



Education, aspiration, and mobility in the Karen borderlands

An ethnography of youth transitions amongst the Kwaegabon Plong Karen of southeastern Burma/Myanmar

*Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy*

by

Richard Dolan
St Antony's College, Oxford

Trinity Term 2020

Education, aspiration and mobility in the Karen borderlands

Existing research on education-to-employment transitions in complex and contested settings in the global South is consumed with the debilitating effects of the 'crisis of youth' and its negative outcomes in which many emerge un/under-employed. Young people are often depicted as in thrall to this predicament rather than probing their agentive capacities for affirmative action to move beyond the impasse. Consequently, few studies explore how youth transitions relate and respond to wider socio-economic and political transformation as young people set about changing the self and the situation.

Based on fieldwork conducted throughout 2015 and 2016 in a remote region of southeastern Burma/Myanmar emerging from decades of armed conflict, government restriction and underdevelopment, this thesis explores how a community of Plong Karen in the Karen State capital Hpa-an, engaging around alternative forms of higher education, are responding directly to local configurations of privation and possibility. By shaping the aspirations and agency of high school and university students to safeguard the legacy of this, this provision amounts to a formidable vision and vehicle of social change.

Adopting an interdisciplinary approach, I bring a concern for temporalities into conversation with socio-spatial mobilities to explore ways in which young people navigate their structured positions and exploit the possibilities around them before and into Myanmar's political transition, and across the Karen borderlands into neighbouring Thailand. I explore how specific struggles and successes around education, shared by this particular social 'generation' across these time-spaces, have informed their capacity to act and the manner in which they are doing so. I suggest that these outcomes are stimulating broader socio-economic transformations within and beyond this community. Access to this education and the opportunities it promises, nevertheless presents young people with new and beguiling possibilities beyond the constraints and concerns of those communities, which remain marked by the spectre of intra-ethnic and religious tensions testing the identifications and affiliations of young people living and learning in contemporary Hpa-an.

from The Years We Didn't See The Dawn

1.

Half asleep, half-awake,
A time of dreaming dreams,

I wanted to walk
But did not know which way to take.

Half unknowing,
My days running out
My paunch thickens and my neck folds sag
As I grow older.
A time of getting nowhere.

I have passed through all this
Unheeding, as in a train
One passes stations by.

Tin Moe (1933-2007)

Translated from Burmese by Vicky Bowman (Ko Ko Thett and Byrne 2012: 27)

from My History is Not Mine

It wasn't me who wrote my history
Eleven out of ten people don't know me
Historians have no idea about
My history written by historians
I have no souvenir whatsoever for sale
PhD scholars, journalists
They have written my history (but I do not remember it)
No stone inscription
No tomb, no bone
Not even ash
I have not written my history
They have written it for me those academics
They have written their own versions
...
They have written my history
Then they have airbrushed me from history
My history has just begun
I am going to write my own history.

Zeyar Lynn (b. 1958)

Translated from Burmese by Ko Ko Thett & James Byrne (Ko Ko Thett and Byrne 2012: 149)

Table of Contents

List of Maps	i
List of Figures	i
Acronyms and Abbreviations	ii
Acknowledgements	iv

PART I: CONTEXT

Introduction	1
Youth transitions amongst the Kwaegabon Plong Karen of southeastern Myanmar	6
Aspirations and agency: temporalities and transformations around youth transitions	8
Education and the politics of aspiration in transitional Myanmar	12
Community-based education and the 'pedagogy' of aspiration in transitional Hpa-an	15
Thesis structure and logic	18
Chapter One. Education, ethnicity, and (im)mobility: a history of the Karen borderlands, 1948-2018	23
Introduction: <i>mobilising around what matters</i>	23
Youth transformations? From breakers to makers in Myanmar's 'democratic Spring'	27
Degrees without freedom: a note on the cultural currency of credentials in Myanmar	29
Reframing Karen identity & interests: seeing the Kwaegabon Plong Karen in contemporary Myanmar	31
The Thai borderlands, 1995-2008: education and opportunity in a parallel Karen domain	53
Contesting discursive frames: Karen in the contemporary mind and media	58
History of the present, 2012-2018: transitions and transformations?	61
Conclusion: Plong Karen aspirations and agency in transitional Myanmar	64
Chapter Two. Transition and transformation: structure, agency and aspiration	66
Youth transitions in context: socio-cultural youth transitions	68
Education-to-employment transitions: crisis and complexity	70
Vital conjunctures: shifting positions and possibilities over time and space	76
Contesting the 'crisis' of youth: notes on the structural 'instability' of crisis	78
Structured agency: on socio-spatial mobilities in youth transitions	82
Generation Myanmar: on 'communities of experience' in Myanmar's democratic transition	84
Back to the future: on temporal mobilities in youth transitions	87
Conclusion	99
Chapter Three. Methods and methodology	101
Methodology: phenomenology and 'double interpretation'	102
Research strategy: iteration, induction and 'grounded theory'	109
Research methods:	117
Ethical considerations and constraints	132
Data analysis	135
Conclusions and claims: a closing statement	139

PART II: ASPIRATIONS & TRANSITIONS

Chapter Four. Crisis and constraint: navigating vital conjunctures in authoritarian Hpa-an _____ **141**

Prelude: vital conjunctures revisited _____	141
The struggle and the sadness: socio-cultural factors shaping positions and possibilities _____	144
Aspirational alliances: a brief portrait of Hpa-an's scholarship alumni 'generation' _____	147
Between a rock and a hard place: navigating the 'crisis of youth' in authoritarian Hpa-an _____	150
Community-based education and the politics of aspiration in contemporary Hpa-an _____	160
Conclusion: critical junctures revisited _____	173

Chapter Five. Privilege and prejudice: socio-spatial mobilities in Thailand _____ **176**

Introduction: mobilising in the memory and the moment _____	176
Learning to leave; leaving to learn: education, migration and memory in the Karen borderlands _____	179
Karen as a 'migrant class': contesting perceptions of mobility and marginalisation _____	183
Strategic moves; silent dimensions: migration and socio-moral mobilities _____	187
<i>Significant others: networks of people, possibility and purpose in Thailand</i> _____	193
<i>Politics and possibility: development, democracy and dependency</i> _____	195
<i>Selective cosmopolitans: navigating fluctuating zones of privilege and prejudice</i> _____	202
Conclusion: mobilising at critical junctures _____	209

Chapter Six. Possible selves: aspirations and agency in transitional Hpa-an _____ **211**

Introduction: <i>building a dream here</i> _____	211
Education and the capacity to aspire _____	215
<i>Models and modalities: teaching and socio-moral identifications</i> _____	218
<i>Motivation as mobility: scholarships as visible and viable pathways</i> _____	221
<i>Working with the enemy: government service as viable and valuable</i> _____	225
<i>Articulating cosmopolitanism: English-speaking Karen in the wider world</i> _____	228
<i>Being and belonging: community development and protection</i> _____	235
<i>Relative aspirations: kinship and community networks</i> _____	238
Conclusion: visions of self and service in transition _____	242

PART III: CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions and contributions: _____ **246**

Empirical: temporal and socio-spatial mobilities in the Karen borderlands _____	248
Theoretical: the affective-ideational dimensions of youth transitions _____	254
Ethnographic: contesting discursive framings of the Karen in contemporary Myanmar _____	259
Future directions _____	261

Appendices _____ **264**

Bibliography _____ **292**

List of Maps

<i>Map 1: The Karen Borderlands: principal field sites 2014-2016</i>	v
<i>Map 2: Hpa-an Township featuring state higher education institutions (HEIs)</i>	vi
<i>Map 3: Central Hpa-an, its Academies and Youth Centre</i>	vii
<i>Map 4: Karen populated states and regions of Myanmar at a glance</i>	32
<i>Map 5. Parallel Karen Domain: the refugee camps in northern Thailand</i>	54
<i>Map 6: Percentage distribution of academy alumni and students interviewed</i>	115
<i>Map 7: Greater Mekong Subregion East-West Economic Corridor in relation to Hpa-an</i>	182

List of Figures

<i>Figure 1. Kanthaya Lake and Zwekabin mountain, Hpa-an, Karen State, Burma</i>	viii
<i>Figure 2. Ancient Caves and 3D Cinemas: transitional Hpa-an in 2015</i>	16
<i>Figure 3. Mobilising Around What Matters: ACDE student protests</i>	23
<i>Figure 4. New Light: Myanmar Youth in State Media</i>	27
<i>Figure 5. Youth and Political Change: government responses to the ADCE student protests</i>	28
<i>Figure 6. Alternative Graduation Photo: Hpa-an University, February 2020</i>	30
<i>Figure 7. Number of higher education institutions (HEIs) by States/Regions</i>	47
<i>Figure 8. Hpa-an University founded in 1995</i>	48
<i>Figure 9. Typical UDE degree course workbook</i>	49
<i>Figure 10. Rise of the Scholarship Alumni</i>	63
<i>Figure 11. Taungalay monastery near Hpa-an</i>	140
<i>Figure 12. Bridge for All? The only academy currently serving Hpa-an's rural youth</i>	155
<i>Figure 13. New and Neutral Ground? Hpa-an's academies and the Baptist Church</i>	169
<i>Figure 14. The Salween River at Hpa-an</i>	176
<i>Figure 15. Hpa-an and the Asia Highway</i>	181
<i>Figure 16. Space to Grow: facilitating alternative educational and aspirational pathways</i>	186
<i>Figure 17. 'Build your dream': recent architectural plan for Hpa-an's Community College</i>	212
<i>Figure 18. Aspirational Architypes: alternative educational pathways abroad</i>	222
<i>Figure 19. Context 'specific' Textbook</i>	229
<i>Figure 20. Politics of Pedagogy: access to previously 'prohibited' ideas</i>	230
<i>Figure 21. Intercultural Encounters: beyond the parameters of community and country</i>	233
<i>Figure 22. Moving Forward: Plong Karen boatmen emerging from Sadan Cave</i>	245
<i>Figure 23. 'Twilight' by 'Lonely Flower' at YCC</i>	264

Acronyms and Abbreviations

ABFSU	All Burma Federation of Students Unions (also known as <i>Ba Ka Tha</i> in Burmese)
AC	Academy Committee
ACDE	Action Committee for Democratic Education
ADRA	Adventist Development and Relief Agency
APIU	Asia-Pacific International University (Bangkok)
APSC	Asia Pacific Scholarship Consortium
BA	Bachelor of Arts
BArch	Bachelor of Architecture
BGF	Border Guard Force
BSc	Bachelor of Science
BSPP	Burma Socialist Programme Party
BYLP	Burma Youth Leadership Programme
CAQDAS	Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software
CBO	Community-Based Organisation
CESR	Comprehensive Education Sector Review
COM	Charity-Orientated Myanmar (Yangon-based NGO)
CUSU	Confederation of University Students Unions
DAE	Department of Alternative Education
DKBA	Democratic Karen Buddhist (sometime ‘Benevolent’ or ‘Burmese’) Army
EAO	Ethnic Armed Organisation (e.g. KNU)
EGG	Education Gathering Group (Hpa-an-based academy; part of the <i>Toungne Lâ Yat</i> programme)
EMIS	Education Management Information System
GED	General Educational Development (US high school certificate)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GLC	Gateway Learning Centre (Hpa-an-based academy)
GPA	Grade Point Average
HEI	higher education institution(s)
HEL	Higher Education Law
IAD	Individual Attribute Data
ICT	Information Communication Technology
IHLCS	Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey
INGO	International Non-Government Organisation
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KAC	Karen Affairs Committee (Hpa-an)
KCBP	Karen Capacity Building Programme (through ADRA Hpa-an)
KCLA	Karen Culture and Literature Association
KCO	Karen Central Organisation
KDN	Karen Development Network
KED	Karen Education Department (affiliated to the KNU)
KESAN	Karen Environment and Social Action Network
KHRG	Karen Human Rights Group
KMSS	Karena Myanmar Social Service
KNA	Karen National Association (1881-1947)
KNLA	Karen National Liberation Army (armed wing of the KNU)
KNP	Karen National Party
KNU	Karen National Union (1947-Present)
KPP	Karen People’s Party
KRCEE	Karen Refugee Committee Education Entity
KSC	Karen Students Centre (Hpa-an)

KSCSN	Karen State Civil Society Network
KSEAG	Karen State Education Assistance Group
KUPC	Karen Unity and Peace Committee
KUSA	Karen University Students Association/Group
KWEG	Karen Women's Empowerment Group
KYO	Karen Youth Organisation (affiliated to but predating the KNU)
LRC	Local Resource Centre
MA	Master of Arts
MC	Management Committee (on AC)
MCAP	Myanmar Community Academies Programme
MEd	Master of Education
ML	<i>Myay Latt</i> (Burmese students' union)
MIMU	Myanmar Information Management Unit
MINE	Myanmar Indigenous Network for Education
MoE	Ministry of Education (Government of Myanmar)
MP	Member of Parliament (referring to members of both upper and lower houses)
MSc	Master of Science
MSAA	Myanmar Scholarship Alumni Association
NCA	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (2015)
NEC	National Education Committee
NEL	National Education Law (2014)
NESP	National Education Strategic Plan
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NLD	National League for Democracy
NNER	National Network for Education Reform
NYP	National Youth Policy (Myanmar)
OKRO	Overseas Karen Refugee Organisation
PAC	Primary Academy Committee (on AC)
PEDU	Phlone [Plong] Education Development Unit
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PSDP	Phlone [Plong] Sqaw Democratic Party
RC	Revolutionary Council
RISE	Research Institute of Society and Ecology (Hpa-an-based NGO)
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal(s)
SGPB/A	Supplementary Grants Program of Burma/Asia
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council
TBC	The Border Consortium (formerly TBBC/Thailand Burma Border Consortium)
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UDE	University of Distance Education
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNPF	United Nations Population Fund
USU	University Students' Union (also known as <i>Ta Ka Tha</i> in Burmese)
YCC	Youth Community Café (Hpa-an-based youth and community hub; aka. 'Veranda')
YLC	Youth Learning Centre (also known as 'Zedaw House'; Hpa-an-based academy)
YMBA	Young Men's Buddhist Association
ZKBN	Zwekabin Myay Education Project (Hpa-an-based academy)

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to many people in Burma, the Karen borderlands in the southeast, in northern Thailand, and the UK without whose support, trust, and confidence this thesis would not have been possible. Above all, I am grateful to the Karen community in Hpa-an, especially the staff and students of its academies and youth centre, whose generosity, courage and honesty rings through in the testimony that follows.

In Thailand, the students, staff and volunteers at Youth Connect, the Wide Horizons and Minmahaw Education Projects, helped me make sense of things in Mae Sot. In Yangon, my friends and colleagues at KDN were instrumental in helping me acclimatise in the early days of fieldwork and build contacts in Karen-populated regions across the country.

In the UK, I am especially grateful to my friends Zoya and Bwa Bwa Phan for their support in establishing wonderful initial contacts amongst the Karen communities in Yangon and Hpa-an and the exile communities of London and Mae Sot; on my return from the field, Ronja Batz, my sometime research assistant, who appeared as if from nowhere to assist with interview transcription and the many useful reflections she offered on these.

I would not have got this far without the guidance, patience and support of my supervisor in Oxford, Professor Dawn Chatty at the Department of International Development to whom I extend particular gratitude and appreciation. I am also grateful to Dr Matthew J Walton, Director of the Programme on Modern Burmese Studies at St Antony's College (2013-2018), for his academic and moral support with this work. I gratefully acknowledge my 'Confirmation' examiners, Dr Gina Crivello and Dr Pia Jolliffe, for their thorough and immensely helpful comments and suggestions at an earlier stage in this work; and Dr Abby Hardgrove, whose thoughts and reflections enhanced the quality of my contribution and clarified my thinking at a key point.

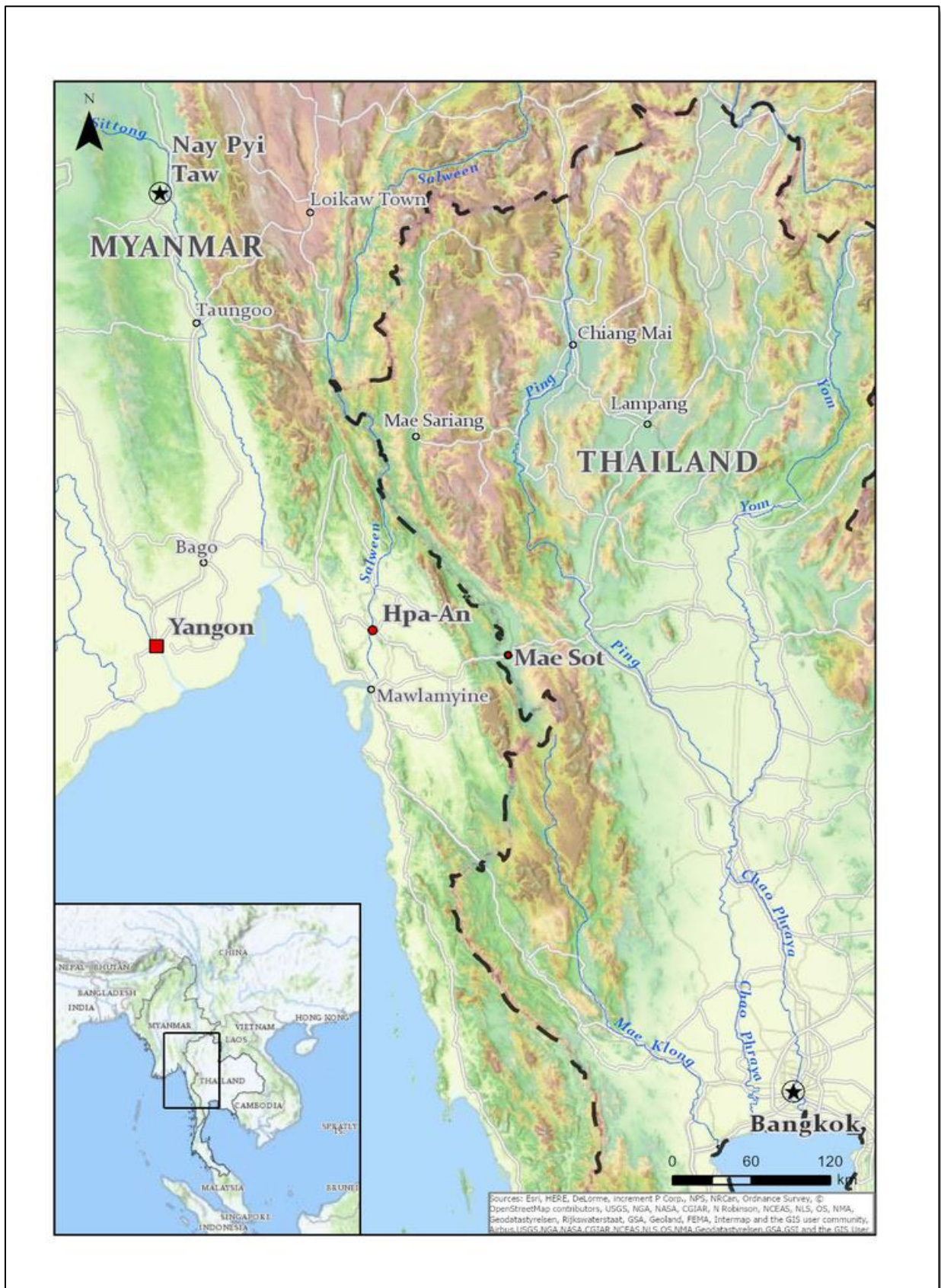
At 'QEH', our wonderful DPhil administrator, Dominique Attala, has been a constant source of support as has Mary Smith at the University's Social Sciences Division, the sweetest person whom I have yet to meet. Heidi Clough at the Bodleian greatly assisted with the mapping and Pamela Stanworth at the IT Learning Centre provided valuable technical support. My friends and former fellow DPhil candidates in the department, particularly Matthew Willner-Reid, Felipe Rao-Clavijo, Alejandro Olayo-Méndez (SJ), Paul Kellner, and Dan Hodgkinson have been a source of inspiration and support from the outset.

I will be forever grateful to the Chapter and community of Pusey House, Oxford for their fellowship and spiritual support throughout the writing of this thesis and the many struggles associated with it. I am particularly grateful to the Principal, the Reverend Dr George Westhaver, who gave me somewhere to live at an extremely difficult time and supported me through that period as he has continued to do; the Chaplain, the Reverend Mark Stafford, for his wise and patient counsel at a critical juncture; Herodotus 'Hero' Ambrose Westhaver, in getting me away from my desk for our many long walks together.

My small and scattered family have been decisive over the many years I have been engaged in this research. My sister Alexandra was an early champion of my decision to pursue formal research on Burma and the Karen I had started in Norwich through doctoral study at Oxford and with a vision for how I might do so; my father Howard and his wife Judith made it a reality in readily and enthusiastically supporting my decision to become a student (yet) again through their unfailingly generous financial support; the boundless moral and practical support of my mother Frances, in particular, has done much to sustain me over these long and often trying years.

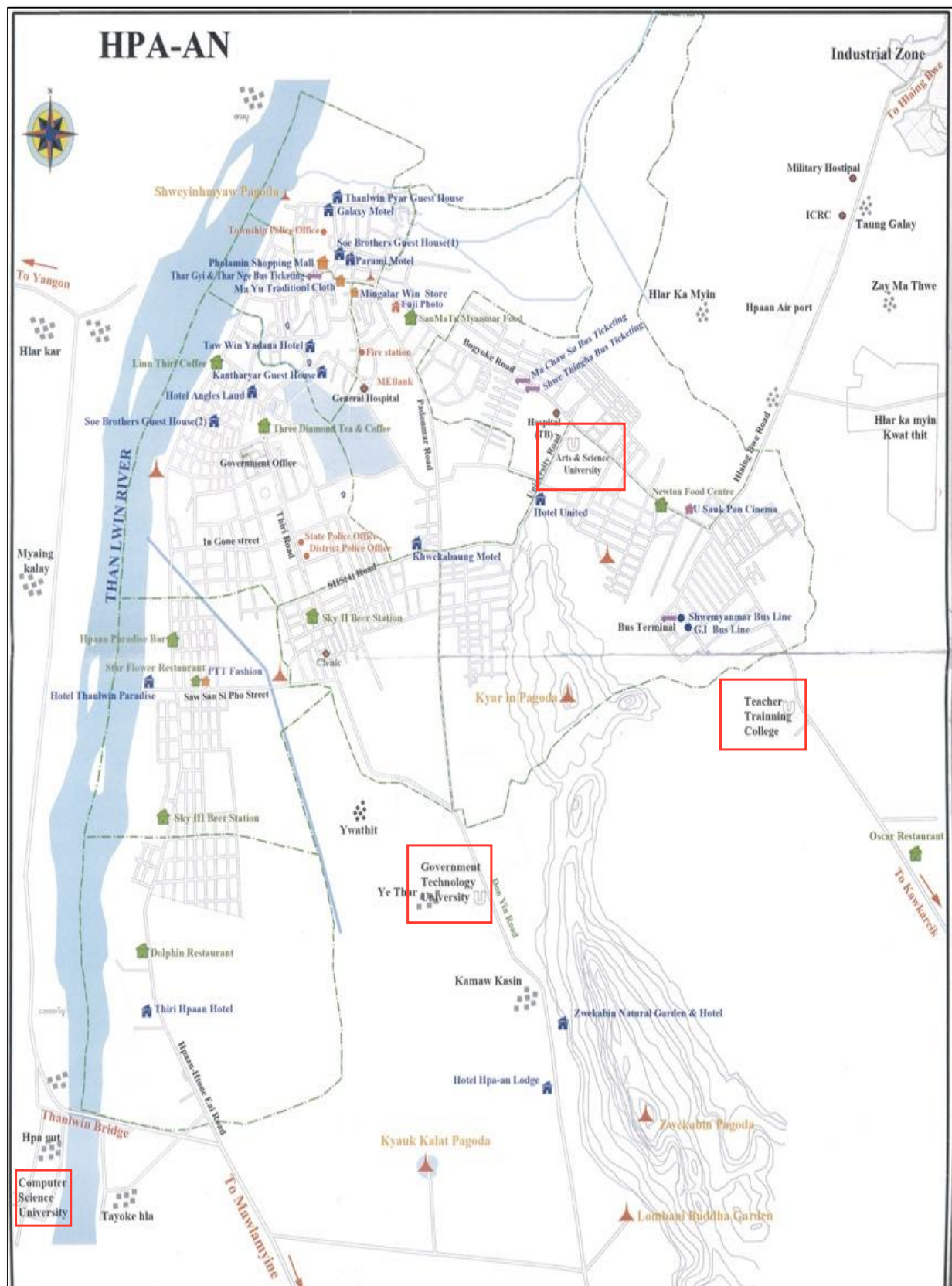
**Pusey House
Oxford
October 2020**

Map 1: The Karen Borderlands



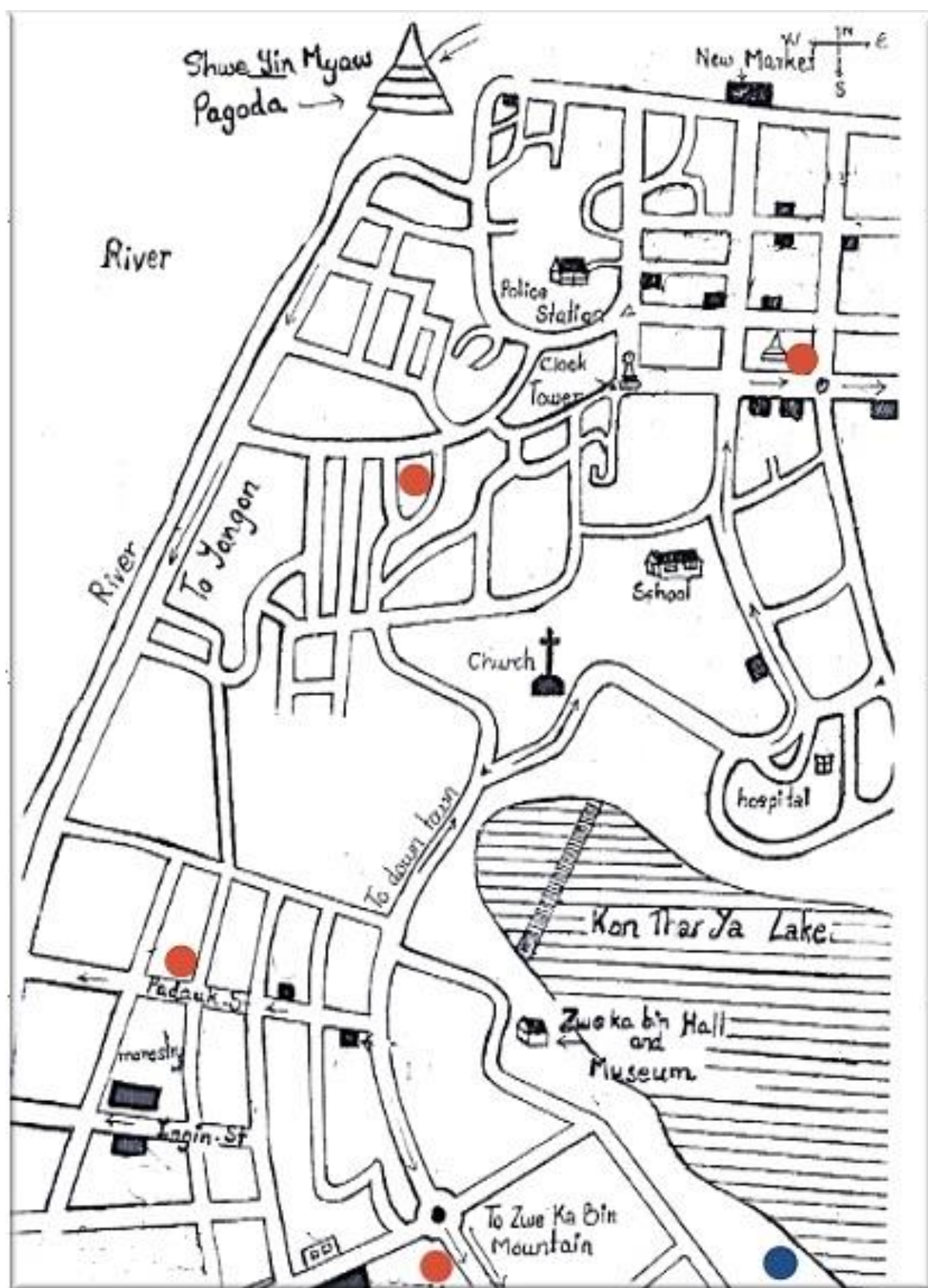
Principal Field Sites: October 2014 – December 2016

Map 2: Hpa-an Township featuring state higher education institutions (HEIs)



Map courtesy of Yangon Tourism Company

Map 3: Central Hpa-an, its Academies (red) and Youth Centre (blue).



Original map courtesy of Soe Brothers Guest House, Hpa-an (adapted by the author)

PART I

CONTEXT



Figure 1: *Kanthaya Lake, Hpa-an, Karen State, Burma with Zwekabin mountain in the background (right)*
(Photograph: Author)

Introduction

Along a quiet lane by the eastern banks of Kanthaya Lake in suburban Hpa-an stands 'Veranda: Youth Community Café'. Affectionately known to all as 'YCC', it was built in 2011 and conceived by a prominent local youth leader who completed a degree in Architecture at university in Bangkok. Coffee tables and wicker chairs are scattered about in the shade. A traditional Karen log canoe stands on blocks at the entrance bursting with flowering plants like a giant window box. The menu is mainly Western café fare – pancakes, smoothies and herbal teas – acknowledging the increasing number of tourists now passing through Hpa-an, though it features a few traditional local dishes. It all looks and feels strangely like somewhere off the tourist trail in northern Thailand but for being here, well inside the Burmese border.

YCC is more than just a café; it aspires to be a 'social business project' managed and maintained by the staff, students and alumni of one of a number of post-16 academies that have sprung up in Hpa-an over recent years. This academy is just around the corner on land provided by the vast monastery at nearby Taungalay, the Sayadaw (abbot) of which is an influential Trustee. YCC therefore provides a source of employment in a context still offering uncertain prospects for young people, whilst functioning as a neutral space for local activists and politicians to meet and plan. I was brought here initially by a nervous community leader in the months running up to Myanmar's historic national elections in late 2015 which ushered in the country's first democratically elected government in over half a century. He wanted to talk in private as student demonstrations persisted across the country in response to the controversial National Education Law (NEL) contesting the process, pertinence and pace of higher education reform (Wa Lone 2014; Metro 2017c).

Nowadays, YCC is very much a thriving social hub and venue for all manner of training and activities. There is a sense of purpose and vitality surrounding it. The walls are plastered with notices and posters advertising the academies and upcoming training on everything from youth leadership to recycling initiatives, as well as vocational training and scholarship opportunities for study abroad. The word 'Transition' is daubed about the place at jaunty angles like an urgent reminder. Behind the kitchen block there is a small educational library, most of which is in English, and a rack of local Karen newspapers consumed with the protracted peace process in faraway Yangon and persisting conflict on

the nearby border following decades of civil war between the Karen National Union (KNU) and the Burmese state.

On any given day you are likely to find excited groups of young people at one table chattering over steaming bowls of mohinga (a traditional aromatic soup) as they consult their mobile phones, whilst a couple of foreign aid workers meet with their local staff at another. Representatives of a prominent Karen NGO might be gathered around a whiteboard in one of the smaller huts preparing for another round of peace initiatives involving local youth, as teaching staff from one of the academies meet in another. These days a foreign tourist could well be looking at his Lonely Planet guidebook over an iced latte and a pennywort salad. The motorbikes are still lined up outside well after dark as the moths flutter around the paraffin lamps.

YCC provides a striking image of the constellation of actors and aspirations mobilising in transitional Hpa-an, and the kinds of transitions and transformations these are prompting for a Karen community emerging from decades of armed conflict, government restriction and underdevelopment. Young people and education, particular higher education, inevitably figure prominently here, as community stakeholders impatient for change seek to shape the response of the next generation of young adults. It also exposes the opportunities and challenges this moment presents, particularly for young Karen themselves, who must navigate through this context.

There's nothing here!

Early one autumn morning towards the end of 2016 and the start of the annual Karen State Day festival¹ I cycled to YCC as the mist was rising over the lake to meet Nann Kaw Kii Suu ('Kindly Flower')², one of the first batch of students to graduate from one of those academies in 2014. She is currently enrolled at the state university in Hpa-an on the second year of a full-time undergraduate degree course in English but still returns to the academy to help her teachers when she can. Whenever I am back in

¹ This four-day celebration is held in early November, marking the formation of Karen State in 1954; this particular one being the 61st annual celebration. It involves traditional Karen 'Done' dancing and other Karen cultural practices, drawing people to Hpa-an from across the region and indeed country.

² The names of all individuals referred to throughout this thesis are pseudonyms but are nonetheless genuine Plong Karen names from this particular region of southeastern Myanmar, all of which have specific meanings. I supply the meanings in English to make it easier to follow specific individuals through the text. They are preceded by the generic title 'Nann' for girls and young women and 'Saw' for boys and young men, roughly translating as 'Miss' and 'Master' respectively.

Hpa-an she is keen to meet and talk and practise her English which gets better each time. I was not surprised to find her waiting for me, chatting and laughing with YCC staff.

Over breakfast Kaw Kii tells me all her news – together with her academy friends she has started a small business and is excited to tell me all about it, “So we have a student tour guide group!” she blurts out and between mouthfuls she explains more: with more and more tourists coming over the Thai-Myanmar border to Hpa-an to explore Myanmar following the elections, she and her friends have decided to offer guided tours of the local sights on the back of their motorbikes.

The itinerary takes in Hpa-an’s famous caves with their ancient wall paintings, its huge reclining Buddhas and columns of life-sized stone monks; it includes a trek up the mighty Zwekabin mountain with its panoramic views over the Karen hills; it features a traditional meal in a Karen village. They charge 8000 kyats³ per person for the whole day. As many as 24 of them are now involved in this enterprise; they have a Facebook page and their teacher takes bookings for them on his phone - they are already quite busy. As she explains, customers get to see the sights whilst she and her friends practise their English and save a bit of money to fund their plans for the future.

“So now we have a goal and we also sell rice at the festival to fund it” she adds.

Such an initiative would not have been possible a year ago under prevailing government restrictions. Few, if any, tourists found their way to Hpa-an before the Karen National Union (KNU) ceasefire in 2012 which brought an end to over six decades of conflict in this region, only consolidated with the KNU signing of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement in late 2015.

When I ask Kaw Kii about that ‘goal’ she says breathlessly, “So our goal is to go to Bangkok and to see the university there and to see what kind of study fee they are asking for so we can see with our eyes and maybe you get an idea what you want to be because you see with your own eyes!” She speaks without pausing, a spoonful of rice hovering mid-air “...and we can see what they do and then we might be able to say, ‘Oh, I really want to do that! Oh my God, that is really interesting!’ something like this; so our goal is to go to Bangkok and learn and go to the university.” The rice disappears into her mouth and she grins at me.

³ Approximately £3.50 at the time of writing (October 2018).

Later, I ask her if she has any aspirations beyond this and her face clouds over and with an exhausted sigh she says, “You know it was really, really difficult for me to decide what my ambition is but you know I think I want to be a teacher”.

I ask her why she wants to be a teacher and she replies slowly and with something like resignation, “I don’t know, but the only thing I am familiar with is like being a teacher. I have taught my brothers and the children in the village for one month and so I think that is the only work that is familiar to me.”

Like many of her generation in Hpa-an, Kaw Kii was not brought up by her parents but her grandmother; her mother continues to live and work as a maid and cleaner in Thailand as she has since she was 18 years old and where Kaw Kii was born.

She seems surprised and a little heartened when I tell her she would make a great teacher and says, “Ok, so I should try, right? I just don’t really know what job will fit me because you cannot see anything here! You only see Myanmar English teacher and Myanmar Mathematics teacher. So, if you finish Chemistry – if you graduate in Chemistry - you will not become a Chemist, so some people even though they finish university they don’t have work!”.

It is a familiar story, echoed by many Karen students and alumni coming of age before and now during Myanmar’s political and economic transition. They bemoan the lack of viable educational and occupational pathways open to them blaming state education, in particular, for failing to grant them the aspirations with which to overcome these constraints and navigate this uncertainty. Within Myanmar’s evolving and uneven transition, neighbouring Thailand continues to offer the prospect of a better life where the quality of services, the educational and employment opportunities, draw many of them over the border indefinitely.

As we leave YCC and wander back towards the main road Kaw Kii turns to me and says in a low voice as if imparting a precious secret, “So I want to study abroad and I also want to get a scholarship and if... if I study Teaching abroad so I will come back here like my teachers you know...” She knows their story well and repeats it like a mantra, “...they get scholarships to Bangkok and they study Education and Psychology and they come back here - if they work in Thailand or other places they will get a lot of money - but they just come here and they think about their community and think about the

youth in Hpa-an - the youth in Myanmar – so they are a role model and an inspiration, and many students are promoted by them.”

On reaching the road she appears to emerge from her reverie adding, “So, I also want to do like this – after I finish studying abroad, I will come back here, and they are planning to start a Community College or Community University and I will be a teacher there!”⁴

* * *

Nann Kaw Kii Suu’s (‘Kindly Flower’) story attests to the considerable constraints and challenges facing young people in securing viable educational and occupational pathways in Hpa-an, where an impoverished education system and labour market have left generations of young people with no hope for the future. As her story suggests, this has prompted high levels of involuntary and indefinite migration, family fragmentation, youth unemployment and dispossession amongst Karen communities in the southeast which persist into Myanmar’s transition; it has made this particular region of Myanmar one of the poorest in terms of educational returns and social mobility (The Asia Foundation 2014; OPHI 2017).

And yet a remarkable transformation is taking place in Hpa-an within the context of the country’s economic and political transition: young people, acting through university alumni networks and intent on redressing specific educational and occupational deficits perceived to account for the sustained marginalisation of Plong Karen⁵ communities in this part of provincial Myanmar, are now engaging around progressive new forms of non-state education for school leavers and university graduates. This provision facilitates pathways from education to work, whilst enjoining students to assume responsibility for the future development of their communities. By introducing viable educational and occupational pathways where they have been lacking and, moreover, shaping the

⁴ This testimony (F18) was largely drawn from an extended semi-structured interview conducted on the afternoon of Saturday, 12th November 2016 (respondent’s emphasis throughout).

⁵ Commonly referred to as ‘Pwo’ Karen in the Sgaw dominated literature on the Karen, which is largely a Sgaw epithet for these Karen people. I exercise a preference for ‘Plong’ Karen since the people refer to themselves, their language, distinct cultural practices, and politics under this term, just as they do in referring to themselves as ‘Karen’ (in English) rather than ‘Kayin’ (in Burmese). This is in direct opposition to changes in official nomenclature from 1989 when the BSPP revised the use of colonial names in preference for those in Burmese and the country ceased to be known as ‘Burma’ and became ‘Myanmar’, an ethnonym of the majority Bamar. Given the historic opposition between the Karen and Bamar/Burmese Buddhist majority (see Chapter 1), Karen peoples tend to have a preference for colonial nomenclature (see also Metro 2017a) though younger Karen appear less concerned with this today. I employ the given form most widely used by those in this study, therefore employing ‘Karen’ and ‘Myanmar’; when I do refer to the country as ‘Burma’ it reflects a preference for that term in relation to the discussion at hand.

aspirations and agency of those like Nann Kaw Kii Suu to safeguard the legacy of this, these institutions amount to a formidable vision and vehicle of social change.

Access to this education and the opportunities it promises, nevertheless, presents these young people with new and beguiling possibilities beyond the constraints and concerns of those communities, which remain marked by the spectre of intra-ethnic and religious tensions amidst the rise in Buddhist nationalism. As community and religious leaders converge on this provision in an effort to shape the response of the next generation, it has emerged as a dynamic forum for ethnic and political positioning; communitarian and increasingly cosmopolitan ideals and agenda are pitted against each other, testing the identifications and affiliations of the young people living and learning in Hpa-an today.

Youth transitions amongst the Kwaegabon Plong Karen of southeastern Myanmar

This study explores young people's efforts to navigate this complex, contested and shifting terrain through an ethnographic account of youth transitions amongst a community of Plong Karen in southeastern Myanmar, currently engaging around non-state higher education initiatives. Through the lens of educational and occupational aspirations, the study explores how a new generation of young people are attempting to realise better futures for themselves and their communities as their country emerges from decades of authoritarian rule and ethnic conflict.

The thesis interrogates the now well-established hypothesis that youth transitions are neither teleological nor universal but socially and culturally situated processes of becoming. They occur over time and space and therefore do not amount to a single event or 'tuning point' but are multiple and mutable. I acknowledge that the positions and possibilities maintained by the young people in this thesis are shaped by global as well as local forces. However, I seek to ascertain how their aspirations and agency to realise their transitions are serving to shape the nature of the context within which they live and learn by responding to the following research question: *how do young people engaging around new learning sites in Hpa-an navigate their structured positions to enhance their transitions from education to employment, and with what consequences?*

The political economy of southeastern Myanmar is marked by unequal socio-economic and political inequalities. These inequalities are the legacy of various historical and political processes. The

development of the post-colonial nation state, and the vicissitudes of endemic inter and intra ethnic political tensions and conflict amongst the Karen and with the Burmese state since Independence, have profoundly shaped encounters around learning and livelihoods, and the pathways between them for Myanmar's ethnic nationality⁶ peoples such as the Karen. As I argue in the following chapter, these processes have exercised particular constraints on the Plong Karen of the Kwaegabon⁷ region of Hpa-an, struggling to live and learn under government control at the margins of the state and amidst Sgaw Karen hegemony in these borderlands.

From the late 1980s state-making assimilation policies intent on integrating southeastern Myanmar more firmly into the polity at the height of the Karen civil war (1949-2012) significantly undermined the viability of available educational and occupational pathways for the Plong Karen. Many young people were forced to migrate to neighbouring Thailand to complete their education and find gainful employment in the refugee camps and migrant hubs of Mae Sot, Mae Sariang, and Chang Mai. Opportunities over the border continue to lure young people away, often indefinitely, whilst an influx of development agencies and NGOs into southeastern Myanmar in the wake of the Karen ceasefire in 2012 are seen to entice young people away from employment in much-needed support of the development of their communities at this crucial juncture in the country's history. Local aspirations around youth transitions are therefore bound up with wider communal expectations regarding the role of youth in processes of social change and development at the community level.

Youth transitions amongst the Plong Karen of southeastern Myanmar have yet to receive any formal and concerted academic attention, still less within the context of Myanmar's wider political transition. Indeed, only in recent years has extended ethnographic research in this region and with its people become viable. Attention on ethnic nationality youth within the political transition has inevitably focused on those collective actions in which young people have sought to contest the pace

⁶ I resist using the term 'ethnic minority' which is unnecessarily misleading within the context of Myanmar's vast and contested ethnic diversity (see Chapter 1, pp. 30-34). Besides, the Plong Karen of southeastern Myanmar are the majority ethnic group in this region by a considerable margin. Moreover, they and other ethnic groups rightly deem themselves to be ethnic 'nationalities' thereby acknowledging their political claim to membership of a federal union of Myanmar.

⁷ (East) Plong Karen for 'Zwekabin' the name of the iconic Permian limestone mountain which rises above Hpa-an to the south (see Figure 1) and which is, according to William Womack, a site associated broadly with 'the recovery of lost Karen traditions including the possibility of the 'return' of a Karen king' with significant spiritual and symbolic importance for all Karen people in the region regardless of ethnicity or religion (Womack 2016).

and substance of the reform process, rather than probing the underlying causes of this. It has been accompanied by a disproportionate focus on state and dominant forms of non-state education associated with the country's many ethnic armed organisations (EAOs), with a preoccupation on available structural and institutional pathways rather than the experience of young people in response to these pathways. It has largely overlooked the burgeoning scale and substance of community-based provision through broad civil society engagement responding to welfare deficits within Myanmar's revitalised private sector and in the face of slow and uncertain reform, now having a significant bearing on the transitions of a new and increasingly mobile generation of young people.

There has, however, been plenty of concern for Karen children and youth in Thailand either amongst the aforementioned migrant communities or indigenous Thai Karen communities elsewhere in northern Thailand who have long been more accessible⁸. However, the only substantial study to address the political economy of these transitions has focused on childhood transitions (Jolliffe [née Vogler] 2010) whilst there has been only limited concern for (educated) youth transitions amongst these Karen communities (Kwanchewan 2005; P. Jolliffe 2017). Academic concern for Karen communities on both sides of the Thailand-Myanmar border has tended to largely concern Sgaw Christian Karen communities with little concern for Plong Buddhist Karen communities and youth until recently (Chambers 2019a). This oversight continues to exact a discursive as well as cultural compromise on the capacity of Plong Karen youth to resist persistently pejorative framings and assume a role in positive change within the context of Myanmar's transition.

Aspirations and agency: temporalities and transformations around youth transitions

There remains comparatively limited ethnographic research on youth transitions in the global South where the overwhelming majority of the world's young people live, still less on the role temporalities play in substantiating and furthering these. Despite this, over the past decade there has been growing

⁸ There are approximately one million Karen living in Thailand, at least half of which are Karen refugees from Burma/Myanmar in the camps along the Thai border (TBC 2019) (see Map 5, p. 54). The Thai Karen or 'Pakanyor' as they call themselves mainly reside in the northern hill regions of Mae Hong Son, Chiang Mai, and Chiang Rai provinces but also in central Thailand. They settled these areas centuries before the Thai came to this region when the country was part of the Mon-Khmer Empire which also encompassed the territory where the community in this study are situated. I therefore make a deliberate point of situating this research within the context of similar work on Thai Karen youth which might inform further work on youth and youth transitions amongst the Karen.

concern for young people's aspirations in this part of the world across a range of disciplines (Chatty 2010; Crivello 2011; Hardgrove, Rootham and McDowell 2015; Kölbel 2015; Zipin *et al.* 2015; Dalton, Ghosal and Mani 2016; Guerrero *et al.* 2016; Kleist and Jansen 2016; Hoskins and Barker 2017) and the policy implications of harnessing positive outcomes around youth aspirations (ILO 2017; Jeffrey and Dyson 2017b; OECD 2017; Conciliation Resources 2018; Harrison and Waller 2018a; British Council/VSO 2019). These contributions illustrate that interventions around youth aspirations might have positive implications for youth transitions by considerably enhancing their capacity and agency to act in the present.

The discrepancy between aspirations and available educational and occupational avenues by which to fulfil them continues to inform the lived experience of young people like Nann Kaw Kii Suu ('Kindly Flower') around the world. Indeed, it appears that much greater for many coming of age in the global South. Despite the opportunities and incentives afforded by the globalised proliferation of higher education (Gledhill, Dolan and Snyder 2019), technological advancement, migration, and neoliberal economic policies (Jeffrey and McDowell 2004; Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson 2011), many youth in the global South struggle to fulfil their expanded horizons amidst persisting social, political and economic constraints. Moreover, in the so-called 'new age of globalisation' where the allure of infinite possibility is confounded by widening disparities of wealth and opportunity (Comaroff and Comaroff 2005), these young people often find themselves at the extreme edge of this disparity. Powerful localisms compete for their affiliations amidst new and beguiling consumerist and aspirational mantras.

Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that a disparity between educational and occupational aspirations and available avenues through which to realise them might propel young people towards negative and often destructive ends: poor access to quality education and credible employment opportunities amongst young people certainly played a role in spontaneous political uprisings over the past decade in the Middle East (Goldstone 2011; Hoffman and Jamal 2012; cf. World Bank 2019: 82), parts of South America (Bellei, Cabalin and Orellana 2014; Alonso and Mische 2017), Africa (Honwana 2014; Schaefer 2018; Fourie-Malherbe and Schreiber 2019), as well as elsewhere in Asia (Jeffrey and Dyson 2017a; Mazumdar 2019), where young people in large numbers took to the

streets to demand change. In many of these contexts this collective action has often failed to achieve much improvement in the conditions that prompted it (see Honwana 2019), leaving the thwarted aspirations that fuelled it that much more desperate and, at least potentially, increasingly destructive (Luithui 1979; Routledge 2004; Oyefusi 2010; Elder 2014; Muiya 2014).

Indeed, much the same is happening in contemporary Myanmar where education, particularly higher education, continues to play a significant role in thwarting youth transitions to employment. It is not surprising therefore that it should frequently emerge as a platform for Myanmar youth to contest dominant state and non-state educational visions, seen as intrinsic to the country's struggle for democracy and development, by engaging in various forms of popular protest and contentious politics (Hlaing 2007b; Rives 2014; Lintner 2015; Metro 2017c). This activity very much continues into the transition (Wa Lone 2014; Burma Partnership 2015; Metro 2017c) only to be swiftly suppressed by the state time and again (IHRC/FR 2015).

In a country where over half the population are now under the age of 30 (The Economist 2015), growing concerns over access to credible education and employment opportunities is that much greater at this particular juncture in the country's history. As such, this substantial youth 'bulge' (Ang, Dinar and Lucas 2014) might represent a formidable constituency of dissent in Myanmar as it has so many times before, rather than the 'demographic dividend' (Bloom, Canning and Sevilla 2003; Department of Population 2016) it could amount to were quicker, more concerted steps taken to close the gap between educational aspirations informing youth transitions and available avenues through which to realise them.

Frustrated or foreclosed transitions and the aspirations (and anxieties) informing these appear to have other negative social consequences. Where availability has not translated into access to education in the global South or that provision has lacked relevance to community needs and the local labour market, it has prompted a so-called 'crisis of youth' (Weiss 2004: 14–16) or debilitating forms of stasis. Young people appear educated but remain un/under-employed: they might have the credentials, but they lack the necessary knowledge and skills; they have growing aspirations but lack the employment opportunities in which to exercise them. Our attention is therefore drawn to generations of educated youth left 'churning' (Furlong and Cartmel 2007), 'time-passing' (Jeffrey

2010b) or ‘straining’ (Finn and Oldfield 2019), unable to make the transition to work and independence. This is often the case in countries emerging from extended periods of authoritarianism and conflict like parts of Myanmar, where many young people in the southeast remain caught between the prospect and the slow pace of change.

Whilst the majority of this literature characterises young people at such times as being constrained and immobile (Jeffrey, Jeffery and Jeffery 2007; Finn and Oldfield 2019), I argue that the apparent uncertainty and insecurity of their structured positions, particularly during periods of rapid and significant socio-economic transition, makes them well placed to reimagine those structures and to contribute to processes of social change (cf. Johnson-Hanks 2005). Indeed, uncertainty, far from being destructive and debilitating can, under such circumstances, be constructive and the basis, as Susan Reynolds Whyte observes (2009), “for considered action to change both the situation and the self” (ibid: 213–214).

This thesis brings this understanding of affirmative action amidst uncertainty and insecurity into conversation with recent work on ‘social generations’ in order to apprehend how aspirations and anxieties around education and employment, shared by groups of young people coming of age at a particular social and historical juncture, might prompt collective action to facilitate wider social and economic development to the situation as well as the self. In this way, I seek to engage work on youth transitions more closely with that on youth in processes of social change to apprehend how young people’s efforts to realise their transitions amidst such personal and political uncertainty might shape the very context within which they do so.

The thesis seeks to explore these ideas through a case study of collective engagement around a network of five post-16 academies which have sprung up in suburban Hpa-an since late 2012, now catering for hundreds of students each year. It does so by exploring the transitions of Hpa-an’s self-described ‘scholarship alumni’ who developed and maintain these institutions (chapters 4 and 5), before considering how this educational encounter has influenced aspirations and agency around education and employment for those students like Nann Kaw Kii Suu now emerging from these institutions (chapter 6). In this way, it reflects on the consequences of this collective engagement and its educational and occupational outcomes for the community in question, exploring how youth

transitions interact with wider social and structural shifts to the context in which young people are situated.

Education and the politics of aspiration in transitional Myanmar

I assume that education⁹ is a decisive variable informing youth aspirations and transitions, albeit certainly not the only (decisive) variable. Indeed, the relationship between education and aspiration has particular implications for youth transitions and young people's socio-economic mobilities, not least in Myanmar at this particular historical juncture.

The aims and priorities of education but also its processes and partnerships combine to promote a particular vision of the future - of what this might (and might not) look like. It is widely acknowledged that during national reform and transition processes education can become a battleground as particular coalitions seek to advance specific visions of that future and shape the next generation (Harber 1991; Bush and Saltarelli 2000; Davies 2004; Buckland 2006). Educational pathways are therefore decisive, for better or worse, in shaping the aspirations of young people and the way in which they act upon these, not least at such fluid and volatile junctures.

Indeed, there is a growing body of work exploring the relationship between opportunity structures and youth agency within social, economic and political transition (Newman 1999; Vigh 2008, 2009a; Wyn and Andres 2011; Jeffrey 2012; Mains 2012; Kölbel 2015). This work has identified that shifting educational and economic opportunity structures within these contexts have a significant bearing on the possibilities open to young people as they attempt to move through the education system and into the employment market (Cartmel and Furlong 2007). In so doing, it has brought 'aspiration' into focus by rightly identifying that these transitions are experienced in the immediate but also in the imagined as youth plot a way forward into the future (Appadurai 2004b, 2013; Vigh 2009a, 2009b). The extent to which they perceive their options to be open or constrained, very much shapes what they aspire to do and, for that matter, how they go about achieving it.

⁹ My concern for education throughout this thesis is with activity *around* education rather than the *content* of that education - what might be described as the 'macro' processes of education and its outcomes in Hpa-an, rather than the 'micro' processes of classroom-based teaching and learning. This distinction has excited lively debates around the nature of anthropological research on education and particularly so-called 'minority education' (Ogbu 1987; Foley 1991; Aikman 1994). I find more recent expression of this distinction within the literature on youth transitions through the notion of education as a space of *connection* rather than simply a space of *transition* (Wyn 2014: 11) (see Chapter 2).

Central to this discussion is the understanding that education plays an important role in the production (and restriction) of these aspirations. Higher education, often associated with the development of a skilled workforce and educated elite, is profoundly associated with youth aspirations and transitions around work and employment. Indeed, studies of young people's transitions from higher education into the labour market have identified the importance of educational and occupational pathways to these transitions more generally as they seek to attain adulthood and independence (Furlong and Cartmel 2007). However, in many developing countries like Myanmar the capacity of higher education to provide this surety has long been called into question. As I explain in more detail in the following chapter, deteriorating educational standards in Myanmar have long confounded youth transitions, particularly for young people from ethnic nationality groups like the Buddhist Plong Karen in the southeast, contending with compromised state and available non-state pathways for whom it has exacted a considerable cultural compromise.

The country's democratic transition, far from alleviating this compromise, has exacerbated the predicament for many. One of the key battlegrounds in the country's political transition has emerged over convergence between a state education system subject to widespread reform under the National League for Democracy (NLD) government, and non-state ethnic education 'regimes' associated with the country's many EAOs, like the Christian Sgaw dominated KNU and its Karen Education Department (KED), now engaging in the peace process. The KNU has provided welfare and education services over many years to conflict-affected communities in the border regions of Karen State in southeastern Myanmar (Lenkova 2015).

The educational visions at the heart of this conflict are built around ethnonational constructions of identity in which issues of language and religion (Lall and South 2014; South and Lall 2016), and particularistic representations of ethnic history (Metro 2011, 2013; Salem-Gervais and Metro 2012) are being advanced through education and contested as part of the ongoing peace process (Jolliffe 2014; Lall and South 2014; South and Lall 2015; Jolliffe and Speers Mears 2016). More generally, it is concerned with who controls education and for whom that education is intended (Zobrist and McCormick 2013; McCormick 2020), resulting in ongoing debates over the extent of

educational decentralisation in ethnically populated regions; many ethnic nationalities, however, do not have a presence or a platform in these formal processes and debates.

Within this context, young people continue to emerge from state institutions lacking the skills and knowledge to navigate a rapidly changing labour market, still more those like the Plong Karen, for whom available state and non-state pathways increasingly lack viability. Under these circumstances, generations of high school and university students often struggle to realise educational and occupational aspirations and are therefore left with a sense of being trapped in-between confirmed social statuses – seemingly caught between youth and adulthood, between education and work, between dependence and independence.

At the time of this research, Karen State had the second highest unemployment rate in the country at 7.5 per cent, and a similarly low participation rate in the labour market with only 61.2 per cent of its population economically active. Unemployment was higher, and the ratio of female-to-male participating in the labour market well below the national average in this particular region. Furthermore, in a context where the majority of employment is in agriculture, wholesale and retail trade, transportation and storage, manufacturing and construction (see Appendix 10, p. 289), educated youth struggle to fulfil their growing aspirations.

It is for this reason that there has been considerable political engagement amongst university students and alumni groups within the context of Myanmar's transition (Prasse-Freeman 2016; Lee 2017), whose futures and mobilities have been captive to these agenda and the current impasse. Indeed, the devolvement of educational oversight to states and regions has been at the forefront of the protest agenda, not least calls to safeguard the autonomy and academic integrity of regional universities (Kamibeppu and Chao 2017), as well as the right to establish private universities, and the interdependence of both (Lall 2016b; Metro 2017c). Despite the profile of this collective action, these issues remain unresolved five years on and youth mobilities just as fraught and frustrated in many parts of the country as they were before the country's transition and reform process.

Instead, others like the young architect behind YCC and Nann Kaw Kii Suu's teachers have chosen different means of navigating the situation and stasis by migrating in search of alternative educational and occupational pathways. Internationally funded scholarships have offered access to

alternative educational pathways through scholarships to Thai universities, particularly for those from conflict-affected communities whose education has frequently been interrupted and transitions forestalled, and who have therefore been the prime beneficiaries of these. This spatial mobility has considerably enhanced their social mobility to act within the transition window back in Hpa-an and to do so in particular ways.

Indeed, within the context of the transition and peace process, increasing numbers of these ‘scholarship alumni’ are returning to Myanmar and mobilising through civil society and social networks around alternative welfare provision, not least higher education, to articulate an alternative vision of educational and social change unencumbered by parochial and partisan politics and priorities at home. This is a vision that seeks to facilitate youth transitions specifically and in so doing further the community’s socio-economic transition; nor is it limited to Hpa-an and the southeast as the presence of the MCAP network confirms. Few studies have sought to account for the role of non-state education in youth transitions and the implications of this for wider socio-economic transformations.

Community-based education and the ‘pedagogy’ of aspiration in transitional Hpa-an

This research is based on over fourteen months of ethnographic research in the Karen State capital Hpa-an and its environs between 2014 and 2016. Hpa-an is one of the larger towns of provincial Myanmar and the biggest in the State with over four hundred thousand inhabitants in otherwise one of the least populated regions of the country where just 22 per cent of the population live in urban areas (DOP 2015). The township itself encompasses a wide network of smaller towns, villages and village tracts that radiate out from this urban hub. It is the symbolic and cultural, if not the political and economic, capital of the Karen people in Myanmar. Until recently, it was considered something of a provincial backwater after decades of conflict, government restriction, and underdevelopment left its economy and labour market all but eviscerated, prompting one western journalist to observe that “most of the people are leaving, not arriving” (Head 2012). Indeed, it still retains an air of the border town given its proximity to northern Thailand less than 100 miles away.

However, at the time of this research it was undergoing significant and rapid transformation following the ceasefire and substantive economic and political reforms sweeping the rest of the

country. In the wake of the historic elections of late 2015, a series of high-profile public and private sector infrastructure projects reinvigorated the town's economy and business sector attracting an influx of labour and investment. Foreign tourists are now an increasingly familiar sight, accessing the country from Thailand via the newly resurfaced 'Asia Highway'¹⁰ and hotels and guesthouses continue to pop up in and around the town; if anything, more people appear to be arriving than leaving at this time.

Another significant development has been the rapid growth of community-based and non-state education emerging within the context of Myanmar's evolving private sector. Numerous language and learning centres, vocational and technical training programmes, ICT courses, youth leadership workshops, and civic education programmes of one

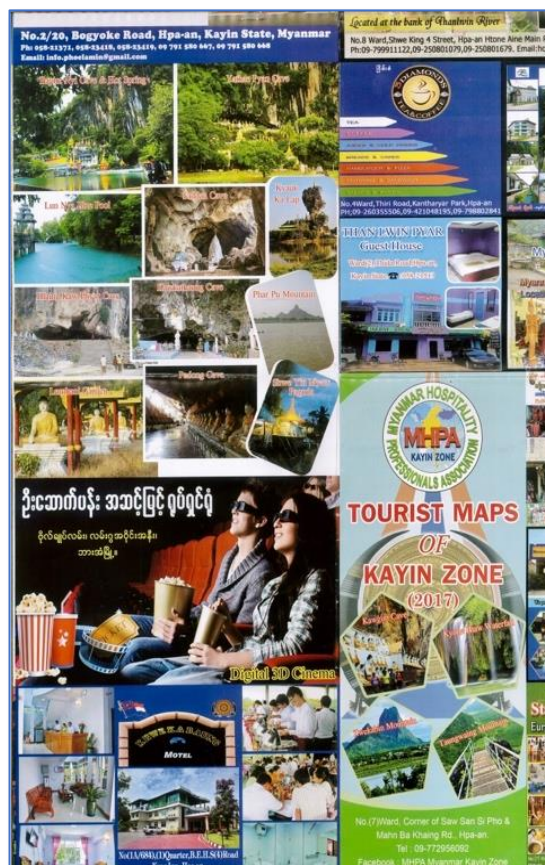


Figure 2. Ancient Caves and 3D Cinemas: *transitional Hpa-an in 2015* (Source: Yangon Tourist Company)

form or another started to appear in and around the town, not least the five academies at the heart of this study. These institutions combine much of this disparate educational agenda, as part of a coordinated programme which provides integrated educational and occupational pathways through a combination of classroom-based tuition, experiential learning and internships. This provision has made Hpa-an an educational and aspirational hub for young people from surrounding towns and villages, as well as elsewhere in the country, who now make up the growing boarding house population in town.

As this education network has evolved its more recent learning sites have sought to bolster academy provision in specific areas, not least English and ICT, skills and knowledge domains insufficiently catered for and fundamental to the increasingly cosmopolitan dispositions and aspirations of young people coming of age in contemporary Hpa-an as elsewhere in the country. They are supported and supplemented by YCC and its 'social business project' for academy students and

¹⁰ The 'Asia Highway' is a trilateral route connecting India-Myanmar-Thailand. Hpa-an is situated on the final section of this route connecting it to the Thai border town of Mae Sot which is approximately 93 miles east/south-east (see Map 7, p. 182).

alumni (Lenkova 2015b), as well as other related capacity building initiatives to support the professional development of academy staff, youth and community leaders.

With evocative names such as *Tounge Là Yat* ('Moving Forward' in Plong Karen), 'Gateway Learning Centre' and 'Bridge for All', these academies act as practical and pedagogical avenues and access points linking educational and occupational pathways which the state has long failed to provide. One of these, for example, identifies that "it is in this space, this gap in the education sector" that it sees its role and another that it, "serves as a bridge between the student's academic life and their professional one". Indeed, the scholarship alumni frequently described their role in conversation with me as working to 'bridge' youth transitions, catering as they do for a broad age range of youth whose education has been interrupted.

To this end, the academies connect knowledge and skills domains as part of a programme of intensive, English-medium and classroom-based tuition in a broad suite of subjects including language and communication skills, ICT competencies, and civic education through the teaching of Social Science and Community Development, punctuated by frequent opportunities for 'service' learning. The programme concludes in an internship for at least six months with a local business, NGO, or Karen CSO where students apply these skills, gain work experience and start to build professional networks in and beyond the locality.

The mission statements guiding these institutions respond directly to the specific configuration of privation and possibility around education, employment and development marking the fraught evolution of this context and the experience of its principal stakeholders. They register social and structural impediments associated with poor state provision, not least a lack of appropriate skills and capabilities, the specific nature of which continues to constrain the development and social mobility of young people and their communities in Hpa-an.

Furthermore, they seek to respond to the implications of this impasse for notions of self and service, as young people struggle to envisage future pathways in Hpa-an and therefore lose confidence in the value of education. Until now, education has conspicuously failed to confront legacies of indefinite migration and cycles of youth dispossession, methamphetamine abuse and addiction, family fragmentation and indebtedness at home. However, many students emerging from new learning sites

in Hpa-an, like Nann Kaw Kii Suu ('Kindly Flower') above, now aspire to follow in the footsteps of their teachers, securing scholarships to study abroad and, crucially, returning to serve their communities to confront these difficult and persisting realities. It is by seeking to facilitate youth transitions in this way, that these pathways provide an alternative vision and vehicle of social change within Myanmar's transition.

This provision is dependent on a wide range of community engagement within Myanmar's nascent and expanding private sector. Religious institutions are significant players; powerful and charismatic religious leaders, traditionally associated with the provision of non-state and community-based welfare services under authoritarian rule, continue to play a prominent role socially and politically. The inclusive ideals and aspirations upon which this provision is founded are therefore questioned and contested when they are seen to conflict with specific ethno-religious agenda. My primary focus, however, is on the principal youth stakeholders involved in this education – the self-described scholarship alumni who developed and now maintain Hpa-an's academies, and the students and alumni emerging from them – and how they navigate this field in maintaining their commitment to the ideals and aspirations, and the transitions and transformations it is intended to facilitate.

Thesis structure and logic

PART I: CONTEXT

Chapter One. Education, ethnicity, and (im)mobility: a socio-political history of the Karen borderlands, 1948-2018

The initial chapter forms the historical and contextual background to the thesis, in light of which I go on to establish my theoretical and then methodological approaches. Here, I delineate the considerable structural constraints faced by the Plong Karen community of southeastern Myanmar at the centre of this study. This has contrived, largely through the role of education in ethnic politics and state-making processes from the 1980s, to compromise youth transitions and the development of these people. I argue that this compromise has assumed a critical and discursive dimension in the contemporary imagination, particularly marginalising Plong women, children and young people. It has left little room for alternative understandings of young Plong Karen as active agents in the construction of their own aspirations, still less those possessing the wherewithal to effect positive change and development.

However, experiences and encounters around education and employment over the border in Thailand were to mark and mobilise aspirations in profound ways, occurring as they did amidst new priorities and possibilities around learning and livelihoods from the late 1990s. I conclude by drawing the Hpa-an education network into the picture in relation to developments elsewhere in the country, which stand to further as well as frustrate the aspirations and transitions it now facilitates.

Chapter Two. Transition and transformation: structure, agency, and aspiration

The following chapter provides an account of the key concepts and ideas that inform my theoretical framework. It begins by situating this study within the context of the literature on youth transitions, identifying a lack of ethnographic research on young people's transitions amidst socio-political constraint in the global South, especially that move beyond depictions of educated young people as captive to the 'crisis of youth'. Drawing on ideas of 'structured individualism' in 'risk environments', I argue that such contexts might enable as much as constrain the agency of young people. I illustrate this might work through young people's capacity to navigate their transitions through temporal as well as spatial mobilities.

In the main body of the chapter, I go on to interrogate the notion of 'aspiration' as a form of forward-thinking agency and means of social navigation. In particular, I explore the relationship between the capacity for aspiration and the capability of realising it in relation to educational pathways and opportunities. As part of this discussion, I introduce two contributions from revisionist anthropologies of youth transitions, 'vital conjunctures' (Johnson-Hanks 2002) and 'Possible Selves' (Markus and Nurius 1986), to help me investigate this process and its outcomes in practice. In this way, I illustrate how social and structural contexts both shape and are shaped by collective aspirations and their enactment, as youth plot a way forward together in an effort to redress educational deficits that have impinged on their transitions and that of their communities.

Chapter Three: Methodology & methods

I then articulate my research methodology which responds to the collaborative turn in work on youth and youth transitions in complex and challenging contexts. I describe how my phenomenological approach prioritises my informants' interpretations over mine and therefore the implications of my

positionality for this research. I go on to explain how my research strategy similarly sought to prioritise data over theory, induction over deduction, which shaped the research in specific ways, namely the multi-sited nature of the evolving enquiry, the places as well as the people that were sampled. Furthermore, I describe how the circumstances under which this research was conducted had a significant bearing on other aspects of my approach, such as how I accessed and ‘constructed’ the field through my choice of case study.

In the second half of the chapter, I consider my choice and handling of qualitative research methods. I describe my approach to participant observation in different forums, conducting semi and unstructured interviews in response to young people’s aspirations, and managing focus group discussions. I comment then on the various ethical considerations and constraints that had a bearing on this research, namely working with potentially vulnerable young people amidst legacies of political and ethnic conflict, and issues this raised for securing and safeguarding free and informed consent. The chapter ends with a discussion of my approach to data analysis, and how I sought to maintain a ‘grounded theory’ approach to the interpretation of data, its classification and coding.

PART II: ASPIRATIONS AND TRANSITIONS

Chapter Four. Crisis and constraint: navigating vital conjunctures in authoritarian Hpa-an

This initial empirical chapter explores the fraught transitions of Hpa-an’s self-described ‘scholarship alumni’, responsible for developing Hpa-an’s new learning sites, who struggled to find appropriate and available educational and occupational pathways in the years immediately before the start of Myanmar’s reform and transition process. I set out to identify what specific social and structural forces marked their aspirations (and anxieties) at this crucial point in their lives. I then establish how these forces come to shape their collective experience and action in facilitating alternative educational provision and furthering youth transitions in Hpa-an.

The chapter draws on in-depth semi-structured interviews with each of the scholarship alumni to explore the ‘vital conjunctures’ they experienced on finishing high school or university, when they were all forced to make a critical decision about their future. I begin by illuminating the kinds of existential hopes and fears that marked this experience. I then go on to explore how a lack of viable educational and occupational pathways prompted a ‘crisis of youth’ in authoritarian Hpa-an, which

encounters with alternative non-state provision, existing under religious leaders and institutions at the time, did little to alleviate. I conclude by exploring how anxieties-as-aspirations fashioned in the past inform their response around new learning sites in Hpa-an.

Chapter Five. **Privilege and prejudice: socio-spatial mobilities in Thailand**

The subsequent empirical chapter explores how this same group of respondents navigated uncertainty and stasis at home through migration to neighbouring Thailand. The chapter explores how critical encounters with institutions, individuals and ideas over the border significantly expanded the horizons of possibility open to them. I demonstrate how migration-for-education, in particular, allowed these young people to overcome educational and occupational constraints, whilst enhancing their capacity to be mobile through the very process of moving and the intercultural encounters this movement fostered.

At the start of the chapter, I establish how Plong Karen mobility might be reframed as a strategic rather than an involuntary response to social, cultural and political marginalisation. I then go on to investigate how specific encounters through social networks and with Karen exile communities in Thailand enhanced the possibilities that this move presented. In the second half of the chapter, I consider how the scholarship alumni navigated fluctuating zones of privilege and prejudice in Thailand's private universities, which greatly influenced aspirations 'to be someone useful for my community', prompting the kind of (selective) cosmopolitanism now characterising youth transitions in a context governed by powerful localisms.

Chapter Six. **Possible selves: aspiration and agency in transitional Hpa-an**

The third and final empirical chapter explores the transitions of those coming of age in transitional Hpa-an. It does so through the aspirations young people, enrolled and emerging from the town's new learning sites, attach to their educational and occupational situations. Drawing on some fifty semi-structured interviews and three focus groups with students and alumni from three of the suburban academies, I explore the meaning and motivation that they bring to these choices, and therefore how they view their positions and the possibilities open to them in response to this particular educational encounter. In so doing, the chapter takes stock of youth mobility in Hpa-an for a group of young people plotting a way forward amidst rapid if uneven socio-economic change.

This chapter offers a second take on how aspirations in response to education are driving and shaping youth transitions to employment in Hpa-an. It seeks to do so in yet more quotidian detail, exploring the process by which they are motivated to act in the present to realise their ‘possible selves’ in the future. I investigate the extent to which these young people are actually acting on their aspirations and so reflect on the agency with which possible selves are furthered. In so doing, I comment on what these responses tell us about the priorities and principles now motivating youth transitions in transitional Hpa-an.

PART III: CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions and contributions:

In conclusion, I account for the empirical, the theoretical and the ethnographic insights and contributions this enquiry has afforded. I reflect on what the study has told us about these different groups of young people and their transitions from education towards employment, before and within Myanmar’s political transition, as well as the changing nature of the context over that period and the challenges and contradictions it posed to these young people. Finally, I provide some suggestions for further research in and around these areas.

Chapter One:

Education, ethnicity, and (im)mobility: a socio-political history of the Karen borderlands, 1948-2018

Introduction: mobilising around what matters

When I arrived in the commercial capital Yangon for another round of fieldwork in the months running up to Myanmar's historic national elections in November 2015, the country was convulsed by a series of student demonstrations over the controversial National Education Law (NEL) passed the previous September. The National Network for Education Reform (NNER), an influential lobby of prominent civil society groups that had grown out of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's pro-democracy movement, had begun by questioning the legitimacy of the legislative process. This prompted the formation of the Action Committee for Democratic Education (ACDE), an alliance of students' unions¹¹, which called for amendments to the NEL (Wa Lone 2014). When the government failed to respond, the ACDE initiated a nationwide demonstration by university students, issued a set of eleven demands, and organised a protest march from Mandalay to Yangon (Metro 2017c).

Education in Myanmar, and higher education in particular, has often formed the crucible of opposition to successive authoritarian regimes and the cause in which that battle has been waged. University students, with seemingly more to lose than other generations, have naturally emerged as the primary voices calling for change. At different junctures in the political struggle they have articulated a specific set of aspirations for the future which have directly challenged that of the state. Like those before it, the ACDE protests were forcefully suppressed for doing just that (IHRC/FR 2015),



Figure 3: Mobilising Around What Matters: ACDE student protests (from left to right) 'Transforming the Role of Women' (10th March 2015), 'Independent and National Education' (8th February 2015), with the support of democracy icon General Aung Sang (1915-1947), the current leader's father; The Irrawaddy (Photo: Author)

¹¹ Consisting of the All Burma Federations of Students Unions (ABFSU), the Confederation of University Students Unions (CUSU), and *Myay Latt* (ML) (Po Po Thaug Win 2015: 11).

but provide a window onto what is at stake for the country's young people on the threshold of its democratic transition.

At the heart of the ACDE demands was an aspiration for the devolvement of educational oversight to states/regions to improve the relevance and quality of education for Myanmar's many ethnic nationality communities, whilst upgrading teaching methodologies with which to do so. The demands reflected specific concerns over the current university admissions procedure, namely a call to revise the High School Matriculation Exam for University Entrance which allocates students to courses in light of their exam performance rather than course preference. The demands also extended into non-state spheres of activity and organisation by safeguarding the autonomy of individual universities, including the development of private universities (Burma Partnership 2015). All these demands have a bearing on youth transitions and the ability of young people to secure viable pathways through education and beyond.

For many of Myanmar's ethnic nationalities such aspirations continue to loom large in state-managed reform and convergence process. Ethnic education regimes, associated with the country's many EAOs, such as the Karen National Union (KNU) with its Karen Education Department (KED), which has provided education for conflict-affected communities in the southeast, are locked in protracted negotiations with the new government over how (and which aspects of) their respective education systems can be 'converged' with established state provision; debates over which language and which history is relevant are particularly contentious. State provision is itself subject to a lengthy ongoing review and reform process in the form of the Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR), with implications for all aspects of education, not least higher education.

This situation is inevitably attracting and consuming the overwhelming majority of recent academic attention and commentary on education and young people in the Myanmar (Hayden and Martin 2013; Jolliffe 2014; Lall and South 2014; South and Lall 2015, 2016; Lenkova 2015a; Jolliffe and Speers Mears 2016; K. Jolliffe 2016; Lall 2016a, 2016b, 2018; Burke *et al.* 2017). However, these processes have yet to find concrete expression within the transition. The CESR, as well as the convergence process, is slow to deliver on its promises: education, particularly higher education, in ethnic-populated areas of the country has yet to see the benefits of increased funding and technical

support; teaching and curricula remain unchanged; university entrance processes are much as they have always been; adult and vocational training though steadily improving remains unresponsive to a rapidly changing labour market. For young people in ethnic minority states and regions of the country, whose futures are in thrall to the political impasse, it only perpetuates their struggle to secure viable educational pathways into employment within the transition.

Though the protests and their political legacy remain uncertain, the community at the centre of this study is nonetheless enacting a relevant vision of higher education through non-state spaces and networks outside of, and therefore less constrained, by the wider state-managed reform agenda. This vision responds to the kinds of concerns raised by the protesters but goes further in accounting for the specific constellation of privations and possibilities currently afflicting youth transitions for this particular community of Plong Karen in the southeast. However, historical legacies of ethnic conflict, underdevelopment and economic marginalisation continue to undermine youth transitions amongst these Karen and these initiatives are not immune to the influence of this.

In order to fully appreciate the structural predicament of the young people in this study, this opening chapter explores the different social and structural forces framing their lives and therefore informing their transitions. It primarily concerns the Plong Karen context and community in Hpa-an district in southeastern Myanmar but necessarily relates this contextual assessment to that of the Karen and the country more generally.

The chapter is divided into four main sections: in the opening parts of the initial section, I consider how the principal social category in this study - 'educated Plong Karen youth' - have been framed academically and discursively. This has tended to conflate Plong identities and needs with other Karen groups and youth and therefore obscure our view of their positions in relation to education and employment. I therefore seek to tease out 'educated youth' as a social category and the 'Plong Karen' specifically, particularly in relation to ethnicity and class, in order to appreciate their structural location within this particular socio-historical context.

In the second and main section of the chapter, I delineate this socio-historical context in a series of shorter sub-sections. I begin by establishing colonial legacies of ethno-religious difference amongst the Karen, before exploring how socio-economic opportunities and aspirations have been

consistently constrained through historical legacies of inter and intra ethnic conflict, state-managed economic marginalisation, and underdevelopment. I determine how these historical and political processes have impinged on youth transitions amongst the Plong over many generations. Specifically, I explore how state-making processes and government assimilation policies, exercised throughout the 1980s and 1990s, exacerbated post-colonial legacies of ethnic conflict and religious difference amongst the Karen. I argue that this has, over time, restricted and compromised educational pathways for Plong communities in conflict-affected and government-controlled Hpa-an.

In the third section, I explain how economic migration and migration-for-education over the Thai border, and across the Karen borderlands, as I describe this geographic hinterland between eastern Myanmar and northern Thailand, became that much more viable from the mid-1990s. Enhanced international development resource and revenue flows were deployed to meet the increasing needs of Karen exile communities displaced by the escalating Karen civil war. This facilitated alternative educational and occupational pathways allowing those like Hpa-an's 'scholarship alumni' to navigate around constraints at home, shaping their transitions in profound ways.

In light of this account, and by way of concluding my socio-historical account of the Karen borderlands during this period, I reconsider discursive framings of the Plong Karen in the southeast. I show how these have largely served to re-entrench their marginalisation by denying them a presence and therefore a voice with which to contest these narratives.

In the fourth and final section of the chapter, I provide a 'history of the present' that situates the community of educated young Plong Karen in Hpa-an in this study within the context of developments elsewhere in the country and its transition. I consider how substantive reforms and peace dividends in the southeast have provided space and opportunity through which to redress historical educational and social deficits impinging on youth transitions for this particular community. I do so, whilst acknowledging that the region remains afflicted by legacies of conflict and cultural compromise (Wimmer 1998; Dietz 2009)¹² which now threaten to undermine these aspirations and their outcomes.

¹² I use this phrase frequently throughout this thesis to refer broadly to aspects of ethno-political marginalisation accounting for Plong socio-economic (im)mobility which should be read in relation to Bourdieu's (1986) notion of 'cultural capital' as outlined below. It was initially derived from work on intercultural education by German anthropologist Gunther Dietz (2009),

Youth transformations? From breakers to makers in Myanmar's 'democratic Spring'

The Burmese academic and commentator Kyaw Lin Hlaing (2007b) has described Myanmar youth, and particularly its educated youth, as “an anti-state force” (ibid: 224) for periodically challenging the state through popular protest and civil disobedience throughout the post-colonial era. Student demonstrations in 1920, 1936, 1962, 1974, 1988, 1996, 2007, and 2015 narrate the political history of the nation, marking the struggle for independence, democracy, peace and freedom (Raynaud 2014). University students were at the forefront of the nationalist struggle for independence from the British over seventy years ago; they ignited the momentous democratic uprising in 1988, and the so-called ‘Saffron Revolution’ in 2007, when the country’s monks joined them on the streets in a defiant show of moral support.

Within Myanmar’s political transition, they are framed in a markedly different light. Far from being considered a problem, they are represented as something of a panacea with which to resolve



Figure 4. New Light: Myanmar Youth in State Media (Photo: Author)

the state’s many problems. They are frequently lauded in the media for their role in various forms of affirmative action (Nyein Nyein 2018; Zon Pann Pwint 2019) and promoted in development discourse as the key to the country’s economic success (see Grizelj 2017; British Council/VSO 2019). Announcing the release of Myanmar’s first National Youth Policy in early 2018, the country’s *de facto* leader Aung San Suu Kyi, declared that the country’s young people would ‘lead the way to a better future’, entreating youth to ‘maximise

their abilities’ in order to do so (The Global New

Light of Myanmar 2018). Indeed, within the context of Myanmar’s transition they have effectively

itself derived from the work of Andreas Wimmer (1998). These authors provide a theoretically nuanced understanding and application of the term at Wimmer (1998: 3) and Dietz (2009: 67–68) which I have drawn on in previous research on the Karen (Dolan 2011).

gone, almost overnight, from so-called ‘breakers’ to ‘makers’ (cf. Honwana and De Boeck 2005) with prominent roles in the peace process and national political dialogue.

Whilst the weight of expectation now appears to rest on young people’s agency to effect positive change in Myanmar, they continue to struggle with endemic and historical constraints on their mobility which might allow them to do so. Indeed, many of the structural problems that made them an ‘anti-state force’ under authoritarian rule forty years ago, remain much the same into Myanmar’s transition, over half a decade on from the country’s so-called democratic ‘Spring’ (Russell 2014; Pederson 2015). As of 2017, for example, it was reported that 17.4 per cent of young people in Myanmar between the ages of 15-24 were neither in education, employment or training (ILO 2019: 2). Furthermore, unemployment amongst educated youth, in particular, has risen sharply and significantly since 2015 - those with university degrees now make up 26 per cent of the total unemployed youth in Myanmar, compared to less than 5 per cent in other ASEAN countries (ibid). Those who progressed no further than College (Grade 11+) exercised the lowest participation rate in response to the national labour market at only 41 per cent (Department of Population 2017b: 23). This suggests that the reform agenda has done little to enhance youth transitions amongst particular groups of educated young people who might otherwise be well placed to make a difference.

Much of the impetus for arguments around youth in processes of positive change is derived from the apparent demographic ‘dividend’ that a large youth population represents. We are frequently reminded that Myanmar youth account for over a third of the country’s population (State Councillor Office 2018); that those aged 15-35 constitute half of the eligible work force (ILO 2019). Until recently, however, similar arguments were deployed to account for the destructive impact of the popular protests I have just described, in which Myanmar’s inflated youth ‘bulge’ was considered the root of all dissent (Gowen 2015). The same statistical



Figure 5. Youth and Political Change: *government responses to the ADCE student protests ridiculed in the context of the 2015 elections. Headline: ‘The Next President Needs to Understand Justice and Public Support’; Cowering Student: ‘Please follow the international example’, Public Affairs Journal, 29th-30th March 2015 (Photo: Author)*

arguments therefore appear to offer vastly different prognoses: large numbers of young people either stand to overwhelm educational provision and employment opportunities in Myanmar prompting destructive social and political outcomes; or huge numbers of young people promise to enhance educational and occupational outcomes propelling dramatic economic dividends by sheer force of numbers.

As I explain in the next chapter, arguments built around demographic quotas say little about the lived experience of young people themselves, their different encounters around education and employment. Still less, in a country like Myanmar with its vast cultural and ethnic diversity, where communities differ greatly in their relations to authority and development, to peace and to conflict, with specific implications for how they encounter education and work; how they navigate between and beyond these domains in an effort to ‘maximise their abilities’. By neglecting to account for how these different positions and experiences mark youth transitions in particular, those demographic arguments typically applied to Myanmar youth, are in danger of conflating youth positions and experiences.

Degrees without freedom¹³: a note on the cultural currency of credentials in Myanmar

Behind the numbers there is usually a more complex and nuanced story. A strikingly similar feature of the many family homes I have visited across Myanmar over the years is a proudly displayed, often oversized, graduation photo of some kind. In both Burmese and Karen, Buddhist and Christian households, it is not uncommon to find these near the small family shrine as you enter the home, as if educated youth are to be celebrated and venerated in equal measure.

As such, credentials remain an important cultural marker of youth transitions across Myanmar despite conspicuously lacking economic currency. Whilst many of my respondents chose to celebrate their achievements on this front through social media, they often did so by ridiculing the value of the credential. They did this in the knowledge that their friends and peers felt the same and it was not uncommon to encounter this attitude in different Karen populated parts of Myanmar.

¹³ I consciously appropriate the title of a well-known study of unemployed educated youth in India (Jeffrey, Jeffery and Jeffery 2007), which argues that education is a ‘contradictory resource’ in appearing to empower young people through the credentials it bestows whilst failing to grant them the prospects and mobility this promises.

But whilst the social and cultural value placed on educated youth is clearly similar for different Burmese families, be they Bamar or Karen; for those living in metropolitan Yangon as it is for those in suburban Hpa-an, the pathways to those graduations and transitions - the opportunities and constraints, the struggles and successes - are certainly not, as we shall see. Indeed, independent assessments confirm that graduations and credentials in southeastern Myanmar, in particular, are less likely to translate into successful educational and occupational outcomes and returns, suggesting that for young people in this region in particular, the currency of these credentials remains comparatively low within the country's transition (The Asia Foundation 2014; OPHI 2017).

In much the same way, *Karen* youth differ considerably in their experiences and encounters around education as they plot a way forward into work. Indeed, it is perhaps significant that the ethnonym 'Karen' is not actually a Karen word but an ascribed label, there being no single word in any Karen language to apply to all Karen people (Falla 1991: 15). 'Karen' could, as Martin Smith (1991) illustrates "equally apply to a Burmese-speaking, University of Rangoon [Yangon] graduate, born and brought up in Bassein [Patheingyi] in the [Ayeyarwady] Delta, and an illiterate, animist, hill-tribesman in the Dawna Range [running through Karen State] who has never even met an ethnic Burman" (Smith 1991: 144)¹⁴.

Just as Smith argues that Karen identity is socially and historically situated, reflecting the relative socio-economic disparity between Karen communities on the basis of ethnicity and education, so too is that of 'Karen (educated) youth', despite being framed (on the wall) in much the same way.



Figure 6. Alternative Graduation Photo: *Hpa-an University, February 2020* (Redacted screenshot of Instagram post: Author)

¹⁴ Cheesman (2002: 200) provides a more nuanced analogy of ethno-religious if not socio-economic difference amongst the Karen by accounting for both Sgaw and Pwo/Plong Karen.

With this in mind, I now situate the specific Karen community at the heart of this study within the context of this evident complexity, in order to bring into focus the socially structured and historically situated positions of this particular group of young people.

Reframing Karen identity & interests: seeing the Kwaegabon Plong Karen in contemporary Myanmar

It is difficult to pin down the Karen amidst the bewilderingly complex demographic portrait of Myanmar's peoples, still less the Kwaegabon Plong Karen of Hpa-an district in the country's southeast. Census data has proved notoriously contentious for being scientifically flawed and politically biased, often in a deliberate attempt by the politically dominant Burman (Bamar) – largely Buddhist – majority (who likely account for at least 65 per cent of the total population) to play down ethnic minority numbers, particularly that of the Karen (Smith 1991: 30) who represent a significant minority. In a country of considerable ethno-linguistic diversity¹⁵, the Karen are variously identified as either the second (Smith 1991, 1994; Thawnghmung 2008) or third largest ethnic group (after the Shan) (Renard 1988; South 2011) at approximately seven to nine per cent of a total population of over 51.5 million (The Economist 2015)¹⁶. According to Ashley South (2007b), the Karen represent the largest minority group in Southeast Asia without a state of their own “in any meaningful sense” (ibid: 59). Demographically and politically the Karen have therefore been perceived to pose more of a threat to Burman (Buddhist) hegemony than most other ethnic nationality peoples in the country, often enduring added persecution and privation as a result.

The division of the country in the years following Independence from the British in January 1948, into seven Divisions, all heavily populated by the Burman majority, and seven ethnic minority States – Chin, Kachin, Karen, Kayah, Mon, Rakhine, and Shan - suggests a comfortable balance of ethno-

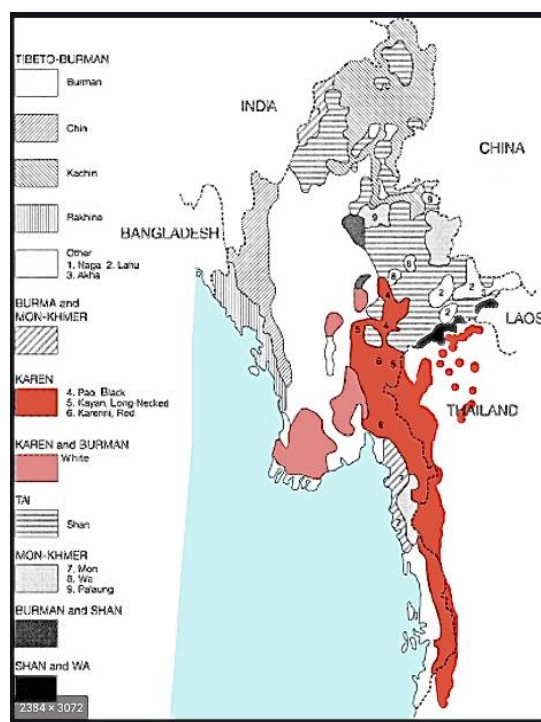
¹⁵ The Burmese government puts this at upwards of 130 distinct ethnic nationalities. Though this remains a contentious and arbitrary government categorisation it nonetheless attests to the scale of this diversity. All data supplied by the Myanmar government, including that provided in the Appendices to this thesis, should be treated with caution though it offers the only 'formal' assessment in many cases.

¹⁶ This is the figure quoted by the Myanmar government's Ministry of Immigration and Population in conjunction with the UN Population Fund who together carried out the last census between March 29th to April 10th, 2014 at the time of this research. Based on the aforementioned academic estimates of the Karen population as between 5-7 per cent of the country's population, this would therefore suggest that there are now between 2.5 and 3.6 million Karen people in contemporary Myanmar. However, this data has been contested and is not currently in the public domain nor likely to be released in the future.

national identities over the territory of the modern nation state. However, the Karen are alone in being more widely dispersed outside Karen State than any other ethnic nationality group (see Map 4 below), where reputedly less than one-quarter of Burma's Karen population actually resides (Smith 1991: 52; Thawngmung 2008: 4), including the Kwaegabon Plong community in this study.

Other Karen communities are located as far north as Mandalay Division and as far south as *Tanintharyi* Division; sizeable Karen communities also exist in the township of *Insein* in Myanmar's largest city, the commercial capital Yangon, and Taungoo and Thandaunggyi townships in northern Karen State; they are to be found in eastern Bago Division and the Ayeyarwady Delta on the western seaboard, as well as in Mon State, the eastern hills along both sides of the Myanmar-Thailand border where large numbers of Karen refugees and exile communities still reside; as indeed elsewhere in northern Thailand (Kunstadter 1967, 1979). Karen lives and experiences differ markedly depending on where and exactly how they are situated within this geography.

It is worth noting that this picture of the Karen population scattered across contemporary Myanmar clearly runs counter to prominent anthropological assumptions about the country's demography. Edmund Leach's (1960) influential claim that 'traditional frontiers' in pre-colonial Burma endure and still allow us to distinguish between lowland Burmans and highland minorities does not ring true against this modern snapshot of the Karen, whose dispersal over lowland and highland Burma clearly defy this easy categorisation, as indeed Smith (1991) was at pains to stress. Indeed, Leach's datum is liable to occlude our view of particular Karen groups such as the lowland Plong Karen, including those from Hpa-an district, who remain a notable exception to this.



Map 4: Karen populated states and regions of Myanmar at a glance (Creative Commons 2010)

Crucially, and perhaps as a consequence of this geographic dispersal (Koenig 1990), Karen ethnic identity is far from homogenous but fragmented along ethnolinguistic, religious and political

lines. Indeed, it is surmised that there are at least 20 ethnic subgroups amongst the Karen alone (Thawngmung 2008) and as many, if not more, distinct Karen dialects (Cheesman 2002), the largest being the Plong-speaking Karen who amount to roughly 80 per cent of all Karen and the Sgaw-speaking Karen who number less than 20 per cent (Gravers 2007b: 244), but also including many other Karen groups such as the Kayah, Pa-o, Kayan, Bre and the Bwe, many of whom do not consider themselves Karen (Gravers 1996).

Notwithstanding the disputed and contentious nature of this data, the overwhelming majority of Karen are Theravada Buddhists, most of whom are Plong; just over 15 per cent are Christians, who tend to be Sgaw-speaking Karen; of the remaining 10 per cent, the majority are animists (Ling 1988: 177–178) though there are small, largely unacknowledged, communities of Karen Muslims (TBBC 2010). The Karen who feature in this study exemplify this ethnic, religious, and linguistic complexity. Most are Buddhist but some are Christian and only one is Muslim; most are Plong but there are some Sgaw, Pa-o, and one is Ke'ba Karen; most speak one of the Plong Karen dialects, predominantly east but including west Pwo¹⁷, some Sgaw, and almost everyone speaks Burmese, and some English and Thai (see Appendix 5, pp. 277-280).

Indeed, Karen ethnicity is as contested as it is complex (see Lehman 1979; Hinton 1986; Rajah 1990; Gravers 1996; Harriden 2002; Gravers 2007; Sharples 2017). Suffice to say, in this thesis I work with a necessarily reflexive or 'interactional' notion of Karen ethnicity in which ethnic identity is not captive to primordial attributes but interacts with the time and place within which the individual is situated (see Oommen 2004). This definition acknowledges that individuals might select from a range of ethnic identities and by implication loyalties, finding these loyalties to coexist rather than compete (see Dolan 2011).

