leadership and financially more lucrative employment, contributes to the replication of expected pathways for young men, while young women find representations of their futures limited to more domestic spheres, or less financially rewarding professions such as teaching and nursing (GEN 2015a). Additionally, the glorification of (Bamar) military violence evident particularly in history narratives, presents a normalisation of violence against those outside the idealised male, Buddhist, Bamar construction, which subordinates not only women, but all those perceived not to live up to this ideal including ethnic and religious minority, LGBT and disabled students (see *4.3.1*). However, beyond the images emerging from curriculum texts, which have received attention from curriculum theorists and activists alike, multiple other forms of practice also overlap to create patterns of inclusion or exclusion within learning environments, including the ways in which teachers have been trained to teach the curriculum (Aikman & Unterhalter 2005). Additionally, key absences in curricula, the most prominent of which being the lack of sex education, also contribute to the assumption of heterosexuality and the expectation and responsibility of young women to

avoid sex by removing opportunity to discuss issues of puberty, sexuality or sexual experiences altogether (see *6.5.3*).

Pedagogy and assessment

The ways in which teachers teach the curriculum, with a common emphasis on discipline and authoritarian styles and the prominence of rote learning within schools emerged as a primary grievance amongst young women and activist-educators alike, reflected in the lament "*our education system never teaches us to think*" (female civil society director and activist, 2015; see *8.2.4*). While the lack of discussion and critical engagement within schools affects all students, subordination is exacerbated for those students excluded from the hegemonic ideal by being denied opportunities to contest and question these assumptions (see *6.5.3*). Similarly, ethnic minority students who are learning in their second or third language or visually/hearing impaired students who may require assistance are similarly disadvantaged in the lack of opportunities for discussion, and therefore explanation, in classes. While individual teachers may be motivated to find ways to adapt their teaching and provide more inclusive learning environments, the constraints of timetabling and the necessity to teach to standardised assessments, particularly significant for the final matriculation exam, limits the possibilities for alternative approaches (see *4.3*).

Finally, assessment practices also codify women's subordination albeit in a seemingly counter-intuitive way. The requirement by many universities that women need to obtain higher grades in their matriculation exams than men in order to access the same university courses in subjects including medicine and engineering may initially be seen as expectations of women's higher achievement. However, the practice was largely understood as requiring women to prove they are capable of undertaking professions culturally deemed to be more appropriate for men and ensuring that men continued to be prominently represented in these fields.

Participation and gendered roles

In addition to gendered roles being reinforced in curriculum texts, the division of subjects within schools can also reproduce assumptions of 'suitable' behaviour and careers for young men and women (see *4.3.2* and *6.5.1*). Consequently, "*handicrafts*" which generally involves sewing and cooking is a common subject taught only to female students which reinforces expectation of domesticity, while young men typically engage in sports, rewarding competition and physical prowess. The refusal of many schools to allow female students to play sports was a particular grievance amongst young women

participating in the research, seen as denying them opportunities for healthy relaxation as well as competition and leadership, and also reinforces the isolation of young women's bodies constructing them as weak, shameful and inferior (see *6.5.1;* also in connection with religious notions highlighted below). Likewise, the gendered division of labour amongst students in schools also reinforced these dichotomies, whereby girls are expected to clean the classroom before lessons and boys to lift heavy items of classroom furniture. Additionally, tasks commonly ascribed to students, such as being class monitor or representing the school at a competition, which are perceived to offer leadership opportunities were frequently felt to be only offered to male students leaving female students again feeling that they had been denied opportunities to engage in more public or 'political' roles.

Adherence to cultural and religious traditions

Allied with those roles mentioned above, while presentations of expected duties for men and women in curriculum texts are strongly associated with Myanmar Buddhist notions of the roles of men and women, these cultural and religious affiliations are also enacted in performative ways within the classroom (see *4.3* and *6.5.1*). Physical positionings whereby young women are not expected to sit on the right hand side of men, or to stand above them, for fear of diminishing their innate masculine power (*hpon*) reinforce a pervasive and visible subjugation of women which is extended to non-Buddhist students (see also Nwe 2009). The dual effect is therefore created of simultaneously projecting an image of Myanmar citizenship as uniquely Buddhist, while also reinforcing the gendered performances that are inscribed within this.

Language and voice

Language of instruction has been a major issue affecting the poor learning outcomes of many ethnic students in state schools (Higgins et al 2016; Lo Bianco 2013), with pass rates for the matriculation exam being reported as low as 8% by Chin teachers engaged in the research. However, the language of instruction used by teachers and in curriculum texts is exacerbated as a barrier to understanding by pedagogical styles that limit opportunities for discussion to clarify meaning. As highlighted in *4.4.2*, some teachers are engaging innovative ways to try to mitigate this barrier and create more inclusive spaces, identified as moments of smoothing, within their classrooms. However, nonetheless, the prevalence of negative experiences remained for ethnic students. Young women identified feeling particularly held back in this regard, as cultural expectations presume women's timidity, and were subject to discipline for seeming to transgress hierarchies of authority (see *6.5* and *6.6*).

Additionally, the general silencing of young women in education environments, as in society more broadly, commonly identified by young women as not being able to "*speak out*", not only leaves them not able to ask questions or check comprehension, but also unable to talk about body changes or negative (especially sexual) experiences (see *6.6* and *9.6.1*).

Emotional consequences of gendered learning

These experiences reinforced emotional dimensions to women's learning experiences, in particular the pervasive sense of shame that was attached to women's bodies, "*shyness*" in not wanting to speak out or draw attention to oneself and the isolation in not having avenues to reach out to trusted adults or in many cases even peers to talk about negative experiences (see *6.5.2* and *6.5.3*). Pressure was particularly articulated by those young women who were motivated to try to overcome the obstacles that were placed in their way, such as the necessity to achieve a higher mark in the matriculation exam to enter the same university course as their male peers, with demands of after-school tuition as well as limited avenues for relaxation and diversion (exacerbated by lack of engagement in sports). The silencing of young women, especially around taboos of sexual practice, also transfers increased emotional stress on women who have experience sexual harassment, abuse and trauma, leading to calls for greater support services to be made available, both within and beyond education structures (see *6.6* and *9.6.1*).

Direct/indirect violence in schools

Many of the above issues may be seen as examples of structural violence in which women are socially constructed as subordinate to their male peers, and excluded from participation in wider roles and opportunities. This indirect violence however, provides the conditions to justify direct violence against women, and other marginalised groups, through the reinforcement of social hierarchies in which more powerful groups are awarded authority and privilege over others. Additionally, as corporal punishment is also widely practiced as a form of discipline within schools, the model of violence as an act of control and as punishment for transgressing accepted patterns of behaviour is already established and violence becomes normalised as part of the (gendered) school experience. Beyond school environments, sustaining patterns of direct violence therefore becomes legitimised, compounded by lack of political and legal support to address violence more broadly.

10.3.2 Seeking alternative sites of learning

In looking for the *ways that alternative sites of learning are presenting alternative models*, attention has focused on non-formal education initiatives as operating with greater independence and therefore with the freedom to construct learning environments targeted to specific objectives. The intention has been to highlight learning practices which represent an alternative approach to those outlined above to serve as a point of comparison and an illustration of alternative approaches. This has reflected the desire to uncover opportunities for *smoothing* in which an undoing of the *striated* social hierarchies might emerge. It is acknowledged however that within non-formal education practices a breadth of practices may be encountered that also replicate unequal and exclusionary constructions, not only relating to issues of gender and sexuality, but also religion, ethnicity, social class, and (dis)ability amongst others. In this regard, *striation* is not to be understood as uncritically negative, as the oversight afforded by regulation and frameworks can provide valuable monitoring tools, which can also support protection for those within learning environments. Rather, the issues arise in the formulation of striations whereby the privileging of some groups over others becomes maintained within the dominant structure.

Nonetheless, amongst the diverse community education providers encountered whose learning environments were aiming to support social transformation certain common features can be identified, not only amongst women's organisations but across the variety of community education sites encountered on both sides of the Thai-Myanmar border (see Chapter 5). While many teachers in community education settings have not received formal teacher training, which may raise alternative complications, the community educators encountered largely shared a characterisation of their learning environments as sharing knowledge rather than traditional teaching, undoing notions of the authoritarian teacher (Freire 1993/1970). This was also supported by students participating in community learning environments both in Myanmar and in Thailand, who highlighted the opportunities to engage teachers in conversation on a more equal level as a key difference appreciated in these classrooms (see *5.5.1*). It should be acknowledged, however, that setting the model of egalitarian relationships within the classroom is significantly easier with smaller class sizes of motivated students, typically comprising between 10 and 20 students. Such class sizes allow for a certain level of informality and the building of relationships between students as well as with the teacher and also ensure space for greater peer discussion and feedback. However, within the state sector teachers are frequently instructing

classes of well over 60 students, or multiple classes may take place in halls without room dividers. Authoritarian teaching practices are recognised therefore not simply as stemming from teachers own sense of authority but also from a sense of needing control in environments that are undoubtedly difficult to manage.

