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Chapter 4

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

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

4.1 Introduction

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

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

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

4.2 Conceptualising spaces of learning: the smooth and the striated

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

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

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

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

4.3 *Striated* formal schooling environments

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.3.1 Constructing Myanmar citizenship

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.3.2 Reproducing violence and gendered hierarchies

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.4 *Smooth* learning dynamics

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.4.1 Sites to reconfigure gendered learning

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.4.2 Smooth dynamics of inclusive learning

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.5 Drawing Conclusions: opportunities for disrupting hierarchies

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

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

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

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

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