The young people in this study are united by their shared engagement around new learning sites in Hpa-an. For the most part, they are proud to be Karen, but their loyalties encompass a broad range of identities and increasingly cosmopolitan affiliations. In this respect, they 'cut and mix', at

¹⁷ There are four different dialects within the Pwo Karen language which reflect the regional distribution of these peoples in Myanmar and Thailand: Eastern Pwo (Karen State, Tanintharyi, and parts of Bago and Taungoo townships), Western Pwo (predominantly in the Ayeyarwady/Irrawaddy delta region), Northern Pwo (amongst the Thai Karen in Chang Mai and Tak provinces), Phrae Pwo amongst Thai Karen of Lampang, Phrae, and Chiang Rai provinces). These dialects are not mutually intelligible.

times deploying hybrid expressions of identity and intent by which they challenge and indeed alter dominant and entrenched identities (Bhabha 1994). The interactional ethnicity of these young people is therefore a mechanism of resilience by which they respond to inequality as they navigate a postmodern world.

Indeed, these attributes – particularly Karen ethnic and religious identity – are powerful socio-economic and political markers of Karen identity informing often fractious intra-ethnic relations into Myanmar's transition. The numerical dominance of the Buddhist Plong Karen in the southeast has rarely translated into political dominance as colonial and Christian encounters from the late nineteenth century set Karen peoples on different, often divergent, paths. I therefore wish to briefly expose the historical roots of these differences in more detail which inevitably have a bearing on the positions maintained by young Karen and the prospects open to them now.

Decisive encounters, divisive legacies: colonialism, Christianity, and cultural compromise

The division between the Plong and Sgaw Karen subgroups, or 'internal opposition' as the Danish anthropologist Mikael Gravers describes it (Gravers 2007a: 228), was largely fashioned by the intervention of American Baptist missions arriving in the hill regions of the southeast from the early nineteenth century, under whom small but significant numbers of largely animist Sgaw Karen converted to Christianity (Petry 1993) whilst the Buddhist Plong generally resisted these overtures (Smith 1991: 45; Gravers 2007b: 234). Indeed, much has been made of the way in which the Baptist Mission was able to appeal to tenets of Karen animist spiritual lore and millenarian belief systems which spoke of the recovery of a lost book with the arrival of a white brother (Hayami 2004, 2018; Gravers 2007a, 2007b), in order to appeal to potential converts, hence the success of their proselytising amongst the Sgaw animists in particular (Falla 1991: 14). Crucially, this suggested that Christianity, having been lost and now recovered by these Karen, was that much more authentic for having originally belonged to them (Gravers 1996).

A strikingly similar spiritual narrative amongst Buddhist Plong Karen at this time, characterises their predicament as "like the orphan without a leader" who patiently await the return of the next Buddha and the recovery of their lost wisdom (ibid). The significance of this narrative has been largely overlooked as has the small but no less significant Buddhist Karen ethno-historiography centring on

communities in the Hp-an region in the southeast that emerged from the 1970s (Ikeda 2012: 437–439).

With their uncompromising rhetoric, ‘pray and obtain’ (cited in Gravers 1996: 252), the Baptists cultivated a sense of political destiny for these (Sgaw) Karen people by conflating Christianity with the promises of civilisation, stoking aspirations for political advancement and autonomy, and so encouraging their social and political profile to grow rapidly. Such was the success of this intervention that (Sgaw) Karen identity became synonymous with Christian identity to such an extent that it became widely accepted that “to be Karen is to be Christian” (Harriden 2002: 96) when this was of course far from the case.

Early ethnographies and monographs produced by prominent missionaries, often published by the American Mission Press, sought to further enhance the indigenous etymology of Sgaw Karen identity over other Karen identity and interest groups. They were identified, for example, as the earliest settlers of what is now southeast Burma and as a chosen people or even ‘the lost tribe of Israel’ (Mason 1843, 1862; see also Garbagni and Walton 2020). However, Falla (1991) amongst others (cf. Ikeda 2012) provides evidence of Plong Karen origin myths that contest this interpretation though again, these counter-narratives have been largely ignored.

From the end of the nineteenth century access to mission education and the printed word, through an initial Sgaw Karen translation of the New Testament (Mason 1850), was decisive in the advancement of the Sgaw (cf. Womack 2005)¹⁸. Mission schools and Christian education became widely available in Lower Burma (that is, including the southeast) from the mid to late nineteenth century¹⁹. Though mission schools and their education promised “ground wide enough for us all to meet on a common platform, united by ties broader than religion” (KNA cited in Smeaton 1920: 214),

¹⁸ Kazuto Ikeda (2012) observes that the Sgaw Karen script was effectively invented as early as 1832 by the missionary Jonathan Wade (1798-1872), who adapted it from the Burmese script system; he also developed the Plong script, though not until much later in 1852 (2012: 434), when Sgaw Karen was already the established basis of Karen education.

¹⁹ Education in the Sgaw Karen language began as early as 1835 in the Mon capital Moulmein and was systematized in 1845 as the ‘Karen Theological School’ (Hayami 2018: 264). It should be noted that Karen Christianity is far from homogenous. Catholic missionaries contributed to educational advancement and increasing literacy amongst the Karen from the 1840s in parts of colonial Burma such as Pegu/Bago and Bassein/Pathein (P. Jolliffe 2016: 59–60). Smith (1991) notes growing tensions between Roman Catholic priests and Baptist missionaries who in 1883 supported rival sides when fighting broke out between Karen villagers on the Karenni-Taungoo borders that was to spark the Karenni uprising (Smith 1991: 45), suggesting a diversity of Christian ideals and diverging interests informing Karen Christian identity and relations from this time; the Christian activist Benedict Rogers (2015) observes that tensions amongst Burma’s Christians and even between Catholics consequently persist into the country’s transition (ibid: 121-141).

it struggled to do so. Rather, the Sgaw Karen came to see education and Christianity “as inseparable factors in their civilisation” (ibid: 226)²⁰. One of Burma’s first institutions of higher education, the Baptist (later Judson) College, was established in Rangoon (Yangon) in 1875 which quickly became known as ‘Karen College’. The first ethnic newspaper, *Hsa Too Ghaw* (*The Morning Star* in Sgaw Karen), founded by a missionary in 1841, was to be the country’s longest running vernacular newspaper until it was closed down following the military coup of 1962 (Smith 1991: 44).

These social, educational, linguistic and technological advancements pathed the way to British colonial preferment as many Christian Sgaw Karen were recruited into the colonial army, serving initially as guides for the British Army in the Anglo-Burmese wars of 1824/5 and 1852/3 and later as troops involved in suppressing a series of nationalist uprisings against the colonial administration in Lower Burma in 1886 and 1930-32 (Smith 1991: 44)²¹. Significantly, Sgaw Karen troops within the colonial army acted in this capacity again in the Salween delta between 1856 and 1860 when thousands of Buddhist Plong Karen rose in rebellion against missionaries and colonisers (Gravers 1996; see also Thant Myint-U 2004: 131).

The first ethnic political organisation in the country, the Karen National Association (KNA) was formed by prominent and educated Christian Sgaw Karen in 1881 which was to become the Karen National Union (KNU) in 1947. The KNA/KNU predates the Young Men’s Buddhist Association (YMBA), the first ethnic Burman (Bamar) organisation, by a quarter of a century (Ikeda 2012). It considerably bolstered the Sgaw Karen position in soliciting tacit agreements from the colonial administration for the right to secede from the newly independent nation with calls for an independent Karen homeland or *Kawthoolei*²² (Christie 1996), marking the birth of the KNU’s ethnonationalist project. In the words

²⁰ The amateur ethnologist and colonial administrator Donald Mackenzie Smeaton (1920) goes on to equate this educational advancement with increasing political disparity between the two Karen group (1920: 227).

²¹ Martin Smith (1991) suggests that even as late as 1939, less than a decade before Independence, there were as many as 1,448 Karen in the British Burma Army compared to just 472 Burman, 886 Chin and 881 Kachin (ibid: 44). Mikael Gravers (1996) suggests that Karen also served in the colonial police service and were favoured by colonists in domestic service. The ‘loyal Karens’ (Smeaton 1920) were to distinguish themselves alongside the British in defence of colonial Burma during the Second World War (see Thant Myint-U 2008: 211, 242, 261), the largely Bamar Buddhist nationalists having sided with the Japanese.

²² This (Sgaw) Karen endonym refers to an area that encompasses the Salween district including Hpa-an and roughly translates as ‘Flowerland’ otherwise ‘Land of Blackened Fields’ or even ‘Land of Purged Evil’ in reference to Karen slash-and-burn agricultural practice (Falla 1991: 379). Whilst it was to form the basis of successionist aspirations amongst the Christian Karen KNU hierarchy, tacitly supported by the British prior to Independence, which even persists within the ethnonationalist enclaves on the Thai border into the modern era (see Rogers 2012: 52–53), Smith (1991) suggests that these aspirations were not shared by Buddhist Karen at the time (ibid: 52).

of one prominent KNU spokesman in November 1948, under the KNU the Karen could “develop socially, politically, educationally, and economically on their own lines and claim the right to self-determination” (cited in Smith 1991: 114). In reality, as Jessica Harridan (2002) observes, “Under missionary and British guidance, this *minority within a minority* was able to advance – educationally, socially, and politically” (ibid: 96; my emphasis).

It was not until 1954 that the Karen were granted their own State in the southeast, the autonomy of which was always in doubt. The KNU’s frustrated aspirations for self-determination was to set them on a collision course with the Burman Buddhist majority who came to see the struggle for independence very much in terms of an historical clash between Buddhist/colonised and Christian/colonial affiliations and aspirations. The Sgaw, and by extension all Karen, were therefore strongly associated with colonial rule in this struggle, most of whom were of course neither Sgaw nor Christian. The ensuing civil war between the KNU’s Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and the Burmese state, still regarded as the world’s longest-running civil war (South 2011), has set Christian and Buddhist Karen against each other in the history of modern Burma. Moreover, the latter have found themselves in the crosshairs of both the Christian Karen/KNU and the Burman Buddhists/Burmese state, the apparent contradiction of their ethno-religious affiliations distrusted by both.

Tensions have been exacerbated by the increasing “S’gaw-isation” (South 2007b: 16) of Karen society in the borderlands of the southeast over many decades and compounded by KNU historicism deliberately ignoring difference and dissent amongst the Karen in the interests of political expediency (Gravers 1996: 248). This is nowhere more true than with respect to education where the KNU’s Karen Education Department (KED) has long maintained and promoted Sgaw literacy and mobility at the expense of other Karen interests and aspirations (Dolan 2011), especially in the refugee camps on the Thai border where it has sought to safeguard the KNU’s identity and interests (South 2007b; Dolan 2011).

From the early 1990s ethnic and religious conflict between the KNU’s Christian Sgaw Karen hierarchy and disaffected Buddhist Plong Karen armed groups inflamed the intra-ethnic dimensions of the conflict in the southeast, resulting in the emergence of the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army

(DKBA). The DKBA was to join other Karen government-aligned 'border guard forces' (BGF) which together with various local Karen militias, were to contest the region amongst each other over the next two decades (South 2011: 14). The state capital Hpa-an quickly emerged as one of the most contested territories in the ensuing conflict and has long existed under government control, well before the eventual withdrawal of the KNU to northern Thailand in 1995. Its predominantly Plong Buddhist Karen population has therefore been subject to some of the most significant and sustained privations at the hands of both Karen and government forces. This has involved violent conflict including the destruction of lives and livelihoods, as part of which indentured labour, rape and sexual violence, were visited on these communities, not to mention the destruction of social welfare systems.

As I go on to explain below, education has become a battlefield of its own and a conduit for dominant and competing interests and aspirations, namely between the KNU/KED and state provision in the southeast (Jolliffe and Speers Mears 2016; Lall 2016b)²³. The state's approach to education, and particularly its role in ethnic assimilation strategies, compounded and therefore exacerbated this cultural compromise for those Plong Karen living and learning within government-controlled territory, which I now consider in more detail. In so doing, I begin to draw the young people in this study into this picture, elaborating on how state-making assimilation processes in government-controlled territory like Hpa-an were to affect the lives and learning of this generation of young people.

Crisis and constraint: processes of assimilation in the borderlands during the 1980s and 1990s

From at least the mid-1960s, in the years following General Ne Win's coup d'état in March 1962 that plunged Myanmar into decades of authoritarian rule, state education acted as a central mechanism by which successive military governments have sought to instil a 'national idea' (Cheesman 2003: 54)²⁴. As part of this education has acted as a primary vehicle by which to impose a pervasive sense of Burman Buddhist identity as a single shared cultural essence in an attempt to diffuse ethnic diversity

²³ At the time of this research, these differences continued to express themselves through a resurgence of armed conflict (Zaw 2018; Karen News 2019), inter-communal religious tensions (Sithu Aung Myint 2016; Weng 2016), and ethnic political difference amongst the Karen in the southeast (Dolan 2015c, 2015b, 2016a).

²⁴ The political ideology which attests to cultural diversity whilst acting to diffuse it. This continues to resonate divisively in contemporary Burmese political discourse animating ongoing conflict, particularly more recently and overtly with respect to the Rohingya whose citizenship is undermined for not being included as *taingyintha* ('national races') (Cheesman 2017). Gravers (1996) also refers to this as 'cultural corporatism' or "the military model of Burmese society [in which] the nation of their imagined Myanmar has one singular cultural essence which is embodied in all individual citizens... as defined in the citizenship law of 1982" (1996: 240).

and difference, hence the moniker, 'Burmanisation'²⁵, attributed to this policy for reflecting the dominant identity and interests of the Bamar/Burman Buddhist majority, and which very much continues to structure socio-political privileges across contemporary Myanmar (see Walton 2013). The teaching of ethnic languages and histories were therefore banned, historical narratives prioritising Burman Buddhist histories over other versions of ethnic history were promoted (Salem-Gervais and Metro 2012), a pedagogy of rote learning rather than critical thinking was stubbornly maintained as it continues to be in many schools across Myanmar (Lall 2011).

Alternative and non-state ethnic education was heavily restricted, especially in government-controlled territory (see below). Institutions of higher education were the focus of particular privations given their historic association with dissent and civil unrest, and prohibited from offering courses in subjects such as Politics and Current Affairs which might further stoke ethno-national aspirations amongst young people and ethnic nationalities (Rives 2014). Indeed, recent surveys deem Karen State to have some of the lowest levels of civic knowledge and values anywhere in the country (The Asia Foundation 2014; Welsh and Kai-Ping Huang 2016), a direct consequence I suggest of historical and endemic *higher* educational deficits in this particular region over this extended period (cf. OPHI 2017)²⁶.

Following the 1988 critical juncture, in which Myanmar's authoritarian regime was challenged by a widespread pro-democracy uprising led by monks and students throughout the country (Smith 1991), the specific configuration of post-socialist development and assimilation strategies exercised in government-controlled territory from the early 1990s would affect life, learning and livelihoods that much more for many in provincial urban centres like Hpa-an. Whilst promising the country's ethnic nationality regions much-needed development after decades of conflict and counter-insurgency, the newly formed Ministry for the Progress of Border Areas and National Races or *Na Ta La*, established in 1992, was essentially a strategic mechanism for extending the state's presence into the country's

²⁵ Some authors use the term 'Myanmarification' to describe the same process (see Houtman 1999) which may be more appropriate given the change in official state nomenclature in 1989. I employ the former for consistency since it is more widely used by scholars of Burma/Myanmar though it should be acknowledged that these terms remain politically encumbered in either form (cf. Metro 2017a).

²⁶ This is not without the qualification that survey data in Myanmar is notoriously unreliable in establishing anything more than a limited and generalised basis upon which to advance such assertions.

border areas (ibid). It amounted to what Mary Callahan (2004) has described as “the most concerted government effort at minority assimilation and disempowerment in the twentieth century” (ibid: 110).

Intent on “marching peripheral populations into national formation” (ibid: 103–104) it did little to enhance the quality of education and healthcare for many peripheral communities during the 1990s (Lambrecht 2004), whilst for ethnic nationalities it exacted a considerable cultural compromise. Suspected of colluding with the protesters, many high school teachers and medical personnel in provincial centres were purged, often replaced with those lacking formal training and unable to communicate in ethnic nationality languages (Lambrecht 2004)²⁷. This significantly amplified young people’s struggles to envision potential future pathways, particularly at the margins of the state where these deprivations were most keenly felt.

As I go on to illustrate in the empirical chapters that follow, the stark contrast between high occupational aspirations - which frequently attends the completion of high school and university - and poor economic opportunities following decades of conflict and underdevelopment produced a veritable ‘crisis’ of youth in many parts of Karen State (The Asia Foundation 2014; Department of Population/UNFPA 2017; OPHI 2017). A generation of young people, seemingly educated were left unemployed or at best under-employed (Jeffrey, Jeffery and Jeffery 2007). The crisis was powerfully inflected in Hpa-an where an outdated and poorly resourced state education system was further compromised by the government’s centralised project of cultural assimilation in the wake of the 1988 critical juncture. This provision contrived, together with restrictions on alternative or private education (see below), the paucity of vocational education and training²⁸, as well as an eviscerated labour market (World Bank 2018: 36; see also Appendix 11 and 11a, pp. 290-291), to accentuate the sense of

²⁷ The legacy of this has persisted into the transition, particularly following the 2012 ceasefire as part of which the government has extended its ‘administrative presence’ across Karen State by building new schools either under Ministry of Education (MoE) or mixed MoE and KNU authority whilst deploying increasing numbers of MoE-appointed ‘contract’ teachers to serve Karen communities (Jolliffe 2015; K. Jolliffe 2016; Burke *et al.* 2017). Jolliffe (2016) reports that the number of government/MoE teachers in schools supported by the Karen NGO, the Karen State Education Assistance Group (KSEAG) almost tripled, from 1,574 in 2012-13 to 4,718 in 2015-16 (K. Jolliffe 2016: 53) suggesting that both state and dominant forms of non-state education within Karen State exact a cultural compromise and increasingly so within Myanmar’s transition.

²⁸ The vocational education sector, previously governed by the Industrial and Vocational Education Law 1978, has long been a poorly staffed and resourced higher/further education domain amounting to another state mechanism contriving to exacerbate the ‘crisis’ of youth in Myanmar. This has, however, shown more rapid and concerted signs of reform and improvement recently than other state education departments, with the advent of the Technical Vocational Educational and Training (TVET) bill now pending imminent parliamentary review and approval. Nevertheless, it is unlikely to respond to current demand and needs in the short-term.

existential crisis for many young people in this region. This has been most keenly felt by Plong Karen communities remaining in government-controlled regions of Karen State, like Hpa-an, lacking credible and inclusive ethnic-based alternatives. Under such circumstances, social mobility has been significantly curtailed as state education can be seen to transfer poor social outcomes both in and around the township and from one generation to the next.

Cultural capital and compromise: on Plong social and cultural immobility

The development of the Sgaw exacted a significant and sustained cultural and political compromise on the Plong “resembling”, as Ashley South (2007) has observed, “aspects of the military-dominated state’s “Burmanisation” of national culture”” (ibid: 61) in the southeast. I suggest that this has worked to diminish the ‘cultural capital’ (Bourdieu 1986) of the Plong over time.

Bourdieu’s thinking around forms of such cultural capital might serve to illuminate this basic point more clearly and particularly what role education plays in this. He identifies three specific forms of cultural capital: the *embodied* dispositions of the mind and body, *objectified* forms of material goods such as art, books, machines, and the *institutional* forms such as educational attainment and qualifications (ibid: 17; emphasis in original) ²⁹. The history above has demonstrated how the Sgaw came to accumulate embodied cultural capital through their increasing social and political standing; they did so through enhanced access to and monopoly of objectified and institutional forms of cultural capital, in the shape of the Sgaw Karen script and mission education through which they gained a command of English and political preferment.

Moreover, it was the specific nature and combination of this capital – the English language, Christianity, and relatively high levels of education (Gravers 1996: 254) - that allowed them to consolidate and deploy what James Ferguson has referred to as a distinctive ‘cultural style’ (Ferguson 1999b: 86) or a performative register of social difference³⁰. Through the acquisition of this particular ‘style’ and set of cultural attributes, facilitated in large part by the education they were able to access,

²⁹ I gratefully acknowledge Abby Hardgrove (2012) for drawing my attention to this particular set of ideas through her work on young male ex-combatants in post-war Liberia.

³⁰ See Ferguson (1999b: 94–110) for detailed account of his theory of ‘cultural style’ which I draw on in its most basic form here merely to illuminate the argument about ethnic difference as a marker of socio-economic difference and mobility in the historical development of the Sgaw-Plong relationship; the important point is one of unequal cultural capital and the form of the compromise it has exacted.

the Sgaw enhanced their social and political profile. This inevitably diminished the relative social and political standing of other Karen groups without access to this education and its socio-political dividends. It is clear that the specific nature of this cultural compromise has become both 'embodied', as Bourdieu (1986) would have it and 'internalised' as Gravers (2007) described it, by Buddhist Plong communities in the southeast over time; my respondents, for example, frequently spoke of their irritation at being dismissed as "a migrant class", as one community leader described it to me, given pejorative associations of Karen in the southeast with migration to neighbouring Thailand. The socio-economic disparity between the exercise of these cultural styles in the southeast and elsewhere in Myanmar is reflected in some of the lowest transition and completion rates (see Appendices 6, 7a, 8; pp. 285-288) and labour market participation (see Appendices 11 & 11a, pp. 291-292) anywhere in the country, not to mention a conspicuous lack of highly educated citizens within this region (see Appendix 9, p. 288).

One of the principal groups of young people at the centre of this study, the self-described 'scholarship alumni', whose struggles and successes around education have very much shaped the emergence of new learning sites in Hpa-an, grew up in the midst of developments described above. They were born in the early to late 1980s, immediately before the 1988 critical juncture which was to exacerbate conditions for young people and their education, especially for those living and learning in government-controlled territory. They would have been young children when conflict within the KNU-dominated borderlands of southeastern Myanmar escalated in the mid-1990s, resulting in the emergence of the government-backed DKBA in December 1994 and the fall of the KNU stronghold at Manerplaw in 1995 to the DKBA and the Burmese army, the *Tatmadaw*. Unlike many Plong Karen communities in the immediate border regions of the southeast who were forced to migrate to neighbouring Thailand following the retreat of the KNU, this group of young people and their families largely remained amidst the increasing austerity of authoritarian Hpa-an or its surrounding villages, where they experienced periodic conflict at close quarters.

They came of age on the completion of high school and university in Myanmar during another significant period of civil unrest immediately before the start of the initial reform and transition process in 2008. This was again led by students and monks calling for democratic change in the

country's metropolitan centres as part of the so-called 'Saffron Revolution'³¹ of August-October 2007. Like the one two decades before, the popular protests were brutally suppressed by the *junta*. Later, many of them were to slip over the border to complete and/or further their education whilst looking for employment primarily in and around the migrant hubs of Mae Sot and Mae Sariang in northern Thailand as well as in the Thai capital Bangkok.

Their childhood, adolescence and early adulthood has therefore been structured by significant political junctures in Myanmar's recent history; these junctures are marked by debilitating experiences of conflict, cultural compromise, and hopelessness but punctuated by brief and significant moments of possibility and promise in which young people and education have figured prominently. It is for this reason that I identify them in chapter 3 as a 'community of experience' (Vigh 2006: 19) - acting in response to a specific and shared set of experiences during this particular period, which has served to shape their evolving positions and the possibilities around them.

It has been suggested that the current historical juncture is shaping experiences for youth across the world more generally and substantively. Sukarieh and Tannock (2016), for example, argue that national and global elites are overseeing a sharp deterioration in social and economic conditions for young people whilst making youth policies and initiatives a priority. These authors suggest that the significance and positioning of youth in this way is directly linked to the global spread of neoliberal forms of capitalism intent on reconfiguring the welfare and development state, and eroding the rights and protections that inform its ties with notions of personal growth and development. They go so far as to suggest that youth as a social category - betwixt and between childhood and adulthood - "have made it an appealing substitute (or euphemism) for other, more collectivist, conflictual and politicized social identities and categories of class, race, nation and religion" (ibid: 1286; see also Sukarieh and Tannock (2015: 24–27).

I believe we can see this happening in contemporary Myanmar where the profile, rights and responsibilities of young people, historically disregarded by the state, are now being publicly and

³¹ So-called because Myanmar's Buddhist monks played a prominent role in this wave of peaceful protests though it is, essentially, a misnomer since Buddhist monks in Myanmar wear *maroon* not *saffron* vestments as they do elsewhere in Buddhist Asia. Furthermore, it ignores other key groups involved namely young people, students, and dissidents of the 88' generation of political activists who together started these new protests in response to the increase in fuel prices.

enthusiastically promoted within the country's transition, as both state and dominant non-state actors mobilise around youth to further highly politicised and partisan agendas. In this sense, young people in Myanmar are being exploited by local and national elites as a means of manifesting supposedly progressive political agendas. This involves shifting the responsibility for such agenda onto young people in an apparent move to empower them whilst advancing their own sectarian interests. Youth, in parts of provincial Myanmar such as the southeast where this is happening, must therefore navigate complex political as well as personal transitions³².

In the next section, I want to probe the socio-historical sites of those educational experiences in further detail. In many ways these amount to an unprecedented confluence of possibility as well as restriction – or what I have chosen to interpret as a 'vital conjuncture' (Johnson-Hanks 2002) - in which these young people were all forced to make critical decisions about their education and their future. These encounters and experiences profoundly shaped the aspirations and actions/transitions of this particular generational group of young people in the years to come (see Chapter 4 & 5), with a direct bearing on evolving youth transitions in transitional Hpa-an (see Chapter 6).

I begin by alighting on those particular aspects of state provision which have long compromised pathways from high school to university, and into employment. I then go on to account for the tradition of non-state education, often provided by religious institutions and civil society, offering young people in conflict-affected and government-controlled parts of the country, alternative pathways from which they have derived considerable hope and impetus under difficult circumstances.

Indefinite youth transitions: state-managed immaturity and immobility

It is almost difficult to appreciate that Myanmar's education system was once considered one of the best in Asia (Lall 2018). Decades of state neglect, under-funding and diminishing standards have reduced it to one of the poorest anywhere in the world (UNESCO 2011). A cursory glance at available

³² I apply the term 'transition' as a *concept*, as well as *discursive context* in which the country is currently situated. Contributing to debates around the former, a recent edited volume on Myanmar's political transition (Prasse-Freeman, Chachavalpongpun and Strefford 2020) deems this to be a so-called 'pacted transition' after the term coined by Karl and Schmitter (2002), who also refer to it as 'imposed transition' in which democratic elites collude with previous authoritarians to "lock in" existing privileges and make redistributive reforms harder" (Schmitter 2010: 23). The editors of the 2020 volume argue that in this way civil society in Myanmar is "systematically excluded... generally extending rather than reducing Burmanization of the nation" (Prasse-Freeman, Chachavalpongpun and Strefford 2020: 4–5). This would suggest the imposition of sustained constraints on the ethnic community in this study at the hands of dominant democratic elites, both Bamar and Karen, who are actively maintaining marginalised subjectivities within the 'transition'.

data on more recent student participation and completion rates confirms as much (see Becker 2015; Department of Population/UNFPA 2017). Appendix 7a (p. 286) indicates that Karen State had the lowest completion rates at upper secondary level in the country. This suggests that just one in nine young people aged 16-19 gained access to higher education at the time of this research, whilst less than one per cent of the remainder were involved in any form of training (ibid). As this data confirms those who do access these pathways become increasingly disenchanted as they progress through it. Moreover, those ‘educated youth’ that do stick the course are beset by specific obstacles that confound their ability to navigate from high school, into higher education, and then into the labour market.

For example, the ACDE protests and demands called for a range of measures to improve the quality of state provision, including revisions to the High School Matriculation Examination, otherwise known (and acting) as the University Entrance Examination, by which their future – the educational and occupational possibilities open to them – are decided³³. In the testimony that follows, the young people in this study frequently identify Matriculation exam as marking a critical juncture in their encounters with state provision in which their aspirations and desired transitions were initially frustrated.

The pass rate for the Matriculation Examination, taken at the end of grade 11 (see Appendix 1, p. 265), is typically low. For example, on average in the academic years 2007/08 to 2010/11, 66 per cent failed the assessment; of 210,000 candidates over 16,000 students repeated the year, while approximately 192,000 dropped out, though a significant proportion of these appear to have attempted the assessment again, often more than once (ADB 2013: 24). This source suggests that the pass rate has been steadily declining in the decade prior to this, reflecting increasing drop-out rates after Grade 10 and declining Grade 11 enrolment rates. Indeed, dropout rates have been increasingly high (61.3 per cent) and transition rates correspondingly low (31 per cent) at this particular educational transition point (ADB 2013: 23) (see also Appendix 6, p. 284). The source also reveals that “the

³³ This examination system has been in operation since 1998, involving 11 question sets across six subject areas (three core subjects and three electives) set and assessed by university academics and allocated randomly to states and regions. In order to gain a passing grade, students must achieve a minimum of 40 per cent in all six subjects. Should they fail one or more subjects, they are required to repeat the year and the process (ADB 2013: 24).

threshold for passing the Matriculation Examination is higher for girls than boys” (ibid: 24), despite which 36.4 per cent of girls passed in this particular academic year compared to 31.9 per cent of boys. In an attempt to maintain gender parity within higher education, competition amongst girls is greater and therefore access harder since they account for a slightly larger percentage of the population.

Furthermore, this assessment continues to determine the university degree course to which students are assigned each year. Given the poor quality of high school tuition, many are not admitted to their preferred degree course but instead assigned to another course, often unrelated to that for which they originally applied. Degree courses in Medicine, Law and Languages (particularly English) are popular and heavily over-subscribed; access is therefore that much more competitive and many, consequently, are left reading for degrees for which they have little enthusiasm and/or aptitude. One of the participants in this study confided in me that since he had not been accepted onto the English degree course he had set his heart on he had chosen to study Geology, “because at least it means going out and around looking at stones which is better than some subject you don’t care about!”³⁴. Those aspiring to vocational training do not escape the vagaries of the Matriculation Examination which determines access to TVET as well as higher education courses (Becker 2015).

Since it is common in Myanmar to complete high school at a comparatively young age, frequently at the age of 15-16 years old (see Appendices 1 & 1a, pp. 266-267) these disappointments are encountered early in life. On completing university - of which only two per cent do so successfully (JICA 2013; Po Po Thaung Win 2015: 8) - they emerge into the labour market at a relatively young age, lacking the necessarily life skills and technical aptitudes to meet the considerable challenges and scant opportunities which quickly confront them; still less today given the disparity between their education and the increasingly technical nature of employment opportunities. We recall Nann Kaw Kii Suu, whom we met in the Introduction, bemoaning this very fact when she observed that, “if you graduate in Chemistry you will not become a Chemist – even though people finish university they don’t have work”. Aspirations around employment and careers, often closely aligned to those around (higher) education are therefore undermined, even for those fortunate enough to access their preferred course of study.

³⁴ Fieldnotes: 16th April 2015.

In this way, disappointments around education and employment are compounded and conflated at these decisive junctures.

One of the first countries in the region to establish a university system Myanmar's higher education sector has grown rapidly over recent decades without the necessary resources and regulation. According to current government information sources, Myanmar had 32 higher education institutions across the country in 1988 but presently has over a 160, offering at least undergraduate courses, (Department of Higher Education 2012)³⁵, 60 of which have been established in the past 15 years (JICA 2013: 104). Almost half of all such institutions in the country are situated in the large urban conurbations of Yangon (33) or Mandalay (36) (Kamibeppu and Chao 2017); provincial parts of Myanmar like Karen State have comparatively few universities compared to most other states and regions of comparable size and population density (Po Po Thaug Win 2015).

State	# of HEIs
Kachin	9
Kayah	3
Kayin	4
Chin	3
Sagaing	14
Tanintheryi	7
Bago	9
Magway	11
Mandalay	36
Mon	4
Rakhine	5
Yangon	33
Shan	14
Ayewarwaddy	12

Figure 7. Number of state higher education institutions (HEIs) by States/Regions (IIE 2013: 14)

This vast education sector has therefore been in steady decline for decades such that availability has not been matched by quality. Courses and curricula are old and outdated; assessment and attainment inconsistent; tutoring and lecturing practices remote and ineffective; course materials and resources limited. Indeed, Lambrecht (2004) ascribes deteriorating public services to the Burmese way to development from the mid to late 1980s which he describes as an 'oxymoron' for the destruction it wrought on social and material wealth. He indicates that people's non-voluntary contributions comprised over 70 per cent of the total market cost of 'rural development projects', whilst state-spending on healthcare and education declined from 3 to 1.4 per cent between 1989-96 to suggest that the state's development initiatives "are more usefully analysed as rough and clumsy state and nation-building endeavours" (ibid: 151).

³⁵ Other commentators report this to be 168 in 2015 (see Lall 2018: 270) and 170 (see Kamibeppu and Chao 2017) though what sources this information is based on are not stated or, to the best of my knowledge, repeated elsewhere.

The National Education Committee (NEC), currently charged with managing HEIs across the country, proudly asserts that it aims to ensure that higher education is “equitable with traditional, cultural and social values and which is also in keeping with the economic and political aspirations of the nation” (MOE 2019). However, it is unclear what these ‘values’ and ‘aspirations’ really amount to when so many young people emerge from the country’s colleges and universities without the skills and opportunities to respond to any aspirations, least of all their own. Moreover, it is unlikely that these values and aspirations are consistently understood and applied given that the sector is managed by no less than 13 different government ministries³⁶, 66 of these under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education whilst 97 are managed by 12 other ministries (Department of Higher Education 2012).

Given the historic role of Myanmar’s universities and particularly their students as a perceived “anti-state force” (Hlaing 2007b: 224), they have frequently been the focus of punitive measures which has served to compromise educational standards, outcomes and returns over time. Following the 1988 pro-democracy uprising in which university students had figured so prominently, the state took putative measures against universities in particular, often seen as a hotbed for dissent; many were closed down initially for two years. Following more student protests in the mid and late 1990s these were closed for a further three years whilst undergraduate programmes were relocated away from urban centres (Lall 2016b).

The first two of Hpa-an’s four public universities were established in the years immediately following these developments - Hpa-an Technical University in 1993 and Hpa-an University in 1995. Many of those in this study are either students or alumni of Hpa-an University which offers a broad range of degree courses including Science and Liberal Arts courses; alongside these are two more specialist universities - Hpa-an Computer (Science)



Figure 8. *Hpa-an University founded in 1995* (Photo: Author)

³⁶ Others put this at 19 government ministries currently involved in administering the higher education sector (see Lall 2016c: 167), though the specific source of this information goes unacknowledged here.

University (est. 2007) and Hpa-an Education College (est. 2003) (see Map 2, p. vi). However, just as many have opted for the University of Distance Education (UDE).

In a deliberate attempt to defuse a resurgence of campus and student union politics, in July 1992 the government instituted the world’s largest distance education programme. It has been estimated in recent years that at least 60 per cent of the country’s university students are enrolled at the UDE (CESR 2013: 8) and this very much reflects the samples of those involved in this study (see Appendix 5, pp. 278-280). The UDE remains the largest university in the country with reputedly over 560,000 students nationwide in the academic year 2001-2002 (Han Tin 2004: 8). Since 1998 it has been centrally administered in Mandalay (for Upper Myanmar) and Yangon (for Lower Myanmar) and has 32 campuses across the country including a regional centre in Hpa-an (YUDE 2018).

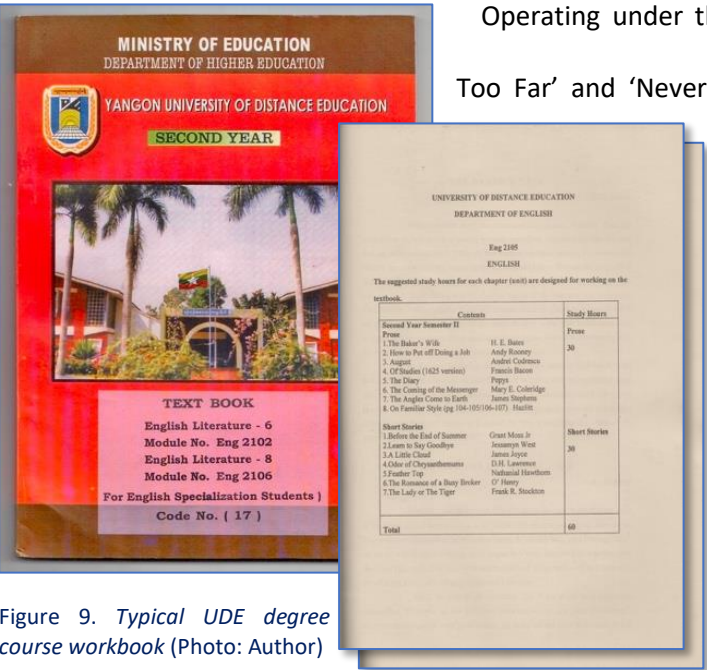


Figure 9. Typical UDE degree course workbook (Photo: Author)

Operating under the combined mottoes ‘Education Is Never Too Far’ and ‘Never Too Old to Learn’ (ibid), it is ostensibly

intended to provide a reflexive education, serving those students who cannot afford to live away from home (British Council 2013: 17; Lall 2018) or who wish to start or resume their education at a later stage in life. It has, moreover, proved an effective government mechanism for diminishing

space and opportunity for student union and campus politics since most of the teaching is currently conducted via the country’s ailing intranet. As a consequence, there has been, until recently, few if any nationwide university student associations, no student newspapers, no participation by university students in student councils or committees, and little if any student exchange or travel (British Council 2013: 20).

Many of the students currently enrolled on courses at the UDE whom I spoke to during my fieldwork commented on how poor and ineffective they felt it was. However, some conceded that at least it allowed them to work towards a degree whilst maintaining employment in the informal labour

market, a fact acknowledged elsewhere (British Council 2013: 17–18). Nevertheless, this would appear to account for the extended stasis in which many young people find themselves, ‘churning’ from one job to the next in the informal labour market, as their education extends over many years, often indefinitely. So, in many ways, state provision in all its forms serves to extend if not frustrate the ability of young people to effect timely, durable and fulfilling transitions from education to employment.

We have now seen how education figured in (Karen) nation and (Burmese) state-making processes which became particularly invasive at the margins of the state from the mid to late 1980s, exacting a cultural compromise on many young people growing up in these regions. These processes inevitably depleted the labour market in those parts of the country like Karen State ravaged by years of conflict, counterinsurgency and underdevelopment. In peripheral locations such as Hpa-an, existing under government control for lengthy periods, they have done much to undermine viable pathways in furthering education and securing employment for generations of young people, the legacy of which is still visible in some of the lowest labour market participation rates anywhere in the country (see Appendix 11, p. 290). Indeed, those in this study - teachers and youth leaders, students and alumni - have had to contend with a state education system that continues to do much to confound their ability to transition from education to employment, from youth to adulthood, even into the more permissive climate of the transition.

Given young people’s natural tendency to aspire to a better future by contesting accepted norms, it is only to be expected that they might emerge as a significant group in re-envisioning those educational domains and pathways that have threatened to take their own future away. This is particularly the case around higher education which has impinged significantly on youth transitions and aspirations for generations. Towards the end of this chapter we will consider how this particular group of young people are continuing to express these anxieties and aspirations around higher education within Myanmar’s political and economic transition and as part of the wider reform process. However, before doing so I want to turn my attention to the space and opportunity available, both at home and over the border in Thailand, providing many of the young people in this study with alternative pathways with which to navigate around the kind of constraints explored thus far. I start

by accounting for community-based mechanisms, particularly those provided by ‘traditional’ civil society, such as churches and monasteries, that have long sought to offset the crisis of youth.

Zones of relative local autonomy? Education and civil society in authoritarian Hpa-an

Informal education and training initiatives have long existed within the context of conflict and government restriction often under the protection and patronage of local churches, monasteries and their leaders and through trans-local networks of ethnic Literature and Culture Associations within what some commentators have described as ‘zones of relative local autonomy’ (South 2011: 26; see also South 2008; Kramer 2011). Indeed, in a country and culture deeply orientated by Buddhist conceptualisations of obligation to the polity (McCarthy 2018: 169)³⁷ religious institutions in Myanmar have traditionally served this purpose, particularly for communities ‘under political wraps’ (Heinrich Boell Foundation 2006), where they have effectively evaded government scrutiny and restriction. As such, these spaces have provided essential havens for the development of welfare services in the face of state inertia, government restriction and surveillance. Moreover, they have provided alternative educational pathways during long periods when the ability of civil society more generally and the private sector to respond in this way was heavily curtailed (see Appendix 1a, p. 266).

In an oft-cited assessment, the distinguished Burma scholar David I. Steinberg (1999) suggests that with the 1974 Constitution under which General Ne Win’s Revolutionary Council (RC) morphed into the still more authoritarian Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP), “Civil society died... perhaps, more accurately, it was murdered” (ibid: 8). This was undoubtedly a period of autarky in which state legislation effectively eliminated or co-opted the private sector restricting alternative and therefore private education whilst bringing existing private schooling firmly under state control. In particular, the Unlawful Associations Act of 1908 (1957) was bolstered, curtailing association and freedom of movement (Liddell 1999: 62–65), whilst the 1984 Private Education Law was introduced firmly restricting private schooling of any kind. This legislation considerably hampered the capacity of communities and civil society to provide such services where they were lacking (Kramer and Vervest

³⁷ McCarthy (2018) identifies this as issuing from *parahita* (in Burmese) which he translates as “the scope of social action for others” (ibid: 168) or “social consciousness” (ibid), and more specifically *parahita seit* or “a mind for the welfare of others” (ibid: 169) not limited to Buddhist institutions but to civil society more generally.

1999; Kramer 2011), and so mitigate the crisis of youth around education occurring in parts of the country like Hpa-an.

However, it has been observed that tentative liberalisation of the private sector in the wake of the 88' uprisings, offered a space for civil society networks to respond to community needs (Callahan 2000; McCarthy 2016a). Amidst the frenzied process of nation and state-building that the new authoritarian government embarked on to consolidate its control, particularly over the conflict-affected periphery at this time, it was deemed politically expedient to shift the policy towards non-governmental organisations (Steinberg 1999; Heidel 2006)³⁸. The state sought to redress long-standing deprivations around the provision of essential welfare services whilst continuing to divest responsibility for these³⁹ by allowing 'apolitical' non-state actors space in which to operate at the community level (Steinberg 1992). Indeed, a notable study of civil society suggests that such organisations increased dramatically at this time more than any other, with upwards of 214,000 NGOs and CBOs identified across the country by 2003 suggesting that civil society was in fact "alive and never died" (Heidel 2006: 60).

Private schooling, however, remained largely restricted, for as Steinberg observes the state continued to forestall the rise of "any pluralistic institutions in society that could offer avenues for public debate and disagreement" (Steinberg 1999: 11), thus very much maintaining its policy with respect to any kind of unregulated education, particularly post-16 and higher education, domains previously and traditionally involved in public debate and disagreement.

This space certainly enhanced the ability of traditional civil society to respond to community needs at this time. Heidel (2006) noted a vibrant NGO and CBO presence in Karen State in his 2003 survey, albeit with limited engagement around education (ibid: 23 & 45). The resilience of these mechanisms, the trans-local networks they developed, and the hope and impetus this has provided many young people with few if any prospects, is a mark of the agency with which Karen communities living and learning in authoritarian Hpa-an, have sustained educational aspirations under difficult

³⁸ Indeed, Heidel (2006: 6) acknowledges that during this period NGOs were also allowed increased access to sensitive border areas like those in the southeast.

³⁹ Government expenditure on health, education and social welfare in 2014-15, at the time of this research, amounted to less than 3 per cent of GDP (UNICEF/MDRI 2014: 24).

circumstances. Whilst there remains scant data on this kind of community engagement other than the aforementioned study, the scholarship alumni, and the parents and grandparents of academy students and alumni, frequently alluded to the presence of these mechanisms. It is a mark of the continued capacity of these communities to mobilise within highly restrictive spaces and the enduring moral impact that such engagement has had on these lives.

However, at best the provision offered within such zones of autonomy has been deemed little more than ‘a patch’ for the national education system (Lorch 2007, 2008), lacking sufficient support and scale to constitute a credible alternative, still less at higher education. As I go on to suggest in the empirical chapters that follow, the legacy of this informal provision very much informs the aspirations, as well as the anxieties, of those directing new community-based learning spaces in Hpa-an today. They are intent on ensuring that community-based approaches assume the scale and recognition they were previously denied and, above all, are that much more sustainable and inclusive for being so. Indeed, the continued power and profile of specific religious institutions and their leaders within post-conflict Hpa-an now exercises influence over access to this education and its dividends (see Chapter 4, pp. 160-175) where it continues to represent yet restrict a zone of (relative) local autonomy.

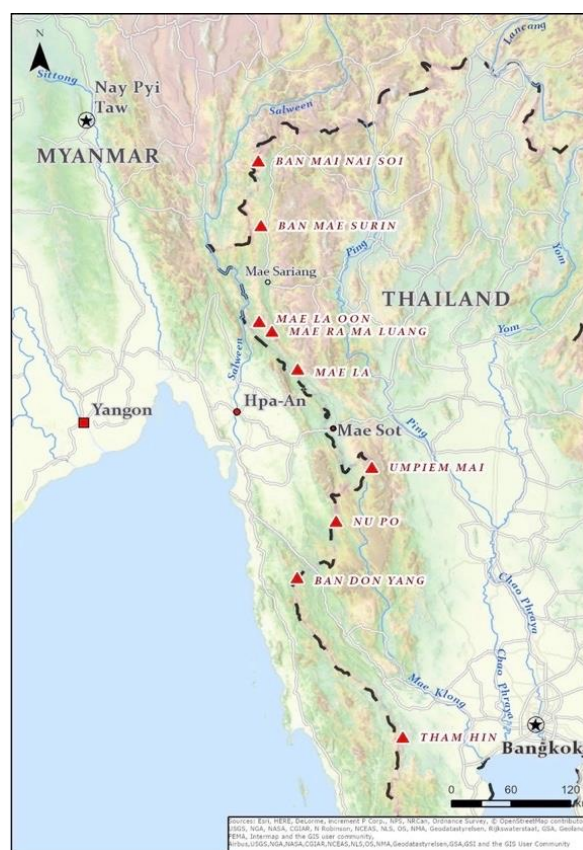
In the final sections of this chapter exploring the context in which these young people grew up, I want to briefly identify how developments on the Thai border, in the decade immediately before Myanmar’s transition, opened up possibilities around education and employment that mitigated some of these constraints and limitations; this was to have a significant bearing on the aspirations and actions of those who exploited these opportunities at this time.