Allied with this reformulation of the role of teachers towards facilitation rather than instruction, community classrooms typically prioritised discussion and debate (see *5.5* and Part II Focus Study), indicating a significant shift from experiences of rote learning. In so doing, opportunities are created for differing viewpoints to emerge which, if respectfully managed, can create more inclusive learning environments. Metro's *Histories of Burma* (2013) textbook provides an illustration of the way introducing the plurality of positions associated with sensitive topics including historical marginalisation/aggression and conflict can be supported through curriculum material (see *4.4.2*). Being beyond the necessity of standardised assessment, community education sites are able to transfer emphasis onto the experience of learning, rather than the outcome as measured through examination. In this sense classes were found to incorporate more varied activities, emphasising group work, practical projects and presentations rather than the reproduction of texts. While this approach supports the development of varied skills and was particularly appreciated by students during feedback, there is a caveat that such learning styles compliment more formal modes of learning rather than replacing them. A notable distinction was encountered amongst students whose learning experiences on the Thai border had primarily involved non-formal education whereby their ability to speak multiple languages and engage in creative and critical discussions was strong, however skills in maths and science were often less well developed. The tendency, noted also by teachers within Myanmar's eastern states of returning migrants, additionally reflects the susceptibility of education environments of the border to the skills of voluntary teachers, both local and international (see *5.6*).

This introduces a paradox within these alternative learning sites. While subjects such as maths and science receive less attention, social sciences and concepts allied with development discourse such as human rights, empowerment or community development are common staples, indicating the avenues through which development rhetoric can influence communities. However, such sources were not found to be singular. Rather, a further common feature of these classrooms was the diversity of sources of material, including textbooks in English and in Burmese, training texts or toolkits from NGO workshops, worksheets downloaded from the internet, news stories, and

videos, reflecting the nomadic subjectivity of educators in accessing and blending varied learning material. This diversification allows for more varied viewpoints to enter the classroom, which if engaged with critically can support analytical skills amongst course participants. However, there are also risks that new stratifications and dominant discourses enter the classroom which may replicate the unequal power structures that were originally under contestation. Likewise, the flexibility of these learning spaces can mean that they can respond rapidly to shifts in the political landscape, as witnessed in women's organisations mobilising community education as a means to engage women in voting (see *8.2*). However, this flexibility also derives from their tenuous position as dependent on securing funds either through donors, through community fundraising or through income-generation activities. Consequently, while they may be able to respond to new opportunities, they are also susceptible to losing funding when political climates alter, as has been the case for many education groups on the Thai border. As a result, education activities can also be influenced by the priorities and agendas of donors which may result in competing influences affecting the orientation of courses.

The experiences of formal education in state schools have also largely provided a foil which women's organisations are reacting to in constructing their own alternative learning environments, particularly those directed to young women at the post-secondary level. The priorities in such community education classes, while varied, highlighted particular concerns with the lack of critical thinking development and preparation to engage with differing points of view or '*speaking out*', the singular source of learning (i.e. from government textbooks), lack of sex education in schools, and exclusion from leadership roles. However, these alternative sites are also subject to influence from varied sources including the state, international involvement or religious institutions, and although their presentation may initially seem idealised, as is further highlighted in the section below, navigating these competing influences provokes challenges.

10.4 Feminist learning and activism in transition

2. *How is women's activism in Myanmar and the Thai border creating alternative spaces for transformative learning during Myanmar's period of political transition?*

Women's movements in Myanmar have drawn attention to the many diverse ways in which women may experience inequality, with activist responses including emphasis on promoting political participation and leadership,

providing psycho-social support and legal services to those who have experienced violence, public campaigns to end harassment in public spaces and challenging religious and cultural traditions, amongst many others. Even within this great diversity of activist and community-based responses, education activities occupy a central position, with the largest share of the 109 women's community groups and organisations surveyed by WON and GEN (2015) being found to focus on education and training activities in some form. While not all of these pursue the emphasis on social transformation and contesting social inequality that have formed the focus of organisations included in this research, nonetheless the close relationship between activism and alternative education is prominent. Likewise, when we compare the gendered practices in state schools, as highlighted above, the expressions of young women describing their schooling experiences and their desires for different learning environments (*Part II Focus Study*), a strong relationship is evident between these prior learning experiences and women's activism, with activist learning environments constructed to address the deficiencies of women's construction in the formal school system.

International development organisations have, however, been neglectful of the actions of women's organisations in supporting women's equality goals (Cornwall & Edwards 2014), and even more so in their practices of delivering alternative forms of education. Consequently, attention here has focused on the contrasting approaches evident between international led training directed towards women in Myanmar and the learning environments that Myanmar women activist-educators themselves construct, with the intention of revealing opportunities to learn from these responses. In doing so, attention is also brought to the distinctive nomadic position of activist-educators in mediating multiple influences and drawing from varied sources to reformulate notions of women's empowerment.

10.4.1 Navigating shifting dynamics

The ways in which women's organisations are responding to shifting constraints and opportunities within the period of transition and the consequences of these responses, are further revealed through this consideration of nomadic subjectivity in which women are navigating the changing dynamics of their environments. While this nomadism has involved physical movements for some, particularly activist networks on the Thai-border, it has also emerged from the increasing diversity of national and international actors and organisations which are adopting varying positions within the process of political transition. The difference in positioning of

women's organisations therefore leads to different strategies in response to shifts. Consequently, the more overt political stances of groups on the Thai side of the border, brought international attention to rights violations by the junta and raised the profile of women's campaigning, challenging "the authoritative power of nationalism [that] continues to suppress and silence the transnational subjectivity of women" (Salman & De Theije 2011, 12; see also 5.7 and 7.5). However, the new climate of political reform within Myanmar, since 2011, despite continued military influence and conflict, has seen opportunities to work in partnership with the new government to (seemingly) shape the agenda of reforms and the peace processes attracting many political exiles back to Myanmar from the Thai border and further afield. While these movements may have been more hesitant amongst women's organisations, the overtly oppositional stance of many organisations have no longer aligned with trends towards partnerships leaving organisations negotiating choices in how and to what extent to engage with state partners.

Concurrently, international donor governments and organisations, who had substantially funded community based organisations on the Thai border, as well as new institutions who had not previously worked in Myanmar, shifted attention after 2012 to forging new partnerships and, in the case of many donor government agencies, bilateral-trade agreements with the newly appointed Thein Sein administration. As a result funding for contentious activities and organisations based on the border largely evaporated, with financing instead being diverted to activities within Myanmar, particularly those focused on economic interventions and less antagonistic forms of political mobilisation such as voter education. This has resulted in a dramatic change in the funding landscape for women's organisations, further exacerbated by the implementation of requirements by incoming agencies such as UN Women and the EU that any civil society organisations receiving grants be registered (according to a new government process).

The responses to this shifting funding landscape varied amongst women's organisations. Several organisations on the Thai-border have chosen to relocate to Myanmar; some within Myanmar have reoriented their activities to be able to access donor funds; others have opted to work through small grant funding for certain projects that appeal to funders, such as political empowerment training, while continuing other parallel activities unfunded; and several organisations involved in the research simply bypassed applications for funding, instead preferring to continue their own community education practices without financial assistance, or supported through income generation activities. However, in all these varied strategies adopted the

insecurity of financial assistance has added both to the stress on activists and their unpaid workloads.

Additionally, the increasing popularisation of conservative and nationalistic notions of Buddhism, exemplified in the emergence of movements such as 969 and MaBaTha, has brought with it an additional and unanticipated form of hostility directed towards women activists challenging unequal gender constructions. While many monks had been prominent instigators and allies in the democracy movements opposing the military regime, and iconic figures of the 2007 Saffron Revolution protests, the rise in political prominence of a number of alternative conservative monks has isolated many women's organisations and activists who have been reframed as undermining Buddhist culture and authority. This repositioning of women's equality work as threatening to religious and cultural identities, rather than as oppositional to military authoritarianism, coupled with the expansion of communication platforms, has resulted in an increase in abuse and harassment directed towards prominent activists, and underscores the different and distinctive position that women activists occupy in relation to other forms of civil society activism as well as the emotional consequences of acting with intent (Davies 2000; Ahmed 2004). Women's activism is increasingly being positioned as opposing religious traditions understood to be aligned with nationalism, and therefore are being constructed as threatening to national unity, leaving female activists once again in a tenuous relationship with the state. In addition to these aggressive and sometimes directly violent reactions to their work, activists and educators consulted in the research often encountered hostility and suspicion from other community members, particularly those working in geographical areas new to them.

While engaging in religious dialogue has generally not been a priority of women's activist classrooms, there is growing recognition of the need for interfaith dialogue to feature more prominently, as activists have been confronted with the necessity of mediating conservative religious positions. Likewise, a public construction of women's supposed 'ignorance' (maintained in part through exclusion and subordination in education systems) has been deployed as justification for the laws and the need to protect Buddhism from perceived threat, setting up paternalistic control over women. This was underscored by comments made by the Chairperson of the Theravada Dharma Network that: "Our Buddhist women are not intelligent enough to protect themselves" (U Aung Myaing, quoted in Walton, McKay & Mar Mar Kyi 2015). In this way women are being positioned within public discourse as passive representations of the nation state, denied active agency and individuality in

determining their own futures. In resisting this discourse, and in using community education as a means to engage others in this resistance, women activist-educators are seeking to gain greater space for gender transformative work to remain possible within transitions.

