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Women's activism and education in Myanmar

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Chapter 1

Introduction to the research

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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'.