The Thai borderlands, 1995-2008: education and opportunity in a parallel Karen domain

The displacement crisis that attended the escalation of conflict in the Karen borderlands from the mid-1990s, following the fall of Manerplaw in January 1995 (see above), saw increasing flows of Karen refugees and migrants, crossing the border into neighbouring Thailand. A string of largely Karen-populated refugee camps were established, many of which remain to this day (TBC 2019)⁴⁰, whilst the

⁴⁰ A recent survey (TBC 2019) suggests that there were under 100,000 refugees still living in the camps on the Thai border as of January 2019, the camps having existed there since 1984. Over 80 per cent of these refugees are Karen. Since 2016, it is estimated that less than a thousand (724) refugees have returned to Myanmar (MPM 2019), confirming that the situation in Myanmar remains too precarious for many to return (TBC 2018). Within this recent time frame migrant and refugee

border towns of Mae Sot and Mae Sariang quickly became (and remain) vibrant migrant hubs (see map 5). This was accompanied by increasing flows of international aid and humanitarian assistance (Steinberg 1992; Banki 2009; IDC 2014: 34–41; Frewer 2017; Strefford 2020) in support of basic welfare provision. Much of this assistance was initially captured by the KNU/KED's “successionist-orientated education-in-exile” (South 2007b: 71)⁴¹ which sought to safeguard the KNU's identity and interests within the Karen refugee camps (Dolan 2011) by appealing to donors through its well-publicised conflict with the *junta* (see South 2011: 36). This remained the situation until April 2009 when a more representative structure, the Karen Refugee Committee Education Entity (KRCEE), was finally established, displacing the dominance of the KED and its politicised agenda in the camps at least, but offering few benefits at higher education despite the demand (see Hsa Doe Doh Moo 2012).



Map 5. *Parallel Karen Domain: the refugee camps and the migrant hubs of Mae Sot and Mae Sariang on the border with northern Thailand overwhelmingly populated by Karen from southeastern Myanmar.*

Whilst the so-called ‘KNU family’⁴² developed under these enhanced revenue flows, the humanitarian economy on the border at this time rapidly diversified to include an increasingly technocratic complex of different NGOs, international development agencies, activists and welfare providers largely based in Mae Sot (though including a smaller number further north in Mae Sariang and Chang Mai), which marked opportunities, particularly around post-16 migrant education and employment, in specific ways.

assistance and funding has diminished rapidly as international development actors have shifted the focus of their agenda inside transitional Myanmar, making the situation on the border increasingly precarious (Quadrini 2020).

⁴¹ The KNU has a designated youth wing – the Karen Youth Organisation (KYO) – which is also implicated in this agenda (see Brown 2012).

⁴² Colloquial term applied by the international development community in Mae Sot to KNU line ministries.

For example, a burgeoning network of migrant schools grew up outside the refugee camps in and around Mae Sot during the 2000s to include post-16/higher education options (Payne 2007; Purkey 2010; Lee 2014; Oh 2016)⁴³ which Hpa-an's scholarship alumni were to benefit from. Crucially, it provided a strategic platform for developing alternative and creative responses to education and development less constrained by state (Thai as well as Burmese) legislation, parochial and partisan politics at home.

Institutions such as Wide Horizons Community Development Program and Minmahaw Higher Education Program typically involved collaborations between international development agencies and migrants. These centred around a curriculum that sought to enhance the capacity of young people to gain employment in the service of their communities through a combination of classroom and experiential learning. Many of the young people in this study were to benefit from this kind of provision in the mid-late 2000s as development interventions explored ways (from the early 1990s) to support wider social and political transformation within Myanmar itself (Maber 2016). This identified a specific role for the growing number of young people living and learning on the border whose education had been frustrated or foreclosed by conflict and displacement, and for those struggling to secure credible employment options.

In reality, this often involved equipping students with the skills, values and dispositions consistent with the practice and principles of the growing number of local and international NGOs on the border for which they would then provide cheap skilled labour (Oh 2016). In this way, these employment opportunities have fostered what I go on to refer to as a culture of 'dependency' which, though promising to empower young people, has done much to curtail their mobility and therefore disempower them.

However, a number of prominent scholarship charities emerged during this period that were to change the prospects of many. Prospect Burma, established in 1989 following the thwarted pro-

⁴³ Both Payne (2007) and Kook (2007) suggest that there were, at (their) time of writing (and therefore when many of Hpa-an's scholarship alumni would have been encountering them), around 34 such schools in the Mai Sot region serving over three thousand students. Another source (Guinard 2006), suggests that in the 2005-2006 academic year there were 43 migrant schools serving five thousand students and supported by 350 teachers. Either way, these institutions amount to a significant and sizeable post-16 education provider at this particular time within the informal education sector in Mae Sot alone.

democracy uprising of the year before, remains committed to realising a democratic future for the country by supporting the (further) education of Myanmar youth who might facilitate wider change and development at the community level⁴⁴. Increasingly, the knowledge and skills economy on the border reflected this concern for democracy and human rights (Sharples 2017; see also McConnachie 2012). This particular form of migrant education thus became a conduit by which to access scholarship opportunities for further study abroad - a springboard through which to realise personal and political aspirations for wider transformation at home.

The young people in this study are primarily beneficiaries of scholarships provided by the Swiss-Thai charity Child's Dream Foundation (est. 2003)⁴⁵ as well as the UK's Prospect Burma. Other notable scholarship providers from which this group have benefitted include the Supplementary Grants Program Burma/Asia (SGPB/A), the Asia Pacific Scholarship Consortium (APSC), and the Myanmar-based B.K. Kee Foundation, most of which continue to support young people in furthering their education today.

The Thai-Karen migrant encounter therefore provided a zone of unprecedented possibility for a significant few for a relatively brief period from the late 1990s until the reform and ceasefire processes in Myanmar breathed new life into the country's private sector a decade later when new learning sites in Hpa-an became possible (see below). As I go on to explore in the empirical chapters that follow, it profoundly shaped the aspirations of Hpa-an's scholarship alumni particularly, occurring as it did amidst new priorities and possibilities around education, employment and development whilst offering critical intercultural encounters with individuals, ideas, knowledge and practices that significantly expanded notions of self and service, or "to be someone useful for my community", in the memorable words of one of my research participants. Integrated educational and occupational pathways that many of the young people in this study encountered in Thailand amidst considerable

⁴⁴ Headquarters in London but with an office in Yangon since 2016. Prospect Burma have awarded over 2400 scholarships to Burma youth over the past three decades, currently providing approximately 90 scholarships a year; 75 per cent of alumni return to Myanmar to work (Prospect Burma 2021).

⁴⁵ Headquarters in Chang Mai but with an 'unofficial' office in Yangon at the time of this research. Child's Dream initiated their scholarship programme in 2006. As of 2019, they had granted 277 scholarships, had 155 active alumni, and 91 current scholarship students. The majority of these return to Myanmar to work for CBOs and INGOs (Child's Dream 2019).

insecurity and uncertainty, marked the potential of education to respond to structural crises and constraints limiting onward and upward social mobility at home.

Indeed, as I go on to argue in the initial empirical chapter of this thesis, this experience was informed as much by 'the struggle and sadness' that they encountered around education at home in Myanmar before the transition - which compelled them to leave family and friends in Hpa-an for a precarious existence at the margins of Thai society - as their eventual successes around education abroad. This has very much enhanced their capacity to mitigate this debilitating tendency for Hpa-an's young people within the transition. Intercultural and cosmopolitan encounters around this education and the credentials it has bestowed have since allowed them to enhance their 'cultural style' (Ferguson 1999b) by making efforts to offset the institutional deficits around access to education that undermined this in the past.

By way of concluding my assessment of the various factors and forces conditioning the lives and transitions of the young people at the centre of this study, I wish to comment on a further dynamic that appears to have largely evaded critical attention on the Plong Karen within Myanmar's transition – the discursive nature of this marginalisation.

We have seen how the historiography of the Karen largely plays into the political interests of dominant Karen identity groups identified above – namely Christian, Sgaw-speaking, metropolitan elites - and at the expense of more marginalised groups namely Buddhist, Plong-speaking communities in peripheral locations such as the southeast. Furthermore, I have alluded to the overwhelming focus of recent academic attention and commentary on state-managed (educational) reform and convergence processes, currently dominating and dictating our critical understanding of education, young people, and the Karen in contemporary Myanmar.

I argue that this commentary reinforces the structural constraints on Hpa-an's young people by disregarding those other pathways they are now forging to contest their positions and realise the possibilities around them; in so doing, it denies them a presence and therefore a platform within processes of social change. Indeed, the aspirations driving Hpa-an's new learning sites and facilitating youth transitions for many in Hpa-an are intent on contesting and, for that matter, confounding these

dominant and pervasive framings. It is therefore important to account for this in order to appreciate how and why they are responding in the way they are.

Contesting discursive frames: Karen in the contemporary mind and media

The accepted image of the Karen today is largely substantiated by an eclectic and now considerable range of materials not limited to an already burgeoning academic bibliography (see Charney 2004: 99–100; see Selth 2010, 2018: 55–56) but including a long and rich tradition of ethnographic enquiry (see Renard 2003: 11–12), initially at the hands of scholar-missionaries (Mason 1834, 1843, 1862; Sau Kau-Too 1847; Cross 1854; Marshall 1922) and colonial administrators (McMahon 1876; Smeaton 1920), and later professional anthropologists, some of whose work on the Karen was to influence the theoretical development of the discipline itself and therefore promote and entrench a certain received image of the ethnic group (Leach 1960; Keyes 1979; Kunstadter 1979; Stern 1979; Falla 1991; see also Aung-Thwin 2008; Chit Hlaing 2008).

Popular and influential works of activist-journalism by Western journalists and commentators (Pilger 1998; Tucker 2003; Rogers 2004, 2012; Bleming 2009; McClelland 2010; Pedersen 2011; Russell 2014; Cockett 2015); a number of high-profile memoirs, occasionally by dissident Karen (Phan 2009; Connelly 2010; Spurlock and Windle 2017; Ralph and Sheera 2020); award-winning fiction including recent work by expatriate Karen writers (Tan 2006; Perkins 2010; Craig 2018), not to mention feature films and documentaries made with the cooperation of Karen communities, particularly those in the southeast and Thai border regions (Welap 2010; Baek 2016; Gomer 2017) have substantiated and sustained this.

This body of work has done much to paint a picture of the Karen in the history of contemporary Burma/Myanmar as either refugees or rebels, migrants or insurgents, thus making the Karen synonymous with the marginal and the itinerant. Certain groups such as women, children and young people are particularly associated with these victimised narratives lacking agency to contest their structured positions. This very much persists into the country's transition, despite recent and increasing efforts to diffuse them (see Balčaitė 2019a, 2019b; Chambers 2019; Hedström 2020; Hedström and Olivius 2020). These framings leave little room for alternative understandings of the

Karen as active agents in the construction of their own aspirations, still less those possessing the wherewithal to effect positive change and development.

How and why has this perception emerged and persisted? In the little guest house I was in the habit of staying in on my arrival in Yangon, the country's commercial capital, I well remember showing the local Burmese manager and his kindly staff where I worked on a big map of the country that hung from a rusty nail behind the reception counter. They would follow my finger as I carefully traced my route down into the southeast. The manager would shake his head in disbelief and then with a wail of laughter shower me in a hail of imaginary bullets, much to the amusement of his staff; yet none of them had ever visited Karen State. In fact, at the time the peace process was all over the Yangon newspapers and Myanmar's newly elected leader, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, had appointed a number of Karen politicians, including those from the southeast, to senior positions in her new government.

This image of the Karen and their State in the southeast nonetheless endures and certainly has an historical basis, as we have seen, in post-colonial legacies of and aspirations for Karen ethno-nationalist political identity and autonomy which set them at odds with their Burmese-Buddhist neighbours before Independence. So, in many ways the hotel manager in Yangon is right in his basic assumptions – Karen State and its people have long been associated with conflict and its difficult legacies. However, this narrative predominantly focuses on the plight of the minority Christian Sgaw Karen involved more overtly in these cycles of armed conflict and political separatism. It has largely ignored other Karen groups, not least the majority Buddhist Plong Karen who have largely been left to contend with these difficult legacies and the privations this has imposed in Karen-populated government-controlled areas of the country like the Karen State capital Hpa-an. If it has concerned them, attention has been focused on other EAOs such as the DKBA and their activities rather than alternative forms of collective and affirmative action intent on contesting dominant discourses and agenda.

This critical oversight has been inadvertently compounded through a recent and worthy research agenda which has sought to throw light on the so-called 'Other' Karen living amongst the Burmese Buddhist ethnic majority in the country's metropolitan centres and seeking to engage more constructively and peacefully with the Burmese majority (Thawngmung 2008, 2012). The political

sympathies and ethno-religious identities involved here are nonetheless largely consistent with those of Sgaw Christian nationalist rebels and refugees who continue to garner so much attention. Indeed, this is much the same as that proposed by Ashley South (2007) which he terms ‘The “Union Karen” Perspective’, referring to Karen communities based in Yangon and the Ayeyarwady Delta who “have sought accommodation with the state rather than challenging its foundations” (ibid: 64) and who also subscribe to a “Christian-orientated Karen identity, similar to that held by border-based groups” (ibid: 65).

Whilst these contributions provide a more nuanced picture of the Karen behind-the-headlines they inadvertently deny ‘an-other’ Karen people, outside this dominant ‘minority within a minority’ (Harriden 2002: 96) and away from the obvious centres of power and politics, a platform and even a presence in processes of socio-political change and development, a corrective which this thesis seeks, in part, to effect⁴⁶. Indeed, by maintaining that the Karen are an ‘imagined community’ (South 2007b: 57), following Anderson’s well-known concept of nationalism (1983), such perspectives would appear to run the risk of assuming that one or any imaginary necessarily speaks for the whole community - calling to mind Partha Chatterjee’s crucial admonishment, ‘Whose Imagined Community?’ (1991). These conceptual framings are now unhelpful and liable to obscure the presence and possibility of other and alternative Karen imaginaries now emerging in transitional Myanmar⁴⁷.

Narratives of the Karen involved exclusively in processes of ‘fight or flight’ in the border regions now lack empirical basis in contemporary reality. As we will now see in the final section of this chapter, the aspirations for a new and quite different future and the agency with which many, particularly Plong youth, are setting about enacting them in the southeast, where these transformations have been most keenly felt, suggests that they are now actively engaged in socio-economic and political change. In comparison, those other Karen groups who continue to make headlines that garner so much attention remain largely consumed with the vicissitudes of the KNU-managed peace process and its seemingly

⁴⁶ I am not alone in this objective; the Japanese scholar Ikeda Kazuto has responded to this critical oversight, (see Ikeda 2012: 436). However, despite the pathfinding work of veteran Danish anthropologist Mikael Gravers (2007, 2010, 2012b, 2012a) this research agenda has yet to receive the critical attention it deserves.

⁴⁷ In a similar vein, James C. Scott (2009) has argued that “the British colonists imagined the Karen” (ibid: xii–xiii). He uses ‘Karen’ as a broad and inclusive moniker falling foul of the same tendency by assuming that such an imagination is as inclusive and homogenous as the moniker (he imagines) it mobilises under.

dated ethno-nationalist project (K. Jolliffe 2017; Thawngmung 2017). In the final section of this chapter, I want to identify what specific factors since 2012 have made this development possible and how institutional initiatives around post-16 and higher education in Hpa-an have been able to thrive within this context.

History of the present, 2012-2018: transitions and transformations?

New learning sites emerging in post-authoritarian Hpa-an have flourished within the context of the Karen ceasefire and the KNU signing of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) in October 2015; they have been enhanced by burgeoning civil society engagement around education for community development as part of the Karen peace process, and facilitated by a raft of new legislation as part of the initial reform process permitting and promoting non-state education across the country as part of the wider political transition.

Foremost amongst this has been the enactment of a law permitting the establishment of private schools since 2012⁴⁸ and provisional legislation concerning private universities has now been under consideration for some time by the newly established Parliamentary Higher Education Law (HEL) Committee (JICA 2013: 27, footnote 13; see also British Council 2013). However, the possibilities around private schooling, post-16 and higher education, have been significantly enhanced since 2014 by related legislation ensuring greater freedom around the registration of NGOs (The Irrawaddy 2014)⁴⁹, under which many informal education projects like Hpa-an's academies, have sought formal recognition, and the advent of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Law which has significantly bolstered the (young) adult and work-based skills and training agenda (Dolińska 2017).

⁴⁸ The Private School Registration Law was approved by Parliament on 2 December 2011 (JICA 2013: 27). By the end of 2012 there were just over 50 private schools but by 2016-17 this number had grown to 585 nationwide, suggesting that private schooling has been increasing at a rate of over a 100 schools each year in the last five years (Phyu 2017; see also McCarthy 2016: 2-3). Lall (2018) rightly argues that the poor quality of state tertiary education is doing much to drive this upward trend (2018: 270) though the aspirations of those behind this development clearly extend beyond this.

⁴⁹ It should be noted, however, that the increased space and freedom promised by this new legislation was swiftly restricted through the imposition of a by-law issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs on 5 June the following year (2015) stipulating that NGOs applying for registration must have a recommendation letter from a government department related to their activities; this angered civil society groups who argued that it undermined the ability of NGOs to make 'voluntary' applications (Shwe Yee Saw Myint and Htoo Thant 2015).

The establishment of a Department of Alternative Education (DAE) in October 2016 within the Myanmar government's Ministry of Education, and the development of an Alternative Education Policy has given non-state education increasing profile, and which is likely to gain formal recognition within the state-managed reform process (Ei Shwe Phyu 2017a). Furthermore, the importance of non-state education to related social welfare policy-making processes, such as that concerning the National Youth Policy, has only enhanced this further (The Global New Light of Myanmar 2018). So, whilst the reform process is slow to respond to aspirations around higher education specifically (Chinelone 2018), it has nonetheless offered legislative space within which communities like the one in Hpa-an have been able to enact an alternative vision of education that meets the specific needs of high school leavers, university students and graduates.

This provision has been significantly enhanced by a sudden and increasing influx of development aid and assistance across the country since late 2015, specifically in border regions emerging from extended periods of conflict and underdevelopment (MIMU 2016). This has had implications for community education and employment but also for community development and protection in Hpa-an. Whilst it has considerably enhanced the local employment market as many new opportunities emerge around this new infrastructure, it has thrown the weight of expectation and responsibility onto the academies for the provision of cheap but skilled labour to meet the needs of this employment sector. In so doing, it now threatens to transfer and extend the culture of 'dependency', alluded to above, from the Thai border where it has ensnared so many young people in the past, into southeastern Myanmar, which these new learning sites are actively resisting.

At the same time, curriculum providers like *Mote Oo*⁵⁰ and funding agencies like Child's Dream Foundation have been keen to support non-state education which promises the kinds of social dividends to which these academies are committed, making them an increasing focus of their in-country development interventions. Indeed, such charities and funding bodies responsible for issuing scholarships to migrants on the Thai border have, since 2016, started to include their alumni in the

⁵⁰ *Mote Oo* ('Gateway' in Burmese) was established in 2013 to "promote social justice through context-appropriate education materials and services" and in direct response to the historical failure of Myanmar's formal education sector to address the needs of young people in the 21st Century (Mote Oo 2020). The academies in Hpa-an use their curriculum materials and in-service teacher training.

maintenance and management of their in-country development plans. As such, scholarship alumni like those behind the academies in Hpa-an and elsewhere have become strongly associated with community and civil society development initiatives in areas of essential service delivery outside formal peace and convergence processes.

This collective action has now assumed formal and strategic impetus through national and regional representative structures and networks such as the Myanmar Scholarship Alumni Association (MSAA) (est. 2012) and the Karen University Students Association (KUSA) (est. 2014) which mobilise through thematic working groups in response to strategic objectives. Education has assumed particular profile as part of this agenda and alumni in Hpa-an have done much to facilitate and enhance the education agenda in particular. They have, for example, driven the development of the Myanmar Community Academies Programme (MCAP) over recent years which now links one of the academies in Hpa-

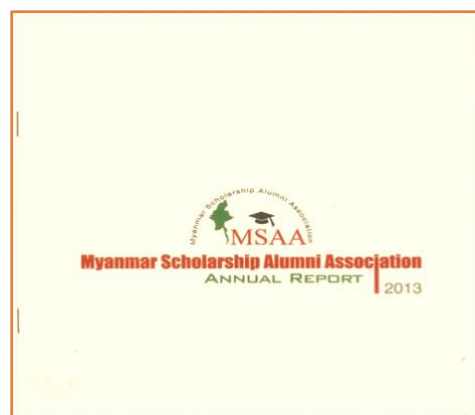


Figure 10. Rise of the Scholarship Alumni: the MSAA was founded in 2012 by Karen scholarship alumni from Yangon's Insein and Lantmadaw townships and has national membership (Photo: Author)

an, the Education Gathering Group (EGG), with similar structures in other parts of the country, including Pinnya Tagar Academy in Myitkyina (Kachin State), Level Up Academy in Loikaw (Karenni State) and, from 2018, a new academy in Taunggyi (Shan State). This amounts to a concerted and expanding inter-ethnic education network (see Appendix 2, p. 267) fostering the next generation of scholarship alumni, community leaders and welfare entrepreneurs in parts of the country which continue to struggle with legacies of youth unemployment and dispossession well into the transition.

Furthermore, this activity now extends into wider national economic and political spheres of engagement. A small but growing number of scholarship alumni are now MPs for the ruling NLD party and some scholarship providers and their alumni networks are currently in dialogue with the newly formed DAE, under which non-state education falls, so there is already some engagement between this group and state structures. It is therefore likely that such scholarship networks will play an increasing role in brokering agreements over state and non-state reform and development. Moreover, this is likely to include non-state provision other than that associated with dominant reform and

convergence initiatives between EAO line ministries and government departments for education and health. In this way, Buddhist Plong Karen communities in the southeast have sought to redress persisting cultural and educational deficits within but also beyond the locality.

Whilst civil society engagement around non-state education in Hpa-an has flourished, different interest groups jostle to influence the next generation at this critical juncture whilst struggling to safeguard locally sustainable responses in the face of increasing external intervention and oversight. For example, ethnic Karen NGOs working in and around Hpa-an such as the Yangon-based Karen Development Network (KDN) and Hpa-an's Karen Affairs Committee (KAC), both led by prominent Sgaw Karen Christians, have appeared to serve a more ethno-nationalist agenda by supporting the KNU-oriented peace process for conflict-affected communities through an emphasis on youth mobilisation and peace education initiatives. The scholarship alumni in this study meanwhile represent a more plural, less (ethno-religiously) partisan platform whose aspirations for alternative forms of community-based higher education are intent on increasing the capabilities of Karen youth within a federal Union of Myanmar through civic education, inter-ethnic cooperation and coalition as part of the wider political dialogue.

Meanwhile, local centres of Buddhist power and patronage providing land, resources, and in some cases enhanced access to the local labour market for academy students and alumni, exert considerable pressure on these new learning sites to favour the admission and advancement of Buddhist Plong Karen students at the expense of other Karen ethno-religious identity groups previously and/or currently perceived to represent an historic threat to Buddhist identity and interests in the region. The ethno-political tensions now informing community-based education in transitional Hpa-an therefore have a direct bearing on the positions and possibilities maintained by young people passing through these institutions with implications for their transitions and futures.

Conclusion: Plong Karen aspirations and agency in transitional Myanmar

In this chapter, I have sought to account for the diverse sociology of structural constraints and opportunities informing the positions and possibilities encountered around education by the young people within this study. I began by framing (educated) Plong Karen youth as a social and ethnic category in relation to education: how ethnic politics and government-led assimilation and state-

making policies in the southeast have combined to undermine pathways from education and into work, confounding youth transitions over many generations that have served to undermine their socio-ethnic status.

I proceeded to explore how possibilities around education have been enhanced by social and educational networks within and across the Karen borderlands in the decade before the current transition, and considerably so with the advent of the political and economic transitions in Myanmar since 2012. In this way, I have sought to capture the context currently shaping collective aspirations and agency around higher education for young people living and learning at the margins of the state at this critical juncture in the country's history.

I suggest that differing encounters with education have set the Karen on divergent courses in the history of contemporary Myanmar, specifically because of the impact this has had on youth transitions over many generations. My respondents' experiences around education and the highly personal struggles associated with it means that they are keenly aware of this. The legacy of inter and intra-ethnic conflict, partisan and parochial political tensions, together with sustained social and cultural marginalisation of many Plong Karen communities in the southeast at the hands of the state as well as Christian Sgaw hegemony, has greatly informed their learning encounters.

Poor state education has confounded their ability to transition to employment in a labour market all but eviscerated by years of conflict and counter-insurgency; alternative non-state pathways for older children and youth have largely been restricted by government legislation or undermined by cultural compromise; a lack of available employment opportunities in government-controlled Hpa-an has failed to provide alternative pathways away from that. Under such circumstances, social mobility has been constrained over many generations. Hpa-an youth are therefore mobilising around education, in particular, in an effort to redress this and enhance better educational and social outcomes within Myanmar's transition.

Chapter Two:

Transition and transformation: structure, agency and aspiration

This study adds to existing research on education-to-employment transitions in contexts of social and political change in the global South. There are at least two general shortcomings in extant research on transitions of this nature within these contexts: first, much of this material is concerned with the debilitating effects of a 'crisis of youth' and its negative socio-economic and political outcomes. This identifies the inherent 'risk' of such a predicament as delaying and disrupting transitions rather than probing young people's agentic capacities for affirmative action to move beyond the impasse. Secondly and consequently, few studies take the opportunity to explore how youth transitions are therefore relating and responding to wider social, economic and indeed political transformation within such contexts.

The thesis responds to this research deficit through an ethnography of youth transitions in a region of transitional Myanmar where, as we have seen, pathways from education to employment have long been frustrated. It does so by exploring how youth navigate their structured positions and in so doing potentially transform the structural context within which they are situated. In the empirical chapters that follow, I therefore consider the positions and possibilities that young people in Hpa-an township maintain in response to their educational and occupational situations. I relate how youth have attempted to alter those positions to enhance the possibilities for their development and that of their communities around new learning sites which have emerged in Hpa-an over recent years.

Through this research agenda I contribute to the hypothesis that youth transitions at this particular juncture are neither teleological nor universal. Moreover, I do so by problematising the assumption, that youth navigate such transitions in the face of crisis and constraint from a fixed place and position in time. By exploring the role of temporalities in youth transitions, I demonstrate how young people plot a way forward across time as well as space within the Karen borderlands based on their aspirations for the future as much as their anxieties over past experiences. Furthermore, I go on to demonstrate how these collectively shared aspirations-anxieties prompt collective action that shapes the situation as much as the self. I do so by responding to the following research question: *how*

do young people engaging around new learning sites in Hpa-an navigate their structured positions to enhance their transitions from education to employment, and with what consequences?

The chapter explores the broad conceptual assumptions informing my research question and hypothesis. I accept that the space and opportunity in which young people's transitions are situated is constrained by social and structural forces. However, I also assume and argue that structures enable agency which might have a bearing on young people's ability to effect transitions amidst crisis and constraint, as well as the evolving shape of those structures.

I accept that the cultural and political value placed on young people and their socio-economic potential shifts over time and place. This is particularly true within contexts undergoing significant socio-political and economic change like transitional Myanmar. Educational and occupational pathways important to youth transitions, are therefore liable to act as sites of socio-political and economic inequality in such contexts. Collective and community-based action around alternative (non-state) provision emerging within transitional contexts, might equally act as a means of resisting and redressing specific sets of educational and social inequalities.

In this respect, work on education-to-employment transitions, has tended to be based on the premise that education is simply a space of *transition* when it might equally act as a space of *connection* (Wyn 2014), in which young people forge useful relations with others with which to navigate crisis and constraint that might facilitate personal as well as social transformation.

I argue that youth transitions are socially structured and historically situated processes of becoming. Since I am concerned with youth transitions amongst the Plong Karen, I relate ideas of 'ethnicity' and 'youth' as social constructions to understandings of inequality and resilience.

The chapter is divided into two halves. In the first half, I begin by situating this study within the context of work on youth transitions. I then explore how these understandings might relate youth to wider social change and transformation within transitional contexts through their agency and aspirations. The second half of the chapter explores the role of temporalities, and specifically the concept of aspiration as a form of forward-thinking agency, in mediating and motivating these transitions and transformations.

Youth transitions in context: socio-cultural youth transitions

There is a knowledge gap in contemporary research on youth transitions which the present study seeks to respond to. There remains comparatively little research on youth transitions in contexts in the global South where the majority of young people live and learn⁵¹. Few ethnographic accounts move beyond a preoccupation with the ‘crisis of youth’ in this part of the world, to demonstrate how exactly young people navigate around this as they attempt to move from one domain to the other. There is increasing concern for young people’s spatial mobilities in this regard (Crivello 2011; Farrugia 2014; Punch 2015; White and Green 2015), and migration-for-education in particular (Adams and Kirova 2006; Valentin 2014; Smith and Gergan 2015; Brown, Scrase and Ganguly-Scrase 2017), as young people realise their transitions through various mobility practices. However, there remains comparatively limited awareness of temporal mobilities, such as the role of aspiration, in mediating and motivating transitions as youth plot a way into the future.

The overwhelming emphasis of work on youth transitions remains in contexts in the global North. This stands at odds with talk of the ‘Asian century’ (Romei and Reed 2019), a region of the world where over 60 per cent of the world’s youth population live (UNESCAP 2013)⁵², marking youth transitions with “new opportunities and also new risks” (Woodman and Wyn 2015b: 17)⁵³ as access to education has increased as well as youth unemployment (UNESCAP 2018: 9). Indeed, it is now a decade since Pam Nilan (2011) declared, in an oft-cited article, that ‘Youth sociology must cross cultures’, calling for increasing “awareness of verifiable socioeconomic realities” (Nilan 2011: 20) in specific contexts. She argues that the key transformations commonly associated with late modernity that are greatly affecting the lives and transitions of young people across the world and informing calls for a ‘cosmopolitan sociology’ of youth (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2009) – namely, the credentialization of the labour market, the growth of the urban middle class, and the decline in guaranteed full time

⁵¹ At the time of this research, media sources put this at as much as 89 per cent based on a UN age cohort of those aged 15-24 (Kedmeý 2014).

⁵² This covers the *Asia-Pacific* region where 750 million 15-24-year olds live. I contest this definition of youth below, but the data nonetheless places most of the world’s youth population in this region where this chronological/biological age range is extended.

⁵³ These authors identify the opportunities as “new areas of production and consumption” and risks as “poverty, ill health and social exclusion” (Woodman and Wyn 2015b: 17); education, crucially, features as *both* an opportunity and a risk therefore.

employment – do not necessarily signal and include the disavowal of tradition and religious belief, and diminishing confidence in family and marriage, which continue to shape and inform the transitions of many young people in the global South today, including Myanmar.

Therefore, whilst young people are undoubtedly integrated through educational participation as part of so-called global ‘transition regimes’ (Walther 2006) ⁵⁴ largely emanating from the global North, the ways in which these interact with specific experiences and meanings of youth in particular local contexts requires closer attention. Moreover, a transitions approach largely orientated by notions of ‘new’ (Wyn 2014) or ‘arrested’ (Côté 2000) adulthood as deferred and extended rather than fluid and fecund fails to apprehend the nature of such post-modern malaise in the global South. Adulthood in these contexts is more often ‘elusive’ for many young people (Durham 2017), thus demanding of young people ever more creative and adaptive strategies in response to this. How they navigate this terrain towards a remote, uncertain, and often unclear prospect over time is therefore important to our limited understanding of youth transitions in this part of the world.

Furthermore, we should be mindful that there are substantial regional differences across the global South reflected in relative levels of violence, poverty, educational participation and attainment, for example, as the effects of colonialism continue to inform the experience of young people across Africa, Latin America, and parts of south Asia (Fanon 1968; Cooper, Swartz and Mahali 2019), including Burma/Myanmar (cf. Smith 1991; Zar Ni 1998; Taylor 2007; Myo Oo 2012). Indeed, we have seen how intra-ethnic relations and conflict stoked by colonial rule have manifested themselves through state assimilation and development policies in the post-colonial state to exact a particular cultural compromise on the Plong Karen of southeastern Myanmar which has had an impact on education and youth transitions in particular. Countries and contexts which have endured sustained periods of authoritarian rule on top of this have only exacerbated the constraints with which marginal peoples and communities have had to contend. I therefore argue that youth transitions differ depending on where and how they are situated in these contexts and in relation to this control and coercion.

⁵⁴ Term attributed to Bois-Reymond and Stauber (2005) referring to educational policy, practice, processes, and discourses transmitted through education systems and structures, welfare systems, and labour markets in the global North that amount to ‘institutional transition points’. These shape the meaning and experience of youth and youth statuses elsewhere in the world with implications for youth transitions in the global South through the proliferation of globalised education into these regions (see also Woodman and Wyn 2015b; Gledhill, Dolan and Snyder 2019).

With this in mind, I advocate a concern for socio-cultural approaches to youth transitions-in-context which seeks to account for the cultural expression of youth transitions and therefore the idiosyncrasies of specific life courses in particular local settings. In Hpa-an, as elsewhere in Myanmar, Karen youth respond to traditional transition markers that signal adulthood through economic independence, marriage and parenthood. Yet these markers are at once more varied and irregular as young people increasingly respond to structural forces issuing from outside the locality that offer different interpretations of progress and success in which academic attainment is of increasing pertinence. It is for this reason that I choose to view the transitions of the young people in this study as 'vital conjunctures' (see below, this chapter), which responds closely to the specific social and structural forces determining the context in which they are situated. This necessarily accommodates an awareness of global as well as local dynamics that have a bearing on those transitions.

Contemporary and transitional Hpa-an is very much defined in this way. Pervasive global forces reflected through increasing international development assistance, technological advancements, enhanced freedom of association and movement, confront powerful localisms which seek to mitigate the influence of this and advance various ethnic and sectarian agenda. National peace and political reform processes have therefore seen communitarian and cosmopolitan agenda competing for young people's affiliations particularly around and through new learning sites in Hpa-an. Few ethnographic studies of youth transitions allow for an holistic account of this nature that integrates the macro processes shaping the context within which young people's transitions are situated and navigated. In part, this stems from the manner in which youth transitions, and particularly education-to-employment transitions, have been conceived.

Education-to-employment transitions: crisis and complexity

Work on education-to-employment transitions rarely accounts for institutions, individuals, and ideals outside obvious learning and livelihood domains. State schools and universities, teachers and lecturers, the classroom and the workplace, academic knowledge and vocational skills are identified as the key variables. Indeed, as I argued in the previous chapter, this has been a significant shortcoming of work on youth and educational pathways in Myanmar. Moreover, work on youth transitions that

does not encompass a wider range of actors and interests coalescing around these domains, risks placing undue emphasis on the education-to-employment nexus that continues to dominate contemporary youth transition approaches (Wyn 2014). Young people's connections and relations with others within and beyond these domains are also a significant factor in their ability to realise their transitions from education to employment.

In part, this is concerned with how we view these particular domains. Johanna Wyn (2014), for example, advocates a more relational approach to education, "to acknowledge education as a place of connection, where the quality of relationships is made visible, moving beyond the rather instrumental metaphor of education as a space of transition" (ibid: 11). She therefore suggests we should view education as a 'strategy and a relationship' in the struggle to construct a life⁵⁵. Throughout this thesis, I work with this considerably more expansive notion of education - as a place of connection *as well as* a space of transition - since it more accurately reflects the broad and dynamic nature of community-based education and engagement in Hpa-an. In this way, it points towards the way in which collective action around the field of non-state education very much mediates youth transitions within this context.

Work on education to employment transitions continues to be dominated by the 'transition' metaphor as marking the apparently fluid and forward passage from the completion of full-time education to the acquisition of full-time employment. It therefore has a tendency to be characterised as hinging on a specific 'turning point' (Elder and Shanahan 1998) or 'critical moment' (Thomson *et al.* 2002), marking the movement from one domain to the other. In reality, these are often multiple and mutable as the temporal linearity and boundaries between education and employment are now increasingly 'fuzzy' (Côté 2016).

The young people in this study are a case in point: most of them have experiences of working whilst at school and university; some of them have been in the labour market for years before returning to complete their education; there are even examples of teachers returning to be students

⁵⁵ Much the same might be said about the field of employment which is increasingly conceived in relation to the knowledge economy at the expense of vocational and skills-based employment, with the emphasis on careers instead of vocations. Furthermore, if we are to assume a needs-based understanding of education, we must conceive of employment as suitably responsive to a range of different needs.

once more, complicating the boundary between student and teacher. Certainly, most of them have struggled to complete their education and find gainful employment compelling them to manoeuvre in and out of these domains in order to breach the boundaries that separate them⁵⁶. This has demanded a range of transitions over time as well as space as they have changed residence, career, and identity often repeatedly.

Viewing education to employment transitions as hinging on a particular point or specific moment has done much to fuel the perception of stasis and crisis. However, the example of young people in Hpa-an suggests these are clearly not confined to a particular moment in time and space. It is therefore perhaps inevitable that the literature on transitions from education to employment remains consumed with the so-called ‘crisis of youth’ in which young people emerge from schools and universities seemingly educated but unemployed or at best under-employed (Jeffrey, Jeffery and Jeffery 2007). Time and again, we encounter young people ‘waiting’ (Ralph 2008; Jeffrey 2010b; Mains 2012) or ‘straining’ (Finn and Oldfield 2019; see also Jeffrey 2010b) as they ‘sit out’ economic crises by remaining within the education system longer, accumulating academic credentials in readiness for a time when they might be able to employ them. Otherwise, they struggle amidst the stasis, ‘churning’ (Furlong and Cartmel 2007) or ‘shuffling’ (Benasso 2013) from one small job to the next. Notwithstanding the evident uncertainty and frustration this predicament signals, talk of a ‘crisis’ of youth needs ridiculing in specific contexts, if we are to make sense of what it really means to young people and their responses to it.

Furthermore, the notion of a ‘crisis’ is premised on definitions of youth founded on biological rather than social attributes – on age rather than needs (Wyn 2014: 12). Instead, the context in which that biography unfolds might present alternative conceptions of youth and adulthood, different crises as well as unemployment such as involuntary migration, family fragmentation and indebtedness. It may therefore include and demand other transitions around residence, career, and identity, as well as around education and employment. Moreover, viewing ‘educated’ youth as a socially structured and

⁵⁶ Briggart and Walther (2006) might refer to these as ‘yo-yo’ transitions and Benasso (2013) as ‘shuffle’ transitions but these kinds of fanciful labels and typologies are unhelpful with their connotations of futility and immobility when this may signal something much more constructive and creative; they also appear to lack any spatial and temporal dimension which might shed light on the phenomenon they seek to describe.

needs-based category pulls into focus issues of identity, namely ethnicity and gender, but also cultural attributes such as language and religion. This suggests that the subjectification of young people based on their age alone occludes our view of these other attributes that continue to mark youth transitions and marginalise many young people in their attempts to navigate these transitions in complex and contested contexts (see Dolan 2011).

Category and catalyst: youth and its (social) meanings

“‘Youth’ is just a word” Bourdieu (1993) tells us, and essentially “the divisions between the ages are arbitrary” (ibid: 94). He stressed that definitions based on chronology and age vary by historical period, across cultures, among classes and between genders (see also Wyn and White 1997: 10; Cole and Durham 2008: 6; see also Threadgold 2020). Talk of a ‘crisis’ of youth amongst educated young people in the global South is often predicated on narrow age-based assumptions, leaving young people less time, space and opportunity to contest the constraints imposed on them.

Policy interventions in a range of contexts are, invariably, informed by much the same assumptions,⁵⁷ rather than the needs and aspirations of young people. Instead, Lesko (1996) and Blatterer (2007), argue that notions of youth and adulthood are determined by social conditions and relations rather than biology. Furlong, Woodman and Wyn (2011) call for a synergy of situated definitions, whilst accepting processes of institutional and educational progression that nevertheless corral youth into educational stages and cohorts often by their age.

The difficulty of prioritising either age or needs in understanding youth in Hpa-an became strikingly clear to me when, early in my fieldwork, I asked a teacher about the ages of the young people gathered in front of us, “Youth is not an age” he said immediately “it is everyone who is learning here *whatever* their age!”⁵⁸. The teacher’s definition of youth in Hpa-an was obviously related to that

⁵⁷ Indeed, UN statistics are often based on a definition of youth as existing between 15-24 years of age (UNESCO 2014) or as UNESCO would have it, “a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood’s independence” (ibid). Such definitions do not, however, accommodate young people whose transitions defy these categorisations and assumptions. This source reveals that the same definition of youth is shared by the UN Secretariat, UNESCO, ILO, UNICEF, WHO, and UNFPA, whilst the African Union and UN Habitat (Youth Fund) put it at between 15-35 and 15-32 years of age respectively.

⁵⁸ Interview: 15th November 2015 (respondent’s emphasis).

particular institutional setting and that moment⁵⁹, but it is a conception of youth that unsettles any kind of received or stringent age definition, since in that particular class the youngest student was 18 and the eldest 32. Moreover, these young people were united by their *need* to pursue and/or resume their education at this point rather than necessarily the age at which they were doing so.

This tells us much about perceptions of youth in Myanmar more generally, where the gerontocratic and largely male-dominated nature of society and community extends the temporal range of youth, whilst largely relegating young people to educational and learning spaces, predominantly and traditionally administered by women and caregivers in Myanmar. The distinction between adulthood and youth is therefore one founded on markedly differential power relations. Until recently, young people, particularly girls and women, were excluded from most decision-making processes where a (much) older, predominantly male generation, retain authority and influence in most sectors of social and political life⁶⁰. The distinction between teacher and student within state education continues to reflect this social hierarchy.

However, the roles and relations within Hpa-an's new learning spaces provided a strategic alternative to this. With gender parity across the teaching and management of these institutions, as well as the student body, there did not exist the gender distinction and its unequal associations typical of state-managed provision, upsetting established associations between these roles and attributes of age and gender, in particular. Indeed, I quickly became aware that in this way the biological distinction between adult and youth was largely ignored, whilst the social distinction associated with particular roles – teacher and student - largely retained their meanings within formal learning spaces as a necessary part of the learning experience.

⁵⁹ Indeed, we might say, at *this particular historical juncture* in Myanmar's history, as more and more (young) people across the country take advantage of increasing access to private sector and non-state education initiatives, thereby considerably inflating the population of 'educated' youth in Myanmar.

⁶⁰ Hopkins and Pain (2007) advocate a 'relational' approach to geographies of age. Drawing on contributions to critical social gerontology they entreat us to "think about and work with age as being produced in the interactions between different people" (ibid: 290). This certainly illuminates meanings of youth in Myanmar which subordinates youth as a social category, prompting what James Côté (2016) describes as 'youth proletarianization' (ibid: 852), which he considers to be redolent of the deteriorating position of young people in relation to wealthy and powerful adults across the globe.

Throughout this thesis, I necessarily work with a broad and inclusive understanding of youth as socially, culturally and historically situated⁶¹ (see Chapter 3, pp. 112-114). This is predicated on the kinds of reflexivity exhibited by the teacher in Hpa-an, who acknowledges the close association between meanings and experiences of youth within this context, as well as institutional processes of education and progression which those students had felt the need to invest in (again) at this stage in their lives. Indeed, without access to alternative provision such as this they would have struggled to do so. This particular understanding of young people contests inherent assumptions that education-to-employment transitions hinge on a given moment, are unidirectional, and assume temporal linearity, when most of the students in that class had made that initial transition long ago.

This understanding lends itself to theoretical notions of youth as an inherently dynamic and volitional life stage. My perception of the young people in this study is therefore informed by insights that present young people as social ‘becomings’ (James 1994; Worth 2009) in contrast to mere social ‘beings’ (James and Prout 1990; Uprichard 2008). The distinction is drawn to emphasize how young people might generate social status as active agents instead of simply emerging into progressive stages, thus accommodating the possibility of more than one decisive transition and outcome over an extended period of time. For example, both Victor Turner’s (1969, 1974) depiction of young people as ‘liminal subjects’ and Jeffrey Jensen Arnett’s (2000, 2004) conception of youth as ‘emerging adults’ offer these interpretations.

For Turner, individuals are seen to be uniquely poised in the liminal phase of youth to be highly inventive and to reconceive established social norms as they are in the process of developing their place in society (Turner 1974). For Arnett, youth is more accurately described as ‘*emerging* adulthood’ to capture the inherent uncertainty yet dynamism of this “most *volitional* period of life” (Arnett 2000: 469; emphasis in original): “It is in many respects the age of possibilities, a period in which many different potential futures remain possible and personal freedom and exploration are higher for most people than at any other time” (ibid: 479), so Arnett argues (Bynner 2005; Tanner and Arnett 2009).

⁶¹ I consciously echo recent work on ‘social’ adulthood here (see Durham 2017: 4). However, as this author makes clear, it is important not to discount biological age in notions of adulthood (and, I argue, youth) which illuminates, for example, the sociology of historical generations (see below) and the biopolitics informing (misguided) policy interventions in response to ‘too-young adulthoods’ or ‘older not-yet-adulthoods’.

Together, Turner and Arnett suggest that youth fosters a particularly dynamic exchange between self and society as young people seek to forge their place and exercise their purpose at a particular moment in that society. Such understandings therefore point towards the inherent mobility young people harbour in forging their transitions despite the structural constraints imposed on them.

Viewing young people in this way suggests they might utilise time and space to contest the constraints imposed on them rather than being captive to these dynamics by settling for ‘waithood’ instead of adulthood (Honwana 2014; Finn and Oldfield 2019), or resigning themselves to “timepass” (Jeffrey 2010b) as they acquire yet another advanced degree instead of contending with the stagnant labour market. Instead of being compelled to engage in such forms of involuntary delay, strategic expressions of inertia, and tactical retreat, the very uncertainty and instability accompanying this apparent “transitional blockage” (Moreno and Urraco 2018: 8) might prompt them to forge alternative ‘navigations’, (Vigh 2006, 2008, 2009a; Bois-Reymond 2009) ‘pathways’ (Evans and Furlong 1997; Furlong and Cartmel 2007; Heinz 2009b), or ‘routes’ (Evans 2008) into their late twenties and beyond in their quest for independence, employment, and a life of value and meaning.

Since youth is better understood as a social construction and ways of ‘becoming’ are intimately linked with the structural context in which young people are situated, I suggest it is necessary to adopt a contextually based approach to the analysis of educational and occupational situations occupied by the young people in this study. In order to do so, I turn to Jennifer Johnson Hank’s (2002) theory of ‘vital conjunctures’ to apprehend what specific structures - be they norms, values, particular social actors and/or institutions, as well as historical experiences – substantiate and shape their structured positions and, crucially, how they exploit the possibilities that open up around these.

Vital conjunctures: shifting positions and possibilities over time and space

Reflecting on the inclination of demographers to conceptualise life stages, such as the transition from youth to adulthood, as coherent with fixed outcomes, when they are often partial or piecemeal, Johnson-Hanks (2002) calls for a new anthropology of the life course. “‘Life stages’ emerge only as the result of institutional projects” she argues “their coherence should be an object, rather than an assumption, of ethnographic inquiry” (ibid: 865). To this end, she proposes an alternative analytical

framework in ‘vital conjunctures’ to aggregate these historical experiences and work between the individual and the social.

She defines vital conjunctures as “a socially structured zone of possibility that emerges around specific periods of potential transformation in a life or lives... when the futures at stake are significant.” (ibid: 871)⁶². As she explains, this potential transformation often occurs around the completion of high school or university when more than one life domain - career, residence, and professional identity - are at stake and come into close association. This resonates closely with the experience of the young people in this study. Far from being a coherent transition with a fixed outcome such a transition remains for the scholarship alumni – as it is for others coming of age within Myanmar’s ongoing transition – a deeply unsettling and uncertain juncture, the consequences of which clearly resonate into the future as they continue to frame and reframe their aspirations against this experience.