10.4.2 Alternative constructions of female citizenship

Despite the challenges of navigating the constraints highlighted above and in seeking to take advantage of opportunities to engage with the processes of transition, community education provides a means for women activists and educators to expand the reach of their activities, to continue to challenge dominant discourses and to gain support for women's increased political and social participation. The final question of the research therefore remains of *what alternative presentations of female citizenship emerge from these learning sites.* In this the practices of women's organisations in constructing alternative learning environments represent a departure both from the formal schooling environments highlighted above and also from the practices of international organisations in delivering empowerment, capacity building or leadership training which are common features of development contexts. While the characteristics of the non-formal learning environments have already been expanded above, certain additional dimensions can be summarised in constructing an alternative presentation of female citizenship. These are then discussed in more detail in relation to broader implications in section *10.5* below.

While each course may be different in its learning approaches and texts, and undoubtedly education activities may reproduce unequal representations of male and female citizenship, the intention has been to explore what alternative models might present examples of different approaches. Differences in the framings and terminology attached to women's activism and activist education can also be linked to the shifting dynamics and positionings highlighted above. Women's organisations and networks on the Thai side of the border have largely framed their activities as campaigns for *women's rights* (see also Hedström 2016), tapping into the rhetoric of development discourses and reflecting influences from international funders and the available training resources. Material used in training courses equally reflected this prioritisation of women's rights, CEDAW and international frameworks and monitoring mechanisms. While such material and discourses are also present amongst women's organisations within Myanmar, an emerging engagement with the discourse of *feminism* is also taking hold, as highlighted in Chapter 8, with community education courses increasingly found

to include material explicitly discussing feminism and its historical origins often accessed during periods of study abroad. While in the initial mapping exercise conducted in 2014 only one community education programme was found to overtly position themselves as feminist, during the two years of the research increasingly classes were found to include discussions of feminism and activists were increasingly using the term to identify themselves. The shift may indicate a desire by activists within Myanmar (and those who have relocated from the border) to repoliticise women's activism and notions of empowerment and to take ownership of contesting women's subordination, rather than appealing to development institutions or donor governments whose alliances have proved uncertain. Instead, emphasis on feminism inserts a notion of transnational solidarity into women's alternative learning environments. However in doing so new divisions may open up which highlight the distance between those who occupy this nomadic subject position and those who do not have access to such influences. Consequently, while identification as feminist may be increasingly popular in more cosmopolitan urban areas, within rural communities, as one activist and educator highlighted "*feminism is not their word*" (interview 2015).

In seeking to provide a counterpoint to the training courses of international development organisations, particular emphasis has been given to the notion of empowerment. While much international training course material targeting women's empowerment has been found to reproduce a homogenising and heteronormative construction of women as either victims of male oppression or individualised and financially independent leaders in business or politics (see *9.4*), women's organisations were found to prioritise alternative notions of empowerment (see *9.6.2*). Emphasising abstract notions of confidence building, which may prove effective within the bounds of the classroom, was found to dissipate once participants returned to their familiar surroundings. Rather, emphasis was given within women's organisations to providing access to tangible and targeted knowledge to address specific areas of concern which included political and legal practice, but also the environmental and gendered impacts of economic development sites, mine clearance or reducing traffic accidents. Additionally, relational approaches to empowerment and equality were prominent across the activities of multiple organisations, so that even though the majority of classes were directed towards women, organisations also sought to engage men in other areas of their work. Likewise, empowerment was often characterised as being able to negotiate for small changes in familial settings as well as in collectively challenging women's cultural subordination, and is therefore perceived in its enactment, rather than as a static entity (see *9.6*).

Finally, also connected to notions of female empowerment, as explored in more detail below, women's activist learning environments drew attention to sexuality and women's bodies in seeking to overcome engrained associations of shame and inferiority. A presentation of female citizenship therefore emerges of women having control and authority over their own bodies, which is in stark contrast to public discourse which places authority in male guardianship and reinforces women's passivity and ignorance. While this moves a step closer to challenging the heteronormativity that is assumed in many educational contexts, it still stops shy of explicit engagement with issues of sexual orientation and presenting a broader understanding of gender beyond male and female binaries.

10.5 Learning from the priorities of women's movements

The practices considered above indicate opportunities to learn from the priorities and activities of women's movements and from activist-educators in particular, especially with regard to the contextualisation and alternative responses they afford to international development goals such as educational equality and women's empowerment. This prompts a return to the idea that, as referenced in *4.4.1*, "[c]reative feminist work in the South often involves a critical appropriation of Northern ideas, in combination with ideas that come from radically different experiences" (Connell 2014, 527). The ways in which women civil society leaders and educators are reformulating and adapting material and discourses drawn from international exposure as well identifying alternative priorities emerging from their community experiences indicates areas that can inform future work with greater contextualisation, not only specific work within Myanmar but also broader approaches to advancing gender just scholarship and practice.

Connell (2015) highlights several key areas of importance for expanding the agenda of theorising feminist knowledge on a global scale that reflects the participation of movements and scholarship in the South in constructing theory. In addition to the need to consider indigenous knowledge formulation (see also Fennell & Arnot 2008; Chilisa 2012), she highlights: notions of power and authority with regard to the State; varied perspectives of identity, with collective identity commonly being prioritised over individualised; alternative methodologies; and issues around land (Connell 2015, 56-8). The priorities emerging from women's movements in Myanmar support these areas of alternative theorising, while also adding supplementary perspectives, as explored below.

10.5.1 Interactions with the state and notions of the political

Questions of how feminist work engages with the state are evident in the contrasting strategies amongst women's organisations in approaching the transitional government as well as persisting mistrust. The period of transition throws the urgency of political engagement to the fore, as the desire to be part of the new political landscape and to affect social change through setting agendas within ministerial or civil service departments is evident amongst many women's organisations. However the climate of fear that has existed around engaging with the state during military dictatorship continues to overshadow expectations. Even in choosing not to work from within or in partnership with state institutions however, the state remains central to these activist movements as an oppositional authority, framing state actions as central to addressing feminist priorities and gender equality. Additionally, addressing the 'fear of the political' as a legacy of authoritarian control has been a major priority for women's activist education environments at a community level. Within these community education practices, challenging women's cultural and domestic roles are revealed as highly political endeavours.

10.5.2 Relational notions of (in)equality, identity and religion

More collective understandings of community roles and the tenacious resistance to challenging strongly held identity constructions especially when allied to notions of religious duty operate in conjunction to place emphasis on relational notions of equality (Connell 2014; 2015). The concept of empowerment therefore becomes more closely aligned with strategies of negotiation and mediating hostility than with individualised formulations of confidence-building. This pattern is brought into relief through nomadic movements which juxtapose strategies of approaching inequality. Consequently, the discourse of rights which struck a chord with activists on the border, within a more plural and transnational context, has not resonated so clearly with communities in conservative, and often rural, areas of Myanmar. Educators attempting to replicate training and community learning initiatives in rural areas of the country have met with strong resistance, and as a response have developed more gentle strategies to build links and adapt their approaches.

As further highlighted below, attachments to religious notions of gender duties are aligned to this resistance, underlining the interconnections between social gender constructions that require holistic responses. Attention

is brought not only to the broad role of faith in the lives of individuals and communities, but also to the specific ways that performative enactments of religious notions can influence gender construction. In the Myanmar context this specifically relates to notions of *hpon*, including how this cultural construction of men's spiritual superiority pervades material practice.

10.5.3 Sex and the materiality of subordination

Preoccupations of women's activist learning environments draw attention to the materiality of women's inequality, through which notions of women's uncleanliness and inferiority, associated particularly with menstruation, are transferred to objects associated with them especially clothing such as panties and *longyi*. Practices of washing women's *longyi* separately, not allowing them to dry in public or be placed higher than a man's *longyi* on the washing line, and warning against men touching them for fear of bad luck (Nwe 2009), imbue women's bodies and items associated with them with not only a sense of shame but also a sense of threat to male power and authority. Women's organisations have therefore prioritised focus on women's bodies as a way to learn to overcome this shame and contest such notions of innate inferiority. Reflecting the holistic nature and interconnections of gender inequality, such practices underscore attitudes towards violence against women, as further highlighted below.

Reflecting this desire to address taboos associated with the female body, an additional area prioritised amongst some women's activism in Myanmar, is the desire to see greater access to sex education, not along a biological model or focusing on the negative consequences of sexual practice, most common in 'life skills' material, but focusing on understanding and accepting body changes and overcoming the shame that has been learned through educational and social practice.

10.5.4 Addressing violence

As violence has been a pervasive feature of Myanmar women's lives, including structural and direct violence from both private and public sources, addressing violence is a major priority of the women's movements. The varied approaches to tackling issues of violence include research into intimate partner abuse, as illustrated by GEN's 2015 report *Breaking the Silence*, campaigns such as 'Whistles on Buses' (Kearl 2015) to draw attention to harassment on public transport, the formulation of and attempts to enact the Prevention of Violence Against Women (PoVAW) law, as well as challenging impunity for militarised

violence against women in conflict areas (WLB 2014). Such combined efforts within women's movements draw attention to the common source of varied practices of violence against women as stemming from unequal social constructions particularly reinforced by the framing of women's bodies as inferior and of less worth. In this way, understandings of the nature of violence are advanced and indicate implications for broader theorising, both of the need to conceive of military violence against women in conflict and intimate partner violence or harassment as originating from the same root of women's social inequality (Meger 2016; Cockburn & Enloe 2012), as well as the role of education environments in contributing to such social constructions.

