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Women's activism and education in Myanmar

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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

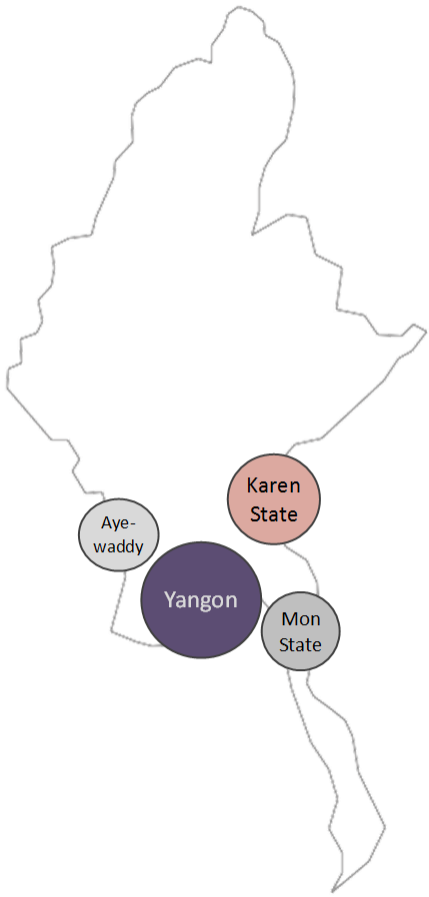
Multiple fieldwork visits were conducted between 2014 and 2016 allowing for the iterative and cumulative nature of the work to emerge. The table below outlines these periods as well as the focus of research activities. The number of interviews (excluding focus group discussions) conducted at each stage 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.

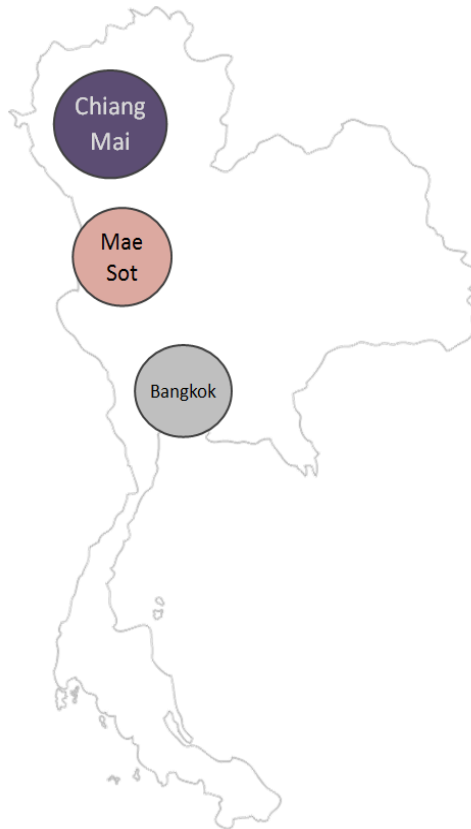


Figure 2: Thailand interview locations

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.

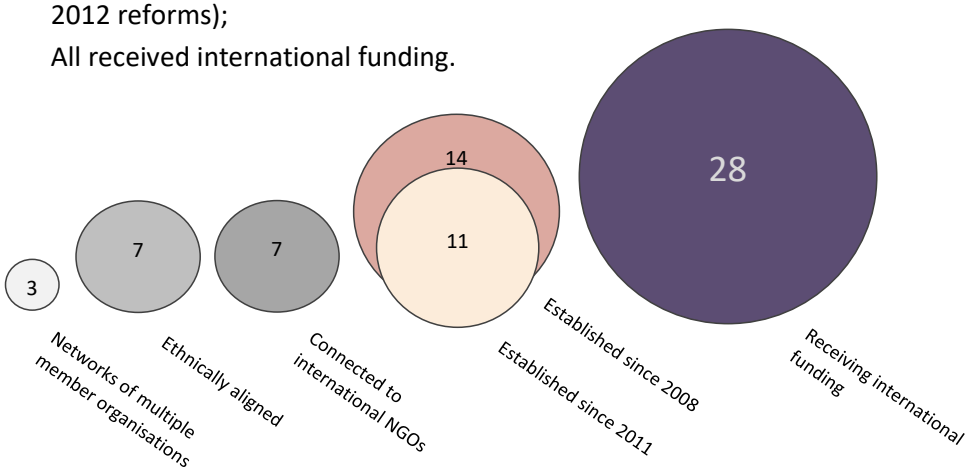


Figure 3: Profile of mapped organisations

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.