I find the vital conjuncture lens a useful way of apprehending change in youth and the social consequences of this change. In the first instance, it contests the assumption that young people’s trajectories and transitions are teleological and universal, by recognising that the historical and social context within which young people are situated has a significant bearing on the possibilities open to them and, therefore, the probability of acting on them; consequently it focuses on the actual process of ‘becoming’. Furthermore, unlike apparently similar models which focus on specific ‘turning points’ (Elder and Shanahan 1998; see also Hackstaff, Kupferberg and Négroni 2012) or ‘critical moments’ (Thomson *et al.* 2002) around and through which lives evolve, vital conjunctures are crucial *periods* in young people’s lives which can have *multiple* outcomes over *different time frames* and, indeed, *across different locations* as new possibilities open up and, consequently, positions are re-evaluated and revised. It therefore provides a useful mechanism for tracking the transitions of the young people in this study over time - before and into Myanmar’s political transition – and over space, on both sides of the Myanmar-Thailand border.

⁶² Johnson-Hanks explains that the words ‘vital’ and ‘conjuncture’ are borrowed from the literature: Bourdieu’s (1977) conception of the *conjuncture* of structure and action/agency, and *vital* from the demographic word ‘vital event’, such as birth, death, marriage, and change of residence but also including other major life events such as migration, illness and career change. In her particular usage, ‘conjuncture’ “emphasizes the intersection of structured expectations with uncertain futures.” (Johnson-Hanks 2002: 872).

The analysis of vital conjunctures as ‘socially structured zones of *possibility*’ in the lives of young people embedded in dynamic contexts very much places the emphasis of that analysis on the social consequences/possibilities emerging from these. Indeed, as Johnson-Hanks argues, this calls for a focus on aspirations – or ‘the horizons of the conjuncture’ as she describes them – “what futures, are imagined, hoped for, or feared” (2002: 872). She therefore suggests that particular attention needs to be paid to sites of vital conjunctures, when structuring elements, be they specific institutions and/or social and political forces, combine in ways which make it more likely that change will happen.

In this way, a theory of vital conjunctures appears to suggest a political economy approach to the study of youth by exposing the specific conditions that manifest social structure and therefore shape the range of possible actions in response to these. Moreover, it does so by accounting for these transitions across time as well as space, and is therefore particularly appropriate when considering contexts subject to rapid and significant socio-political flux when wider structural shifts – in the shape of local, national and indeed international transitions - converge and collide with youth transitions to make change more likely over time, and particularly so around education frequently and heavily implicated in both personal and political transitions.

Johnson-Hanks’s emphasises that the social analysis of a set of vital conjunctures rests on “the systematic comparison of the kinds of futures the actors imagine when confronted with specific challenges” (2002: 872). The emphasis here is on the possibilities young people apprehend around their structured positions and the mobility this grants them in plotting a way into the future based on their actions in the present. This concern for the ‘conjuncture’ between structure and action, which sits at the heart of the debate over youth transitions, and which is configured here as existing over both time and space, therefore sheds further light on the (enhanced) capacity of young people to navigate their structured positions. Furthermore, it has implications for the way in which we apprehend how young people contend with crisis and constraint and how they respond to it.

Contesting the ‘crisis’ of youth: notes on the structural ‘instability’ of crisis

Whilst the changing nature of youth transitions is widely acknowledged, the consequences of these transformations for those involved has divided opinion. This stems from the relative emphasis placed on structure and agency which has excited considerable debate given its prominence in explaining the

changing nature of youth transitions (Schoon and Lyons-Amos 2016; see also Heinz 2009a). I therefore consider this in more specific detail in order to apprehend how young people might contend with their structured positions and the possibilities around them. Indeed, much of the momentum for the so-called 'crisis of youth' and the stasis that typifies it (see Richards 1995; Kleist and Jansen 2016) is derived from notions of institutionalised risk environments in the form of volatile labour markets that have come to typify the global economy, hampering young people's ability to navigate through them (see Johansson 2017). These arguments suggest that specific structural transformations associated with late modernity - increasing labour market volatility and the declining association between education, training and employment - constrain young people's agency to effect viable transitions.

However, others argue as part of the post-modern 'turn' in work on youth transitions since the 1980s, that youth have the capacity to exercise 'structured individualism' (Giddens 1984, 1991) in response to economic systems that fail to generate viable employment opportunities. Far from constraining agency, so this argument goes, such 'risk environments' (Beck 1992, 2000) might actually enhance the capacity of young people to realise their transitions since this demands of them greater individual reflexivity and initiative in order to navigate such complexity. A compelling body of work has grown up around this set of ideas characterising transitions in terms of 'planful competence' (Clausen 1991), as part of 'choice biographies' (Beck 2000), and as expressions of 'self-regulation' (Markus and Nurius 1986) and 'self-actualisation' (Heinz 2009a). However, far from arguing in favour of the reflexive individual over the structured individual, as detractors are wont to suggest, these contributions throw the emphasis onto individual decision-making and planning processes which are nevertheless influenced by the exercise of social structures and institutions governing particular contexts.

Work on youth transitions in the global South has tended to reject such individualisation theories, questioning the over-emphasis on the individual within contexts where young people derive considerable support and impetus from communities, family, friends, and peers (cf. Nilan 2011). Furthermore, it is argued that structural constraints on young people in this part of the world do not allow for anything more than the most benign expressions of structured individualism such as the kind of strategic inertia and delay described above. It is on the basis of these arguments that dispiriting and debilitating social outcomes are apprehended and advanced.

Indeed, as we have identified in the previous chapter, these structures and institutions present formidable constraints on the capacity of young Plong Karen in the southeast to act. Identity politics in Myanmar continue to exercise powerful constraints on their freedom to choose and enact a course of action. Moreover, these structural impediments have exercised still more insidious constraints on Plong youth through unobserved, often unconscious inclinations, assumptions, and values assimilated by young people and recursively reproduced in the practice of society – what Giddens (1984) refers to as the ‘rules and resources’ or what Bourdieu (1972) might call ‘habitus’ or the ‘community of dispositions’. Notions of social and educational, ethnic and economic marginalisation - the perception of these Karen as ‘a migrant class’, have come to define the identity, knowledge, and dispositions of Plong Karen in southeastern Myanmar as a subordinate group vis-à-vis the Sgaw and Bamar/Burman majority. This has evidently been recursively transmitted from generation-to-generation curtailing choice and aspiration into the country’s democratic transition, particularly around education and employment which might otherwise present them with an opportunity to contest the terms of this subordination (see Appendix 9, p. 288).

Whilst not discounting the formidable constraints this imposes on youth transitions in contemporary Hpa-an, young people currently engaging around new learning sites are actively contesting these particular constraints. I therefore derive theoretical impetus from Giddens’ conception of the structured individual as ‘knowledgeable’ and ‘enabled’, acting on their necessarily structured knowledge in creative and innovative ways. Furthermore, it follows that if enough, or even just a few, well-positioned and suitably enabled individuals act together in this way, their collective action may influence the very structures that granted them the capacity to act in the first place (Sewell 1992: 4); after all, the structured ‘individual’ is, in reality, never alone, still less in societies such as Myanmar, founded upon such tight and interdependent social structures.

Moreover, I am mindful that the context in which this particular group of young people are situated is subject to rapid and significant flux and change with implications for the ‘stability’ of that structural context. Indeed, the Danish anthropologist Henrik Vigh (2006, 2008, 2009a, 2009b) has questioned the very possibility of *structural stability*, suggesting that all contexts but particularly those marked by considerable socio-political flux and change - what he describes as contexts ‘in motion’ -

considerably animate the system of interaction between structure and human action, with significant consequences for the process of interaction between the two. He argues that, “in trying to make sense of the actions of agents within a socio-political environment that is itself in motion, we need to go further than the concepts of ‘field’ and ‘habitus’[for example] can take us” (Vigh 2006: 12). To this end, Vigh proposes that we conceive of the structure-agency dialectic in such contexts as “motion within motion” (ibid: 14) to capture praxis in the midst of socio-economic and political change, and so apprehend how actors “navigate networks and events as they move within fluctuating social structures” (ibid: 13).

The young people in this study are indeed ‘in motion within motion’ as they contend with their own evolving transitions or ‘becomings’ whilst navigating a rapidly shifting structural context in the form of Myanmar’s wider, often uncertain and evidently uneven, transition(s). I therefore argue that in contending with wider substantive transitions as well as personal transitions the fluid and changeable nature of their predicament is greatly accentuated, perhaps even more so than Vigh’s theory of social navigation can take us. On these grounds, I argue that transitional contexts like contemporary Myanmar are that much more susceptible to “the efficacy of human action or “agency”” (Sewell 1992: 2), thereby accommodating the idea of change and transformation to the self and the situation.

However, if anything, the structural ‘instability’ described above only amplifies the sense of uncertainty for young people. Youth transitions are surely more uncertain and volatile, contested and complicated, delayed and deferred, within structural contexts that are themselves fluid and uncertain. But whilst this complexity might herald crisis it might also prompt creative responses to resolve that. Indeed, we recall Susan Reynolds Whyte’s (2009) suggestion that uncertainty might be the very basis for constructive and transformative action to change both ‘the situation and the self’ (see Introduction p. 11).

Anthropologists and geographers have identified that in such contexts a disparity between aspirations and sufficient opportunities to fulfil them might propel young people towards political unrest and violence (Richards 1995; Jeffrey 2013). There has nonetheless been some concern for how this disparity might prompt positive and creative responses (Bush and Saltarelli 2000; Ginwright and

James 2002; Frye 2012). Indeed, Vigh (2006) reminds us, “Social navigation may thus involve detours, unwilling displacement, losing our way and, not least, redrawing trajectories and tactics” (ibid: 14). This suggests that the very uncertainty and instability that defines youth transitions in transitional contexts might enhance and enable the agency of young people to act given both the opportunities and obstacles it presents.

However, as Deborah Durham (2008) rightly observes, “it is important to go beyond a recognition that youth have agency. We must ask *what kind of agency they have, how they come by it and exercise it*, and how their agency *relates them to others and to their society*” (Durham 2008: 153; my emphasis). With these questions in mind, I now go on to explore the various forms of agency which I believe the young people in this study exercise in relation to their transitions, to others and their community.

Structured agency: on socio-spatial mobilities in youth transitions

These understandings of the process of interaction between human action and *shifting* structural contexts have a significant bearing on how we might apprehend the potential for change and transformation to the self as well as the situation. The literature on youth transitions within structural contexts marked by socio-economic and/or political instability speaks of ‘cultural production’ in the global North (Willis 1978, 1981, 1983; Gordon 1984) or ‘local appropriations’ in the global South (see Anderson-Levitt 2012; Levinson and Pollack 2016). These ideas suggest dominant local and global structures are assimilated by young people in specific cultural settings in order to lend meaning to their transitions and mobility in effecting them.

Such contributions suggest that the agency with which young people realise their transitions amidst structural instability and inequality might tend towards the appropriation of dominant cultural styles rather than rejection and resistance of this. Instead of tending towards social transformation, this set of ideas point towards social reproduction as young people entrench dominant structures through their agency, associations, and appropriations. Moreover, there is an inherent assumption here that the structural context within which these young people are situated is static and stable, demanding of them tactics and strategies which largely comply with the structured positions and the possibilities prescribed for them rather than contesting the terms of these.

Young people's spatial mobilities, and migration-for-education in particular, has assumed increasing profile within the literature on youth transitions. Indeed, it has been observed that in many parts of the world access to quality local education, particularly at the secondary level and beyond, has not always been sufficient to meet the needs and aspirations of young people from subordinate or marginalised groups (Chatty 2010; Crivello 2011, 2015; Azaola 2012; Boyden 2013). Under these circumstances, migration-for-education has become an increasingly common strategic response, particularly in parts of the global South where these deprivations are most keenly felt.

Indeed, Gina Crivello (2011; 2015), in exploring this trend through her work on child poverty in Peru, has pointed out that mobility and migration are underlying, sometimes silent dimensions, on aspired transition processes around education for young people. To this end, she argues that "education both requires mobility and increases one's capacity to be mobile" (Crivello 2011: 407) and, as such, are integral to the process of "'becoming somebody' of value... in life'" (ibid: 402) through education and work (see also Waters 2006, 2012; Holdsworth 2009; Waters and Brooks 2011; Findlay *et al.* 2012), rather than just becoming 'somebody someplace else' (Crivello 2011: 409). These authors rightly identify migration to be a process encompassing a range of everyday mobilities, rather than a single act or event of relocation in the lives of young people.

In order to bring these practices into closer and more quotidian focus I find Natascha Klocker's (2007) conception of praxis in terms of what she describes as 'thick' or 'thin' agency, useful here. She differentiates between decisions and everyday actions in highly restrictive contexts and those where there is space to act within a broad range of options. I find this a useful way of thinking about how my young people might exercise agency in response to a shifting structural context depending on where, when and how they are situated in relation to it. Indeed, Klocker argues that the thick/thin metaphor is apposite to "convey a sense of the 'layering' or 'eroding' effects of the multiplicity of factors that affect young people's lives." (ibid 2007: 85).

This suggests that space for intentional action may fluctuate in response to a range of different indices – structures, contexts, demographic and cultural attributes, as well as relationships, and the political climate; some thicker than others at certain places and junctures, thus constraining or expanding the range and substance of viable options depending on where and when an actor positions

themselves with regard to these factors - the space around some being more permissive or 'thicker' than others. Migration to Thailand amongst the community at the heart of this study is often informed by this awareness such that they (re)position themselves at times *and* in places where space and opportunity to act is most propitious or, at the very least, at a sufficient remove from where such opportunities appear most constrained.

Social and ethnic networks across the borderlands have significantly expanded the possibilities open to them. It has provided them with access to better education and more gainful employment as well as the opportunity to 'select' more cosmopolitan ideas, ideals and identifications with which to counter dominant ethno-political identifications at home. Migration for young people between Hpa-an and the migrant hubs of northern Thailand, in particular, therefore offers one such tactic or strategy by which they consciously 'thicken' their agency in a number of areas, and so offset the constraints imposed on them through those relatively restricted areas at home.

This spatial mobility is more often than not undertaken in relation to others who make educational and occupational pathways visible and viable to these young people having pursued this course of action before them. There are frequent references in the testimony that follows to the way in which a decision to move was guided by the example of an older friend or family member, a teacher or mentor, granting them confidence to navigate uncertainty. I argue below that whilst this particular relational dynamic clearly lends considerable impetus and support to transitions, it is the co-existence of my young people as a social generation that has lent impetus to their ability to make progress – sharing what Mannheim identified many years ago as a “common location in the social and historical process” (1927: 291) at this particular place and point in Myanmar's history.

Generation Myanmar: on 'communities of experience' in Myanmar's democratic transition

During the course of this discussion, we have identified how young people's transitions are closely associated with the context in which they live and learn. By viewing these transitions as 'vital conjunctures', which are broadly defined by the institutions and structural forces framing them, it follows, as Johnson-Hanks tells us, that they are distributed over social groups. In this way, particular groups or cohorts located in a specific place and point in time are exposed to the same social and historical shifts; they are therefore that much more likely to share a similar set of experiences in

response to these. Indeed, Henrik Vigh (2006) appears to say as much by identifying the young ex-combatants in post-conflict Guinea-Bissau in his study as constituting a “community of experience” (ibid: 19), founded upon their shared history and positions as young former combatants, which very much distinguishes them from the rest of post-conflict Guinean society, experiences which he finds to be “as enduring as they are profound” (ibid)⁶³.

I argue that the young people in this study are similarly a ‘community of experience’ united by their ongoing struggles and successes around access to quality education and suitable employment opportunities at this particular temporal and spatial location in Myanmar’s historical process⁶⁴. In this way, I suggest that vital conjunctures shape *common* aspirations and *collective* action within the context of the country’s political transition. It is around the domain of education where “society hides its dreams” as Foucault said (1987: 81), that personal and political transitions inevitably converge, given its prominent and dynamic role in shaping the future of both the self and the situation.

Recent work on the generational dimension of youth transitions (Woodman and Wyn 2015a; Moreno and Urraco 2018) might help us identify how this shapes the agency of a particular social group or generation at a given historical juncture. These authors suggest that the notion of a social generation extends beyond groups that cohere closely around shared biological attributes such as age and “represents a belonging to a *common destiny* in cultural and historical terms” (Moreno and Urraco 2018: 4; emphasis in original) or as one of my respondent’s articulated it, ‘because my education is supported I have to be someone useful for my community’ (see Chapter 4, p. 143), a commitment echoed by many others in this community given the evident privilege of their position to act in this way. The educational encounters shared by this group of young people have marked their experiences profoundly and associated them closely. Their ‘common destiny’ is therefore informed by a moral

⁶³ It is important to note here that Vigh (2006) defines ‘experience’ as “a mutual point of reference and common history rather than a condition experienced subjectively as in an individual process of cognition” (ibid: 34) and a ‘community of experience’ as therefore “sharing specific ordeals, praxis, perspectives and positions within a given terrain and thus sharing certain points or spheres of reference... Suffering similar ordeals creates a space of commonality.” (ibid: 19). Young school or university-going people who might form a ‘community of practice’ through the institutional structures to which they belong (Lave and Wenger 1991: 40–43) might form a ‘community of experience’ through their shared ‘suffering’ (and success, for that matter) in relation to these structures.

⁶⁴ It should be noted here that Bourdieu reminds us that the ‘field’ of education tends to be the primary location where the experiential factors shaping and binding generations occurs most naturally and powerfully given the sense of relative deprivation it tends to impart to the younger generation (Bourdieu 1993: 101), lending further theoretical substance to this educational-experiential-generational argument.

obligation to serve their community with this particular concern in mind whilst the historical moment allows them to do so.

Therefore, whilst work on youth transitions has acknowledged that they may differ in their manifestations it has been slower to accept that they share a similar generational basis which might shed light on the wider forces mediating and mobilising them (ibid). Indeed, early work on generations appears to attribute enhanced mobility to young people through their structural position as social generations. According to Mannheim (1927) the emergence of a fresh wave of young people amounts to a decisive form of “fresh contact” that “facilitates re-evaluation of our inventory and teaches us both to forget that which is no longer useful and to covet that which has yet to be won.” (ibid: 294). I believe this is exactly what we are seeing in contemporary and transitional Myanmar as young people across the country mobilise within the context of the country’s transition to reject a state-managed agenda that has long impinged on youth transitions to employment.

Not only are young people like those in Myanmar open to new ideas during periods of social change but new practices since these circumstances might allow them to act on these ideas in ways that have not been possible before (Sherrod *et al.* 2005; Sherrod 2007; Sherrod, Torney-Purta and Flanagan 2010; Dyson 2019). Moreover, as Jennifer Cole observes, “Such an approach [as Mannheim’s] highlights the ways in which youth’s structural liminality - the fact that they are less embedded than adults in older networks of patronage and exchange - makes them uniquely positioned to take advantage of new social and economic conditions” (Cole 2007: 78). It therefore follows that they are that much more likely to “figure in *how* change is imagined” (Cole and Durham 2007: 18; my emphasis).

We are of course reminded of the student protests over the NEL sweeping the country’s metropolitan centres at the time of this research, calling to mind similar student demonstrations throughout Myanmar’s fraught history (see Chapter 1, p. 27). And yet at the same moment in time, collective action around alternative educational provision in Hpa-an has clearly gained traction. It has clearly done much to endow this group of young people with the capacity to re-evaluate and revise the socio-educational inventory, now considered at stake within Myanmar’s wider reform and transition agenda.

This collective aspiration/action is consistent with developments elsewhere. The current historical juncture has imbued social generations of youth, particularly educated young people, across the globe with a similar sense of ‘common destiny’. This is now recognised and compounded through various high-profile multinational policy platforms such as the ‘Cohort 2030’ initiative (IYF 2018; see also United Nations 2018; Dyson 2019), identifying those born after 1980, like the young people in this study (see also British Council/VSO 2019), well placed within the context of higher education to respond to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda (UN 2018). The various university scholarship and alumni groups that feature in this study are redolent of this collective and concerted action⁶⁵.

Back to the Future: on temporal mobilities in youth transitions

Throughout these discussions time itself has assumed a prominent position and particularly with respect to youth transitions, as they are contingent on when as well as where they are situated. Despite wide agreement that youth transitions are extended over time and mounting calls to “bring the future back in” (Appadurai 2013: 182), there is not the concomitant awareness and application of temporalities in the study of these transitions as there is for spatial mobilities. And yet temporal dynamics very much inform these, in which young people might circumvent constraints imposed on a given space by moving around or away from them at a given time. Otherwise, a given historical juncture might grant them the capacity to act in a given location in ways that have not been possible before, as we have just seen. Moreover, given young people’s natural proclivity to envisage a new and different future, that is *to aspire*, it is still more surprising that this dynamic has not assumed more concerted and consistent profile in the huge literature on youth transitions. Indeed, it is perhaps an unfortunate irony that young people should be depicted as either frozen in time or compelled to waste time as part of the ‘crisis’ thesis, when time itself might grant them the mobility to plot a way forward out of it.

⁶⁵ I am mindful that recent work on social generations in the global North paints a negative prognosis of the impact of historical junctures on the formation of social generations which accounts for stasis as much as agency (see Frederiksen 2013; Alexander, Loewenthal and Butt 2020).

Henrik Vigh's (2006) theory of social navigation might help us to start thinking about how this might work, and particularly within the kind of shifting structural context within which my young people are situated. He describes how the young participants in his study in Guinea-Bissau mobilise in both the 'immediate and the imagined'⁶⁶, arguing that "for a great number of people around the world, the social environment is not experienced as stable or static but as an unfolding process [which] requires that we analyse practice in a manner that is sensitive to the fact that tactics and strategies (cf. de Certeau 1984) are constructed and actualized in, and constantly attuned to, a shifting terrain and its imagined and anticipated configurations" (Vigh 2009a: 424–425). If agency is temporally situated as he suggests here – in that the 'imagined and anticipated' has a bearing on the tactics and strategies undertaken in the present (or 'immediate') – the fluctuating possibilities afforded by contexts 'in motion' might also have a significant bearing on the space for intentional action.

Work on youth agency has sought to identify how this might work and what the effect of it might be. For example, Karen Evans (2007) conceives of agency as 'bounded', seeing "actors as having a past and imagined future possibilities, which guide and shape actions in the present, together with subjective perceptions of the structures they have to negotiate, the social landscapes that affect how they act." (Evans 2007: 92–93). Like Vigh, for Evans agency is temporally and socially structured, but for her action in the present is shaped/bounded by the structured past as much as future possibilities. This regard for the past as well as the future in shaping action substantially conditions the focus, and indeed form, of an actor's agency and it very much concurs with the experiences of the young people in this study. Time and again their aspirations are framed in response to the privations of the past prior to Myanmar's transition, as much as the possibilities inherent in the future; anxieties as much as aspirations are significant here as they respond as much, if not more, to enduring privations in the past as well as new possibilities now emerging around education and employment (Stambach 2016: 5).

There is a growing albeit disparate body of work on temporalities and specifically 'futures' amongst young people which we might draw on in extending our awareness of how this functions as

⁶⁶ It is important to note here that for Vigh 'the imagined' is neither fanciful nor necessarily ephemeral as the epithet might suggest but has a definite basis in lived reality consistent with, for example, Malkki's (2001) definition of history and the future as "imaginative constructions built out of people's perceived realities." (ibid: 328). It is therefore very much akin to 'immediate' realities; my subsequent use of these terms is intended to be consistent with this understanding.

part of youth transitions. This includes a burgeoning literature on ‘aspiration’ (Appadurai 2004b; Chatty 2010, 2017; Leavy and Smith 2010; Frye 2012; Boyden 2013; Guerrero *et al.* 2016; Tzenis 2018) as part of a crowded and often contentious critical lexicon which includes work on ‘hope’ (Mains 2012; Hage 2016; Jansen 2016; Kleist and Jansen 2016), ‘expectations’ (Carter 2001; Young 2004), ‘dreams’ (Swartz, Harding and de Lannoy 2012), ‘desirable futures’ (Foster and Spencer 2011), ‘imagined futures’ (Mische 2009), and ‘utopias’ (Salemink, Bregnbæk and Hirslund 2018), to name but a few. All of these terms have been employed to capture how processes of intentional action towards a given goal or set of goals might facilitate some form of transformative action in the present.

However, the majority of this work remains centred on young people in the global North. Moreover, it rarely takes the opportunity to relate these theoretical insights to youth transitions or processes of ‘becoming’ specifically. It therefore neglects to explore how the capacity to aspire might enhance the capability with which young people navigate their transitions and the consequences this has for the situation as much as the self.

In this thesis, I exercise a preference for the concept of ‘aspiration’ which has received more concerted critical attention and, as I go on to argue, offers greater heuristic utility (see Chapter 3, pp. 124-127). However, I resist the tendency within the debate on aspirations to discount other initiatives in the field of temporalities that might offer equally valid insights. In the following sections of this chapter, I therefore endeavour to bring specific threads of this work into closer conversation with work on young people and their transitions. First, however, let us determine what we mean by ‘aspiration’ and, for that matter, what we do not.

What’s in a name? Aspiration and its (selective) meanings

Sewell and Hauser (1980) feel the need to make the distinction between aspirations as ‘wishes’ and expectations as ‘plans’ (cited in Frye 2012: 1566, footnote 2) to determine the difference between what people *hope* to achieve on the one hand and what they *expect* to achieve on the other (see also Leavy and Smith 2010). In a similar vein, Hearn (1992) argues that aspirations are more abstract than expectations. The ‘aspiration’ concept has therefore been the subject of some criticism for lacking conceptual precision and heuristic utility, seemingly failing to capture the relationship between possible futures, as mere day-dreams, with potentially motivating action, and therefore the link

between future goals and young people's agentic efforts to work towards them (see Hardgrove, Rootham and McDowell 2015).

This argument points towards an important distinction between *aspiration* on the one hand and the *ability* to act on it on the other. As Carling and Schewel (2018) illustrate, the aspiration to migrate, for example, and the ability to actually do so are quite different – whilst we might *hope* to study or work abroad at some point in the future we might not realistically be able to *expect* such an outcome then or indeed ever since we lack the foreseeable ability and means to make it happen. The relationship between aspiration and capability (that is, the *agency* to actually enact our *aspirations*) is an important one, as it raises similarly important questions about the extent to which aspiration alone can be transformative.

In a rare longitudinal study of educational and occupational aspirations, Furlong and Biggart (2007) have noted that there have existed two main theoretical approaches to educational and occupational aspirations: a 'developmental' approach, influential until the late 1960s, in which occupational choices are derived from and consistent with an individual's self-conception; and 'opportunity structure' approaches that have since become more prevalent, arguing that a focus on opportunities (and constraints) to exercise educational and occupational aspirations is more profitable than the study of subjective orientations. This, of course, closely mirrors the conceptual differences, described above, framing youth as a demographic and/or a social category, where psychobiological understandings have militated against notions of youth as an historically situated and socially mutable category and vice-versa.

However, since the 1980s, there have been efforts to integrate these approaches by recognising that young people cannot be held apart from the context within which they are situated which has such a significant bearing on their transitions. Most notably, Markus and Nurius's (1986) concept of 'Possible Selves', combines an awareness of self-concept and opportunity structures in work on young people's aspirations. It does so in order to apprehend more clearly how (self-) *concept* and *context* combine in shaping young people's ability to actually act on their aspirations and so realise the possible selves to which they aspire.

These shifts in conceptual understandings of aspiration are very much reflected in the different ways in which researchers have sought to develop the heuristic utility of the concept. These appear to explore the extent to which young people are able to overcome the limitations on their expectations in order to fulfil their aspirations in spite of the constraints imposed on them by their structured positions. Like Sewell and Hauser (1980) above, MacBrayne (1987) makes a distinction between aspirations and expectations, describing aspirations as “an individual’s *desire to obtain* a status object or goal such as a particular occupation or level of education”, whilst expectations are “the individual’s *estimation of the likelihood* of attaining those goals, plans, ambitions or dreams” (1987: 135; my emphasis). Aspiration nonetheless appears to emerge as both the impulse for action and the incentive sustaining it and it is surely difficult, therefore, to discount as a mere ‘daydream’.

Indeed, Morrison Gutman and Akerman (2008) appear to suggest as much by conceiving of aspirations as the ability to set future goals whilst being “inspired in the present to work towards those goals” (2008:3), thus capturing how aspirations amount to more than just a set goals but act as a dynamo facilitating and furthering action in the immediate towards the imagined. This last definition appears to accommodate the more ephemeral notions of idealism and inspiration informing aspirations, together with those tangible goals and plans with which these might be focused.

The preceding arguments all point towards the close association between aspirations and capabilities/agency; that enhancing the capacity for aspirations might enhance the capability to act on them. Were this relationship to be suitably engendered and sufficiently engaged it appears it might foster potentially transformative action.

Aspiration and capabilities: rationale and relationship

There is a burgeoning body of literature exploring the relationship between aspiration and capabilities (Appadurai 2004; Hart 2012, 2016; Ballet *et al.* 2013; Conradie and Robeyns 2013) derived, though not necessarily limited, to Amartya Sen’s (1999) capabilities approach (see also Nussbaum 2011 and Alkire 2002; Deneulin 2009). This work identifies ways, not conventionally included by welfare economics, in which capabilities associated with well-being might be extended and by which human development might be enhanced. This has had significant policy implications spurred on by the work of Arjun Appadurai (2004, 2013) in particular, who, in contesting Bourdieu’s notion that subordinate groups

are socially constrained by 'the choice of the necessary' (Bourdieu 1984) has suggested that the agency with which to contest structural constraints might also be harnessed through the 'the capacity to aspire'. For Appadurai, this is a navigational capacity that enhances people's capability of improving their lives and, by extension, facilitates wider social transformation. His rationale for this is that aspiration "is allied to the future-orientated logic of development" by which the poor "contest and alter the conditions of their poverty" (Appadurai 2004b: 179).

This argument suggests that aspirations are shaped by the structural context within which they arise but have the potential to shape that context. For example, Appadurai (2004) recognises that "aspirations form parts of wider ethical and metaphysical ideas which derive from larger cultural norms. Aspirations are never simply individual (as the language of wants and choices inclines us to think). They are always formed in interaction and in the thick of social life." (Appadurai 2004b: 187). Indeed, the aspirations and actions of those in this study are rarely formed in isolation but peopled and promoted by others, most of whom have been exposed to similar experiences and conjunctures (cf. Sladkova 2007; Froerer 2011; Ansell et al. 2011). At times, we get glimpses of these collective aspirations when the scholarship alumni and their students are seen to consciously echo, compliment and construct them in conjunction with others. This suggests that shared aspirations might prompt collective action arising from and responding to the situation with which they interact.

Furthermore, Appadurai (2004) recognises that some have a more fully developed capacity to aspire than others, given privileged access to "opportunities, experiences, relationships and resources" (ibid: 179). This access allows them to develop their aspirations and typically occurs for young people around the domain of education that provides these experiences and encounters. However, he does so by acknowledging that the robust relationship between the *capacity* to aspire and the *capability* to act on those aspirations can, nonetheless, be harnessed by less advantaged groups in overcoming the constraints of their structured positions. As his research with urban slum-dwellers in Mumbai has shown, strategies that unite local activism with global networking – that is, alternative means not limited to dominant structures or what he calls 'vernacular cosmopolitanism' (Appadurai 2004a, 2013) – allow them to navigate around constraints determining their structured positions. These are means to which youth, as we have already identified above, have a natural aptitude for and inclination

towards. In this way, young people might close the gap between their capacity to aspire, however wayward those aspirations might appear, and their capability to act on them – between their aspirations and their expectations to actually realise them.

The quiet violence of dreams: aspiration, inequality and social reproduction

The ‘capabilities approach’ tends to cast aspiration as the basis upon which to overcome inequality and facilitate upward social mobility particularly within the fields of education and work (Flechtner 2014). As such, structural adjustment programmes and development interventions abound in the global South that seek to redress ‘the poverty of aspiration’ (Johnson and Tonkiss 2002; Scalmer 2005; Dalton, Ghosal and Mani 2016). These interventions tend to be focused on marginalised and structurally disadvantaged groups of young people and so promote more ‘aspirational citizens’. Aspiration, in this sense, is invoked as part of a ‘deficit discourse’ (Zipin *et al.* 2015), equating a lack of aspiration with a lack of motivation, often though not always, acknowledged in conjunction with a lack of opportunity (Ray 2006; Bernard, Taffesse and Dercon 2008).

Efforts to promote ‘aspirational citizenship’ (Heater 2002; Shultz 2007; Raco 2012) and forms of ‘responsibilisation’ (Morrison 2014; Gradin Franzén 2015) as a means of neoliberal governmentality are intent on enjoining young people to take responsibility for their own development and progress. They are therefore aimed at dislodging so-called ‘expectational citizenship’ based on welfare state logics of acting in response to citizen expectations (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson 2011: 82). In this sense, aspirations are very much intended to exceed expectations if they are to drive young people to lift themselves out of poverty by, for example, encouraging and increasing participation in higher education, regardless of how bleak the labour market might be.

The rationale for this is founded on the assumption that aspirations are an unequivocal good when they can equally act in quite the opposite manner; whilst they might account for social transformation, they may equally sustain and entrench social reproduction. Indeed, Craig Jeffrey (2014) has observed that aspirations “are not simply like so many precious stones gathered together in a basket” (Jeffrey in Unterhalter, Ladwig and Jeffrey 2014: 144); that “Encouraging one young person’s aspirations may, in competitive settings, have the effect of constraining other people’s choices” (*ibid.*). Indeed, the stirring rhetoric of enhanced aspiration has proved elusive and misleading

for many young people by failing to provide them with sufficient educational and occupational opportunities through which to fulfil them (Jeffrey, Jeffery and Jeffery 2007; Jeffrey 2013).

Instead, in many parts of the world, particularly amongst structurally disadvantaged groups, young people are 'sentenced' or 'condemned' to hope (Wannous 2019). Their aspirations remain frustrated and foreclosed yet the potential and possibility are to be seen all around them through beguiling representations of self and success as proliferated through social media and sustained by neoliberal development discourse. For example, my respondents frequently alluded to this sense of frustration when consulting their Facebook or Instagram accounts in which representations of wealthy and successful young people elsewhere in the world (and increasingly closer to home) were paraded before them on a daily basis. Throughout my fieldwork, I was mindful that rural youth converging on Hpa-an were often confronted with enticing and elusive models of success generated through new learning sites around town which only accentuated their disappointments and frustrations.

Furthermore, the actions and behaviour that frustrated aspirations prompt are liable to be similarly divisive. Demerath (2003) has, for example, illustrated how emerging personal subjectivities and new social networks shaped aspirations around academic disengagement for a critical mass of high school students in Manus Province, Papua New Guinea. This 'negative agency' (author's term) may express itself in relatively benign forms, as here for the young people in that study, who refused to 'buy into' a particular set of aspirations associated with dominant power structures by making a conscious decision to defer the future in favour of a commitment to the present (Jeffrey in Unterhalter, Ladwig and Jeffrey 2014).

However, these responses may actually reproduce and deepen those established structures of power (Jeffrey 2012). For example, in a study of young global justice activists in Europe, North and South America, Juris and Pleyers (2009) suggest that new forms of global activism or 'alter-activism' intent on contesting dominant power structures do so by inadvertently marginalising poor and minority youth actors. In much the same way, it is clear that new learning sites in and around Hpa-an whilst seeking to enhance and fulfil the aspirations of some do so at the expense of others who cannot presently access this provision, thus extending and entrenching divisions between groups of urban and rural, educated and uneducated youth across the township.

We must therefore be mindful that aspirations and their enactment whilst appearing to be socially transformative may nevertheless tend towards social reproduction and thus account for what K. Sello Duiker (2001) termed 'The Quiet Violence of Dreams' (cf. Swartz, Harding and de Lannoy 2012), complicating and even confounding youth transitions in the process.

Seeing transformation: capturing aspiration and aspirational agency in motion

In this study I employ the term 'aspiration' freely as a broad critical moniker to denote expectations as well as aspirations, hopes and dreams, to include fears and threats, which together shape what young people aspire towards. I do so in order to track a broad range of aspirational impulses in shaping evolving identifications and agenda, in the present and into the future. In this respect, I agree with Archer *et al* (2010) who argue that aspirations "reflect something about the individual in question [and] also provide a degree of impetus and drive for current behaviours and future actions and choices" (Archer, Hollingworth and Mendrick 2010: 79). This definition covers a variety of possible inclinations, identifications, impulses and behaviour we have discussed above. Without a suitably broad working definition of aspiration like this one we are liable to miss the diverse and often diffuse range of activity that informs the capacity to aspire, which as Appadurai reminds us, "thrives and survives on practice, repetition, exploration, conjecture, and refutation" (Appadurai 2004b: 189). It is therefore liable at times to be irrational, thwarted, intangible and misguided but no less legitimate and worthy of our attention in promoting credible aspirations and potentially transformative action.

Indeed, Margaret Frye (2012) very much illustrates the danger of throwing out the baby with the bathwater when applying an understanding of aspiration that is not suitably reflexive in accommodating this ephemera. She suggests that educational aspirations, in the case of the Malawian schoolgirls in her study, are also potent assertions of identity. However irrational and idealised such assertions may appear, they provide a valuable marker of moral identity 'as one who aspires' and thus the *type* of person to which an actor or community of actors subscribing to the same meanings are working towards in the present. As she argues, "Independent of the ends to be achieved, the goal itself makes a statement about the person aspiring to it, and the zone of possibility in which she finds herself... [which] hinge[s] on their ability to sustain belief in their ambitious goals, even in the face of evidence to the contrary" (ibid: 1598).

In much the same spirit, recent work on ‘utopias’ in the global South (Risør and Arteaga Pérez 2018; Saleminck, Bregnbæk and Hirslund 2018; Vigh 2018) has been shown to act as a means of contesting structural positions through ethical possibilities. These visions of a positive future might act as “a concrete alternative to experiences of marginalisation and precarity” not necessarily converging with spatial axes but “overlaid by a vision of the good life in the same place, albeit ethically different” (ibid: 131; see also Crivello 2011). This insight shares striking similarities to the moral and spatial imperative governing the aspirations and agency of those in this study. These young people are involved in envisaging a qualitatively better life at home in Hpa-an rather than abroad in Thailand, by responding directly to the structural constraints that have shaped marginal and precarious existences for young people in those contexts.

I nonetheless accept that it is important not to lose sight of the distinction between aspiration and expectation. It is in the relationship between the two that we are able to apprehend more concrete instances in which aspiration is actually regulating and motivating action in the present. For this reason, in the final section of this chapter I turn to the concept of ‘Possible Selves’ (Markus and Nurius 1986) in order to ensure that I maintain focus on the motivational relationship between the immediate and the imagined; between the capacity and the capability to aspire.

Possible selves observed: apprehending (transformational) aspirations and agency

The concept of Possible Selves exposes the means by which imagined futures *become* motivational, prompting and shaping young people’s action in the immediate towards the imagined. Moreover, it promises to bring into view more clearly the actual process by which imagined futures motivate and mediate behaviour in the present with an eye on the future. As Markus and Nurius (1986) argue, Possible Selves provide a conceptual link between self-concept/cognition⁶⁷ and motivation by representing “the ideal selves that we would very much like to become. They are also the selves we could become, and the selves we are afraid of becoming” (ibid: 954) and as such “they represent specific, individually significant hopes, fears, and fantasies” (ibid). Since they are framed in response

⁶⁷ In its simplest form, self-concept refers to “the idea of one’s self constructed from the beliefs one holds about oneself” (Patel 2017: 41) which can guide and substantiate action (see also Markus and Nurius 1986: 955; Leavy and Smith 2010: 11 footnote 7).

to the opportunity structures governing a given context like Hpa-an, this might be the well-educated and respected local teacher or youth leader; it could also be the itinerant migrant worker or struggling local shop keeper; it could be more fanciful or just as prosaic as these examples, but the important point is that it remains significant to the individual concerned.

Possible selves are just as liable to be marked by fears and threats – “reminders of bleak, sad or tragic futures that are to be avoided” (ibid: 960) which might play a significant role in shaping action. It may inspire tactics and strategies intended to avoid this unwanted outcome as much, if not more on occasion, than those intended to achieve favourable conceptions of self. Struggles around education and employment are therefore as significant as successes for the young people in this study, just as involuntary migration as well as migration-for-education motivates choices. This conceptual framework has the potential to overcome the vagaries but capture the value of potentially nebulous hopes and fears, which nonetheless lend impetus to the conception of the future self.

In this way, possible and future selves derive from representations of the self in the past as well as the future, and though different and separable from the ‘current or now selves’, are nonetheless intimately related to them. As Hardgrove, Rootham and McDowell (2015) argue in their application of the concept, “possible selves provide useful images of potential outcomes that motivate decisions, strategies, and behaviours” (ibid: 165) and therefore offer a useful mechanism by which to apprehend action, change and development in the present moment; in short, ‘possible selves’ would appear to have the potential to track and capture youth transitions in real time with an awareness that these are fashioned over time.

A focus on possible selves is useful to this study for three particular reasons: it allows me to regard the full set of incentives motivating action and behaviour amongst these young people. Secondly, the evocation of possible selves also provides a context in which to evaluate the current and ethical view an individual has of themselves as poised in the face of this diverse set of incentives. Thirdly and consequently, I find the Possible Selves framing to be consistent with a focus on the process of ‘becoming’, since it recognises that individuals are socially embedded and that the system of interaction between structure and agency has a significant bearing on the possible selves that they might realistically aspire towards and go on to enact.

Two notable recent studies have illustrated the kinds of useful insights the concept might offer: in a study of young men in the UK labour market Hardgrove, Rootham and McDowell (2015) demonstrate that specific possible selves often possess a motivational capacity for young men navigating transitions from school to work when accompanied by institutional and/or relational supports, as well as by known routes towards these. The respondents in their study were seen to be pursuing a definite course of action towards a clearly stated possible self, particularly when proven pathways towards it were made visible and viable by individuals and institutions providing them with relevant exposure, experience and examples of these through training, education, and work experience.

In a study of marginalised young college-going women from Gujarat in western India, Patel (2017) draws on the work of Hardgrove *et al* (2015) above, in order to exercise what she describes as “a relational approach toward spatializing the possible selves construct” (Patel 2017: 46). This contribution directs attention to the social relations maintained by young people as they move through everyday spaces such as the home, college and workspace, and the significant role played by family and peer group in facilitating and fashioning evolving possible selves. The results of this particular study foreground the significance of affinity-based relationships that these young women cultivated within, through and beyond the college campus, together with familial relations, especially parental support, in the construction of possible selves. Furthermore, she finds these narratives to be at odds with received notions of empowerment and participation that inform a wider development discourse governing the contexts within these young women are negotiating their transitions. This suggests that possible selves might militate against dominant norms and narratives just as much as complying with them.

Together these two studies provide relevant insights as to the specific factors, institutional and relational, that shape possible selves in Hpa-an. However, they do not take the opportunity to relate these ‘becomings’ to the situation as well as the self. Indeed, if the construct has the potential to apprehend innovative projections of possible selves, as Markus and Nurius (1986) suggest, it therefore follows that these projections may well facilitate wider social change and transformation. Evidence of this initiative can be most clearly identified at moments of ‘self-regulation’ in the framing of possible

selves, when individuals consciously rationalise a particular course of action through decisions and strategies intended to progress in that specific direction. A specific social group or generation of possible selves cohering around particular ethical representations and aspirations in response to a particular structural context, might therefore influence the evolving shape of those structures through the coordinated exercise of those possible selves.

Conclusion

In the introduction to this thesis, I made some initial connections between education as a field of practice strongly associated with enabling and constraining aspirations for young people coming of age amidst a range of forces out of their control. Whilst these structural impediments are likely to leave them with a sense of being trapped in between life stages – between youth and adulthood, dependence and independence, education and employment – the uncertainty that this situation produces might prompt constructive and creative responses in redressing the very constraints which delimit their positions and the possibility of altering them, not least through (reimagining) education itself.

Here, I have provided some theoretical reflections on how structure might enable (not simply constrain) actors in contesting these structured positions by enhancing the agency with which to do so, before considering how youth as a social category might therefore act as a catalyst for social change. I identified various means by which young people might act towards these ends. I then introduced the notion of ‘vital conjunctures’ (Johnson-Hanks 2002) to help me explore, in more quotidian detail, how the context in which an individual is situated might offer them a zone of possibility, in which aspirations play a potentially significant role in expanding those possibilities and effecting those transitions into the future.

In the second half of the chapter, I focused in some detail on the concept of aspiration itself in order to explore and identify how it might work in this way, particularly in closing the gap between aspirations and expectations, the imagined and the immediate, over time and space. In light of this, I suggested that a theory of ‘Possible Selves’ (Markus and Nurius 1986) might provide an effective heuristic tool with which to apprehend the way in which imagined futures become motivational and to do so with sufficient focus and empirical detail.

Finally, I proposed that this notion of Possible Selves might also be useful in exploring collective responses to social change for a particular social group subscribing to and acting on a shared set of aspirations and ideals.

Chapter Three:

Methods and methodology

Until the 1990s empirical studies of youth were largely concerned with urban, white, often working class, young men in the global North. Much of this work was concerned with how class and socio-economic disparities marked youth transitions, particularly around education and employment (Jackson and Marsden 1973; Willis 1978; Markus and Nurius 1986). Work on these social groups and in these contexts has continued to preoccupy social scientists (Hardgrove, Rootham and McDowell 2015; Reay 2017). However, there is now increasing focus on youth transitions in the global South (Hart and Tyrer 2006; Crivello 2011; Honwana 2014) and amongst girls and women (Johnson-Hanks 2002; Patel 2017), prompting more concern for how issues of gender and ethnicity figure in youth transitions (Cole and Durham 2007; Jeffrey, Jeffery and Jeffery 2007; Boyden 2013). There has also been some limited concern for youth transitions within the context of conflict and displacement (Hart 2008; Hardgrove 2012). Similarly, there has emerged a greater awareness of the role of migration and mobility practices in youth transitions, and therefore socio-spatial dynamics that characterise youth aspirations and transitions around education and employment, particularly where opportunities for both are limited (Frye 2012; Crivello 2015).

This shift in research focus has prompted more collaborative research practices in order to explore young people's perceptions of their transitions in such contexts and under such circumstances, as they move through education and into the employment market. Such approaches have highlighted the important role aspirations play in these transitions, as young people attempt to plot a way forward into the future where immediate prospects to do so often appear bleak and dispiriting. Furthermore, these studies have contributed to lively debates on working with young people whose transitions appear frustrated or foreclosed (Boyden 2001; Hart and Tyrer 2006; Chatty 2017), and how to elicit and explore their aspirations as they attempt to navigate around this (Frye 2012; Hardgrove, Rootham and McDowell 2015). Notable examples of this work have shaped emerging theory around the very concept of youth transitions (Markus and Nurius 1986; Johnson-Hanks 2002), and yet despite the

increasing awareness of how aspirations function in this way there remain few studies which have sought to build on this work in collaboration with young people themselves.

The present study responds to this research imperative, not least through the collaborative nature of its approach. Since I am concerned with the positions and possibilities maintained by young people in Hpa-an in response to education and employment, I have inevitably placed them at the centre of the study. Their subjective responses and reflections as to how they perceive their evolving positions and the possibilities/transitions around them are naturally of particular significance to this research. I therefore set out to identify and interpret the experiences and encounters, aspirations and agency, thoughts and feelings shaping these young people's responses. These objectives have largely dictated my methodology, guided my choice of methods, and informed the analysis of data, a detailed account of which I now provide in this chapter.