10.5.5 Sites of learning and knowledge production

While also a priority across multiple sites of feminist scholarship, raising questions of knowledge formulation draws attention to practices within education systems and the goals of state-sponsored learning. While this research has intentionally focused on education practices, drawing the link between experiences in formal education and gender constructions which are both reflective and constitutive of social practices, women activists and civil society leaders also commonly stressed this priority. In particular the affective dimensions of learning experiences, particularly of learned fear, shame and shyness formed the bases of women's counter-responses through reformulating empowerment in community education sites.

There is of course a need to avoid over idealisation of local women's organisations, recognising that there are multiple different civil society groups with varied agendas. However, opportunities to learn from the strategies and priorities of women's movements indicate ways to advance both broader theoretical understandings of gender and learning as well as specific improvements to training approaches. Such opportunities do exist, as highlighted by the civil society director designing sexuality curriculum material in Burmese:

> *We started in English until 2013 and then [mixed with] Burmese. So now it's partial English and partial Burmese. [Once we finish writing the material] We will translate back to English so it's available to international NGOs.* (Civil society leader and trainer, 2015)

As highlighted further below, a challenge therefore lies in opening up pathways through which such practices and the knowledge gained by members of the

women's activist movement through longitudinal experience can also inform responses from international development institutions.

10.6 Implications for international development

While Deleuzian notions of difference and becoming, whereby acts are never fully complete but also in constant progress of transformation (Davies, B. 2011) creates dissonance with development studies agendas, "it is important to resist the uncritical reproduction of sameness on a planetary scale" (Braidotti 2011a, 6). The global nature of international development institutions and frameworks for development agendas, exemplified in the Millennium Development Goals and subsequently the Sustainable Development Goals, can exacerbate decontextualisation which renders progress towards equality shallow at best. As highlighted by Dunne:

> Even if this imperative to action arises from a broad commitment to an equity goal, when based on macrolevel generalities it is an effective denial of the relevance of context. Such decontextualisation objectifies people and simplifies the complexities and contingencies of social life and universalises gender (and other) processes. (2009, 11)

Understanding the interconnections and intersections of social difference that influence gender identities leads towards the prioritisation of more holistic approaches to seeking gender equality (Yuval-Davis 2011a; Unterhalter 2012). While it is acknowledged as essential that development interventions be gender sensitive in considering the impact of work on differing men and women, to have deeper benefits in challenging the underlying conditions that support gender inequality a transformational approach is needed. Transforming gender inequalities into more equitable relationships therefore has to include analyses of power, and unpacking the contextualised power relationships and imbalances between different groups of men and women. Such considerations have relevance not only for development goals oriented towards gender equality but also for targets for universal quality education provision, and highlight the overlaps between these priorities[45].

[45] See for example MDG 3 to *promote gender equality and empower women*, of which the single target was to eliminate gender disparity in education (UN 2015), and SDG 4 to *ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all*, which also prioritises reducing gender disparities as well as mainstreaming gender equality within educational content (UN 2016a).

A key implication for development practice therefore lies in acknowledging the interconnections and mutually constitutive nature of forms of social inequality (Yuval-Davis 2011b, 4). However, frameworks, particularly those relying on narrow measurement indicators (Smith & Vaux 2003, 16-18), can truncate responses to specific dimensions of inequality with the effect that the transversal connections across such boundaries are frequently lost. Understanding the enactments of community education, as highlighted above, as a form of activism that explicitly aims to counter the models of learning presented in formal state education systems, indicates the persisting gendered challenges that exist within education systems even when enrolment figures may suggest equality. These patterns therefore add further evidence to appeals that universal access to education does not equate to universal experiences within education (Leach 2000; Aikman & Unterhalter 2005; Unterhalter 2012; Parkes 2015; Dunne 2009; Kabeer 2005) and that the complex and overlapping intersections of gender identities and other dimensions of social difference result in radically different experiences (Yuval Davis 2011a). This emphasis on the experiential dimensions of education environments also points to implications for international measurements and the tendency to attempt to codify progress towards highly variable and context-dependent notions such as empowerment into universalised indicators.

In highlighting the priorities that emerge from women's activist and educational environments, implications are similarly apparent for the ways that international development agencies and actors engage in equality work in the global South. As highlighted by Fennell and Arnot (2008):

> Where international agendas uncritically import liberal individualising models for education into developing countries, they could undermine women's position and future and perhaps could even aggravate existing gender divisions. (526)

This critique has been particularly directed towards the MDGs, and in particular the reduction of women's empowerment to access to education and national positions of political leadership (Kabeer 2005; 2015; Unterhalter 2012). Guided by these ill-fitting standardised models of equality/inequality and empowerment, international development actors in the field risk replicating a superficial understanding of the nature of gender inequality, the role of education is contributing to equality/inequality, and validating responses that remain insufficient to address underlying structural conditions of power (Cornwall & Rivas 2015; Fennell & Arnot 2008). This tendency is exacerbated

by the short-term engagement of many staff members of international organisations within the country of operation, underscoring the need to build genuine partnerships with local organisations and actors working in the context. This necessitates taking the priorities of activist movements seriously and creating channels of dialogue to learn from their experiences in formulating responses. For example, as has been highlighted in Chapter 9, recognising the experiences of women activist-educators in contextualising notions of empowerment and the burden that is placed on them, particularly through training of training initiatives, to adapt material for their contexts may lead to more reciprocal interactions between international development organisations and those they seek to 'empower'.

While the recent SDGs have explicitly sought to provide a more holistic platform for development intervention, and their formulation included much wider consultation processes than their predecessors, there is nonetheless still concern that inconsistencies within the SDGs may be replicating this reductive tendency (Esquivel 2016). SDG 4, *ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all*, includes considerably greater emphasis on the quality of content and processes within varied learning environments than previous manifestations, and indicates a role for education for sustainable development as well as "promoting a culture of peace and non-violence" (UN 2016a) (see also Bonal & Fontdevila 2017). However, targets for Goal 5, *achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls* (UN 2016b), as well as the phrasing of the goal itself, continue emphasis on *giving* empowerment to women rather than stressing the experiential processes by which this may be enacted or by drawing attention to the relational considerations of gender inequality and the ways in which multiple gender identities and expressions may contribute to varying experiences of inequality or marginalisation (see also Esquivel 2016). A further risk in attempting to universalise notions of empowerment emerges from the mis-alignment of indicators and contextualised experiences of gender inequality, over-anticipating women's subordination in some fields while neglecting social variations in others (as illustrated in *9.4*).

However, it is recognised that development frameworks and international agreements provide important leverage for women's civil society organisations in seeking to influence state practices (Ackerly 2001). Consequently, rather than seeking to abandon links between activism and development, strengthening the relationships and dialogues across these positions is likely to contribute to more effective alliances in advancing meaningful enactments of equality goals. Such perspectives reinforce calls for

more inclusive approaches to development that place emphasis on social, relational and ecological inclusiveness in order to make progress in achieving sustainable development for all (Gupta & Vegelin 2016; Pouw & Gupta 2017). As Gupta and Vegelin (2016) highlight, there has been "little emphasis on including the knowledge of all, or engaging all, or promoting effective capacity building to enable better participation" (441). It is therefore suggested through this thesis that recognising the roles and expertise of activist-educators in contextualising concepts as well as building closer alliances with women's activist organisations who are designing and delivering their own education and training practices provides a starting point to support more targeted, inclusive and participatory efforts to simultaneously support gender justice and development objectives.

10.7 Concluding reflections and future research

This research project has aimed to explore the landscape of gendered learning in Myanmar with particular attention to the ways in which women activists are attempting to undo hierarchical notions of gender through community education practices. In this the research can be seen as a starting point from which to continue to further examine the role that civil society and activist organisations in advancing notions of equality and social justice, as well as deepening understandings of the actual and potential interactions between formal and non-formal learning environments. In particular, three areas emerge as fruitful avenues to move the research forward.

Firstly, as initially highlighted in *1.4*, a significant part of this research project has focused on the transmission process and reformulation of notions of empowerment, women's equality and gender training through the practices of women activist-educators. An evident extension to the research project would be a refocusing on the process of the reception of training and community learning environments amongst participants. While attempting to quantify the achievement of empowerment is seen as contradictory to its performative, evolving and multiple nature, further exploring the responses, perceptions and experiences of participants in training courses would extend the research to build deeper understanding of the contributions of these community learning spaces. Additionally, while this research has largely focused on the practices of ten women's organisations in formulating training on political and social dimensions to women's equality, empowerment and leadership (as outlined in Appendix 4), there is scope to expand the focus of interventions to include other dimensions such as economic or ecological

prioritisations within training, and to further research the differences between practices in varied regions of the country.