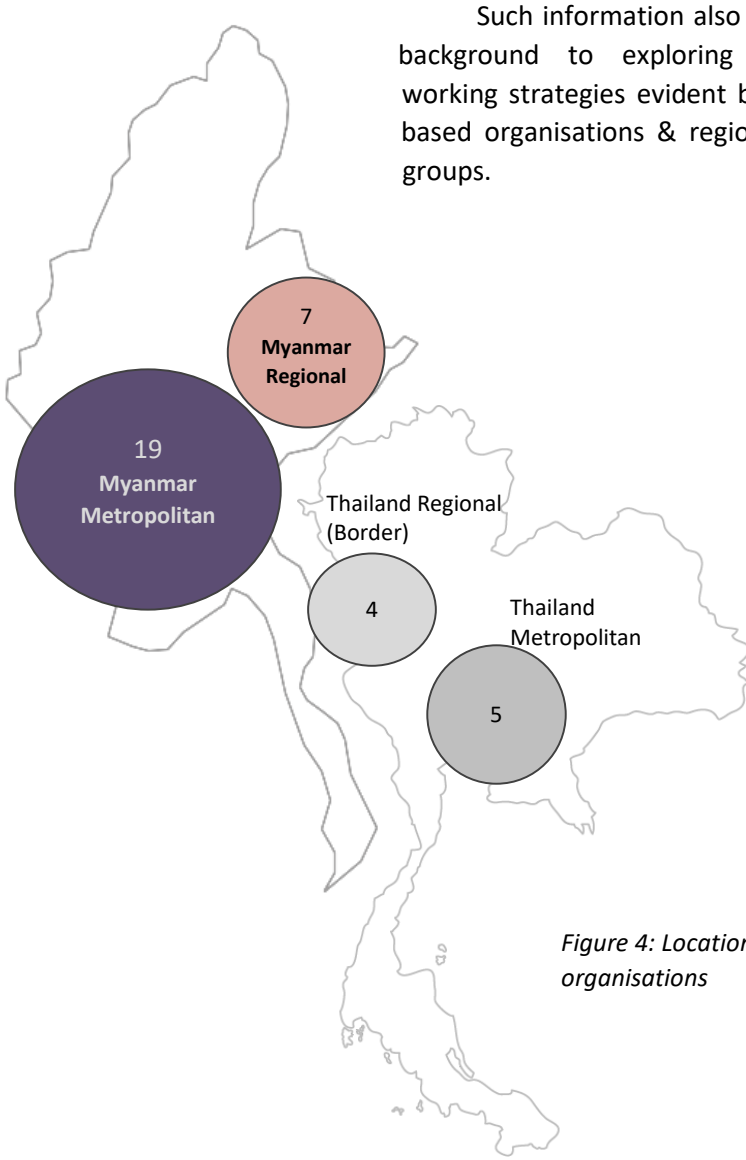


Figure 4: Locations of mapped organisations

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*).

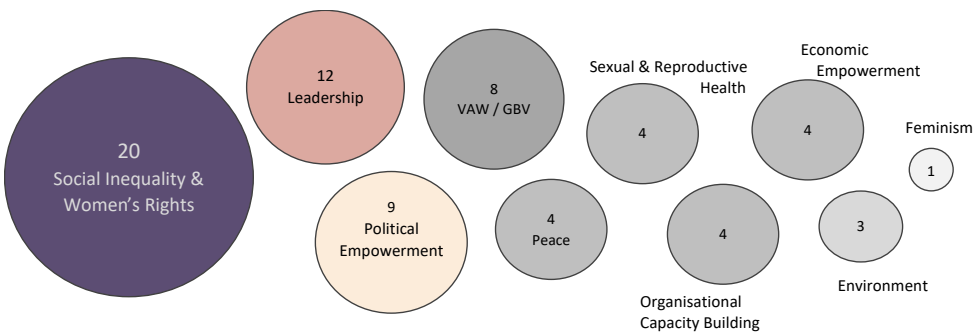


Figure 6: Focus of courses identified in the mapping exercise

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.

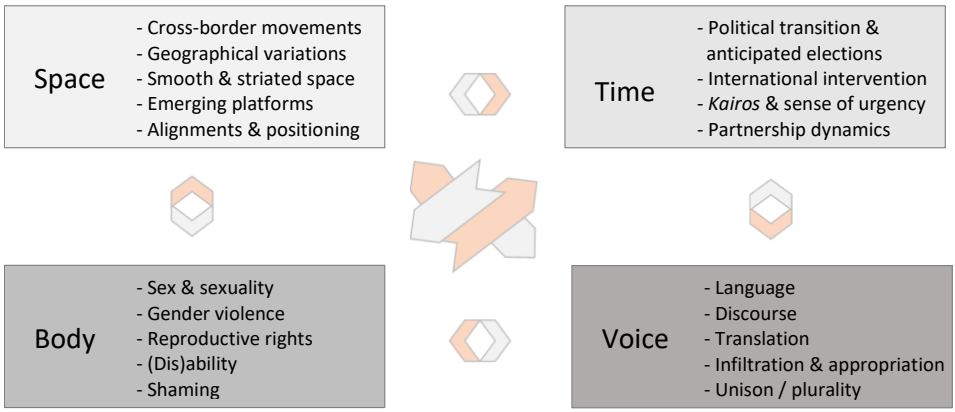


Figure 7: Conceptualising thematic threads – Space, Time, Body, Voice

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.