The chapter is divided into five sections: in the initial section I provide a statement on my methodology, including reflections on issues of axiology, namely my positionality, and the specific values and biases that I believe define this. In the second section, I describe my research design, briefly identifying those means and methods involved, and how I established the parameters within which data was collected and from where/whom, with a discussion of scope and sampling. I also comment here on how these decisions on issues of sampling and the data gathered as a result has informed the nature and scope of the claims and conclusions I have derived from this.

The third section provides a detailed discussion of my choice and handling of the qualitative research methods employed here, and the nature of the data I gathered. I situate this discussion within the context in which I worked at the time, and the specific personal/practical circumstances and constraints shaping my approach to fieldwork and my access to the community in Hpa-an.

In the fourth section, I explain how I conducted the analysis of this data before turning, in the fifth and final section, to a discussion of the various ethical considerations and constraints which had a significant bearing on this research.

Methodology: phenomenology and 'double interpretation'

The methodology governing this research is embedded in the interpretivist/constructivist paradigm and particularly hermeneutic-phenomenological approaches; this is, broadly speaking, the art and

science of interpreting how individuals make sense of the context in which they are situated (Macey 2000: 179). Moreover, this epistemological position calls for the researcher to prioritise the informant's point of view rather than their own in order to effectively interpret their choices and actions. It would not be possible to interpret the significance or even identify the nature of an individual's aspirations, still less the meanings individuals attach to these, unless an attempt were made to view them, as far as possible, from the very perspective of that individual as situated within that context at that particular time.

I assumed this approach, in order to expose and then explore my interlocutors' interpretations of and meanings ascribed to their aspirations, and the actions with which they were forging their transitions. This 'double interpretation' (Bryman 2016: 28) – my interpretation of my research participant's interpretations – which characterises phenomenological epistemologies, necessitated an inductive approach to research within the field. This approach prioritised my informants' responses over other interpretations which might impinge on my ability to make, as far as possible, clear and unbiased observations. This involved, at least initially, resisting theoretical and conceptual interpretations as well as empirical assessments of young people's transitions in similar contexts and comparable circumstances.

However, it did not include other actors, situated within this context, engaged in (re)framing assessments of these young people and their actions – be they encoded in the state's response to them and through new learning sites in Hpa-an, or the attitudes of community and youth leaders towards them, or indeed through how young people were represented in the media. The interpretations of these significant 'others' obviously had a bearing on the interpretations of the young people under observation and therefore needed to be included to some extent. It is for this reason that I did not limit my sampling to the young people themselves, as I explain below, but factored in other interpretations, since these clearly influenced the meaning ascribed by those young people to their aspirations, actions, and transitions (see Appendix 5, pp. 281-283).

Interpretative approaches of this nature inevitably raise questions about the positionality of the researcher, namely the extent to which the beliefs and values of the researcher might influence the substance of data provided by participants. Indeed, this methodology, in particular, requires the

researcher to 'bracket out', as far as possible, the biases and preconceptions they bring to the field. Issues of axiology and the positionality of that researcher therefore have a particular bearing on the way in which research is conducted and the data that emerges as a result. It also raises questions about the relative power and position of that researcher in relation to research participants. I therefore want to disclose, from the outset, the nature of this in some detail, and in so doing acknowledge how my positionality might have influenced my interpretations and that of my informants as they related these to me. It is a point to which I will return in my discussion of the handling of research methods, and again at the end of the chapter when accounting more closely for those ethical considerations and constraints pertaining to this.

Interests versus interpretations: my place(s) and positionality

During my fieldwork I assumed multiple roles which considerably enhanced my access and proximity to the community in Hpa-an, informed relations with those within it, and mediated the interpretations I derived: I was oftentimes researcher and observer, most obviously at the beginning of this research when I entered the field with this sole and stated agenda in October 2014, and at that the end when I left having fulfilled that agenda in December 2016. However, for the most part I was a volunteer teacher and mentor to academy staff and students in Hpa-an throughout 2015; thereafter, I was occasionally involved in vocational youth training at YCC. I morphed briefly into a blogger and commentator, reflecting on the historic national elections from Hpa-an in late 2015 for Burmese (Dolan 2015b) as well as international media outlets (Dolan 2015a, 2015c), covering the aftermath of this the following year (Dolan 2016a, 2016b). Intermittently, I acted as a technical consultant in support of the Karen peace process across Karen-populated areas of the country for a prominent Yangon-based Karen NGO, work which I remained involved in throughout 2017 from the UK.

My position and profile within this community, amongst its young people and education network was therefore not insignificant, shifting and diversifying over time. In some respects, these various positions appeared to compromise my ability to make sense of my informants' view of the world because, by these interventions, I was playing a role in shaping it as their teacher, through my representation of Hpa-an in the media, and by my development work as part of the peace process. I was mindful of this and sought wherever possible to limit the impact of this: my teaching was student-

led and student-centred, focused around locally prescribed learning objectives; my journalism impartial and deliberately without a focus on education and youth; my development work situated outside and away from the community in Hpa-an. At the same time, this work and these positions offered me multiple perspectives on the structural context within which individuals and institutions in Hpa-an were situated, which proved invaluable as I sought to make sense of my informants' view of the world.

All these roles, nonetheless, had a somewhat official air about them that placed distance and emphasised difference between myself and my interlocutors – teacher and student, observer and observed, male and female, youth and adult, (Western) foreigner and (Myanmar) local - distance and difference founded on differential power and identity relations. These were liable to echo the many negative experiences of authority and surveillance encountered over the years by these young people, unless handled carefully. As a DPhil/PhD researcher from a famous university in the UK I appeared more intimidating and remote to them, at least initially. Girls and young women were not always confident to engage alone, and it was not uncommon for them to be accompanied by a chaperone, often a female friend of the same age who had already met me. Indeed, I was always conscious that for those whom I was teaching, talking to, working with, or even 'hanging out' with, I remained a foreigner and an outsider – at once strangely exotic to many young people who had come across few foreigners until now, but also relatively intimidating and inherently remote for being so.

There always remained an unseen barrier in my dealings with younger people and students who saw me as a figure of authority, albeit a kindly one, who existed mainly in and around formal learning spaces and very occasionally in more informal settings outside the academy. The difference in age between the students and myself was considerable, often as much as twenty to twenty-five years – a generation separated us - and I was even a good ten to fifteen years older than their teachers⁶⁸. In Myanmar, as in many Asian countries, age and seniority are treated with considerable deference which can be difficult to set aside, especially when you want to get a straight answer to your

⁶⁸ In colloquial parlance this amounted to a dialogue across three different generations - Generation X (me), Generation Y or 'Millennials' (scholarship alumni/teachers), and Generation Z or so-called 'Zoomers' (academy students and academy alumni) (Kasasa 2020).

question. My young research participants usually called me *Cha Lah* or 'Teacher' (in Plong Karen), rather than by my name; on one occasion I even received a sweet message on Father's Day!

I readily accepted that these barriers between myself and my younger informants were, in many ways, unbreachable and that a certain distance would inevitably remain between us. However, as they became more familiar with me, they became more confident around me and I answered the many personal questions they had for me. I frequently shared details of my own long and truncated educational journey. This appeared to resonate with them considerably - that a teacher from a country with a good education system had faced obstacles and upsets at one time or another - and to motivate them as they aspired to study abroad and gain scholarships to do so. It was not long before I was being approached by some of them for support with their scholarship applications, which offered me further insight into the worlds they inhabited and aspired to inhabit in the future. In this respect, my academic credentials and affiliations, at first intimidating to them, eventually served to cement closer relations and break down some of those barriers that had previously existed between us.

My presence as an older or mature student-teacher was much the same as many of the teachers within these academies, who were also engaged in various vocational courses and distance learning programmes whilst they worked. As the months passed, I felt better placed to conduct my interviews and focus groups which emerged as somehow consistent with the kinds of situated educational activities and engagements that we, both students and teachers, had been involved in together within various learning spaces - formal learning encounters that necessitated their leadership as well as mine.

My professional background, as a qualified career teacher and development practitioner, with experience of working with young people of this age in a variety of learning environments and cultural contexts (initially in the UK, then abroad for over a decade, primarily in different parts of Asia but also for some years in Latin America) was an advantage in some respects: I was very familiar with the kinds of social and educational preoccupations and challenges facing both students and teachers as they sought to complete their education and make something of themselves, often under difficult circumstances. I had supported and guided many like them through this particular transition over the

years. I therefore quickly established strong, trusting and productive working relationships with the students and staff of Hpa-an's academies.

However, this understanding of mine was clearly founded on certain preconceptions regarding the experiences and imaginaries of young people of a certain age. The trajectories of many young people in Hpa-an did not conform with those I had come across before, challenging my assumptions. For a start, I encountered increasing numbers of older students whose pathways from education to employment had been frustrated and who still harboured unfulfilled aspirations. Likewise, almost all of the young people with whom I came into contact had some dispiriting experience around migration to neighbouring Thailand and yet migration of some sort continued to figure as much in their aspirations as it did in their anxieties. In short, my initial assumptions were not informed by an awareness of the context in which these young people's transitions were situated; it was only with increasing time and contact that I was in a better position to appreciate this and to some extent set aside the preconceptions I had brought with me.

As a mature adult, I assumed it would prove much easier to negotiate access to the various community and civil society organisations that feature in this study – namely religious (largely Buddhist) institutions, places of work and business, various development agencies, and in my dealings with community and religious leaders. This, however, was not always the case. My initial requests were often met with considerable reservation as they questioned my agenda. Ironically, it was the mention of 'Oxford University', so intimidating initially to my young informants, which served to defuse this distrust. Older generations were more familiar with the name and were quick to tell me it was where their new leader, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, had been educated. They were intrigued by my association and my agenda. Providing I had a chance to explain what this was and how the research would be used I was often welcomed and included.

In much the same way, as my professional background served to enhance access, my previous experience of fieldwork amongst the Karen was beneficial for the contacts I could draw on, if of little relevance in understanding the context in Hpa-an. I had previously worked with Burmese Karen youth and on aspects of their education when conducting research for a master's dissertation in 2011, but this was amongst the largely Christian Karen refugees on the Thailand-Myanmar border (Dolan 2011).

I had no previous knowledge or experience of conducting research inside Myanmar itself and with other Karen communities there. Access was relatively uncomplicated on the border - western researchers and development agencies ubiquitous, and the Karen very familiar in dealing with outsiders. The experiences and imaginaries of young Buddhist Plong Karen who had grown up in government-controlled Hpa-an could not have been more different and my expectations were again quickly challenged or confounded.

In the past, researchers were usually compelled to access parts of government-controlled and conflict-affected southeast Myanmar 'illegally' from neighbouring Thailand, avoiding official border crossings during the day and slipping over the Salween/Moei river by canoe under cover of darkness (Tucker 2000; Pedersen 2011; see also Chambers and Cheesman 2019). It is perhaps significant therefore that, at the time of this research, I was able to gain access to Hpa-an and the southeast from within Myanmar itself without the need for this kind of deception, a mark of how things had changed, and the increasing viability of research in the southeast. It also shaped the nature of my encounter in another significant way: I did not emerge from the echo chamber of the exile and ethnonationalist Karen enclaves of northern Thailand amidst a swirl of rumour and conjecture about what was going on in the southeast. Instead, I encountered it through the cities, towns, and villages of the country itself where I saw for myself how the country was changing and how the southeast was positioned in relation to those changes. This provided a form of cultural acclimatisation that served to enhance my understanding of the context and (re-)evaluate some of the preconceptions I had formed about it.

The encounter I had with the community in Hpa-an between 2014-2016, and particularly its young people, has left me with considerable respect and sympathy for their fortitude and innovation in a context subject to considerable and ongoing threats and privations. It is not difficult to be inspired by their example. Over time, this has, if anything, grown as I continue to learn of their struggles and successes and their efforts to overcome these. I therefore acknowledge that my affinity with them has, at times, made it difficult for me to disentangle my own interpretations from that of theirs. In an effort to mitigate the impact of this I have, throughout the process of assembling this thesis, sought to be reflexive in the assessment and judgements I have made here. This has become increasingly easier

having worked at a remove from those in southeastern Myanmar for some time now, placing me in a better position to regard the data more dispassionately and temper my interpretations accordingly.

Research strategy: iteration, induction and 'grounded theory'

In the discussion above, I mentioned how my methodology prioritised the interpretations of my informants above my own and that of others, whilst acknowledging how my positionality both helped and hindered this objective. This very much influenced my research strategy, as part of which I prioritised data over theory at many points during data collection and analysis. Since this data was my informants' knowledge – their thoughts and feelings, their attitudes and aspirations - the research was necessarily qualitative and ethnographic. To this end, I employed a range of qualitative research methods specifically intended to elicit this kind of data, the handling of which I will go on to discuss in detail in the next section. Furthermore, the extended and embedded nature of the ethnographic fieldwork I conducted amongst the community in Hpa-an over a period of two years, allowed me to develop the necessary trust and cooperation with which to enhance insights around these particular kinds of disclosures.

As this data increased, my process of interpretation assumed an increasingly iterative modality as I sought to make sense of it by engaging this evidence more closely with critical theory. For example, it emerged that decisive or 'vital' junctures were punctuating and clearly playing a significant part in shaping many young people's transitions from education to work and in specific ways. This, incidentally, prompted me to turn to the literature on the anthropology of youth transitions in order to make more sense of this and in so doing prompt my respondents to elaborate on the critical duration around the completion of state high school. In this way, I was able to slowly bring other interpretations seeking to account empirically and conceptually for such behaviour amongst young people in similar contexts into conversation with emic interpretations of this in Hpa-an. This became an ongoing and iterative process of comparison, back and forth between data and theory as I moved into the more advanced stages of fieldwork and into data analysis.

This inductive approach influenced my research strategy in another unforeseen and yet significant way: research was conducted at multiple sites by circumstantial necessity rather than preference or original design. The young people at the centre of this study are not static. Indeed, their

evolving aspirations do not allow them to be fixed in time and place. The shifting temporal and spatial context in which they were situated has both compelled and prompted them to move in order to further those aspirations; I necessarily moved with them, figuratively as well as physically, in tracking this mobility and its impact on their evolving transitions (see Appendix 5, pp. 281-283). Furthermore, it became clear to me that the education network and its stakeholders in Hpa-an was not simply a product of the location but responding to dynamics beyond the spatial parameters of that location and to the needs of young people elsewhere in the country. I would therefore describe this study as a 'multi-sited ethnography' but only in so far as I have had to go where the research has taken me, in order to trace multiple connections with the activity in Hpa-an rather than necessarily exploring the multiple sites that unite those connections (see Robben 2012: 367–368).

These connections have indeed been multiple, constituting what Hugh Gusterson (1997) has described as “polymorphous engagements” (ibid: 116), typical of ethnographic work in more than one site. Indeed, I have engaged with a range of different sources across those sites, and in different ways, in order to make sense of youth transitions now encountered in one particular place. Indeed, in an influential review essay George Marcus (1995) suggests seven modes or practices shaping the construction of multi-sited ethnographies (be they pre-planned or opportunistic). All have, to some degree, determined the multi-sited nature of my ethnography: I have necessarily and specifically followed the paths and movements of *people* and their *biographies* (Hpa-an youth and academy stakeholders), but I have also incidentally tracked the passage of *things* (academic resources and materials), *narratives* and *metaphors* (educational discourse and objectives), and *conflicts* (the transnational wanderings of education and economic migrants navigating ethnic, religious and ideological conflicts and compromises in southeastern Myanmar) which have substantiated and shaped youth transitions in Hpa-an.

This research might therefore be identified as a multi-site ethnography in so far as it centres on what Marcus describes as a “*strategically situated* (single-site)” research object (ibid: 110; my emphasis) – the education network in Hpa-an - the evolving shape of which is contingent on the aforementioned connections circulating beyond as much as within that particular site and around that particular object. It is therefore only local circumstantially, for it attempts “to understand something

broadly about the system in ethnographic terms as much as it does its local subjects” (ibid: 111), now increasingly exposed to external forces within Myanmar’s wider social and economic transition. In so doing, it utilises the context/field within which they are situated in a different way to that of a single-site ethnography which does not account fully for the impact of these extraneous forces on the site under observation (see also Appadurai 1990; Gupta and Ferguson 1992, 1997; Hannerz 2003; Mand 2011).

So in many respects, I assumed a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967) to this research by prioritising the data over the theory or, more to the point, grounding my interpretations in this data rather than the theory, at least at the outset. My research strategy issued from this, characterising my approach to data analysis as well as data collection, as I go on to explain through my account of how I coded my data. Indeed, my main research question was very much shaped by my interpretation of this data as it accumulated and as I reflected on it through my process of analysis, assuming greater definition and clarity as I did so until an advanced stage in the writing process. Had I done otherwise, and brought theory into the process sooner, it would have added another level of interpretation to that associated with my positionality, already mediating my relationship with my participants. This ‘third’ interpretation would have been extraneous to the context in which this research was conducted and to the lived experiences of those within it. It should be noted that beyond this, I do not claim to adhere to a specific version of grounded theory, still less to have maintained this rigorously, shrouded as this is in ongoing controversy (Charmaz 2000), but only in so far as my inductive approach prioritised my observations and findings over those of theoretical and conceptual interpretations in framing and formulating this thesis.

In the next section, I turn to the methods I employed in order to carry out this research. I begin by explaining the parameters within which data was collected and from whom through a discussion of sampling and the scope of the research. In the main section of this chapter, I consider the specific choice and handling of each of the chosen qualitative research methods, beginning with some reflections on the nature of my field work more generally. This concerns how I accessed and ‘constructed’ the field, which had a significant bearing on my choice and use of methods, and indeed the focus and feasibility of this research.

Setting parameters: sampling and scope

Over recent years there has been a lively call, particularly within the pages of *Journal of Youth Studies*, to account for political economy in the study of youth (Côté 2014, 2016; France and Threadgold 2016; Sukarieh and Tannock 2016). It is suggested that this might involve “the recognition of the breadth of actors involved” with youth in a given setting together with their “activities and agendas” (Selwyn 2013: 31–32 cited in Sukarieh and Tannock 2016: 1283) and not just youth themselves in order to account for “the positioning of youth in relation to those (adults) in a given society with political and economic power” (Côté 2014: 528). I have endeavoured, as far as possible, to respond to this research imperative by including a broad range of stakeholders coalescing around this education and the young people for whom it is intended.

i) People: communities of experience and their extent

a) Suburban ‘educated’ youth: academy students, academy alumni, and scholarship alumni:

“Youth is everyone who is learning here!”

Karen youth currently engaging as teachers and students in Hpa-an’s academies are the primary unit of analysis in the empirical chapters that follow. As I explained in chapter 2, I consider ‘youth’ to be a socially constructed and historically situated category, my cultural and contextual understanding of which was derived from the perspectives and assumptions of those whom I encountered in Hpa-an and around its academies at the time. As the statement above illustrates - made by one academy teacher to me during a class I was observing - local understandings of ‘youth’ were closely associated with active engagement in the process of learning within these particular institutions. Since the academies catered for learners whose education had been interrupted or deferred, ‘youth’ in this case covered students from the ages of 17 to 32 and occasionally older. This education was, however, never referred to as ‘adult’ education for encompassing such a broad age range.

Furthermore, the teachers and headteachers responsible for these young people - namely the social group/generation referring to themselves as the ‘scholarship alumni’ who established and managed these learning sites – often described themselves (and were described by others elsewhere in the community) as ‘young people’ though they were aged between 28 and 35 at the time (see Appendix 5, p. 277). This undoubtedly had much to do with the predominantly gerontocratic nature of

community engagement around these learning sites as reflected in the aging membership of the Academy Committees providing the governance for them (see Appendix 3, p. 268). Since my research explored the past educational experiences of this group in some detail (Chapters 4 and 5) together with the younger participants in this study (Chapter 6), I was often dealing with different ages across a broad and extended youth domain which eventually encompassed experiences from the age of 17 to 35 (see Appendix 5, pp. 277-280). If I had to impose demographic parameters on what I mean by ‘youth’ as far as this research is concerned, it would include all those within this age range who were associated with these particular learning sites at the time of the research⁶⁹. Collectively these young people understood themselves to be involved in the process and business of furthering ‘youth transitions’ between education and work, though they would not necessarily have described it using this particular term.

I have mentioned that the qualitative emphasis of this research prioritised my informants’ experiences, attitudes and understandings. My purposive sampling of this broad range of ‘urban educated youth’ was structured by my perception of the differences between these experiences. In helping me select and organise the samples I therefore thought very much in terms of the different social categories of youth engaged in this education – teachers and headteachers (the scholarship alumni); academy students *currently* engaged in that education; academy alumni *previously* engaged in that education and now entering the labour market – who together represented the principal education stakeholders. In a few cases, individuals might fall into one or more of these categories. For example, some of the academy alumni returned to work at the academy as teachers or administrators, sometimes as soon as they graduated. In other cases, an academy student might be the same age or older than a teacher; and as I mentioned earlier many of the teachers themselves were involved in some form of vocational training after hours.

The differences within this social category is therefore not so much one of age and position but needs, that is *experience*, particularly within the context of Myanmar’s transition where youth transitions are often delayed and deferred, hence my preference for the notion of ‘communities of

⁶⁹ This age range maps onto received state definitions of youth which are identified as covering all those from the age of 15-35 (State Councillor Office 2018).

experience' (Vigh 2006: 19), in order to differentiate between a range of youth experiences under observation. The initial two empirical chapters (chapters 4 and 5) concern the scholarship alumni largely before the transition; the third and final empirical chapter (Chapter 6) another community of youth experience - academy students and alumni coming of age within the transition. Together they offer glimpses of these different communities of experience as they navigate their transitions from education to employment before and into Myanmar's transition, in relation to each other, and the institutions which they have in common.

To represent the perspectives of these different stakeholders, I developed purposive samples drawn from these specific categories of youth. Since there were just 12 scholarship alumni, I was able to include all of this group in the study with whom I conducted extended individual semi and unstructured interviews on more than one occasion with each individual (see Appendix 5, p. 277) building up considerable biographies in the process. I selected a sample of 15 academy alumni for interview from three of the four learning centres located in suburban Hpa-an (see map 3, p. vii)⁷⁰ which constituted approximately a third of the current cohort⁷¹, ensuring a balance of gender, ethnicity, age, and religion across the sample (see Appendix 5 pp. 278-279; see also map 6, p. 115). Whilst this was very much a 'convenience' sample developed through my close association with the academies and their students, many of whom I had taught, worked or socialised with over many months, it was structured as something of a 'quota' sample (cf. Bryman 2016: 188) for reflecting the relative proportions of these institutional populations.

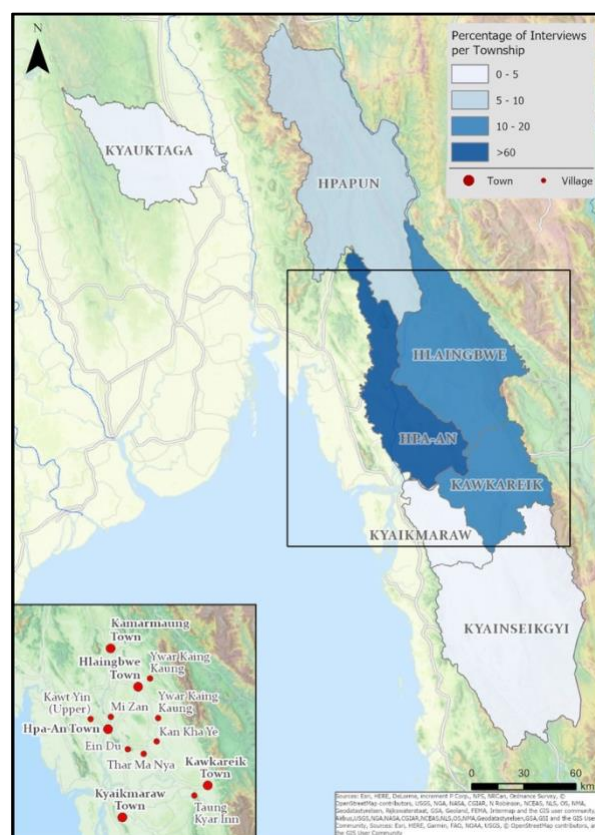
However, I manipulated this somewhat by incorporating a sub-sample of two students from each of the three academies currently engaged in this education to diversify the range of perspectives and educational experiences available to me amongst those who had experienced this education at different times/years, and to explore youth transitions within education, and between education and employment domains. In this case, I approached the academy's Alumni Coordinator who supplied me

⁷⁰ Initially, I incorporated the only rural academy and its students (see Figure 12, chapter 4, p. 155), specifically to involve rural youth more fully in this study, but it proved logistically difficult to continue to do so given the poor state of roads and communication links and all but impossible during the monsoon and its aftermath. Scholarship alumni responsible for this particular institution were, nonetheless, involved in this study accounting, to some extent, for rural youth.

⁷¹ By 'cohort' I refer to those two specific years of education that these institutions covered at one time (each one a cohort of about 20 students), since the course they provided extended over that period, meaning that there were approximately 40+ students enrolled in a given year in a given institution.

with details of past cohorts from which I selected that sample from across the different cohorts and against the independent attributes listed above.

A purposive sub-sample drawn from all those 45 academy students/alumni with whom I conducted individual semi-structured interviews were selected to participate in three focus group discussions which involved no more than 4 individuals per focus group (see Appendix 5, p. 280). Again, these were selected against the aforementioned independent attributes, incorporating individuals from the different academies within each focus group, as well as with an awareness of how different individuals might respond together within this forum, based on my awareness of the students in class and from conducting individual interviews with them previously. Students and alumni came from a wide range of towns and villages scattered in and



around the environs of Hpa-an township as Map 6 illustrates.

Map 6: *Percentage distribution of academy alumni and students interviewed across Hpa-an township and its environs in 2016.*

b) Community and civil society stakeholders:

A range of other community stakeholders associated with this education and its principal stakeholders were involved in this study in order to offer different perspectives on the education, its objectives and outcomes for the young people concerned (see Appendix 5, pp. 281-283). The Academy Committees (AC) – the *de facto* governing body - responsible for the management and strategic development of each institution reflected the range and diversity of community engagement around this education (see Appendix 3, p. 268). It was through my observation of occasional AC meetings that I was able to engage a number of prominent community and religious leaders, local businessmen, retired state-sector teachers and health workers, Karen CBO representatives concerned with this education.

Whilst I sought to include a range of such stakeholders from different sectors of the community, I organised this sample against a similar set of independent attributes as I described above. For example, I made a point of including both Christian and Buddhist spiritual leaders acting as trustees for these institutions; I included commercial as well as welfare entrepreneurs, private and public sector workers, men and women of a range of ages and ethnicities – some now long since retired, some only recently graduated from one of the academies. This particular sample involved 10 individuals from each AC accounting for a third of each committee.

c) Network partners:

I also incorporated a number of other institutional and individual connections actively engaged with this education and its young people (see Appendix 5, p. 281). This included those NGOs, INGOs, funding bodies, curriculum providers supplying resources and training to these institutions, as well as network partners such as YCC (the prominent local youth centre in Hpa-an), the Myanmar Communities Academy Program (MCAP) to which the Hpa-an academies are affiliated to other similar models of education in other ethnic-populated states. It also included ADRA's Karen Capacity Building Project (KCBP) that supplied the Hpa-an network with much of its human resources and contributed to its strategic direction through two local youth leaders (also scholarship alumni) who administered the project. My close association with staff and students inevitably granted me access to their families and friends whose informal contributions can also be seen within this data.

I estimate that at least 170 informants were interviewed as part of this study (Appendix 5, pp. 277-283) primarily in Hpa-an but also in other locations, though this does not include the many other informal and spontaneous encounters that yielded valuable insights over the two years during which I conducted this fieldwork.

ii. Places: sites & spaces

As mentioned above, the inductive nature of my research strategy had a bearing on *where* my sample was drawn as much as *whom* it included. In Hpa-an, my focus was on the three⁷² academies in

⁷² At the time of research, another academy opened in suburban Hpa-an in property owned by the Christian Baptist diocese. I chose not to include this in the study since it catered for relatively few students at the time and was still in the process of building its programme and recruiting staff, many of whom were recent alumni from the other academies.

suburban parts of the town – their learning, organisational, social and recreational spaces - but necessarily encompassed spaces inhabited by academy stakeholders across the larger township, its surrounding villages and village tracts, where they lived and congregated. However, Hpa-an was not the only field site from which respondents were engaged: I spent time in Yangon, Myanmar's commercial capital (approximately an 8-10 hour bus journey and 120 miles north-west of Hpa-an and my point of arrival and departure in the country), as well as in the Thai border town of Mae Sot (approximately 3-4 hours by taxi and 100 miles east, including the international border crossing at Myawaddy), exploring connections to the Hpa-an education network amongst the sizeable Karen exile communities there (see Map 1, p. v).

In Yangon, I identified links with other scholarship alumni and their networks as well as connections with other private sector education providers related to the education network down in Hpa-an. In Mae Sot I considered forms of migrant education upon which the network in Hpa-an is closely modelled, as well as links with Karen non-state ethnic education 'regimes' associated with the KNU and border-based network partners, identifying how this provision opened up a space for the network in Hpa-an. My research also took me to the Thai capital Bangkok on at least three occasions, where I engaged a number of informants working on migrant welfare and education amongst the sizeable Karen communities living there. I ran into some individuals associated with the academies in Hpa-an in these different locations – namely the scholarship alumni and various AC members. I met many in these other locations who knew them, confirming that individuals associated with the Hpa-an-based education network maintained strong links with these other sites, their communities, organisations and institutions across an extended and diverse geography.

Research methods:

The methods selected proved the most suitable to gain a deeper and richer qualitative awareness of individual aspirations and attitudes motivating youth transitions in and around Hpa-an. These primarily took the form of extended semi-structured interviews, many months of participant observation across a number of locations and learning spaces, with a small number of focus group discussions. These methods allowed me to effectively probe my informants' subjective responses towards education,

employment and their aspirations around this. Furthermore, these particular methods allowed me to explore the structural context within which they were situated, and which shaped those subjective responses. As such, it amounts to an ethnography of youth transitions in Hpa-an and the structural forces shaping them within and to some extent beyond the locality. Before I consider those methods, I want to comment on the conditions under which I conducted my fieldwork, as these very much shaped the nature of the ethnography and the application of my research methods.

Fieldwork: accessing and constructing the field

This research project is markedly different from the one I originally envisaged in Oxford in late 2014. Until that time, any work undertaken by foreign nationals with ethnic nationality groups in Myanmar, their education and young people, was deemed particularly sensitive given its prominent role in processes of political and ethnic assimilation (see Chapter 2), still more amongst ‘separatist’ groups like the Karen. In 2008, on my first visit to the country, I well recall having to undergo a lengthy and intrusive interview followed by an uncertain 10-day wait in Bangkok just to receive a 28-day tourist visa, largely because I had identified myself as a ‘teacher’; my movements in many parts of the country were monitored and restricted at that time. It remained all but impossible to conduct research in the country with anything like official sanction, still less in the Karen State capital whilst it was under government control and large parts of the southeast consumed in ongoing armed conflict. I therefore planned initially to base much of the research on the Thai border amongst the Karen migrant communities there, as I had done before and where I had established contacts.

Only with the substantive political reforms of 2013 and, moreover, the Karen ceasefire that year did the prospect of conducting research in parts of the southeast become more feasible, granting unprecedented access for researchers to communities in that region. I therefore altered my plans and shifted the focus of my research inside Myanmar and to its Buddhist Plong Karen communities, hitherto largely neglected by Burma scholars, in order to take advantage of an opportunity that might prove as brief as it was tentative. There has, until now, been little research on peripheral Karen communities, still less those emerging from government control which has proved both an opportunity and a challenge for this ethnography (see chapter 1).

The country I encountered was one locked in the past and labouring under stultifying protocol and privation after decades of military rule but now in the throes of significant socio-economic and political flux and change: university students were demonstrating for changes to the National Education Law, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the iconic Burmese pro-democracy leader was finally out of house arrest and drawing large crowds wherever she went. There was talk of an election. The military-backed civilian government was nervous and there were large numbers of police on the streets. Access to the Karen heartlands of the southeast was better than it had been in the past but fraught by legacies of inter-communal and intra-ethnic conflict between Karen Christians and Buddhists, between Buddhists and Muslim minorities as brooding sectarian conflicts ignited with the end of the world's longest running civil war. The road to the border crossing with Thailand at Myawaddy was frequently blocked as conflict broke out between various Karen forces in the vicinity.

Conducting research in a country emerging from over sixty years of authoritarian military rule presented significant obstacles, still more in a region emerging from sustained armed conflict. I had no difficulty travelling (albeit achingly slowly) down from Yangon to Hpa-an on a pitted broken road but recall being frog-marched off a bus as I approached Hpa-an for the first time by a local policeman who wanted to inspect my passport. On another occasion, I remember attending a local peace initiative for Karen youth groups just outside Hpa-an with a member of Special Branch sitting at the back of the room. People in the villages surrounding Hpa-an were wary of outsiders and were intimidated by my questions, which they clearly associated with the kinds of government intrusion and surveillance to which they had long been subjected; educational institutions, particularly high schools and universities, were prohibited from engaging with foreigners; I recall wandering the vast and silent corridors of Hpa-an University, devoid of students, and struggling to find any staff willing to talk to me, who clearly felt it was more than their job was worth. Reliable and contemporaneous data on educational outcomes and labour market engagement remains hard to come by, very little of which is within the public domain.

So, whilst there was apparent access there were still considerable obstacles and limits to what I could realistically achieve. I could not easily and safely venture beyond Hpa-an township; I still could not involve any state mechanisms in my research; I could not easily engage communities in rural areas

that had seen the worst of the conflict and government intrusion who remained generally guarded. Furthermore, I could not stay anywhere other than a registered guest house or hotel and therefore had to be in an urban centre of some kind; nor could I secure a visa for any longer than a 28 day stay, unless I declared my research intentions which would have completely jeopardised my presence in the country. I therefore could not remain in the country for long periods but had to leave frequently.

However, two factors as incidental as they were fortuitous, made this research more viable, almost overnight, and influenced the nature of the emerging ethnography: my chance encounter with the Hpa-an education network provided me with a viable and accessible case study around which to base my ethnography, and the acquisition of a one-year multiple entry work visa which gave me the opportunity to remain in the country in order to do so; the latter I procured through a 'travel agent' in Bangkok, shortly after which I ran into Nann Phawt Hsaung Khuu ('Lonely Flower') one slow afternoon in the offices of a state-run development organisation on the outskirts of Hpa-an where she was temping. I was not surprised when she told me the directors were not interested in talking to me. However, I jumped at her invitation to 'visit my old school', whereupon I encountered the institutions and their stakeholders at the centre of this study.

My fieldwork proved episodic and extended as I struggled to juggle fieldwork with family commitments at home in the UK. I arrived in the country in October 2014 for a six-week scoping exercise. I returned to Hpa-an again in April 2015 and remained there for the rest of the year. Following an eight-month hiatus I returned to Hpa-an on two subsequent occasions in the latter half of 2016 when I conducted the majority of the formal data collection for this thesis – first in August and again in November/December. In total I spent fourteen months carrying out this fieldwork in situ, but it extended over a period almost double that. It is fair to say that it was a source of ongoing concern and frustration to me that no sooner had I gained access and started to build relationships, than I had to leave again, only to seemingly reset these and find myself having to work them up again over a number of weeks on my return. It also proved very expensive financially which compelled me to maintain paid employment whilst conducting this research.

I have since come to appreciate the advantages all this had for the fieldwork: it allowed me valuable time to step back and reflect on the significance of what I had seen and heard within the field,

whilst consolidating initial findings and identifying further avenues of enquiry. In-field employment (both paid and voluntary) offered me other, often multiple, perspectives on the structural constraints and conditions within which my research participants were situated. Furthermore, the considerable break following the first year of fieldwork and the data collection in 2016 allowed me to encompass the crucial period after many of the seismic political and economic transformations in Myanmar that marked 2015. The advent of the KNU signing of the NCA in September, and the historic national elections of October of that year which ushered in the country's first democratically elected (albeit military-backed) government in over half a century, had such a direct and profound bearing on the shifting structural context in parts of the southeast like Hpa-an but were very difficult to appreciate at the time.

Moreover, my frequent absences over this extended period actually worked to consolidate rather than compromise my relationships within the Hpa-an community. I became an increasingly familiar face as I returned to Hpa-an time and again, and my reappearance met with increasing familiarity over many months. In fact, with each visit I substantially enhanced my access to the community and the trust bestowed upon me as friendships and working relationships matured and developed over time. This was very much the case by the time I came to collect the majority of the data in the latter half of 2016 when my access to individuals and institutions was that much more assured. This was crucial in my work around educational sites and with young people where issues of access and trust are that much more complex and sensitive (Felzmann 2009; Hammersley and Traianou 2012), still more within the context of conflict and involuntary migration (Boyden and Ennew 1997; Boyden 2001; Boyden *et al.* 2002; Ungar 2005; Hart and Tyrer 2006; Graham, Powell and Taylor 2015).

Participant observation

Throughout my fieldwork I was at all times engaged in some form of participant observation. This assumed varying degrees of involvement from the relatively benign and passive to the actively engaged. For example, I often began the day perched on the stoop at the entrance of my guest house with a mug of coffee watching the town go about its business whilst chatting to one of the young guest house staff; or I grabbed my bicycle and peddled over to YCC where I helped staff set out the tables and water the plants. In this respect, I was 'hanging out' and since this was my usual routine at the

start of every day over the many months during which I was engaged in this research it amounted to a form of 'deep' hanging out (Geertz 1998), granting me valuable perspectives on those whom I was working with. Many of my most fruitful encounters with the young people at the heart of this study emerged in this way, unplanned and unscripted.

At the other end of the spectrum, I was actively involved in some form of teaching or training as I sought out ways to make use of my expertise and experience in the service of the community and, it should be said, as a means of accessing that community and developing trusting relations with its stakeholders. In this way, I slowly insinuated myself into this particular teaching and learning environment, better to observe it and the young people engaged with it. In many respects, and over time, I became just 'one of the teachers'. Since the academies were small institutions, often established in a traditional teak house on land owned by a local monastery or church and with no more than 40 students, some of whom lived on site or in a nearby dormitory, it was much like joining an extended family; before long I found myself regarded and included as such, often returning after hours to cook and eat with students and staff.

I believe this role – that of 'teacher-researcher' - granted me a degree of autonomy, whilst allowing me to move relatively easily between formal and more informal domains, observing whilst engaging with my interlocutors at both work and play. In this way, I was, for example, able to maintain their respect and trust in formal settings for the purposes of teaching/instruction, as well as in less formal settings for research/interview, when I needed them to think critically whilst responding honestly. It also allowed me the opportunity to slip into the background unobtrusively and observe how they behaved in these different environments as they became familiar with seeing me in both. It was a position in which I was party to all kinds of spontaneous disclosures that were to inform my evolving understanding and interpretations.

This point of access was invaluable, given that I was restricted to state-registered (albeit privately-run) hotels or guest houses which inevitably mediated my encounter with the context within which I was working, cutting me off from the lived experience of those whom I was observing. My guest house nonetheless served as a good platform from which to observe those wider social changes affecting the context in which they lived. From there, I couldn't help but notice how Hpa-an was rapidly

changing from that sleepy backwater or ‘ghost town’ it once was to the now thriving social, economic and educational hub it is, as the increasing presence of foreign tourists drove up the price of my room with each visit!

Outside the parameters of the academies, I consciously sought out other opportunities to spend time with the young people associated with Hpa-an’s education network so that I could observe and engage with them in as many of the different forums within which they lived and learned. Occasionally, I was invited back to their homes and villages, spent time with their families, shared food with them, and marked various festivities with them, not least the annual Karen wrist-tying ceremony at Taungalay (see Dolan 2015c) and the annual Karen State Day celebrations from Hpa-an (see Introduction). I hung out with them in tea shops and canteens; I became friends with many of them on Facebook and Instagram (both of which I deliberately joined for that purpose and which provided yet another window onto their worlds), and my phone frequently rang with various requests to join them at particular academy or social events such as recycling or fund-raising initiatives in villages outside Hpa-an.

In this way I was able to observe my informants over time within the relative privacy and intimacy of the institutions and gated communities to which they belonged – the classroom, the youth centre, the monastery – but also more private social spheres such as the home, the tea shop, at rest by the banks of nearby Kanthaya Lake, occasionally outside their dormitories at the end of the day or by the football pitch, which granted me some understanding of the multiple worlds they inhabited and which shaped their attitudes, affiliations and aspirations.

Interviews

After participant observation, semi-structured interviews were my primary means of gathering information. These were particularly useful in attempting to develop a relatively structured dialogue with many young people about their educational experiences over time, how they perceived these to have shaped their aspirations, whilst probing their responses at specific points and places in that dialogue. Indeed, this particular research method allowed me to effectively explore those “attitudes, values, beliefs and motives” (Barriball and While 1994: 329) driving my informants’ aspirations.

Questioning in theory:

The framing of questions exploring young people's aspirations has attracted some critical attention as alluded to in chapter 2. I was mindful of these debates in framing my specific questions. Much of the contention has been concerned with the extent to which it is realistically possible to disaggregate real and tangible hopes and aspirations (and, for that matter, the fears and concerns shaping them) from unrealisable fantasies and dreams. For example, Hardgrove, Rootham and McDowell (2015) in a study of young working class men's aspirations within the labour market in the UK argue that "aspirations provide a general notion of desired, future outcomes, but as a concept it often lacks specificity" (ibid: 164), to which end their interview questions were designed to ensure that responses remained credible and realistic (see also Crivello 2011). As we have seen, others such as Frye (2012) in her study of Malawian schoolgirls living amidst poverty, have argued that imagined futures remain significant regardless of whether they are realistic or not, since they tell us something significant about the direction in which the respondent is headed and how they perceive themselves at that point; as such, they remain motivational and credible for being so. We recall how the aspirations she encountered were apparently 'irrational' but provided potent moral claims rather than rational calculations and were valuable as such. I see the merits of both these perspectives and so allowed my questioning to capture both the credible without disregarding the incredible by simply asking them, at the appropriate stage in the interview, 'What do you want to do in the future?'

It was, however, rare for my respondent's aspirations to exceed the possibilities and pathways open to them. I never needed to bring them down to earth. They were keenly aware of the structural constraints arrayed against them but within the more expansive landscape of the transition, they might be excused for dreaming big for once. Indeed, it might be something of a strategic choice to do so in order to navigate the uncertainty facing them at this point in their lives. I did not want to constrain the potential for this which seemed to offer valuable insights as to how a younger generation of Karen people perceived their future selves, allowing me to apprehend the full range of possibilities motivating these young people. For example, Nann Eah Tha Mhawt ('Unity') in Chapter 6 is intent on becoming the Karen State Education Minister in order to respond to structural deficits in state provision. Whilst this might be deemed an unrealistic and unrealisable aspiration for a young woman

in her position it was no less credible for being so. Like Frye's (2012) schoolgirls (see Chapter 2, pp. 95-96), it emerges as something of a moral claim orienting her action in the present just as much as any rational choice might do. Instead of disregarding such statements, I used my subsequent questioning to focus in on those specific efforts and engagements that were seen to give shape and substance to these conceptions of their 'possible selves' in the future, however inflated and remote they might at first appear.

Indeed, I have employed the Possible Selves model (Markus and Nurius 1986), as I discuss in Chapter 2, to expose this motivational action more fully in Chapter 6. It has been employed by others to harness more credible aspirations and avoid potentially nebulous statements when working on young people's aspirations (see Hardgrove, Rootham and McDowell 2015; Patel 2017; Harrison and Waller 2018). Instead, I have employed it here to encompass a broad range of possible selves, made clear and credible by evidence of motivational action in the present that tends towards the fulfilment of these desired outcomes in the future. In keeping with my chosen methodology, rather than allowing my qualitative interpretation of those desired outcomes to dictate and delimit the research agenda, I have used the Possible Selves model to bring the *immediate* into conversation with the *imagined* - whatever that might amount to - in the study of these young people's aspirations and so expose their efforts to realise these now and in the future in that much greater quotidian detail.

Questioning in practice:

I had ample opportunity to pilot questions and their sequence during my initial scoping exercise in late 2014. On my return to the country in early 2015 I piloted interview questions with many different participants in response to KDN training initiatives in Karen-populated areas Yangon, as well as Tanintharyi, in the far south of Myanmar and Taungoo, three hours' drive north of Yangon. This initial experience greatly informed my later approach to questioning in Hpa-an, which I frequently adjusted in light of how informants responded, changing a word here or adding a question there to elicit further information and to clarify questions and responses. Indeed, it has been observed that interviews, whether short or extended, formal or informal, structured or semi-structured are an effective research tool for use across more than one site, particularly when one language is being used as it was in this case – English - ensuring a degree of consistency to enquiries and responses (Hannerz 2003); this was

certainly borne out by my experience at this early stage in the research. It is also a useful method when there may not always be sufficient time or means to draw on other methods such as questionnaires or surveys (ibid); again, this was certainly the case in Mae Sot and on occasion in Yangon where my time and resources were often limited.

The topics or themes to which those questions related were as important as the specific questions; perhaps more important in responding to my research question. I therefore developed a question frame which clearly indicated these, and which explored the relationship between education and employment, aspiration and opportunity. Broadly speaking, this began with a focus on current 'motivation and mobility', gauging aspirations in the present before reflecting on 'educational experiences' driving these in the past; it proceeded to explore specific encounters within this experience and those prompting action in the present. It then considered specific employment/vocational experiences and efforts through which these young people were working to enact their aspirations. This inevitably pulled into focus the wider social networks within which these young people were situated, which were also considered in relation to projections of their possible selves. These interviews typically lasted between 20 and 40 minutes.

This basic structure meant that very early on I did not require the question frame in front of me when conducting interviews, since it was easy to remember the sequence of themes I wanted to cover and with those broad themes the questions that substantiated them, making the encounter that much more informal and reflexive. On a few notable occasions, my informants, particularly older youth and those in leadership roles, dictated the sequence of exchanges on these topics, digressing and deviating, and I allowed them to do so since it accounted for some of the richest and most memorable contributions. Indeed, the question frame allowed me to maintain relative focus whilst accommodating valuable excursions away from this which often provided other perspectives and insights.

It was significant how informants often responded to a given question with largely the same answer. For example, when questioned on their previous educational experience they typically bemoaned the poor quality of state education. This consensus was useful in confirming the presence of this specific structural constraint, but it also prompted me to supplement this question to

understand what particular aspect of the encounter with state education prompted this negative response. Crucially, this experience was seen to shape their aspirations in different ways (see Chapter 6). Some aspired ultimately to teach within this system in the future to improve teaching standards from within, whilst others resolved to collaborate around alternative provision of the kind they had benefitted from in Hpa-an, and so provide the kind of educational and experiential encounter lacking elsewhere. All were therefore seen to be motivated to act in positive, albeit quite different, ways in response to this negative educational encounter, especially when prompted to articulate the specific grounds for their reservations.