Secondly, the limited number of sustained research studies within Myanmar, particularly relating to gender and to education practices, points to a continued need for further research attention. As Myanmar's political transition advances and processes of reform continue there is hopefully increased opportunity to conduct further research, especially in remote areas and within formal state education institutions that have previously been largely beyond access. The continued efforts of individual women and activist organisations in campaigning for women's political participation and inclusion within the peace processes also indicates opportunities for aligning research and practical agendas in advancing notions of social justice and inclusion in moments of transition and peacebuilding. In particular, research that is attentive to and incorporates the existing knowledge and expertise within the country, such as the experience and perspectives of women activist-educators, is recommended to support the recognition of Southern theoretical perspectives and to continue to advance contextually-informed, intersectional feminist analysis. In my own research, I am continuing to work towards this aim through co-authoring forthcoming work with several of the women who have provided feedback on my work in Myanmar with the intention of maintaining research collaborations.

Finally, the conceptualisation of women activist-educators as nomadic subjects would be greatly supported by exploring such dynamics in alternative contexts beyond that of Myanmar. While the moment of political turbulence and transition in Myanmar makes this a particularly fruitful site to examine the role of women's movements in supporting social transformations, exploring the dynamics of both education and activism, and their interconnections, in relation to (re)constructing notions of female citizenship in other countries would enable the conceptualisation to be tested and refined.

Afterward

When I first started working as a teacher and trainer in Myanmar in early 2009, I had not anticipated the changes in the political landscape that would unfold over the subsequent eight years, nor that I would continue to be engaged in the country both professionally and personally. This thesis, and my work in Myanmar, have been part of a journey of transitions which is still unfolding.

In this regard the research project has focused primarily on the period between 2011 and 2016, as civil society organisations sought to navigate emerging opportunities and challenges amid the shifting political climate and between election cycles. This period has seen a tentative opening of civil society and activist space, which has enabled women's organisations to increasingly garner space and attention for their efforts to promote gender justice and inclusion. These shifts are however ongoing and are by no means irreversible. The political transitions that have taken place have perhaps resulted in fewer substantial changes than many would have hoped for, and there are growing concerns over religious tensions, ongoing conflicts and dissatisfaction with the processes of peace negotiations. Such tensions, particularly with regard to the oppression of religious minorities, risk severely undermining efforts to advance equality, social inclusion and justice. In 2017 therefore, there remain significant challenges confronting the NLD government and the diverse constituents of civil society and educational organisations alike.

For those working to establish transformative constructions of female citizenship within this transitioning landscape, the journey is likewise inchoate. As one feminist activist in Yangon lamented, "*Sometimes I think, oh my god, it's going to be a long, long way!"* While extending my thanks to all those activists, educators and students that have participated in my research project, I also wish those committed to social transformation courage and support in continuing their journey.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Nederlanse samenvatting

Construeren van vrouwelijk burgerschap in transitionerend Myanmar

De rol van vrouwenactivisme en onderwijs

I. Introductie

Onderwijspraktijken als onderdeel van sociaal geconstrueerde instituten, kunnen zeer *gendered* zijn en daarmee modellen presenteren van verwacht gedrag van jonge mannen en jonge vrouwen (Dunne, Humphreys & Leach 2006; Dunne 2009). Zulke praktijken kunnen echter significant verschillen tussen en binnen contexten en in verschillende vormen van onderwijs, zowel formeel als non-formeel. Dit onderzoek exploreert de velerlei manieren waarop onderwijspraktijken ideeën en verwachtingen van vrouwelijk burgerschap kunnen construeren binnen de veranderende context van Myanmar, inclusief tegenreacties vanuit maatschappelijke bewegingen.

Er is groeiende aandacht in internationale ontwikkeling en *comparative education* voor de rol van onderwijs in overgangs- en door conflict aangetaste contexten als potentieel om kansen te creëren om meer sociale inclusie te bevorderen en ongelijkheden die wrok kunnen voeden aan te kaarten (Davies 2010; Leach & Dunne 2007; Novelli & Lopes Cardozo 2008; Lopes Cardozo & Shah 2016). Eveneens hebben ontwikkelingsprioriteiten van de laatste twee decennia, zoals gereflecteerd in de Millennium Ontwikkelingsdoelen en nu de Duurzame Ontwikkelingsoden alsmede initiatieven zoals Onderwijs voor Iedereen (*Education for All*), intenties laten zien voor zowel het uitbreiden van inclusief onderwijs als het bevorderen van *gender*gelijkheid en vrouwen*empowerment*, wat de associaties tussen deze twee domeinen benadrukt (Salvi 2017; Unterhalter 2015; UN 2016). Er is echter een neiging geweest om deze relatie te eenvoudig voor te stellen, en

het historische gebrek aan betekenisvolle aandacht voor de verbindingen tussen zulke globale doelen, die verder reiken dan louter toegang tot onderwijs, zijn stevig bekritiseerd (Kabeer 2005; 2015; Unterhalter 2012; Cornwall & Rivas 2015; Esquivel & Sweetman 2016). Hoewel de Duurzame Ontwikkelingssdoelen het doel hebben om verbeterde connecties tussen deze domeinen te bevorderen (UN 2016), blijft bezorgdheid geuit worden over het te weinig benadrukken van de rol van onderwijs in het teweegbrengen van transformatieve verandering (Sterling 2014; 2016; Esquivel 2016). Bovendien zijn, ondanks de referenties aan non-formeel onderwijs en leven lang leren in internationaal beleid, de rol van non-formeel onderwijs en de bijdragen van non-gouvernementele actoren in onderwijspraktijken, vooral dat van NGO*s* en maatschappelijke bewegingen, vaak onderbelicht gebleven ten gunste van een nauwere prioritering van scholing (Casey & Asamoah 2016; Stromquist 2015a). Eveneens is aangekaart dat de rol van vrouwenorganisaties en activistische bewegingen in het bevorderen van gelijkheidsdoelen op een vergelijkbare manier een gebied is dat meer overweging behoeft (Cornwall & Edwards 2014; Stromquist 2015a; 2015b), met name door internationale instituties en actoren die gendergelijkheid trachten te bevorderen.

Dit onderzoek draagt daarom bij aan deze debatten door specifieke sociale, culturele en politieke invloeden aan het licht te brengen die opereren binnen de context van zowel onderwijspraktijken als activisme georiënteerd op gendergelijkheid/-rechten in Myanmar, waarmee - middels referentie aan deze twee domeinen - de begrippen gendergelijkheid en *empowerment* verder bevorderd worden. Resulterend daaruit stel ik een conceptualisering voor van *activist-onderwijzers* als sleutelbemiddelaars tussen internationale-, nationale- en gemeenschapsagenda's, erop wijzend dat betere overweging van de complexiteit aan invloeden die maatschappelijke activisten en onderwijzers navigeren, meer holistische benaderingen naar onderwijsdoelen kan bevorderen. Een *sustained case study* benadering is daarom genomen om de aandacht te vestigen op deze ontwikkelende responses binnen Myanmar's activistische vrouwenbewegingen, daarbij ook voortbouwend op mijn eigen ervaringen in het werken met het maatschappelijk middenveld en onderwijsbeoefenaars binnen deze context sinds begin 2009.

Daar Myanmar politieke transities ondergaat na een halve eeuw autoritaire militaire bewindsvoering, en spanningen blijven aanhouden door gewapende conflicten en geweld tussen gemeenschappen (Lall 2016; Walton & Hayward 2015), verstrekken de veranderende politieke dynamieken van de afgelopen vijf jaar een kans om de opkomende reacties te observeren van velerlei onderwijsbeoefenaars en maatschappelijke bewegingen die oproepen

tot verhoogde sociale inclusie. Deze oproepen bevatten eisen voor hervormingen van formeel onderwijs en een uitbreiding van capaciteiten van het maatschappelijk middenveld die zich bezighouden met non-formeel onderwijs, voornamelijk geleid door organisaties van vrouwenactivisten. Het onderzoek kaart derhalve de volgende twee hoofdonderzoeksvragen en sub-vragen aan:

1. *Wat zijn de rollen die verschillende onderwijspraktijen spelen in het construeren van burgerschapsidealen in Myanmar, en wat zijn de manieren waarop deze* gendered *zijn?*

- *Hoe hebben praktijken in onderwijs de sociale ondergeschiktheid van vrouwen aangehouden en gelegitimeerd?*
- *Wat zijn de manieren waarop deze alternatieve leeromgevingen alternatieve modellen presenteren?*

2. *Hoe creëert vrouwenactivisme in Myanmar en de Thaise grens alternatieve* spaces *voor transformatief leren gedurende Myanmar's periode van politieke transitie?*

- *Hoe reageren vrouwenorganisaties op verschuivende beperkingen en mogelijkheden gedurende de periode van politieke transitie en wat zijn de consequenties van deze reacties?*
- *Wat zijn de alternatieve voorstellingen van vrouwelijk burgerschap die voortkomen uit deze leeromgevingen?*