Focus group discussions

Towards the end of my fieldwork, I arranged a number of focus group discussions with students and alumni from the three academies - a mixture of those who were currently engaged in education at these learning sites and those who had recently graduated, to capture different perspectives on youth transitions (see Appendix 5, p. 280). I chose to conduct the focus groups with this community at the end of my fieldwork and following the interviews rather than any earlier for three main reasons: first, I wanted the issues, topics and questions to emerge from the broad array of individual responses gained through participant observation and interviews, rather than being generated from the comparatively limited sample involved in the focus groups.

Second, by the end of my fieldwork I was in a better position to know what kind of questions worked and what topics were relevant to my research; I still felt that I lacked a sufficient awareness of youth perspectives on the context in which they were situated other than that provided by more senior community stakeholders. The focus group discussions therefore provided me with an opportunity to explore those issues and ideas not sufficiently covered through the interviews, whilst identifying those attitudes and preoccupations held by the young people of this community.

Finally, by that stage in the research I enjoyed the level of trust with the young people in question and was therefore better placed to manage such discussions effectively without the exercise being in anyway intimidating or restrained; crucially, I had the necessary understanding of these young people as individuals to ensure that group dynamics promoted suitably engaged and diverse

exchanges. This was borne out by the enthusiasm and intelligence with which groups responded and the many valuable insights they provided.

I organised the sample for these as explained at the beginning of this chapter. They were necessarily small focus groups involving no more than four participants but lasted up to an hour and a half thus allowing all participants the opportunity to contribute freely and fully on a range of topics. I reserved a space at YCC and provided a light buffet lunch ensuring that the occasion was as informal and relaxed as possible. I chose to employ this method as a means of capturing different and often divergent responses to supplement those of my interviews (Gibson 2007). Moreover, the focus group gave us the opportunity to explore the topics beyond the more immediate and intimate parameters and concerns of interviews, which very much focused on individual experiences, to now probe youth responses and attitudes more broadly. This extended beyond the education to employment nexus but the changing structural context in which they were living and learning, and how this might affect learning and livelihoods in the future (Nyumba *et al.* 2018).

As with my interviews, I piloted focus groups with different groups of Karen youth in different communities across the country at different stages in the research, so was familiar with working in this way with these sorts of participants. I also arranged the structure of these focus group discussions in a similar manner to my interview questions, employing a basic question frame that progressed over a number of relevant and related themes and topics with associated questions, allowing me the freedom to moderate the discussion from memory without recourse to notes and prompts. In that sense, it was just like one of the many class discussions I had facilitated in Hpa-an throughout my time there (cf. Felzmann 2009). Having had a chance to pick over our food and exchange small talk, I invited participants to briefly introduce themselves and say something about where they were studying or working and what they hoped to do in the future.

The initial topic of discussion concerned the community context and what they considered to be the most significant challenges and concerns facing them and their community. I began in this way because I wanted to establish what mattered to them, what preoccupied them, what they saw to be the priorities and obstacles facing them and their communities at this particular point in their country's history. Education and employment featured but these were not the only priority. The discussions

concluded by exploring their aspirations for their communities and the role they saw themselves playing in this. The approach appeared to work well with its different opportunities for the group to consider individual and collective responses, and to get them to think about how these might relate to the wider and rapidly shifting structural context within which their communities in Hpa-an were situated (cf. Bagnoli and Clark 2010).

I wanted to encourage the discussion to develop organically, very much allowing the group to take the lead and determine the focus, rather than necessarily dictating the agenda as I had done in the interviews (see Bagnoli and Clark 2010). As the discussion developed, I simply ensured that everyone had an opportunity to speak and made space for them to do so rather than necessarily prompting them to do so, if only to ensure that no one participant dominated the proceedings though this was rarely the case. In this sense, these collective forums mitigated some of the power dynamics that might have constrained responses within a traditional interview, particularly as noted in feminist research (Wilkinson 1998, 1999). In all three focus groups the participants supported each other well so that when one occasionally struggled for the correct word in English a fellow participant was invariably able to provide a helpful prompt which I then verified with the individual concerned before we moved on.

Recording and transcription

I recorded and then transcribed all my interviews and focus groups as typed Word document files held on my laptop with the original recordings, usually at the end of the day on which they were conducted when they were also uploaded to a secure Cloud server. I did this whilst they were still fresh in my mind. This was particularly important in order to recall those many non-verbal indicators (Gorden 1987) which might otherwise have been missed or forgotten. There were many of these as my informants frequently sought alternative means of expressing themselves as they struggled to find the appropriate word or phrase in English; this frequently meant recourse to a Karen language or Burmese, which I encouraged them to do at such times, and which I would then identify and translate later. At other times, they might pause when struggling to relate a difficult and distressing memory. Indeed, silence frequently punctuated our exchanges for these emotive reasons (see Ghorashi 2008; Spyrou 2016) as they hesitated to say what MacLure *et al* (2010) identify as “something more, or something

else, or something more true, or something deeper” (ibid: 495) and I made a note of this. I therefore found the discipline of timely transcription essential in order to capture the more ephemeral dynamics of our exchanges whilst monitoring multiple responses in a given day, allowing me to identify consistencies and inconsistencies across responses. I supplemented this throughout with fieldnotes which I often scribbled down immediately after my informant had left, in the way described below, and which I would consult during transcription.

The transcription of focus group discussions proved challenging and time-consuming given the extent of the exchanges, the range of voices involved, and the variety of communication employed. This involved that much more non-verbal indicators than occurred during individual interviews, as the group murmured agreement or threw in a comment or exclamation of some kind. Indeed, I wanted to capture the quotidian detail of this engagement as much as I could because it often signified points of consistency and contention across responses and between participants. For example, concerns over environmental degradation through the misuse of land and farming, and the failure of communities to respond to this effectively, prompted agreement from much of the group even though not everyone chose or wanted to speak on this issue. However, differences emerged around rural and urban attitudes to this issue. At such times, the tone of the discussion changed markedly, and I sought to capture this within the transcription for what it revealed about the different attitudes and values maintained by this particular group of young Karen.

It should be noted that I found the presence of a recording device on the table liable to inhibit individual interview responses, making respondents initially slightly reticent and their answers strangely formal and truncated. Having gained consent to record our dialogue I was therefore in the habit of dropping my device into my shirt pocket where my informant quickly forgot about it. I avoided taking many notes during the interview itself, other than a word here or there to jog my memory later, since it might have unsettled respondents in the same way it did for those villagers I referred to above, who certainly found this practice intimidating. This was not such an issue in my focus groups when exchanges with others distracted attention from me, my recording device and any notetaking I might be inclined to do, but I ensured that they were unobtrusive, nonetheless.

Most of my interviews and focus groups with younger informants in Hpa-an were held at YCC, the friendly, familiar and informal atmosphere of which encouraged a more relaxed and open dialogue, particularly with less confident youth. Here, I could buy them a smoothie or a pennywort salad for their time (cf. Metro 2017). It was also both a public and neutral space where all manner of engagements like this commonly took place amidst more social and spontaneous encounters; crucially, it was a designated space for young people but distinct from the learning sites where we usually met.

Fieldnotes

I recorded my impressions of these various encounters in my fieldnotes which I maintained whenever and wherever I had an opportunity, usually shortly and discreetly afterwards or back in my hotel room in the evening and on getting up in the morning when details of certain encounters had a habit of (re)surfacing. I maintained these in a series of different coloured A5 notebooks – one for each distinct spell of fieldwork - with various tabs and markers indicating the different encounters, forums and themes as they emerged. This included everything I heard and saw but it amounted to more than that: the pages were stuffed with scraps of paper and scribbled notes on the back of beer mats, napkins and bus tickets which might refer to my physical environment or what someone had just said; the specific character of these notes and jottings were immediately recognisable to me often prompting me to recall who I was with and where I was when I made them. Occasionally, I pasted in snippets of curriculum materials or fliers advertising youth initiatives of various kinds. My fieldnotes included diagrams and mind maps connecting people and places; the margins were littered with names and phone numbers or common words and phrases, most in Plong Karen, occasionally Sgaw Karen and Burmese as frequently used by my informants and to jog my memory. Some of this marginalia was in different hands as I consciously invited my informants to literally inscribe themselves within my fieldnotes when I struggled to catch a name or number, a word or phrase (see Loizos 1994).

In this way, my fieldnotes provided a portrait of the shifting context within which my interlocutors were situated. They included details of all manner of local youth initiatives occurring in Hpa-an and my other field sites. Party manifestos appeared within the covers of these notebooks in the run-up to the elections in late 2015, often referring in some way to education and political aspirations around it, as well as candidate fliers which invariably included individual academic CVs and

credentials in extensive detail. I pasted in newspaper articles that caught my eye. Occasionally, I wrote down more intimate thoughts and feelings reflecting on my own position, my own aspirations and frustrations, or the changing relationship with an informant. At the back of each volume was a detailed diary or 'index' of each day's encounters and activities, however small or incidental, so I could keep track of what I had done, where I had been, and whom I had encountered. These fieldnotes were never far from me and undoubtedly my most valued possession in keeping track of my research and its progress. Together these volumes of fieldnotes acted as the basis for all manner empirical and theoretical speculation and conjecture in the field, as well as valuable prompts for interview and focus group discussion questions.

Ethical considerations and constraints

Youth amidst conflict, compromise, and complexity:

My research with marginalised and potentially vulnerable young people, many of whom had dispiriting experiences of violence and displacement, and around learning sites in a context which, until very recently existed under government control and surveillance, presented a number of ethical challenges. As I mentioned above, I have worked with children and young people in a professional capacity over many years, including youth training with a UN Peacekeeping mission in East Timor immediately following the civil war there and academic research with Karen refugee children and youth in northern Thailand during the Karen civil war in Myanmar. I therefore have some practical experience conducting ethically informed research when working with these particular groups of potentially vulnerable participants and in contexts of this nature.

Despite only two informants within this sample being below the age of 18 (at 17 years of age which is, nonetheless, deemed 'competent youth' by the institutional ethics code to which I was accountable (see CUREC 2019), the ability of some of these to make a free and informed choice about participation was complicated by their uncertain command of the language in which the research was conducted - English. Furthermore, it was clear to me that the maturity of these young people differed considerably with those younger university students and recent graduates lacking experience of interacting with adults outside educational and welfare settings and beyond the parameters of their

communities. As I mentioned above, very few of my informants had encountered foreigners before (though this was changing rapidly at the time of this research), still less had been involved in research exercises like interviews and focus group discussions with foreigners.

Of further concern were the complex and contested social circumstances within which they were situated at the time of this research: the spectre of intra-ethnic conflict amongst Karen communities and inter-communal and religious tensions in the southeast loomed large for Hpa-an youth. As I have explained, the academies were established on land belonging, for the most part, to powerful local monasteries and *Sayadaws* (abbots) commanding considerable moral and political authority across the township and wider region. These learning sites and their stakeholders were therefore often in thrall to these institutions and their leaders particularly if those leaders were acting as trustees of the academy (see Appendix 3, p. 268). Students and youth enrolled at them emerged as pawns in this power play as different identity and interest groups – either Plong, Sgaw, Buddhist, or Christian Karen - jostled to influence academy policy and provision (see Chapter 4), shape the next generation, and redress persistent educational deficits long perceived to constrain the social and economic mobility of Buddhist Plong Karen communities in the southeast (see Chapter 5). With the rise of Buddhist nationalism across the country (Walton and Hayward 2014; Schonthal and Walton 2016; Walton and Jerryson 2016) and the increasing space offered by the peace and reform process in the southeast, these dynamics became that much more prevalent and contentious for communities, like the one in Hpa-an, emerging from government control. The identities and affiliations of young people coming of age in such contexts were being constantly tested and challenged, especially through their engagement with this education and, by extension, their engagement with my research.

Securing and safeguarding free and informed consent:

In order to mitigate the very real possibility that these dynamics might complicate or even confound free and informed consent amongst my research participants, it was imperative that my young informants, in particular, were fully aware of what they were participating in and how the information they provided through that participation would be used; that they were under no obligation to participate but should they choose to, their involvement and identity would be safeguarded then and thereafter.

My approach was to explain that I would like to ask them some questions for my doctoral research about their experiences around education and their aspirations for the future. I explained how long this was likely to take and where it would take place, stressing that it was entirely up to them whether they wished to participate and that they did not have to make a commitment until they had had the opportunity to consider this further, should they need to do so. As part of this, I stressed that their anonymity would be safeguarded, and our exchanges would therefore remain confidential throughout the process from their participation to the publication of the research. On agreeing to participate, this information was conveyed to them again verbally and in writing (in English as well as in Plong Karen, Sgaw Karen, and Burmese (see Appendices 4 – 4c, pp. 270-277).

Most of my informants were confident students of English and could speak and often write well in English which they were keen to practice. Indeed, to study at the academy their English had to be of a sufficient standard to cope with the English-medium programme of study. However, in those very few cases where they were not, I provided interpretation either through one young male or one female graduate of one of the academies, fluent in the languages above, both of whom had experience of acting in this way before in support of doctoral research. These research assistants had themselves participated in the research so were familiar with my particular protocol, well versed in the questions and procedure, all of which I reiterated to them prior to the interviews in question; they proved excellent in this role.

Towards the end of my time in Hpa-an, many young people associated with these academies were actually seeking me out to be interviewed - rather than the other way around – eager for any chance to practice their English like their friends. Indeed, these exchanges became still more generous and reciprocal; as one informant rationalised it to me, “because you are interested in us and our education so we want to help you by sharing our experiences with you” – a kind of gift exchange if you will (Metro 2017b; see also P. Jolliffe 2016; Jolliffe and Worland 2018) which increasingly facilitated and furthered this research. I was mindful, however, that the considerable trust and respect that they had in and for me by that stage made them that much more vulnerable to coercion – that they were liable to grant me their consent simply because of who I was to them and that they wanted to please me. If they offered to be involved, I therefore stressed the principles and protocol outlined above to

ensure that I secured their free as much as their informed consent.

It was seemingly more straightforward to gain informed consent from adult informants whom I approached for this study. Given the prevalence of English amongst older generations, many of whom had access to mission education or, in the case of the scholarship alumni, language education on the Thai border and in Bangkok as part of their English-medium degree courses, gaining informed consent in and for research exercises conducted in English did not prove problematic. However, when this came to data derived from participant observation this was not as straight forward.

Indeed, opportunities to gain formal and informed consent when making informal and often spontaneous observations of individuals and groups of individuals, such as the AC meetings described above, do not present themselves readily (Wilson 1992). I mitigated this somewhat by limiting my engagement to more communal and public spaces less likely to compromise individual identities and anonymity. My account of these was governed by the same level of confidentiality and discretion with respect to the collective identities, organisations and institutional contributions described above. Furthermore, I was often invited to introduce myself when observing such forums and therefore considered my introduction and explanation of my purpose for observing a given forum, an acceptable means of seeking and gaining informed consent within such spaces.

In a few cases, I have made use of material communicated through social media in the shape of various images that punctuate the text (see, for example, Figure 6, p. 30 and Figure 18, p. 223). I have again safeguarded the anonymity of those involved by obscuring and redacting identifiable features and sensitive information that might jeopardise that anonymity. Despite this material existing in the public domain I have gained the consent of the individual(s) and institutions involved.

Data analysis

Throughout my fieldwork I reflected critically on the data gathered. Consistent with my inductive research strategy, this involved drawing up various tables and diagrams based on this material linking ideas and positing evolving conclusions. However, by the time I started the process of formal analysis this data covered a period of nearly three years and some of it is, as I write, over five years old. I do not consider this to compromise the value of the data and its contribution but rather to enhance this since it offers glimpses of youth aspirations and agency in ‘motion *squared*’ (Vigh 2009; my emphasis)

over an extended period of time. Since the initial empirical chapters explore youth transitions before the country's political transition it constitutes something of a longitudinal study in accounting for as much as ten to fifteen years in the life of some of those who feature in this study. This did, however, present considerable challenges when it came to analysis given the volume and variety of data and my fluctuating proximity to it over this period. In the final section of this chapter, I explain how I overcame this; how I organised and interpreted this material.

Hardware: post-fieldwork research assistance

Interviews and focus groups were, as explained above, quickly and scrupulously transcribed. I did this myself in the field but felt I had to employ a research assistant on my return to the UK to help with the transcription of the many individual interviews I conducted with academy students and alumni in late 2016 over a relatively short period. This work had mounted up around me with much of it yet to be completed in early 2017 when I was impatient to get on with the analysis. A young Dutch university graduate, much the same age as those with whom I had conducted these interviews, happened to approach me via email at this time expressing an interest in Myanmar and my research, and requesting opportunities to be involved in it. Ronja and I met in a café in Oxford and she agreed to support me in transcribing all remaining data for which I paid her an agreed fee. I asked her to sign a basic confidentiality agreement which I drew up safeguarding the names and identities of the study sites, organisations, institutions, and participants involved in the study. This also committed her to agree not to use the data for her own purposes then or in the future.

I gave her basic guidelines for transcription with specific instructions on how to capture meaning and inference and how to record non-verbal indicators. I necessarily involved her closely in the objectives of the study, as far as this particular material was concerned, in order to inform her approach to the transcription. We agreed, at her suggestion, that she might provide some of her own reflections in a short paragraph at the end of each transcript on what she had heard. Occasionally, we discussed this and her progress via Skype and email. This commentary and communication is not included in my final conclusions but certainly informed my thinking around this on a number of occasions.

Her perspectives on and proximity to the voices she was listening to were useful to me. She identified closely with their struggles and successes around education at a similarly uncertain point in her own life where she was navigating the transition from university to employment and career; she was not really certain which route to take. She was therefore well placed to offer fresh, often intuitive, perspectives on the data, unencumbered by my more extensive awareness of the structural context. This drew attention to some of the metanarratives informing youth transitions. In short, she found significance where I did not notice it and her reflections prompted me to revisit certain transcripts and re-evaluate the data there.

I verified the transcripts she produced thoroughly against the original recording and in some places amended these considerably to ensure that they provided an accurate reflection of the recording, since there were inevitable errors and misunderstandings usually involving specific cultural references. Some of these I communicated back to her and the accuracy of the transcripts improved accordingly. I met Ronja one further occasion in the same café in Oxford to complete our work two or three months later, shortly after which she secured a post with a prominent INGO on the Thai-Myanmar border working on health initiatives for Karen migrants there, for which I provided a reference. We kept in touch about her work and experiences during that time. I understand she is now training to be a doctor at home in the Netherlands.

Software: coding & 'noding'

In order to manage, maintain and monitor the analysis of the many thousands of pages of data accrued over the years I made use of Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS), and specifically NVivo, to which I uploaded all interview and focus group transcripts. So-called 'Internal Sources' included a range of material, including various education policy and practice documentation harvested from the institutions with which I was concerned: including academy websites and webpages, relevant academic and 'grey' literature, articles from the Myanmar and international press, social media posts and blogs, typed notes from informal encounters with contacts; it also included relevant situational analysis from reputable organisations providing contemporary contextual analysis such as the Myanmar Information Management Unit (MIMU). By bringing together this disparate body of material it became possible to bring the individual experiences of my respondents into conversation

with wider structural forces and developments. Furthermore, it proved particularly useful in handling the many interviews transcripts, that accounted for the majority of my data, allowing me to interrogate that large body of material more completely, quickly and accurately (see Welsh 2002) than I would have been able to achieve through manual techniques (see Hilal and Alabri 2013).

Furthermore, I corralled all this information into three broad but distinct 'Cases' – People, Places, Structures – to navigate the different human and structural terrains across which the data took me. This allowed me to grant individual attributes to the principal stakeholders by way of recording and monitoring essential demographic information such as age, gender, ethnicity, religion, and the village or township from which they came, but also covering education-specific attributes that might have a specific bearing on the data and its interpretation, such as whether or not they had a high school certificate. It also allowed me to consider the intersectionality between ethnicity, gender, class and opportunity/education. Furthermore, this 'case' information quickly identified and emphasised the efforts of these people to enact their aspirations around education which brought them into contact with multiple structures – institutional, cultural, organisational, discursive – across a range of places uniting the local with the trans-local, the regional with the national, the national with the international, and demonstrating how youth transitions are embedded in a wider, often global, structural network.

Beyond determining cases and ascribing attributes to them, I made every effort to code my data with an open mind rather than employ any predetermined, systematic approach. This was perhaps as inevitable as it was pragmatic as I sought to re-engage with data assembled over a period of years and now brought together for the first time. In this respect, I assumed something of a 'grounded theory' approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967) by developing my coding in response to the data in front of me rather than the other way around. I progressed from initial coding, comparing data with data, to focused coding that delimited and guided this earlier analysis, before determining so-called 'theoretical' codes, articulating relationships between categories I had established. From here, I was able to determine the 'nodes' or themes (topics, concepts, ideas, opinions and experiences), sub-nodes and sub-themes, that emerged organically around this coding. It was in this way, I built the story around which this research was situated rather than vice versa. As these thematic nodes grew and developed so did the story at the heart of this research. So it was, that the process of analysis – of

organising the data according to codes and nodes – prompted and substantiated my evolving theoretical interpretation of the material and its significance.

Conclusions and claims: a closing statement

This study remains relatively small in scope and the conclusions limited to the community in question during the period in which they were encountered. Furthermore, it remains a necessarily subjective selection of the social reality I encountered in Hpa-an from late 2014 through until late 2016, having selected to include some and not other ethnographic and empirical data in relating this particular story.

I make no claims for it to be more representative of youth aspirations and transitions elsewhere in the country and in other contexts other than those I have specified. In other words, I do not claim that the variables and conclusions are statistically significant, only in so far as they represent repeated and therefore common experiences and encounters amongst my sample of interlocutors. I have, however, sought to triangulate and corroborate these experiences as much as possible by bringing them into conversation with a range of other source material as I mentioned above. This has allowed me to relate the experiences of young people in Hpa-an to developments elsewhere in the southeastern Myanmar, the country and beyond.

By establishing these connections, I have also sought to make an example of the exceptions in which youth aspiration and agency amongst this particular group of young people has tended to deviate from normative responses and outcomes. Indeed, as a case study, the Hpa-an education network remains, to my knowledge, a unique initiative in terms of its scale and impact.

PART II

ASPIRATIONS & TRANSITIONS



Figure 11. *Avenue of apparently limitless doorways at Taungalay monastery near Hpa-an*
(Photograph: Author)

Crisis and constraint: navigating vital conjunctures in authoritarian Hpa-an

Prelude: vital conjunctures revisited

"I have to start long ago first. I used to be a migrant worker in Thailand after high school in Myanmar. I did office work and housework and I cooked and cleaned and then I feel like I have no hope for the future"⁷³. It is late on a Friday afternoon and I am sitting with Nann Eh Klain ('Kind'), a young Plong Buddhist Karen woman and English teacher in the makeshift classroom of a small private school directly under the Kyar Taw Ya Monastery in central Hpa-an which she established with her fiancé in June 2014.

She looks out of the window and sighs, "I have very high hopes since I finished high school in Myanmar but a lot of people in Hpa-an, in Karen State, they move to Thailand as migrant workers - a lot of people do that because there are no jobs here; there is no hope here".

The high school she and many of her students went to, 'Hpa-an Basic No. 1', is opposite the monastery. Like all government schools in Myanmar it is a vast featureless building on a plot of dusty scrubland where hundreds of students in uniform white shirts and bottle green *longyis*⁷⁴ graduate each year to assigned courses at one of Hpa-an's four state universities (see Map 2, p. vi; also Chapter 1, p. 48). All Eh Klain's students are currently enrolled on such university courses whilst attending her school to learn English and Social Science. For many like Eh Klain, the Thai borderlands with their thriving Karen exile communities, NGOs and migrant schools have offered the only hope of a better life after decades of armed conflict and civil strife in southeastern Myanmar (Payne 2007). They have nonetheless committed generations of Karen migrants to itinerant and unregulated labour at the margins of Thai society (Lang 2002; Campbell 2018).

The classroom we are sitting in used to be one of the monastery's meeting halls. It now has clapboard walls and a corrugated iron roof; there is a rough sheet of linoleum on the stone floor and

⁷³ (F29) This testimony is largely drawn from an extended semi-structured interview conducted on Thursday, 17th November 2016.

⁷⁴ A sheet of cloth wrapped tightly around the lower body much like a long kilt, invariably brightly coloured in reds and blues amongst the Karen; girls and women also wear a similar item known as a *htamein*.

a heavy black curtain dividing it from another classroom like this one. In front of the black curtain stands a whiteboard bearing traces of a point of English grammar; we sit amongst the desks and chairs in the gathering gloom and she continues, “Also, at that time when I finished high school, my father passed away so my family cannot support me, so I *have to* work over there. I *need to* work. I have five siblings; my two younger sisters were so very, very young, so I moved to Thailand and I worked there for a few years. I was not a teenager anymore. I was 20; like around 20 or something you know”.

Eh Klain is now 30 and has recently got married; she met her Christian Karen husband when they were both undergraduate students at Asia-Pacific International University, a private Christian university in Bangkok, where they studied on scholarships through a charity based in northern Thailand. When I met her here for the first time in early 2015 there were just two classrooms where the young couple taught forty students. But such has been the demand for their school that now, little more than a year later, they have double the number of classrooms and students and have had to recruit two additional teachers.

The school has a growing reputation in the community and despite running extra classes in the evenings is frequently oversubscribed. Since they opened their doors over seven hundred students have passed through the school and they are already talking about moving away from the monastery to find a bigger site of their own. Besides, the monks complain about the noise; and now, for the first time in decades, it is possible to register a non-state school with the Myanmar government since the laws on association and private schooling were recently relaxed.

As the shadows lengthen around us she takes up the story on a more positive note, “At the time I was also working for the Overseas Karen Refugee Organisation (OKRO) which also provides learning opportunities for migrant workers and it was then that I met with the scholarship alumni - they are not alumni yet; they are scholarship students who are studying in Thailand, but they work as volunteer teachers. When I see that they are studying at the university I really want to study like that. I admire them because they are also Myanmar Karen people and they can study at an international university and they are also working for the education of the migrants and I want to be one of them”.

As she recounts this her voice wavers and her eyes suddenly fill with tears, “Right then I have the dream that one day if I become a teacher I will come back to my country and then I will be the

teacher here. I will help the young people not have to go to Thailand anymore...” she stops to catch her breath and wipe away the tears adding, “...because for people here, for us, it is difficult – very difficult – to have a good education, you know, and as a migrant worker it’s very difficult for you to be an international student – to study like that.”

When we get up to leave the lights in the main prayer hall above flicker on and the classroom fills with a weak orange glow. We straighten the desks and chairs and Eh Klain says, “Every time I have to talk about my past experience I have to go back there to the struggle and the sadness” wiping away more tears as she says this, “but when I get the scholarship I feel very special – I feel like I have a responsibility for my community – it starts from then like that – I feel like I am more privileged than others because my education is supported and then after I graduate I have to be someone useful for my community.”

I begin this chapter with Eh Klain’s story – her departure from home and hopelessness in Hpa-an, the struggle and sadness of her years as a migrant worker in the Thai borderlands, her hopes and aspirations for a better life and education, her awakening social conscience and increasing sense of responsibility, the eventual fulfilment of her aspirations with the growing success of her own school back in Hpa-an – because it is a narrative and trajectory shared by a growing number of Karen committed to the development and expansion of non-state education in Hpa-an today.

They came of age in the years immediately before the start of Myanmar’s reform and transition process and struggled to find appropriate and available educational and occupational pathways within the country but did so through Karen exile communities and social networks in neighbouring Thailand. However, rather than remaining like so many others, seemingly waiting or in limbo (Jeffrey, Jeffery and Jeffery 2007; Mains 2012), Hpa-an’s ‘scholarship alumni’ returned home to enact new freedoms and aspirations made available by that reform process.

I argue that this decision and its consequences were prompted and shaped by a series of ‘vital conjunctures’ (Johnson-Hanks 2002) in which they were all forced to make critical decisions about their future and their education at various times and places (see Chapter 2, pp. 76-78). Following my theoretical conception, I hold that the aspirations with which young people navigate these vital conjunctures are socially embedded and “always formed in interaction and the thick of social life”

(Appadurai 2004b: 67). In this initial empirical chapter I therefore want to investigate the durations around those critical decisions in relation to education in order to identify what specific structural factors - be they norms, values, particular social actors and/or institutions as well as historical experiences - have guided decisions about the future and how they have shaped aspirations.

The chapter is divided into three key sections: initially, I reflect on the example of Eh Klain's ('Kind') trajectory from education to employment and what this tells us about this particular context and youth transitions within it.

In the main body of the chapter, I go on to investigate the specific sites of those vital conjunctures predominantly in Hpa-an, both before and into Myanmar's transition. Drawing on a series of in-depth interviews with each of Hpa-an's 12 scholarship alumni responsible for developing new learning sites in Hpa-an, I identify what specific factors substantiate the 'crisis of youth' afflicting this particular context and shaping youth transitions during this period.

In the final section of the chapter, I consider how this crisis and the constraints substantiating it manifest themselves through and around community-based education, in particular, now including new learning sites in Hpa-an like Eh Klein's school. I consider the nature of the cultural compromise this has and continues to exercise on the ability of these young people to navigate their transitions. In so doing, I point towards the ways and means by which the scholarship alumni circumvent this through their aspiration to change the self and the situation now and into the future.

The struggle and the sadness: socio-cultural factors shaping positions and possibilities

Eh Klain's transition from high school student in Hpa-an to establishing her own school back there nearly a decade later is extended, contested, and unsettling. It unfolds over the course of nearly a decade and is indeed continuing to do so now as she contemplates further educational transitions, building on those she has already made across the Karen borderlands and in the Thai capital before and into Myanmar's transition. Therefore, far from being marked by a 'turning point' or 'critical moment', it has involved a number of transitions as she changes residence (from Hpa-an to Mae Sot to Bangkok and back to Hpa-an), and the various roles and identities she assumes (high school student

to informal worker to university scholarship student to welfare entrepreneur) as she tracks between these different selves and situations, between different countries and communities, over time.

When viewed as a series of vital conjunctures these 'zones of possibility' become much clearer to apprehend, and with them the specific social and structural forces framing them. Indeed, as Johnson-Hanks (2002) reminds us, "'Life stages' emerge only as a result of institutional projects... their coherence should be an object, rather than an assumption, of ethnographic study" (ibid: 865). Amidst the apparent incoherence of Eh Klain's trajectory, different and dominant institutions loom large - the state high school she attended in Hpa-an and later the patronage of the Kyar Taw Ya Monastery; in Thailand, the Karen social welfare organisation where she worked and learned English and Thai, the charity that awarded her the scholarship, the private Christian university in Bangkok where she studied: formal and many informal⁷⁵ institutions variously expand and constrain her options at different times and locations as she swings from determination to despair and renewed determination, prompting her to make a decision in relation to her education which in turn has significant consequences for her future.

Furthermore, in sharing the struggles and successes around her education and its outcomes she reveals how these possibilities are conditioned by structural forces at times less obvious but no less decisive to her options: changing familial roles and expectations as she has to assume increasing responsibility for her family; stable and shifting cultural norms and values as she strives to balance her growing aspirations with her commitments to her family and community; evolving social and cultural networks on both sides of the border and the developing personal and strategic relations this involves with particular role models and patrons many of whom remain in the shadows; as well as changes in national laws and legislation that first confound and then facilitate her enhanced social and spatial mobility.

The bearing that these dynamics have on this young woman's transition(s) would appear to vindicate Pam Nilan's reticence over calls for a so-called 'cosmopolitan sociology' of youth (see Chapter 2, pp. 68-69) that risks "rip[ping] young people from the local foundations of their families and

⁷⁵ Read also, 'state' and 'non-state'.

communities” (Nilan 2011: 21). Eh Klain’s strong obligations to her family as well as her community, for example, compel her to leave as much as they do to return to Hpa-an again in the future. These relationships and the cultural expectations informing them clearly have a considerable bearing on her transitions, as much as a more general and global aspiration shared by educated young people like her for the continued acquisition of academic credentials and the socio-economic dividends these promise, despite diminished prospects within uncertain and volatile labour markets (Jeffrey, Jeffery and Jeffery 2007).

Furthermore, Eh Klain’s story illustrates that her transition from education to employment within this particular context encompasses a wide set of institutions and actors not limited to obvious learning and livelihood domains we might associate with these particular transitions. Religious institutions, welfare organisations and charities, assume a significant profile and bearing on her shifting position and the possibilities around it within this particular context and at that specific moment. Indeed, these positions and possibilities are also very much determined by the fluctuating socio-political context within which she is situated in the context of Myanmar’s transition. This creates as much as it constrains opportunities around alternative non-state education in the face of which she both struggles and succeeds, first as a student then as a teacher by moving away and then back again.

Time and timing are indeed crucial here. Eh Klain’s transitions necessarily occur over an extended period of time as she is required to navigate fluctuating zones of possibility presented by wider social and structural shifts to the context within which she is situated - a context that is itself ‘in motion’ (Vigh 2006). So, we see her move from educated and unemployed high school graduate lacking hope and impetus in government-controlled Hpa-an, to distressed and dissolute migrant worker at the margins of Thai society struggling to move forward. However, when she encounters the OKRO in Mae Sot new educational possibilities quickly open up and we see her move to aspiring undergraduate and increasingly committed social worker. Her aspirations – that is, the possibilities for action in the present/immediate with respect to the future/imagined – are thereby enhanced and enabled not only by the opportunities afforded by the shifting structural within which she is situated, but by the example of a similar social group and generation making the opportunity to act on them both visible and viable for her at this time; as she says at the memory of this encounter, “It starts from then like that”.

Crucially, the uncertainty associated with the deferred and displaced nature of her transitions allows her to frame more credible transitions in the end. The ‘struggle and the sadness’ involved has clearly imbued this trajectory with moral significance for her as someone who is, in having been fortunate enough to successfully navigate them, “special... more privileged than others” and therefore upon whom it is that much more incumbent “to be someone useful for my community”. This aspiration, like those of the Malawian schoolgirls in Frye’s study (2012) (see Chapter 2, pp. 95-96), emerges as a potent assertion of identity and initiative driving her response to them in the present.

Given that the struggle and the sadness continue to afflict many young people’s transitions, the maintenance of these aspirations is that much more important to her and those like her who have shared similar experiences in the past. Indeed, it assumes a particular form and focus ‘to be the teacher here’ so that young people ‘do not have to go to Thailand anymore’. In this way, we see her and her associates actively turning these circumstances into a set of plausible possibilities, at once more credible for the struggle and the sadness upon which they have been founded.

These experiences are clearly ‘as enduring as they are profound’ (see Chapter 2, p. 85). In the next section, I therefore provide a brief portrait of the social group and generation with which Eh Klain is associated - Hpa-an’s scholarship alumni – who have shared similar experiences to the ones she describes above. By viewing these young people still more closely in relation to the historical junctures that have shaped their transitions, as described in Chapter 1 I account for the sense of ‘common destiny’ (see Chapter 2, pp. 84-87) they share, and their collective aspiration to shape Myanmar’s transition through their collective action around community-based education in Hpa-an.

Aspirational alliances: a brief portrait of Hpa-an’s scholarship alumni ‘generation’

‘Scholarship alumni’ is a self-ascribed and emic label primarily referring to Karen graduates of private Thai universities, though at the time of research was being used more widely by other ethnic nationality groups gaining some access to these scholarships. Indeed, to be referred to and included as ‘scholarship alumni’ is to wear a badge of significant academic and social prestige within this community and beyond. Since Karen students are the majority beneficiaries of these academic endowments, by virtue of their proximity to the border-based charities originally issuing these, it is, I

argue, a particular mark of Karen social and academic mobility at present, around which other networks have since been established⁷⁶. However, the enhanced educational mobility with which this collective action is associated is the product of specific historical struggles and successes around education within the context of Myanmar's fraught transition which, as we have seen, have been both dispiriting and decisive to their transitions.

All Hpa-an's scholarship alumni were born in the early to late 1980s immediately before the 1988 critical juncture (Smith 1991). (see Chapter 1, p. 27 & p. 39). Their early lives were therefore overshadowed by government control, intrusion and regulation which exacted a particular cultural compromise on their ability to access viable educational pathways through state and dominant forms of non-state provision. Girls and young women, as well as non-Buddhist Karen amongst them were to struggle that much harder in gaining access to this provision.

Whilst benefitting from informal education initiatives and summer schools existing under the patronage of religious leaders and institutions 'under wraps' during this period, these proved limited. This was only compounded by the wave of state-making and assimilation policies which undermined the local economy and labour market prompting a veritable 'crisis of youth' in Hpa-an as well as other Karen populated areas of the country, in the face of which they struggled to secure gainful employment.

Hpa-an's scholarship alumni were to benefit from decisive encounters around post-16 migrant education on the Thai border made possible by increasing development assistance at this time, significantly enhancing their options around education and employment. It nonetheless exposed them to a growing culture of dependency and subordination which they hold responsible for perpetuating legacies of indefinite migration and family fragmentation, considerably impinging on community development and protection back home.

The acquisition of scholarships to private universities in the Thai capital undoubtedly marked them out as more fortunate than many others. Furthermore, it was to expose them to cosmopolitan ideas and ideals that challenged parochial and partisan identifications and agenda that had

⁷⁶ For example, the Myanmar Scholarship Alumni Association (MSAA) and the Karen University Students Association (KUSA).

undermined pathways from learning to livelihoods at home. Nevertheless, as we shall see, fluctuating zones of privilege and prejudice within these exclusive learning domains very much informed their experiences and encounters around higher education abroad, compounding their commitment to a more inclusive and socially informed educational agenda back home.

The majority of Hpa-an's scholarship alumni are originally from Hpa-an, its surrounding villages and elsewhere in eastern Karen State. However, over recent years some have joined the initiatives in Hpa-an from Ayeyarwady division, others from Insein township in Yangon, the largely Karen-populated enclave in the commercial capital, others from Taungoo in Bago Region and Thandaungyi in northern Karen State, central-east Myanmar. They therefore offer a broad cross-section of Karen populations from across the country and whilst Buddhist Plong Karen account for the majority of Karen in areas of eastern Karen State like Hpa-an, nearly half of its scholarship alumni are Christian Karen including a minority of Sgaw-speaking Karen. They maintain gender parity across management and teaching within the academies.

As youth and community leaders in a largely Plong Karen context they draw on a broad range of Karen ethno-religious identifications and networks without particular identifications and affiliations predominating. It is important to note, therefore, that Hpa-an's scholarship alumni appear relatively unencumbered by the kinds of ethno-nationalist affiliations and bias that have historically accounted for Karen intra-ethnic social, political and educational differences in the past (Cheesman 2003; Thawngmung 2012), and particularly those between Sgaw Christian and Plong Buddhist Karen agenda and aspirations (South 2007b)⁷⁷. In drawing on a wide range of regional associations they would appear to offer a more inclusive understanding of Karen identity less susceptible to parochial and partisan affiliation and with positive implications for a pan-Karen communitarian project, its welfare and development initiatives (see Chapter 1, pp. 33-34).

⁷⁷ Current tensions between Sgaw Christian and Plong Buddhist Karen have been most forcefully expressed through the building of pagodas on Christian Karen church compounds over recent years (Weng 2016). These intercommunal tensions have been felt elsewhere in civil society; as described to me by a scholarship alumnus and senior youth leader in Hpa-an, initiatives around Karen education, development and youth mobilisation mark a fault line in Hpa-an civil society engagement within the transition, between those serving a more Karen nationalist agenda which is closely aligned to the (KNU) peace process and a seemingly less partisan platform more concerned with increasing capabilities and capacities through civic education, community development and through inter-ethnic cooperation and coalition (Interview: 18th August 2015).

In the following sections, I now explore how this socio-historical context has shaped the contents of the vital conjunctures experienced by this specific group of young people from the completion of high school and/or university in Myanmar. I am particularly interested in exposing the particular institutional and structural forces informing experiences and encounters as part of the ‘crisis of youth’ in Hpa-an and crucially the efforts these young people have gone to in order to navigate around them at this time and in this context.

Between a rock and a hard place: navigating the ‘crisis of youth’ in authoritarian Hpa-an

i. *Broken schools: state education, aspirational deficits, and (missed) opportunity costs*

Framing the life experiences of all Hpa-an’s scholarship alumni is the uncertainty and stasis following the completion of high school or university in Myanmar. It does indeed emerge as a ‘conjuncture’ when more than one life domain - career, residence and professional identity - are at stake and come into close association, the joint evaluation of which defines the completion of education as a vital conjuncture when transitions across a number of personal indices are at stake (Johnson-Hanks 2002: 871). It is therefore a point at which multiple aspirations converge and are in flux.

Nann Eh Klain (‘Kind’) described this experience as one of high but unfulfilled hopes – one in which the potential inherent in gaining her High School Certificate was clearly and quickly undermined by a lack of available pathways in Hpa-an, be they educational or occupational. For her and many like her, this critical duration is therefore remembered as a difficult and frustrating time when aspirations for further study, vocational training and career development far from being clear and coherent are constrained and compromised.

The stark contrast between high occupational aspirations and poor economic opportunities that Eh Klain refers to above appears indicative of that facing many young people on leaving secondary school and university in other contexts around the world and particularly in the global South. In places as diverse as Ethiopia (Mains 2012), Senegal (Ralph 2008), Papua New Guinea (Ralph 2008), India (Jeffrey, Jeffery and Jeffery 2007) and Nepal (Kölbel 2015), the expansion of modern education systems coupled with a stagnant labour market has left a generation of young people without any tangible prospects for adequate employment that would allow them to build a secure future. This so-called

‘crisis’ of youth (Weiss 2004: 14–16) in which young people emerge as educated but unemployed or under-employed has been particularly evident in contexts experiencing protracted political and economic crises (Newman 1999, 2008; Wyn & Andres 2011). This has only amplified young people’s struggle to envision potential future pathways, as it did before and continues to do during Myanmar’s uncertain and uneven transition.

The crisis facing Hpa-an’s scholarship alumni in the years before the transition was compounded by their specific encounter with state educational structures. Throughout my research, sustained criticism was levelled at state secondary schooling and higher education in almost all aspects of provision; these were most clearly and forcefully articulated by those currently engaged in it confirming that this continues to be a perceived constraint. Indeed, I well remember one of the young, recently graduated, academy students telling me that it was, in his opinion, the “broken schools, broken houses and then broken people” that was the main problem with his community (see Chapter 6, p. 220⁷⁸); for him, at least, it was the root cause of so many social problems.

For Eh Klain and others, encounters with the state education system and, in particular higher education, before the country’s political transition can be seen to add to the sense of existential crisis and uncertainty by appearing to enhance their prospects through the acquisition of high school and degree certificates whilst failing to do so in reality. Scholarship alumna Nann Phaw Eah (‘Lovely Flower’), a contemporary of Eh Klain’s, and now a prominent youth leader in Hpa-an explained it in the following terms,

I could only study at the university here for one month and then I quit without telling my mother; I just went on my own to the border and found my education opportunity there because I don’t like the system of education in the university here – it is closed; a closed system, you had to read and you had to remember everything – I don’t like it; it’s a waste of time because at the end you have nothing. Also, I went to Thailand to work as a migrant worker because at that time I don’t have any money and there are job opportunities for Karen people there not here.⁷⁹

A pervading lack of trust and confidence in the state’s secondary and higher education systems was frequently articulated by reference to it being a constrained and ‘closed’ system – dominated by

⁷⁸ Interview (M18): 8th November 2016

⁷⁹ Interview (F35): 21st November 2016

rote learning and teacher-centred approaches – and, as such, not a viable educational option or ‘opportunity’. At the same time, the absence of alternative vocational education and training has only accentuated this crisis (see Chapter 1, p. 40), whilst a lack of available jobs and employment in Hpa-an fails to provide alternative pathways away from that. As expressed here, educational and occupational aspirations at this vital juncture are closely related in the memory – both are foreclosed by a lack of opportunities through which to extend them in the locality.

In the case of Hpa-an, it therefore appears that the crisis of youth is seemingly inflected, where an outdated and poorly resourced state education system and stagnant labour market have contrived to exacerbate the predicament – the former lacking pertinence, the latter possibility. Under such circumstances, social mobility is constrained in the immediate and the imagined (Vigh 2009a), restricting mobility now and in the future by failing to equip young people with relevant skills and aptitudes, and failing to provide the opportunities through which to exercise them on graduating and in the future. The extent of this crisis – now both un/under-educated as well as un/under-employed – defines many of the vital junctures around the completion of high school and university for Hpa-an’s scholarship alumni. The only means of circumventing these constraints is apparently to migrate away from the predicament, as Nann Phaw Eah (‘Lovely Flower’) suggests.

A number of alumni, however, commented on the efficacy of having opted for a UDE degree as opposed to taught courses (see Chapter 1, pp. 49-50). Though a much-maligned state mechanism, this alternative pathway did at least allow them the time and opportunity to engage in the informal labour market whilst working towards their degree certificate. Many talked of maintaining small jobs through family, friends and social networks, thereby offsetting some of those informal occupational opportunity costs otherwise incurred (King and Hill 1993; Brown 2003; Punch 2007). For most of these UDE students, this meant spending more not less time in the state education system as their degrees frequently extended well beyond three years. Nevertheless, this decision amounts to a tactic by which these young people have sought to offset the crisis and its accompanying uncertainty by accessing that particularly part of state provision which allows them the greatest possibility with which to maintain trajectories between education and employment.

However, as Phaw Eah ('Lovely Flower') says above, it remains 'a waste time' when 'you end up with nothing' to show for it. Under these circumstances, the currency of credentials such as high school and degree certificates is considerably diminished and qualifications appear compromised as a positional good (Hirsch 1977)⁸⁰, as the attainment of certificates and credentials rarely enhance transitions in the context of a stagnant labour market. Despite this, the fact remains that these credentials are not without some currency in Myanmar. Indeed, we recall those proudly displayed graduation photos in family homes across the country (see Chapter 1, pp. 29-30), confirming that for many young people they appear to be worth the struggle to gain despite being of little practical value in furthering their transitions. It seems likely that this certification provides access to other benefits, recognition and resources which therefore imbue this with greater currency within social rather than specifically educational and occupational spheres or that it will accrue value at some point in the future.

The legacy of this crisis assumes still greater resonance within the context of the ongoing economic and political transition. Young people now coming of age in such parts of provincial Myanmar, especially in border regions, are faced with more local employment opportunities than at any time before as INGO and humanitarian agencies open field offices and seek to recruit local staff⁸¹. As a scholarship alumnus and head teacher told me, "There are just so many jobs in that sector – its exploded; it's incredible!"⁸². And yet state approaches to education remain unchanged and unresponsive to these new realities and the aspirations they might prompt⁸³. Graduates therefore enter a rapidly expanding labour market conspicuously lacking the technical knowledge, skills and

⁸⁰ I use this term with respect to the way that credentials of this kind are "subject to congestion and crowding through more extensive use" (Hirsch 1977: 27) undermining their relative currency/credibility.

⁸¹ In its September 2016 situational analysis of south-eastern Myanmar, the Myanmar Information Management Unit (MIMU) reported that "foreign donors' funding modalities for public services are shifting. Previously, many donors based their funding activities for Myanmar in Thailand. However, efforts are now being made to support activities based in-country. This has generated some resentment among those recipient organisations that have seen funding opportunities dwindle" (MIMU 2016). This shift has particularly affected Karen State given its proximity to Thai border where many of these development and humanitarian agencies were previously based.