Het onderzoek neemt een kritische feministische benadering aan die bouwt op post-structurele conceptualiseringen van *space* en de mogelijkheden van transformatie (Braidotti 2011a; Butler 2004), met als doel kansen te benadrukken om te leren van de ervaringen van Myanmarese vrouwenactivisten in het construeren van alternatieve omgevingen van *gendered* leren. Het onderzoek bouwt specifiek voort op ideeën van Delezue over *space* en *nomadism* (Deleuze & Guattari 2013/1988; Braidotti 2011a) om een conceptualisering van leeromgevingen en de positie van *activist-onderwijzers* te bevorderen, wat de pluraliteit aan invloeden die hun weg kunnen vinden naar leeromgevingen laat zien. Onderzoek was uitgevoerd gedurende meerdere veldwerkbezoeken tussen 2014 en 2016 en volgde een etnografische benadering waarbij semigestructureerde interviews, focus groep discussie, locatiebezoeken en observaties met etnografische discourse analyse gecombineerd werden (Manor-Binyamini 2011). Dit nam een *case study* benadering aan, waarbij tien vrouwenorganisaties betrokken waren die

gemeenschapsonderwijs organiseerden om sociale ongelijkheid van vrouwen aan te kaarten. Dit maakte het niet alleen mogelijk om hun onderwijspraktijken, inhoud en geschreven cursusmateriaal te bestuderen, maar ook de perspectieven van onderwijzers en participanten in het construeren en ervaren van deze leeromgevingen. Het proefschrift is vervolgens gestructureerd in twee hoofdsecties, Deel II (Hoofdstukken 4-6) en Deel III (Hoofdstukken 7-9) die de duale prioriteiten bespreken van het onderzoek zoals gereflecteerd in de onderzoeksvragen.

II. Onderwijs en *Gendered* Burgerschap

De hoofdstukken in Deel II exploreren de verschillende leeromgevingen en de *gendered* voorstellingen die daaruit voortkomen, wat de eerste onderzoeksvraag beantwoordt dat zich richt op de rol van verschillende onderwijspraktijken in het construeren van burgerschapsidealen.

Theoriseren van Onderwijs Spaces: conceptualiseren van spaces voor leren en constructies van (gendered) burgerschap in Myanmar's transitie

Hoofdstuk 4 ontwikkelt de conceptualisering van onderwijs*spaces* die ten grondslag liggen aan de navolgende hoofdstukken van het proefschrift. Verschillende onderwijs*spaces*, voornamelijk in conflict- en transitiesituaties, kunnen meerdere en veranderende rollen spelen, inclusief het valideren van reproducties van door de staat gesanctioneerd burgerschap langs exclusieve lagen, or andersom het aannemen van een meer oppositionele houding. Dit hoofdstuk exploreert de dynamieken en contributies van uiteenlopende onderwijspraktijken binnen de context van Myanmar, met een focus op de manieren waarop zulke praktijken en de opkomende voorstellingen *gendered* zijn. Voortbouwend op Deleuze en Guattari's begrippen gekerfde *(striated)* en effen *(smooth) spaces* (2013/1988), benadruk ik de verschillende dimensies van Myanmar's onderwijs *spaces* die afwisselende leerpraktijken en wegen voor het uitbreiden van inclusie laten zien. Overheidsonderwijspraktijken in Myanmar zijn grotendeels bevonden kansen te beperken voor inclusief leren door het repliceren van diepgewortelde sociale hiërarchieën die karakteristiek zijn van een gekerfde *(striated) space*. Door allereerst te benadrukken hoe verschillende onderwijs*spaces* leren benaderen in contrasterende en wat lijkt tegensprekende manieren, doen zich momenten voor waarin overlappingen aan het licht komen. Dit onthult mogelijkheden voor alternatieve en meer inclusieve leerpraktijken beginpunten te vinden om hiërarchische sociale structuren die normaliter gerepliceerd worden in institutionele scholing te

eroderen. Op basis van voorbeelden van praktijken in zowel gemeenschapsonderwijs en door individuele docenten alreeds binnen formeel onderwijs, effen *(smooth)* blijkt dat leerdynamieken mogelijkheden kunnen aanbieden om de onveranderlijkheid van hiërarchieën terug te draaien.

Het leren van geweld en schaamte: gendering geweld en het lichaam in Myanmar's formele onderwijsspaces

Hoofdstuk 5 verkent *gendered* praktijken in formele scholing, zoals ervaren en geuit door jonge Myanmarese vrouwen van diverse religieuze en etnische achtergronden, terugreflecterend op hun recente onderwijservaringen. Ik maak connecties tussen de subordinatie van vrouwelijke studenten, wat ingegrift staat in formele onderwijspraktijken en de legitimering van geweld tegen vrouwen binnen de Myanmar maatschappij in het algemeen. Drie dimensies van *gendered* praktijken komen met name aan het licht, die bijdragen aan het promoten van terughoudendheid en schaamte; de fysieke positionering in onderwijs*spaces*; de materialiteit die wordt geassocieerd met vrouwenlichamen; en de stemmen van jonge vrouwen het zwijgen opleggen. Deze leerpraktijken, die zelf voorbeelden zijn van structureel en symbolisch geweld, worden bevonden patronen van direct geweld tegen vrouwen aan te zetten en te behouden, zoals ingebed in sociale ongelijkheden en *gender*hiërarchieën. Het hoofdstuk eindigt met een additionele focus studie dat de verlangens voor alternatieve schoolomgevingen presenteert zoals uitgedrukt door jonge vrouwen in een focus groep discussie, wat aan het licht brengt dat leermethodologieën, relevantie van het curriculum en praktische activiteiten inclusief participatie in sport sleutelprioriteiten zijn voor deze jonge vrouwen.

Grensoverschrijdende transities: navigeren van conflict en politieke verandering door gemeenschapsonderwijspraktijken in Myanmar en de Thaise border.

Politieke schommelingen in Myanmar en Thailand, tussen militarisering en democratische hervorming, hebben een snelle heronderhandeling ingegeven van de aanpassingen, doelen en prioriteiten van non-gouvernementele onderwijsaanbieders, zowel internationaal als gemeentelijk, langs de grenzen van deze twee landen. Hoofdstuk 6 exploreert de responses op verschuivingen in politiek klimaat, inclusief de heroriëntering van donorfinanciering en een toegenomen nadruk op repatriëring, welke gemeenschapsonderwijspraktijken hebben getroffen binnen Myanmar en onder de vluchtelingen- en migrantengemeenschappen langs de Thaise grens. Middels het doortrekken

van de theoretisering van effen (*smooth)* en gekerfde (*striated) space* worden de *nomadic* ervaringen (Braidotti 2011a) binnen grensoverschrijdende bewegingen benadrukt. Dit laat zien dat gemeenschapsleeromgevingen op de Thaise grens gebruik maken van verschillende contactpunten om uitgesproken leeromgevingen de creëren, vaak geconstrueerd in oppositie tegen Myanmarese scholing. Deze leeromgevingen zijn echter ook onderworpen aan diverse invloeden en verschuiven prioriteiten met de huidige processen van politieke veranderingen, wat resulteert in toegenomen nadruk op voorbereiding tot terugkeer naar Myanmar.

III. Feministisch Leren en Activisme in Transitie

De implicaties van de *gendered* aard van leerpraktijken in het handhaven van de sociale onderdrukken van vrouwen worden beantwoord met tegenstellingen en betwistingen in de leeromgevingen geconstrueerd door organisaties van vrouwenactivisten. De hoofdstukken in Deel III breiden daarom de analyse uit naar de *gendered* aard van leerpraktijken om te verkennen hoe vrouwenorganisaties gemeenschapsleren hebben gemobiliseerd als een middel om genderongelijkheden te bestrijden binnen Myanmar, wat de tweede onderzoeksvraag beantwoordt dat zich right op hoe vrouwenactivisme alternatieve *spaces* voor transformatief leren creëert.

Conceptualiseren van space voor vrouwenactivisme in conflict en transitie

Hoofdstuk 7 verbreedt de theoretische conceptuliseringen van *space* en *nomadic subjectivity* tot de positie van vrouwenactivisten en de activistische leeromgevingen die zij (re)construeren. Maatschappelijke organisaties van vrouwen bezetten een onderscheidende positie in het mediëren tussen verschillende gemeenschaps-, staat- en internationale prioriteiten, welke geaccentueerd worden door de veranderende dynamieken van conflict- en transitiesituaties. De ervaringen van verplaatsing en verstoring die voorkomen uit turbulente situaties kunnen de contactpunten die activisten tegenkomen vermeerderen, wat bijdraagt aan kansen voor alternatief leren dat activistische agenda's kan ondersteunen. Zulke situaties kunnen echter ook vijandigheid en risico doen toenemen waar activisten mee geconfronteerd worden. Door feministische activisten in het navigeren van deze diverse invloeden te conceptualiseren als *nomadic subjectivity*, laten ook de strategieën en leerpraktijken die activisten gebruiken zien wat de vaak verscholen affectieve consequenties van hun posities zijn.

Feminisme ontdekken, een stem ontdekken? Het mobiliseren van gemeenschapsonderwijs om vrouwenparticipatie op te bouwen in Myanmar's politieke transities

Hoofdstuk 8 verkent veranderende positioneringen binnen activistenbewegingen van vrouwen, in met name een toenemende aandacht voor 'feminisme' als een concept en term, zoals benadrukt door Myanmarese vrouwen *activist-onderwijzers*. Ik laat zien dat deze opkomende identificatie als feministen onder activisten zowel ongenoegen aantoont met de de-politisering en de-contextualisering van gendergelijkheid doelen dat tot uitdrukking komt door interacties met een aantal internationale organisaties, en ook het *nomadism* van *activist-onderwijzers* reflecteert in het construeren van alternatieve toepassingen van feministisch onderwijs. Het hoofdstuk eindigt met een tweede focus studie naar feministische leiderschapstraining, wat de mogelijke disconnectie laat zien tussen de inhoud van de leiderschapstraining en de behoeftes van huidige en aspirant vrouwelijke leiders.

(Re)construeren van empowerment: uitdagingen en alternatieven in het overbrengen van vrouwenempowerment training

Vrouwen*empowerment* training is een veel voorkomend kenmerk van initiatieven binnen ontwikkelingscontexten, aangeleverd door zowel internationale als lokale organisaties dat vaak een 'trainen van trainers' (ToT) benadering volgt met als doel het bereik te vergroten. Hoewel de reikwijdte van individuele cursussen varieert, werd bevonden dat veel van het materiaal dat gebruikt wordt een homogeen en lineaire representatie van mannen en vrouwen aanbiedt die zelden gecontextualiseerd zijn naar lokale contexten, wat zorgen wekt over mogelijke replicatie van oppervlakkige representaties van gender identiteiten, rollen en relaties. Desalniettemin blijven zulke representaties niet onbetwist door lokale vrouwenorganisaties die constructies van internationale trainingspraktijken betwisten om alternatieve manieren te creëren voor *empowerment* door leren. Hoofdstuk 9 belicht de uitdagingen waar *activist-onderwijzers* mee te maken hebben gehad in het proberen *empowerment*training toe te passen, en presenteert twee *case studies* van alternatieve *empowerment*cursussen ontwikkelend in response daarop door twee vrouwenorganisaties; deze benadrukken seksualiteit en vrouwenlichamen, ervaringen met geweld, en zeer gelokaliseerde inhoud zoals de implicaties van federalisme voor etnische staten en de impact op het milieu van winningsindustrieën.

IV. Conclusies en implicaties

Het begrijpen van de manieren waarop gemeenschapsonderwijs uitgedragen wordt, zoals hierboven beschreven als een vorm van activisme dat expliciet doelt op het bestrijden van leermodellen zoals gepresenteerd in formele Staat-onderwijssystemen, laat zien hoezeer *gendered* uitdagingen aanhouden binnen onderwijssystemen, zelfs wanneer inschrijfratios gelijkheid lijken te suggereren. Alternatieve leeromgevingen die geleid worden door vrouwenactivisten en gemeenschapsonderwijzers van maatschappelijke organisaties hebben als doel een andere constructie te presenteren van vrouwenburgerschap, dat zich met name focust op ideeën van *empowerment*, politieke- en gemeenschapsparticipatie, en leiderschap. Omdat deze leeromgevingen niet gebonden zijn aan voorgeschreven vakspecifieke curriculum teksten en toetsen, laten ze een belangrijke variëteit zien in hun prioriteiten en benaderingen, wat op mogelijkheden wijst om noties zoals *empowerment* te contextualiseren, wat een probleem blijft in algemeen ontwikkeling discourse (Cornwall & Rivas 2015). Deze creatieve, activistische leeromgevingen zijn bevonden een variëteit aan ervaringen te reflecteren van vrouwenactivisten en onderwijzers die op meerdere contactpunten voortbouwen, inclusief internationaal trainingsmateriaal, om zo noties zoals *empowerment* aan te passen, te herdoelen, en te herformuleren. Zulke heroriëntaties zijn bevonden ook de prioritering van seksualiteit en vrouwenlichamen, ervaringen met geweld, meer relationele begrippen van (on)gelijkheid, identiteit en religie, politieke betrokkenheid en relaties met de Staat te bevatten.

Aandacht voor deze alternatieve prioriteiten laten daarmee dus mogelijkheden zien niet alleen om begrippen van gendergelijkheid en *empowerment* te bevorderen en contextualiseren binnen ontwikkelingsagenda's, maar ook prioriteiten binnen onderwijshervormingen aan te moedigen voor meer inclusieve en transformatieve leeromgevingen. Deze bevindingen bevestigen de oproepen voor meer inclusieve benaderingen naar ontwikkeling die nadruk leggen op sociale, relationele en ecologische inclusiviteit om vooruitgang te boeken in het behalen van duurzame ontwikkeling voor iedereen (Gupta & Vegelin 2016; Pouw & Gupta 2017). Het is aangeduid dat het erkennen van de rollen en expertise van *activist-onderwijzers* in het contextualiseren van concepten, alsmede het bouwen van nauwere bondgenootschappen met organisaties van vrouwenactivisten die hun eigen onderwijs- en trainingspraktijken ontwerpen en aanbieden, voorziet in een startpunt dat meer doelgerichte, inclusieve, en participerende inspanningen steunt in de strijd voor gender rechtvaardigheid.

Appendix 2

Fieldwork Information Sheet

UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM

About me

I have worked as a teacher, curriculum writer and consultant in Myanmar and the Thai border region since the beginning of 2009, including several years developing training courses and material on women's empowerment and community development.

I am now with the University of Amsterdam completing a doctorate and doing research as part of a consortium (which includes the Universities of Amsterdam, Sussex and Ulster) in Education, Social Justice and Peace-building.

About my research

My work focuses on women's training programmes with the aim of promoting equality and social transformation and currently I'm preparing a mapping study to identify courses being delivered to adult women across Myanmar and the Thai-border. The hope is that this will build up a picture of the type of training being offered in different areas and how it varies in different locations.

I am interested in finding out what training is being offered to women from Myanmar to help support them in leadership, empowerment and capacity building and I would like to know what courses for women have been offered by organisations recently and if any are planned for the coming year. I'd particularly like to hear from the teachers of such training programmes to hear how they feel about their role and to see how they work with material, adapting and supplementing it to their needs.

Aim of the research

I think that education is a useful way to support women's equality in society and in leadership and I would like to help others learn from what is being done in practice. Particularly, I would like to find out what topics are being included in training and how teachers and trainers are choosing and adapting material so that it is most useful to them in their classrooms. I also hope that the study will be useful in helping develop training material that is flexible and fits the needs of trainers. This will be part of my PhD research and I'm hoping that this will draw attention to the valuable work of women's organisations and so that people can learn from the experiences of trainers promoting women's equality and to help inform useful strategies to support trainers.

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Appendix 3

Preliminary Fieldwork Documents

Mapping and case study identification process 2014: stages, techniques & ethical safeguards

Introductory emails and informal meetings to explain purpose of my research, what it involves and time frame of visits
- Verbal / email consent obtained for follow-up interview and to include org in mapping exercise
Key contacts *(anonymised to protect research participants)*

Gathering information for mapping – *methods*: meetings / interviews held in offices of orgs; telephone or online conversations
- Verbal / written consent reiterated for including org in mapping - Notes taken, not audio recorded
Info templates filled in for each course

Further interviews and meetings, both in formal and informal settings to ask further questions of course designers and trainers
- Audio recorded where appropriate and participants are willing – verbal consent sought - Conversations without consent for audio recording – notes taken - Complete anonymity of individuals recorded – recordings will only be used for transcription, never played publicly - Purpose of research re-explained regarding further work in 2015
Questions asked from follow-up questions template regarding motivation and goal, trainers' perspectives, material and approach. Relationship building to establish partners for further fieldwork in 2015 – identification of courses planned for early 2015 for ethnographic study (classroom observations etc)

Collecting curriculum material for analysis, where available
- Written material exchanged and/or photographed with permission - Purpose of curriculum analysis re-explained
Material will be analysed after fieldwork study.

The initial data collection for the mapping exercise will therefore include the following data for each programme:

Template for mapping data collection

Name of course	
Geographical Location	
Delivery Organisation (INGO, NGO, Community based)	
Target Audience	
How are courses advertised? (recruitment of participants)	
Language of publicity:	
Stated Aim (empowerment, leadership training, capacity building)	
Key words associated with course description:	
Course content overview	
Language of Delivery	
Mode of Delivery (class-room based or otherwise)	
Length of Programme	
Dates:	
Funding Origins	
Additional Notes	
Including, where possible, curriculum material used	

Is the information found here in the public domain (e.g. available on a website)? **Yes / No**

If No, does the organisation consent to its name appearing in the research? **Yes / No**
(If No, the organisation's name not appear in the research)

Additionally, the interviews conducted with available trainers will provide more details on course motivation, material selection and training practices to allow for a layering of information that will ultimately contribute to a richer profile. This will serve as a pilot study to identify those organisations, training coordinators and trainers who may be willing to participate more fully in the case-study which will combine critical discourse analysis of the training material used with ethnographic techniques.

Additional question prompts during initial interviews:
(These are intended as a guide and do not constitute an exhaustive list of questions)

Motivation	What do you see is the aim of this course? What do you hope it achieves? Why do you think a course like this is necessary?
Training material:	What training material do you use? Where did you get it from or did you design it yourself? Do you feel it is sufficient? Do you have to add to it? Do you feel the training material is appropriate for your context?
Training approach:	What techniques do you use in trainings? E.g. group discussions, games, etc. What do you feel are the benefits of these approaches?
Trainers' perspectives:	What do you hope that participants learn from your course? Do you feel supported in your training? What helps you feel this way? or What would help you feel more supported?
Networks:	Do you feel connected to other organisations?

It is from the initial interviews that I will recruit participants for my case-study analysis, asking if the organisations and the trainers themselves are willing to participate in this more detailed study.

The criteria for identifying case-studies is as follows:

- Courses must take place between July 2014 and August2015;
- Courses must take place in areas that are safe for the researcher to access (i.e. not in the states affected by conflict, to which foreigners are not permitted to travel): at least one course should be located in Yangon, and at least one course located in Thailand (border region or Chiang Mai);
- As with the mapping exercise, courses must aim to affect social change for women through promoting participation in leadership and facilitating equality in rights;
- Training material used must be at least in part in English;
- Trainers and training coordinators must consent to participating in the research project, understanding that this will involve sharing the training material used and participating in interviews, discussions and if possible class observations.

Appendix 4

Training Material collected

Curriculum and training texts were shared by 19 organisations, included in the mapping exercise, who were delivering women's empowerment and gender equality training, including the 10 organisations included as case studies (see Appendix 4). All organisations used a variety of sources in their training and workshops, drawing and adapting from multiple texts. Training material can be categorised according to the following four different patterns:

a) international material produced in English for international organisations and therefore intended to be used in development contexts, including:

Training texts collected		
Text	Source	No. of courses using
Women's Rights	Amnesty International	2
Women Can Do It	Norwegian People's Aid	2
Empowering Young Women to Lead Change	UNFPA & YWCA	2
Women's Empowerment Leadership Development toolkit	Centre for Creative Learning	1
The Oxfam Gender Training Manual	Oxfam UK	1
Disability Rights and Advocacy Training for Women with Disabilities in the Arab Region	The Supreme Council of Family Affairs, The Arab League & Rehabilitation International	1
Disability Rights, Gender, and Development: A Resource Tool for Action	Wellesley Centres for Women & UNFPA	1
Gender & Development	World Vision	1

b) international material produced in English for domestic organisations in the UK, the USA and elsewhere, and therefore not designed for use in development contexts, as well as films and media material beyond specific teaching texts, including:

Training texts collected		
Text	Source	No. of courses using
Facilitator Activity Guides: Friendship; Mind, Body, Spirit; Relationships with Peers; Expressing My Individuality; Paths to the Future	Girls Circle	1
Leading to Action: A Political Participation Handbook for Women	Women's Learning Partnership	1
A New Weave of Power, People & Politics: the Activity Guide for Advocacy and Citizenship Participation	Practical Action Publishing	1

c) material produced specifically for use within Myanmar, but developed by international staff and consultants, in English but sometimes also translated into Burmese, including:

Training texts collected			
Text	Source	Language	No. of courses using
Gender: Issues & Perspectives	Mote Oo	English & Burmese	5
Gender Issues	Educasia	English & Burmese	5
Active Citizenship	Mote Oo	English	1

d) local material developed by women's organisations often in participation with their community members, in Burmese and ethnic languages, sometimes also translated into English, including:

Training texts collected			
Text	Source	Language	No. of courses using
Basic Gender Awareness Training	NGO GG	English & Burmese	1
Introduction to Gender Studies	NGO GG	English & Burmese	1
Experiences of Violence: personal accounts	NGO GG	Burmese	1
Gender & Politics	Rainfall	Burmese	1

Appendix 5

Case Study Organisations

Ethnographic discourse analysis was conducted with five case-study groups during 2014-2016, with a lighter study conducted with an additional five organisations, each listed below. To protect confidentiality, data has been anonymised: the names of the organisations are not included and the titles of courses have been paraphrased.

In-depth case studies

1. Women's Political Empowerment

A five day course delivered in Burmese language by local staff but supported by an international organisation. The Myanmar trainers designed and adapted the course based on I course that I had originally designed for the international organisation two years previously. Consequently I was familiar with some of the material that they were drawing from, although the course had changed substantially in its aim and target. The course was delivered at multiple sites within Myanmar between 2013 and 2015 to adult women with the aim of promoting knowledge of political participation at a community level. Six interviews were conducted:

3 x the senior trainer and course designer
2 x the course trainer
1 x additional trainer

2. Empowering Women for Political Participation

A seven day course delivered by a feminist organisation based in Yangon to women from varied states and regions of Myanmar with the aim of building understandings of gender and feminism whilst also promoting political participation in the lead up to the 2016 elections. The organisation has no religious affiliation although the majority of participants identified as Buddhist. Observations and events hosted by the organisation were attended in addition to conducting six interviews:

1 x co-founder and trainer
2 x co-founder and trainer
3 x co-founder and trainer

3. Young Women's Empowerment & Leadership School

A six-month residential course delivered in Thailand to 20 young women from seven of Myanmar's different states as well as young women from the refugee and migrant communities on the Thai border. The organisation has no religious affiliation and participants identified Buddhist and Christian. Training was largely delivered in English, with some use of Burmese and ethnic languages. This case study was originally used as the pilot study and consequently involved a more sustained engagement, also due to the length of the course, than other groups. Observations and discussions were conducted with the course participants at the beginning and end of the course in 2014-15, including residence for one week with the participants. Additionally, eight interviews were conducted:

1 x the three organisation directors and senior management
3 x the programme manager
4 x the lead trainer

4. Sexuality Training

A Yangon-based organisation delivering sexuality training to women in the Yangon area. Courses vary in length, typically covering eight classes and focus on issues of understanding women's own bodies, overcoming shame and addressing sexual harassment and violence against women. Some courses were also delivered to mixed groups of men and women, with the aim of engaging men in understanding and supporting issues of gender equality. The organisation was also in the process of developing their own teaching material on sexuality also in partnership with another local organisation, with the aim of sharing this material more widely. Three interviews were conducted with the organisation director and the senior trainer and curriculum developer.

5. Gender training

Yangon-based, mixed gender training delivered frequently to groups of varying sizes for between three and five days. The organisation has Christian leadership but takes no religious position in its training and participants share varied ethnic and religious affiliations. The organisation and its gender training include a particular focus on understanding and combatting violence against women, with training largely being conducted in Burmese, with some use of English texts. Observations and site visits were conducted in 2015, with three interviews conducted with the organisation director and lead trainer.

Light case studies

1. Ethnic women's empowerment

An organisation run by and catering to the needs of Karen women in Karen State, as well as Ayewaddy Division, Bago and Yangon. Courses varied in length and focused on women's empowerment through addressing issues of violence against women in the community and supporting access to justice mechanisms, women's political participation through voting and participation in the peace process. From 2014 to 2016 multiple site visits and discussions with trainers and a visiting consultant were conducted in addition to two interviews with the organisation director and one trainer.

2. Young women and girls' empowerment

A Yangon-based organisation devoted to training trainers and delivering training to groups of girls and young women aged 12-17 at multiple sites across the varied regions of the country. Although the organisation frequently works with nunnery schools, they have no specific religious affiliation. Training typically took place over eight-ten classes delivered once a week, delivered in Burmese, with an emphasis on understanding puberty and body changes, and sharing emotions and raising questions. The organisation was also in the process of developing their own curriculum, as well as working with other organisations to develop material on understanding the body, sex and sexuality. Three interviews were conducted in 2015 with the organisation leader and trainer.

3. Muslim women's empowerment

Informal training on women's empowerment and gender equality delivered to Muslim women in the Yangon area, including university students, by a female trainer leading a local educational organisation. Three interviews were conducted with the trainer between 2014 and 2016, and interviews with four young women who had participated in the training and continued their own female Muslim students' discussion group.

4. Disability and gender training

Training delivered by a female disabled trainer both to disabled women on understanding rights and participation and to mixed gender and mixed ability participants on accommodating the rights of disabled women. Three interviews were conducted with the lead trainer in 2014-15.

5. Women's rights

Workshops delivered in Ayewaddy division through a Christian organisation focusing on sexual and reproductive health, CEDAW, women's rights and youth leadership. Group interviews were conducted with three trainers and six participants in 2015, and a further follow-up interview with one trainer in 2016.

Varied education sites, particularly in situations of conflict and transition, can play multiple, and changing, roles, including validating reproductions of state-sanctioned citizenship along exclusive strata, or conversely adopting a more oppositional stance. Such constructions can be highly gendered, leading to varying presentations and expectations of gendered behaviour. In Myanmar, diverse education providers from the state to women's community-based activist organisations can produce competing visions of female citizenship, complicated by ongoing political transition, armed conflict and inter-communal violence. This research seeks to explore these multiple and varied ways in which education practices may construct notions and expectations of female citizenship within the transitioning context of Myanmar, including attention to both formal education practices within state schooling and non-formal education practices amongst community-based and civil society organisations.

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Cover art by Chuu Wai Nyein, a Myanmar feminist artist whose work takes as its focal point the daily lives and struggles of Myanmar women.