⁸² Interview (F32): 18th August 2015

⁸³ This includes the Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR) (2012-2014) which was used to formulate a National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) (2016-2021) together with a Quick Wins programme covering all domains of education including secondary, higher, vocational, and non-state education (Jolliffe and Speers Mears 2016). In spite of the profile of these government-managed reform mechanisms the pace of change remains slow in the face of rapid socio-economic development in the country, threatening to make the quality and relevance of state education a persistent problem in the years to come.

aptitudes to meet its demands - the very capabilities required with which to play an active role in the development of their own communities.

ii. *Broken homes: socio-cultural deficits and diverging transitions*

The negative consequences of the crisis therefore multiplies over time as many, failing to find viable employment options, are left 'churning' (Furlong and Cartmel 2007) or moving from one small job to the next in and around Hpa-an for years at a time. Eh Klain ('Kind') was compelled to do this for at least a few years before she had to leave Myanmar at the age of 20 on the death of her father. And this is also true of other Karen in different parts of the country; her fiancé, Saw Shar Phaung Khlain ('Star'), graduating from a missionary school in Myaungmya in Ayeyarwady division, described a similar sense of stasis on completing secondary school. His only option for university was the nearby Myanmar Union Adventist Seminary; since this did not appeal to him, he worked as a vegetable farmer in his home village for over a year before realising that this was no longer viable and making for the border.

Furthermore, the extent of the youth crisis can be seen to widen and deepen as many young people, questioning the point and purpose of an education which lacks credibility and currency, drop out of school earlier each year (see Appendices 6-7a, pp. 285-287). Many in and around Hpa-an are entering this stasis at an earlier age and remaining in it longer than they would otherwise do so on the completion of school or university, much as Nann Phaw Eah ('Lovely Flower') and others chose to do before the transition.

This clearly contributes to other poor social outcomes. Whilst the crisis afflicts all parts of Hpa-an township it appears to be felt most keenly in surrounding rural areas where the quality and coverage of state provision is poorest and where alternative pathways and opportunities away from it are at their most scarce. As scholarship alumnus Saw Eh So ('Patriot'), founder and head teacher of the Bridge for All programme based near the village of Tantaroo, some 20 miles southeast of Hpa-an, explains:

The drugs are the biggest problem. Many young people just drop out of the school when they are very young. In the rural areas there are no opportunities but in the towns you see more opportunities and for that reason I started Bridge for All; it was also to inspire them to be responsible people. They barely have any education - they don't know the importance of education so they can't watch over themselves and each other. And they don't have anything to do and they cannot afford to stay in the town for the opportunities there, so they become victims to the drugs.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Interview (M34): 11th November 2016

Lacking credible education and employment opportunities many young people, particularly in rural areas, are left without even the option to ‘churn’ or indeed any constructive pathways to avoid and confront entrenched legacies of methamphetamine abuse continuing to afflict communities in many parts of Karen State, not least those situated close to the resource-rich unregulated borderlands (see Kobori *et al.* 2009).

This often involves more than one generation, as Eh So went on to explain, meaning that many families are consumed in the cycle of abuse and addiction, lacking the experience and education with which to confront and escape it. This is often accompanied by indebtedness; a number of families with which I came into contact through my research were involved in the smuggling and trafficking of illicit substances and therefore caught in cycles of violence and poverty with which this activity is commonly associated. Some of these young people identified this as the only viable and stable form of employment open to them in this location; as one of them said to me, “It is there because nothing else is there!”⁸⁵. The presence of Saw Eh So’s academy alone is not enough to respond to these entrenched educational and social deficits. Furthermore, the presence of this institution in this particular rural location threatens to accentuate social and aspirational disparities amongst rural as well as between urban and rural youth, setting them on diverging trajectories into the country’s transition.



Established by a scholarship alumnus from this particular village who previously taught at one of the academies in town.

Figure 12. Bridge for All? *The only academy currently serving Hpa-an’s rural youth* (Picture Sources: Academy Facebook page)



⁸⁵ Interview (M31): 25th March 2015

This exposes the extent to which state provision has impinged on youth transitions amongst rural youth in particular (see Appendix 9, p. 288; see also Leavy and Smith 2010; Farrugia 2014). Indeed, for those scholarship alumni like Saw Eh So who grew up in the small towns and villages around Hpa-an and in other rural and peri-urban contexts these kinds of negative social outcomes, closely associated with educational deficits, frequently attend the vital conjunctures around the completion of their own education. They consequently bemoan the state's failure to redress them now and in the past as part of a broader commitment to personal and social development, 'to inspire them to be responsible people' as he says, 'and to watch over themselves and each other'.

Indeed, Nann Phaw Eah ('Lovely Flower'), who grew up in Ein Du, a small town on the road to Tantaroo, talked repeatedly about the need "to change the mind-set of young people"⁸⁶, identifying a pressing need to supplement approaches to education if they are to have the capacity to do so. This suggests that aspirations around emerging forms of alternative education might respond to issues of personal and collective wellbeing (Wyn 2009; Wyn and Andres 2011; Chase 2020) currently undermining youth transitions in rural communities near Hpa-an, as well as broader notions of social mobility (necessarily encompassing ideas of social obligation and responsibility) in order to tackle those specific and entrenched dynamics informing the crisis of youth in this region.

This stark contrast between aspirations and opportunities, which is at the centre of the debate around the apparent crisis of youth in a range of locations around the world, profoundly marks the vital conjunctures of Hpa-an's scholarship alumni and remains powerfully inflected in contemporary Myanmar. It is, almost in every case, a protracted and frustrating experience during which aspirations are repeatedly thwarted and often indefinitely. The critical duration on completion of high school or university is therefore remembered as paths not taken and alternatives since closed (Johnson-Hanks 2002); it is associated with the specific nature of the social constraints and the poor social outcomes that mark that duration: educational options at home are not credible or viable, even if they might now appear available in nearby urban centres; occupational avenues are limited or at best insubstantial; space and opportunity to develop alternative responses remains constrained; a widening gulf between

⁸⁶ Interview (F35): 21st November 2016

urban and rural needs and opportunities is compounded by legacies of substance abuse, poverty and underdevelopment which continue to go unaddressed by Myanmar's ongoing reform and transition process.

iii. *Dreaming of a better future: educational deficits and the incapacity to aspire*

Under these circumstances, state education can be seen to transfer poor social outcomes both in and around Hpa-an and from one generation to the next, suggesting that it has long failed to provide pathways made visible and viable through the example of others. Few appear to emerge from school or university with options or ideas of how to progress as they lack positive and proven examples to emulate and follow (see Frawley, Larkin and Smith 2017). Now, as well as before the transition, government teachers, who may appear well placed to act as such positive role models, emerge as weak and constrained in the narratives of both scholarship alumni and their students; positive notions of social responsibility, service and leadership with which they might be associated are therefore undermined and the profession of teaching is deemed uninspiring and unappealing. These potential pathways, which should have the capacity to exercise a positive effect on the aspirations of the next generation, are therefore compromised in the eyes of many.

It is for this reason that the scholarship alumni often reflected on the relationship between education and aspirations through the metaphor of frustrated and foreclosed dreams or dreaming. For example, scholarship alumnus Saw Eh Phlon ('Karen Boy'), the founder of a successful local NGO which now runs civic education and youth leadership programmes in Hpa-an, explained it in the following terms,

I asked one student, 'What do you want to do for your future?' He replied, 'What do you mean?' so I said, 'Do you want to be doctor or engineer or someone else?' and he said, 'What is a doctor? What is an engineer?' So I asked him, 'You don't have that dream?!' 'Dream?' he replies, 'yes, every night I dream but I never dream about what I want to be; I don't *know* what I want to be'. This kid is maybe the future, yet he doesn't have a dream! It was the same for me so I decided at that point that I wanted to be the *dream creator* for those young people who can't dream!⁸⁷

Here, Eh Phlon's own struggle to identify tangible and viable pathways before the transition clearly informs his aspirations and their enactment within it, 'to be the dream creator', as he puts it. Moreover,

⁸⁷ Interview (M28): 9th April 2015 (respondent's emphasis)

the encounter he reflects upon here exemplifies the gulf between the capacity and the capability to aspire within this particular context. The young student Saw Eh Phlon encountered clearly lacked even the capacity to frame aspirations of any kind given “the lack of opportunities, experiences, relationships and resources” (Appadurai 2004: 179) to fashion these around (see Chapter 2, p. 92). This awareness prompts Eh Phlon to explore alternative means not limited to dominant structures that might allow him and his community to navigate around constraints determining their structured positions; his civic education initiative is intended to do just this – enhance the capacity of young people to aspire and thereby their capability to do so.

In a similar vein, one afternoon whilst chatting in a local teahouse, Saw Khung Suu (‘Peaceful Nation’), co-founder and head teacher of the Zwegabin Myay⁸⁸ Education Project, provided me with a more esoteric example and explanation for this. Dismissing my questions with a wave of his hand, he told me what he felt I ‘needed to know’ by saying,

You know when I was in Yangon there is a learning centre for blind people and my analogy here is that it was interesting seeing the blind people playing football - watching them I understand something about them: that there are two *very different* kinds of blind people - those who have been born blind and those who became blind later. They’re not the same; they act differently you know... The most important thing to remember is that people who become blind later, they dream; people who have always been blind never dream because to dream you know, you need to know colour and light to build a realistic picture. So what you have seen during the day, what we call ‘subconscious’ you know, whilst sleeping that comes to your mind and you dream.

Ok, so here we ask the university students, ‘What do you want to be?’ and they say, ‘I don’t know’ – they have been taught *what* to think, not *how* to think... the 88 generation, the students at that time, they dreamed, you know⁸⁹; maybe some of them became blind later because of centralisation [authoritarianism] you know, but they still dream; but after like how many decades since 1962...⁹⁰ after forty-odd years people have just gone blind you know! Their parents had no dream, you know, so they never heard of any dream from their parents; so that is one of the reasons why the students do not participate, you know, because they cannot dream; they have *always* been blind.⁹¹

These reflections on the relationship between aspiration, blindness and dreams appear to suggest a still closer association between the paucity of educational and occupational pathways and the struggle

⁸⁸ Meaning ‘Zwegabin Land’ since it is situated on Zwegabin Road which leads out of town to the foot of Zwegabin mountain.

⁸⁹ The ‘88 Generation Students Group’ is a prominent pro-democracy movement known for its activism against Myanmar’s military *junta*, taking its name from the 8888 Uprising, a series of student-led protests in 1988 opposing the military rule of Ne Win which constituted the aforementioned ‘critical juncture’.

⁹⁰ The year that Myanmar effectively became an authoritarian state when General Ne Win seized power in a coup d’état on 2nd March of that year, ushering in decades of military rule which effectively lasted for over half a century until the elections of November 2015 which brought Daw Aung San Suu Kyi’s party, the National League for Democracy, to power.

⁹¹ Field notes (M27): 3rd September 2015 (respondent’s emphasis)

to construct viable aspirations. Indeed, it offers a profound insight around the evolving legacy of educational and occupational deprivation in Hpa-an which has clearly extended over time to such an extent that the capacity, let alone the capability, to aspire has been significantly diminished impinging on youth transitions for successive generations before and into the transition.

The community-based initiatives both Saw Eh Phlon ('Karen Boy') and Saw Khung Suu ('Peaceful Nation') have developed are specifically intended to overcome and indeed transform the structural context within which young people are situated by developing their capacity to dream as young people in this region did many years ago. Indeed, we might speculate that this particular social group and generation see the need for this more clearly and keenly than previous generations were able at this particular juncture in the history of their country and community.

In the final section of this chapter, I explore how the domain of community-based education, facilitated by traditional civil society institutions and their often powerful individual leaders, has long sought to respond to the crisis of youth in authoritarian Hpa-an. I begin by exploring the relational dynamic of youth transitions in this context which has an avowedly spiritual dimension as young people turn to religious institutions and their leaders, drawing on different sets of spiritual ideals with which to navigate the uncertainty. Indeed, I go on to illustrate how community-based education provided by churches and monasteries with which this engagement is associated has traditionally offered 'a zone of relative local autonomy' (South 2011) intended to alleviate constraints on youth transitions within this locality.

I then draw new learning sites – Hpa-an's network of academies – into the picture of community-based responses in Hpa-an currently responding to that crisis within the context of the Karen peace process and amidst formidable Buddhist hegemony in this region. I argue that in order to advance this ethno-religious agenda, spiritual involvement in secular initiatives like Hpa-an's academies is now seeking to exercise cultural constraints that serve to exacerbate the crisis of youth for specific identity groups and their capacity to dream of a different future. I nevertheless register how this is being resisted by a generation of young people with different visions of the future.

Ideals: gateways, bridges, and other aspirations

The names of Hpa-an's various academies offer telling insights around local perceptions of youth transitions in this particular context. Moreover, the way in which these names and identities were conferred on these institutions suggests something of the different aspirations and agenda governing these institutions and, by extension, the transitions of those attempting to navigate through these institutions.

Tounge Là Yat, for example, translates roughly as 'Moving Forward' in Plong Karen. As the staff of EGG told me, the Plong name was conferred, as tradition warrants, on their academy by the *Sayadaw* of Taungalay Monastery, the vast monastic complex 5 miles northeast of central Hpa-an within whose spiritual and political *mandala*⁹² the township is situated. The English alternative 'Education Gathering Group' was added later by the scholarship alumni, in part to distinguish between the specific educational programme (*Tounge Là Yat*) and the wider organisation (EGG). This, however, appears to amount to a significant 'rebranding' as part of which an increasing amount of the academy's activity within Myanmar's transition is now happening outside the purview and patronage of religious and particularly monastic oversight, with the intention of attracting the attention of those beyond the parameters of this locality be that prospective students and/or funding agencies.

This activity involves at least one other learning centre in town catering for the needs of students not able to access the curriculum at EGG, support for other similar initiatives in rural locations, as well as the nearby youth centre, YCC, and its range of youth and vocational training activities. The programme also facilitates staff training and professional development through a Thai University affiliated project management course delivered by local staff through night classes, not limited to the training of teachers but project management training more generally. There are long-standing plans to develop Hpa-an's first Community College from this basis (see Introduction, p. 5; Chapter 6, pp. 211-212).

This broad educational agenda is intent on addressing a variety of transitions not only individual but institutional transitions; not only education-to-employment but transitions within and

⁹² Pāli, meaning 'circle' and applied here as a Southeast Asian political formation or 'political orbit'.

beyond those domains as young people navigate between different learning spaces, both academic and vocational. It is therefore concerned with supporting young people to progress – that is, ‘to move forward’ – in a number of ways and from a number of positions, assuming that they may occupy more than one of those positions at any one time as teachers pursue a course at night school and students work at YCC in the evening. The programme itself ‘gathers’ this ‘group’ of different stakeholders in this disparate but shared enterprise as they ‘move forward’ with their lives and future aspirations.

In a similar vein, Nann Eh Klain (‘Kind’) told me she originally wanted to give her new school a Karen name – ‘*Kamawsu*’ – the Plong name for the Salween River but was dissuaded by the *Sayadaw* of the monastery on the grounds that it lacked relevance. Instead, he suggested the current name; as she told me, “We are teaching our students to go to further study, so it is a ‘gateway’ for them”.⁹³ Indeed, she predominantly caters for high school students specifically seeking a ‘gateway’ to University degree courses and scholarship opportunities abroad.

However, it became apparent to me later in conversation with the *Sayadaw* of this monastery that ‘gateway’ had other meanings which might point to different understandings of youth transitions. As he explained to me, the notion of a ‘gateway’ is rooted in *Buddhasāsana*, that is the teachings of The Buddha, which dictates that only through *pariyatti* (study) and *paṭipatti* (practice), can we achieve *paṭivedha* (realisation) (Bodhi 2005). The ‘gateway’ here is therefore both a pedagogical and a practical one, as the capacity to learn thrives in tandem with the practice of that learning and therefore the capability to act on it; the two being mutually dependable, otherwise understanding/realisation eludes the student. Moreover, as he went on to explain,

There are two types of education: one is for *life* education and another is for *future* education so we can divide education into two paths – education for real life in this world, and the other being education for another life as we reach to heaven. So, for the second level, you need a little bit of merit – you have to be stronger than normal people to go to another level – this is not just about what we know it is about how we *act* on what we know⁹⁴.

This is to suggest that the aforementioned notion of education is embedded within a cosmological and transcendent notion of education – that the transition through the former might facilitate a transition to the latter.

⁹³ Interview: 17th November 2016

⁹⁴ Interview: 15th November 2016 (including all subsequent comments from this source; respondent’s emphasis throughout)

The *Sayadaw* explained to me that it was for this reason that the learning centre beneath his monastery has an inclusive admissions policy by which,

We support *all* ethnic people and all religions - Muslim, Hindu, Christian – *everyone* can come and study here. This education [academy] is a neutral space for everybody, for the prosperity of the people and the country and not just because of *religion*. If we want to live in the world, we have to be able to interact with *everybody* and cooperate with *everyone* around the world.”

This set of ideas point towards the moral, and the avowedly (Theravada) Buddhist, basis of this education as part of which it emerges as a space of multiple transitions as well as a space of multiple connections (Wyn 2014) (See Introduction, p. 12, footnote 9; Chapter 2, p. 67). In regarding the transitions of the young people in this context we should therefore be mindful that their aspirations around their education and occupational transitions are embedded within this rich spiritual cosmology. This may lend an added dimension to the struggles and successes with which they navigate these terrains.

The *Sayadaw's* ‘gateway’ is an expansive and enlightened one given the dramatic rise of Buddhist nationalism across the country and this region in particular (ICG 2017; Gravers and Jørgensen 2020), and the role this continues to play in the much publicised Rohingya crisis in Rakhine State far away from Hpa-an in the northwest (Walton 2020, 2021). I therefore want to probe the nature of these connections a bit more, first with specific *individuals* and then *institutions*, many of which are associated with different kinds of traditional and religious sensibilities coalescing in this locality. I then look more closely at the ethno-political *ideals* espoused by them which might have a further bearing on educational transition points and outcomes in this particular context.

i. *Individuals: venerable patrons, viable pathways before the transition*

In this context, and others like it in the global South, afflicted by socio-political and economic constraint, youth transitions are rarely navigated in isolation nor are the aspirations informing them maintained alone but fashioned and furthered in relation to others (see Chapter 2, pp. 79-80). Despite lacking visible and viable pathways before the transition, scholarship alumni frequently cite the guidance and example of various patrons and role models during the critical duration around the completion of their education in Myanmar. These community and religious leaders, friends and relations, colleagues and

co-workers can be seen to promote and therefore shape the outcomes of pathways existing under or beyond government constraint.

Like a number of his friends and colleagues, scholarship alumnus Saw Kyaw Eh Dar ('Boy'), now a teacher and youth leader in Hpa-an, cited the positive influence of those local religious and youth leaders who provided valuable support on leaving high school. In his case, he dropped out and fell in with a wayward gang in his village until a Baptist Pastor encouraged him to join the church youth group; as he explains it,

Before I was a believer, I was a bad boy but at that time I met with one of the youth leaders here and he is very active for the church youth programme and he motivated me to change my behaviour and through his example I did so.⁹⁵

He commented on the selflessness and sacrifice which characterised his benefactor's example and, like others, framed the successful navigation of this uncertainty in terms of spiritual epiphany and moral triumph. The existential crisis of youth in Hpa-an was seemingly diminished for this young man through this positive encounter. He went on to describe this particular youth leader as being 'very energetic for the community; he suffered for the community and he motivated the youth to participate',⁹⁶ stressing the spiritual nature of the impetus this lent him,

He used the Jesus Model: whenever he spoke with the spiritual group he started with spiritual things and then he tries to engage with the development ideas - the development concepts. He shows the good example and role model to the villagers and he shows his attitude of empathy and tolerance in the village. He is trying to motivate the other spiritual group⁹⁷ to learn about the development because we cannot ignore the development for our community - we want to work for both sides; we need to be balanced... we are all working for the community that's why we don't look at our salary or our time.⁹⁸

This encounter clearly provided Saw Kyaw Eh Dar with a viable template for social responsibility and action from which he, like others who struggled to move forward at this difficult time in their lives, benefitted. They were able to frame credible future aspirations around similarly positive points of moral reference, in much the same way as Nann Eh Klain ('Kind') found point and purpose with which

⁹⁵ Interview (M25): 19th March 2015

⁹⁶ Interview (M25): 19th March 2015

⁹⁷ Mainly Karen Buddhists but also other Karen Christian groups (Seventh Day Adventists, Catholics) as well as small numbers of Karen Animists.

⁹⁸ Interview (M28): 19th March 2015

to navigate uncertainty by eventually overcoming ‘the struggle and the sadness’ through the example of others.

These encounters occurred outside obvious learning domains like the school and family. Furthermore, as Kyaw Eh Dar explains here, a notion of responsibility and action emerges from this encounter, informed as much by Baptist spiritual determinism as it is by political expediency that acknowledges ‘both sides’ and seeks ‘to accommodate the other spiritual group’. Despite issuing from a very different theological basis from that espoused by the *Sayadaw* above, it tends towards the same regard for ethnic pluralism. Rather, it is one that acknowledges but apparently subordinates Karen ethno-religious difference between Baptist and Buddhist ‘groups’ in Hpa-an in the interests of the wider communitarian project and its development.

For many young people growing up in Hpa-an, these kinds of ethno-religious tensions have impinged on their access to education and therefore both the capacity and capability to effect viable transitions; this example therefore provided Kyaw Eh Dar with a credible alternative example of what he might aspire towards and how he might enact that aspiration in the future.

Echoes of a similar moral lexicon can now be heard amongst a younger generation in Hpa-an, as those students now learning under the scholarship alumni, can be seen to construct their own aspirations in reference to the moral example provided by their teachers, much as Nann Kaw Kii Suu (‘Kindly Flower’) did (see Introduction, pp. 4-5); as another explained it,

So they are a role model and an inspiration – like many students are promoted by them; they see them as their role models and they... *[pausing as if remembering something]* some people they regret because a long time ago they were very bad or something like this and now they see their ways – something like this – and they get the experience so I also want to do like this – this kind of thing you know - after I finish studying abroad I will come back here and be the good example.⁹⁹

This rationale was common amongst those passing through new learning sites in Hpa-an and is testimony to the renewed confidence in teachers and the teaching profession. Moreover, it reflects the influence of this particular group of significant others in the construction of aspirations around education and employment. By providing their students with moral impetus and imperative with which

⁹⁹ Interview (F18) (with friend/chaperone occasionally translating): 12th November 2016

to navigate their transitions in this way - as more and more young people choose to return to Hpa-an 'to be the good example' (see Chapter 6) rather than settle abroad – the scholarship alumni make definite steps to safeguard the legacy of this imperative for future generations. Indeed, the specific nature of this 'good example' is one that appears to conflate moral and spatial trajectories in the pursuit of viable and credible youth transitions.

We are reminded here of Gina Crivello's (2011) assertion (see Chapter 2, p. 83) that "education both requires mobility and increases one's capacity to be mobile" (ibid: 407) and is therefore integral to the process of 'becoming somebody' (see also Chapter 5) as the moral basis driving these aspirations emerges. Furthermore, it would appear to have positive implications for the situation as well as the self, as all stakeholders mobilise in an effort to ensure 'that young people do not *have to* go to Thailand anymore' but that they might *choose to do so* instead, and in the interests of returning home in support of the development of their communities in the future.

ii. *Institutions: 'zones of relative local autonomy' in authoritarian Hpa-an*

Those interviewed often commented on the important role specific religious institutions and their leaders had played in furthering their transitions around education in this context. Indeed, as I explained in Chapter 1, churches and monasteries often provided the only form of alternative and educational and training pathways in government-controlled Hpa-an (see Chapter 1, pp. 51-53). It is therefore inevitable that the ideals governing these institutions should have a significant influence on youth transitions during this period and the possibilities around them. The manner in which these encounters are recounted suggests that they have done much to alleviate anxiety and uncertainty in the context of conflict and displacement in particular.

Furthermore, they have impressed upon these young people the potential of community-based responses to education in alleviating the specific constraints sustaining the crisis of youth in this region. We are reminded here, of Appadurai's rationale that the capacity to aspire is a navigational capacity that enhances people's capability of improving their lives for being "allied to the future-orientated logic of development" (Appadurai 2004b: 179). Indeed, through these encounters, aspirations around development loom large in the minds of the scholarship alumni in which education

is identified as performing a specific and substantial role, not least because it is regarded as a less overtly 'political' field of engagement in their minds.

For example, Saw Eh Phlon ('Karen Boy') recalled the limited but effective education he accessed through the small informal school maintained by his local monastery, in support of which he subsequently collected donations to buy books and writing materials, explaining that,

The monk supports the children who are fleeing from the conflict and the Myanmar army - so many different groups - he is standing for education not for politics so the military and police department they don't bother him; they just mention 'don't do political activities in the school' so they agree on that."¹⁰⁰

As framed here, this educational encounter played a decisive role in serving pressing community needs in response to legacies of conflict and displacement during the Karen civil war. Moreover, it does so by engaging those like Saw Eh Phlon ('Karen Boy'), struggling to gain educational and occupational traction in government-controlled Hpa-an, in this essential endeavour. Indeed, it appears to do so in much the same way as that described above by Saw Kyaw Eh Dar ('Boy'), whose encounter with the Baptist Pastor produced similar reflections.

This suggests that these morally inflected transitions are made possible and plausible by religious and particularly Buddhist patronage and authority, pervading the Kwaegabon Plong Karen region. For many scholarship alumni this has provided decisive encounters with new ideas and ideals in respect to community service and civic responsibility (see Buzzi, Hayes and Mullen 2012) that were to shape their growing aspirations occupationally and vocationally. Whilst Saw Eh Phlon ('Karen Boy') suggests that this kind of social engagement is distinct from anything 'political', I would argue that the patronage and priorities that inevitably delimit access to this provision and its dividends suggest otherwise. This served to enhance his capacity to aspire and the capability to act on those aspirations but for others not able to access such enlightened and inclusive domains it has not.

Ashely South (2011) has referred to these domains as 'zones of relative local autonomy', to signal how local churches and monasteries have provided relatively unrestricted havens for the development of essential social and welfare services in the face of government restriction and surveillance. Since these spaces are frequently presented as a 'patch for the national education system'

¹⁰⁰ Interview (M27): 9th April 2015

(Lorch 2007) it is often assumed that they are more inclusive and depoliticised than state provision. As such, their role in shaping youth transitions, the ideals and aspirations informing them and their outcomes, has largely gone unquestioned and unexplored within the substantial literature on Myanmar's pre-'transitional' civil society (Steinberg 1999; Hlaing 2004; Hlaing 2007; Rozenberg 2010; Kramer 2011; Thawngmung 2012; Petrie & South 2014).

However, in providing some of the only viable alternative educational pathways under constraint, religious patronage in Hpa-an has inevitably defined how that relative autonomy is coordinated and to what ends it is committed (Schober 2011), educationally and occupationally within this particular locality. The engagement of these spiritual domains with those new and largely secular initiatives with which this study is primarily concerned, suggest that they continue to exercise a considerable influence, and therefore continue to have a bearing on youth transitions. Indeed, perhaps more so now within the context of the contested peace process and amidst rising Buddhist nationalism in this and other parts of the country. In the final section of this chapter, I therefore draw the focus more firmly into the present in order to explore the implications of this in more detail for young people and their transitions in contemporary Hpa-an.

iii. *Interests: mandalas of cultural control and compromise in contemporary Hpa-an*

Referring to the current *Sayadaw* of Taungalay monastery, Ashley South (2011), states that "this religious leader's personal patronage and authority are central to the creation of a zone of relative local autonomy. In this area, he has been able to provide some limited protection for local civilians from the abuses of various armed groups. He has also promoted community development projects and a well-regarded (secular) school." (ibid: 26). As we have seen he was also instrumental in the formation of Tounge Là Yat and EGG, Hpa-an's first academy.

As defined here, it is the exercise of the individual's spiritual charisma and authority which determines and defines the zone of relative local autonomy which incorporates, as he acknowledges, educational as well as humanitarian initiatives. The form and focus of this community development as well as access to and allocation of social services within that space would therefore appear to work at the behest of the *Sayadaw* alone. This suggests that certain services and resources might be favoured over others and access to them conferred or denied depending on his personal preferences and

predilections at any given time (see Tosa 2009; Rozenberg 2010). Viewed in this way, this benevolence and the access it confers has a distinctly political dynamic to it with implications for the transitions of those granted or denied access to it.

Juliane Schober (2011) appears to be contributing to this debate when arguing that this ‘socially engaged’ form of Buddhism “emphasizes the *sangha*’s¹⁰¹ moral obligation to act in *samsara*¹⁰² for the benefit of the community and thus opens a new venue for the *sangha* to mobilize support and influence social policy.” In suggesting that such activity is informed by a Buddhist moral imperative she goes on to clarify that “Its ideas are rooted in traditional Buddhist notions of good governance... [and that] ... This discourse is often interpreted in light of social issues such as human rights and democracy” (Schober 2011: 132).

This suggests that such zones of relative local autonomy are governed by socio-political aspirations consistent with a rights-based agenda. This should likely ensure and safeguard access and inclusion around those community-based social activities and services with which it is involved. This, however, has not always been the case in Hpa-an with some scholarship alumni enjoying its benefits and others not. For example, a number of Baptist Christian students informed me that they had, in the past, been denied access to this provision in favour of their Buddhist friends. The legacy of these ‘mediated’ zones of relative local autonomy, and the tensions it has exposed around community-based education, continue to resonate into the transition.

Indeed, religious institutions and leaders remain significant powerbrokers around non-state education in urban Hpa-an where, under the patronage and protection of the *Sayadaw* of Taungalay, Tounge Là Yat and EGG continues to operate on monastic land, much as Eh Klain’s (‘Kind’) burgeoning school has been able to flourish under the benevolence of the *Sayadaw* of the Kyaw Taw Ya Monastery.

The Baptist Church is now also a stakeholder on this front providing property and land for one of the more recent ventures in Hpa-an’s burgeoning education network, ‘Zedaw House’ or the Youth Learning Centre (YLC), through the auspices of a prominent youth leader and scholarship alumnus,

¹⁰¹ Pāli, meaning ‘company’, ‘association’, ‘assembly’, or ‘community’ but meaning the monastic community in Burma/Myanmar here.

¹⁰² Pāli, meaning ‘world’ or ‘wandering’ in reference to the karmic cycle of death and rebirth.

whose father is a well-connected Baptist pastor in Hpa-an and the border areas. Moreover, both Buddhist and Christian patronage extends directly into the governance of these institutions through the AC responsible for their operations. Both the *Sayadaw* of Taungalay and Pastor of the Fellowship Baptist Church and Agape Hall currently act as the Board of Trustees for EGG whilst the Head of the Monastic Education School at Taungalay and the Chairman of the Christian Baptist Hpu Hsan Paw Bible School in Done Yinn, southwest of Hpa-an, are Patrons of this institution.



Figure 13. New and Neutral Ground? *One of the few academies in Hpa-an established through the Baptist Church which attests to scholarship alumni efforts to resist dominant and partisan Buddhist affiliations currently determining youth transitions in Hpa-an* (Photo: Author)

This influence continues to shape successes and struggles around education for the scholarship alumni and their students. For example, in reflecting on the governance structures around EGG Nann Eh Suu Phawt ('Lovely One'), co-founder and former Social Science teacher, described the workings of its AC. She suggested that the success of the

programme depended on the influence and profile of individual committee members, saying "they are basically the stamp of approval and we rely quite heavily on them for our recruitment processes" adding,

In Hpa-an where you've got really high community involvement the AC members are very, very influential – they get jobs for the [EGG] alumni. So, it's like, say you have an AC member working in an organisation, you can approach that organisation and that AC member is going to say, 'this is an EGG student; they're from my programme'. So, for Hpa-an it works for them - it is incredibly nepotistic, and grants are found and given depending on who you know. But because EGG is in good standing, they are getting a lot of good opportunities or say donations.¹⁰³

Nann Eh Suu Phawt identified this 'good standing' as emanating directly from the person of the *Sayadaw*, saying, "it just so happens we have the *Sayadaw* of Taungalay [on the AC] and you can't get anyone more influential than that in Hpa-an so it's his monastic cover that's given us a lot of that".

¹⁰³ Interview (F32): Yangon, 12th November 2015

She went on to explain that whilst some AC members act in a relatively benign capacity offering advice when approached or ‘giving speeches at ceremonies’, the *Sayadaw* and ‘the whole Buddhist side of things’ continues to be much more invasive. This patronage has benefitted the school and its students in different ways: quite apart from ensuring enhanced access to the domestic labour market, the monastery provided the school with classroom space and a car ‘just as a favour’, and apparently issued sixty mobile phone SIM cards at a reduced price for students at a time when these were difficult to acquire at less than hugely inflated prices.

However, this kind of favouritism has and continues to impose restrictions on certain aspects of school policy and provision, as Nann Eh Suu Phawt went on to explain,

I would say that our school is predominantly Buddhist and Plong, not so much Christian Sgaw; forget about Mon, Burmese.... All of our teachers are Karen; I think there is one Burmese half Karen student. That school is seen for Karen people and a particular kind of Karen people! *[giggling nervously]* So it can be a great thing, but it can also be hard because of the respect that’s paid to the *Sayadaw*. Christian missionaries have been coming into Karen State and giving Karen Christians tons of opportunities, so the border is more Karen Christian and you’ve got a lot of leaders who have risen up on the border whereas the Plong are the ones who have stayed and like hung on and they are the ones who are running Hpa-an now.¹⁰⁴

The extent to which this particular academy and the scholarship alumni associated with it are in thrall to this agenda was illustrated through the shifting relationship between Taungalay and the new head teacher of EGG.

For Nann Muu Suu (‘Peaceful Girl’), a Plong Christian Karen from Hpa-an and another of the academy’s original co-founders, Myanmar’s political and reform process has provided her with space in which to confront the dominance and dictates of Taungalay in her bid to foster more inclusive recruitment policies and procedures. Whilst she actively maintains such a policy in delivering an American Embassy micro-access scholarship programme in the evenings which has broad inter-faith community support, during the day she struggles to instil similar principles at EGG; as she explained it,

First, with Kyaw Say [the former Principal], who is a really *obedient* guy and a strong Buddhist as well, he is what we call in Burmese *anade* – *he feels uncomfortable to do things differently from others* – so whatever the monks say he used to say, ‘Yes’ and he tried to adjust according to the monks¹⁰⁵. But when I take over, I change it a little bit because I don’t have this kind of

¹⁰⁴ Interview (F32): Yangon, 12th November 2015

¹⁰⁵ *Ah-nar-Deh* is a widely used Burmese term/cultural concept which might be simply translated as ‘the fear of embarrassing others’ but it carries with it more idiosyncratic socio-cultural connotations than that; as Nann Muu Suu (‘Peaceful Girl’) herself described it to me later, “we use that in a situation when we feel uncomfortable to refuse or receive things, e.g. you asked me to give you time but actually I may not want to meet you but feel *Ah-nar-Deh* to say ‘no’ so I said ‘yes’ to meeting you”

relationship with them and it's like... [whispering] our school is now a bit far from the *Sayadaw*. We just want to make our school a community school – this school belongs to everyone not just the *Sayadaw*, not just the Pastor and not just the donor – so this is for the community; anyone can come and work and doesn't need to worry about anything you know. So, one of our objectives is to create a space for everyone to come and learn. Under the *Sayadaw* the Muslim, the Hindu and Christian, they might feel intimidated and unwelcome¹⁰⁶; if we are under Christian [authority] maybe it is the other way around. We want diversity but diversity means different ethnics, different locations and different religions and we are trying to recruit Muslim and Hindu, but we haven't got any yet.¹⁰⁷

It is alleged that as a consequence of this revised position Taungalay has refused to provide alternative land to which the school needs must relocate in the face of rising rental fees in the neighbourhood unless, that is, it submits to his authority. As Muu Suu explained in conversation with me,

He said that he will give the space and build the new school and he will do everything for us if we are happy to work under him. He will create the same [school] like EGG and we go and work there – it's kind of like he wants to maintain influence.

RD: So what do you think he means by 'working under him'?

I don't know; he just said, 'Will you work under me, under the monastery?' and we said, 'No'.

RD: ...like a monastic school?

Yer, yer; like a monastic school¹⁰⁸ and he might want to say that this is the school he runs but we said, 'No'. I don't like it when someone is influencing us; so that's the message I want to give to the *Sayadaw* and any others who try that.¹⁰⁹

In light of such testimony, we should therefore guard against accepting unquestioningly that such 'zones of relative local autonomy', existing under authoritarian constraint, offered and continue to offer unfettered freedoms and opportunities when they might have represented struggles rather than successes around education for some¹¹⁰. Indeed, it has clearly marked those critical durations around the completion of education for Hpa-an's scholarship alumni, some of whom were granted access to zones of relative local autonomy and others who were not; as such, it has shaped and

(Email communication: 11th December 2017). This is to suggest a pervasive sense of social obligation particularly accentuated around religious institutions and leaders in Myanmar and in this case, compromises around education and its dividends.

¹⁰⁶ This attitude of course stands in stark contrast with that of the *Sayadaw* of the Kyaw Ta Ya or 'Gateway' monastery. Indeed, I was surprised to learn later that as novices both had been students of the same teacher.

¹⁰⁷ Interview (F31): 15th November 2016 (respondent's emphasis)

¹⁰⁸ Though deemed 'non-state', monastic education employs the same curriculum as state education though it falls under the purview of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and not the Ministry of Education (Zobrist & McCormick 2013: 10).

¹⁰⁹ Interview (F31): 15th November 2016

¹¹⁰ Furthermore, in ignoring these dynamics we are in danger of conflating community engagement with community ownership as international development actors, both national and international, continue to do in lauding the democratic principles of community schooling by committee and coalition in parts of Karen State without taking into account the hegemonic Buddhist agenda dominating those cultures (see Moo and Daly 2016).

continues to shape their attitudes and aspirations around education and indeed employment into Myanmar's transition¹¹¹.

However, there is now increasing evidence that there is more room and perhaps more reason within the expanded zones of autonomy and possibility opened up by Myanmar's transition to question the intrusion of religious patronage and power into less restricted social spheres. The 'rebranding' of Tounge Là Yat as the Education Gathering Group is a case in point. Indeed, as Saw Eh So ('Patriot'), headteacher of Bridge for All put it to me, "Yes, we approach the monastery for safety but now we have democracy we don't need them in the same way". In a similar vein, Saw Khung Suu ('Peaceful Nation'), co-founder of Zwekabin Myay Education Project, a stone's throw from EGG on a site directly adjacent to monastic land, told me how he and his colleagues specifically and successfully resisted, albeit not without difficulty, the influence of monastic patronage in establishing his school in early 2013,

Our ethos is a little bit different because inclusion is very important to us. They [EGG] are more established in terms of monks and Buddhist leaders so they have a more traditional and Karen focus – so out of 30 students there would be 29 Karen over there. We were probably a bit impatient at starting up; we weren't kind of prepared to wait for the monk's 'ok'. It has and it is probably the less stable way to do it, but we grew impatient and we wanted to go ahead and get started. We kind of... yer.... *[searching for the right way to put it; then carefully enunciating]* don't necessarily feel that they should have the opportunity to control us as much as they do. We are very interested in being open to different ethnic groups and different religions which is kind of not the norm with a lot of schools here".¹¹²

Such reflections provide historical as well as contemporary insights around the relationship between religious patronage and community-based education in Hpa-an, as seen through the eyes of those scholarship alumni who apprehended this at critical junctures before and now into Myanmar's transition. Together, they suggest how zones of relative local autonomy might circumvent whilst compounding constraints around education which have and clearly continue to shape the positions and the possibilities around them for young people in transitional Hpa-an. Indeed, many who benefitted

¹¹¹ In an anecdotal coda to this narrative, Nann Muu Suu ('Peaceful Girl') has since resigned as head teacher of EGG and opened her own school, apparently under the patronage of the Karen Baptist Church with which she has stronger and more positive connections. This suggests evolving ethno-religious differences around non-state educational access and aspirations in Hpa-an 'moving forward'.

¹¹² Interview (F30): 26th August 2015 (respondent's emphasis). It should be noted that by deliberately resisting the patronage of Taungalay this academy found itself, at the time of this research, repeatedly harassed by various local government administrators as well as Special Branch.

from alternative educational provision under monasteries and churches before the transition now question the intrusion of Buddhist patronage and authority into these socio-cultural spheres within the expanded zones of possibility that the transition has presented, as much as those who did not.

In a culture and a context in which social and cultural life is deeply infused with Buddhist cosmological associations this position marks a significant shift in aspiration, agency and intent around informal welfare in transitional Hpa-an and despite arguments otherwise (for example McCarthy 2016a, 2018). Moreover, the social consequences of this (cf. Johnson-Hanks 2002) have clearly prompted aspirations that tend towards a more openly instrumental rather than avowedly spiritual expression of social responsibility and obligation now currently informing educational and occupational development in Hpa-an. Certainly, there is a moral, and often Buddhist basis to the identities and aspirations emerging amongst young people coming of age in Hpa-an today, but at times this is being expressed in conscious opposition to the institutions and ideals that have had a tendency to frame difficult choices for them.

Conclusion: critical junctures revisited

This chapter has sought to investigate the transitions of Hpa-an's scholarship alumni through the 'vital conjunctures' they experienced in Myanmar on the completion of secondary school and/or university. It has therefore necessarily ranged over time before and into the country's transition, charting this in response to both state, 'traditional' non-state and, more recently, community-based education they are now involved in.

In so doing, it has found that a range of social and structural constraints - primarily the paucity of state high school/university pedagogy, the politics of patronage around religious institutions, together with a stagnant labour market - have colluded to undermine the viability of educational and occupational pathways available at them. This has sustained an existential crisis of youth in and around Hpa-an as part of which education, and in particular the roles and responsibilities with which it is associated, are implicated in profound disappointments around state welfare. Moreover, it has curtailed the capacity of young people in this region to dream of a better future.

This set of constraints have had a particular bearing on specific identity groups. For those with experience of living and learning in rural and peri-urban contexts around Hpa-an, transitions have proved that much harder to realise given added privations around education and employment which have prompted negative intergenerational social outcomes. For both Plong and non-Buddhist youth, this was a particular challenge before Myanmar's transition, whilst non-Plong struggle to access alternative provision amidst rising Buddhist hegemony in this region today (see Gravers and Jørgensen 2020). It has prompted growing distrust around the capacity of alternative provision, as determined before the transition, to redress this within it.

Despite the debilitating spectre of crisis, with its images of broken schools and homes, this investigation has afforded positive glimpses of developing personal and strategic relations. Critical encounters with various role models and patrons have mitigated this uncertainty at crucial junctures, emphasising the presence of ethnic and gender networks across the Karen borderlands. These connections have therefore made those limited available pathways not only more visible but viable. Indeed, whilst young women have been historically marginalised in accessing education they emerge here as both resilient and innovative in gaining access to these opportunities through their relations and initiative. Furthermore, such encounters and examples have clearly done much to shape ideas around self and service or 'how to be someone useful for my community', imbuing these pathways with moral point and purpose, and therefore exercising a positive bearing on the situation as well as the self.

Far from resigning themselves to strategic forms of inertia or delay, this particular group of young people have drawn on their anxieties-as-aspirations in positive ways in order to move forward. The uncertainty and instability associated with this expression of temporal immobility appears to have lent impetus and focus in responding directly to the basis of 'the struggle and that sadness' with which youth transitions in Hpa-an have long been associated. However, within the context of the faltering peace process and the rise of Buddhist nationalism in this region they clearly struggle to enact this more inclusive and progressive agenda.

In the next chapter, I go on to investigate alumni attitudes and association forged by experiences and encounters over the Myanmar border in the migrant hubs of Mae Sot and the Thai

capital Bangkok which many have alluded to in the past chapter. These experiences have been defined by fluctuating zones of prejudice and privilege as we find them struggling at the margins of Thai society and in the exclusive enclaves of Thailand's private universities. I argue that their socio-spatial mobility over these time-spaces, has allowed them to grow in strength. I illustrate how this has marked their aspirations and the agency to enact collective and self-sufficient action around education defined less by prevalent and parochial social norms and affiliations at home and abroad (Aung-Thwin 2002), but (selectively) cosmopolitan and inclusive understandings of Karen identity and aspiration in the wider world.

Chapter Five:

Privilege and prejudice: socio-spatial mobilities in Thailand

Introduction: mobilising in the memory and the moment

“Flight is a recurrent theme in Karen history and culture” Jonathan Falla (1991) tells us in the opening pages of his rich and elegiac ethnography, *True Love and Bartholomew*, in which he records a year spent living and working as a nurse amongst a disparate band of Karen fighters on the Thai-Burma border in the 1980s at the height of the Karen civil war. In the opening chapters, he proceeds to catalogue the many and various origin myths involving the movement and migration of Karen peoples with which that history and culture is richly adorned.

“Perhaps”, he speculates, “the Karen were, as the writer Saw Moo Troo says, ‘persecuted by an evil king’ and driven to flee south.” (Falla 1991: 14). This particular story is one of many which finds the Karen compelled to migrate, driven out of either Mongolia, India, northern Tibet or China by a series of rapacious rulers, undertaking a formidable and treacherous journey, before settling on the fertile banks of the Salween River at a site close to that of modern day Hpa-an.

Other versions of this narrative abound but offer variations on this theme which I often heard repeated in different though essentially similar forms during my fieldwork. It is a narrative of oppression, flight and deliverance which might offer insights into the nature of Karen strategic and social mobility in the more recent as much as the distant past, in the memory as well as the moment.

Picking up another thread of this narrative, Falla goes on to explain that the Karen settled this region in two distinct waves, the first in 1125BC and the second in 739BC adding,

From the outset there was rivalry between the two groups. The Pwo [Plong] became known as the ‘mother’ group, the Sgaw as the ‘father’. The Pwo regarded themselves as the

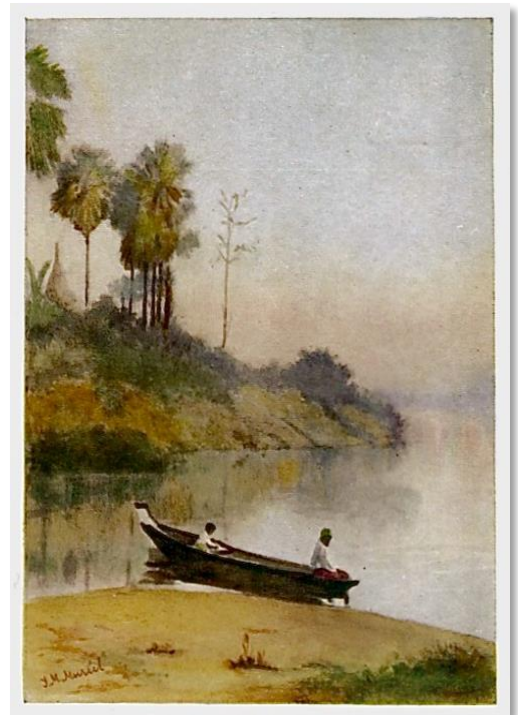


Figure 14. The Salween River at Hpa-an. Artist's (unknown) impression from the late nineteenth century (© Sir Joseph Causton & Sons Ltd, London).

guardians of Karen tradition; the Sgaw dispute this... The traditions say that the Pwo Karen were the first to migrate and that they settled by the rivers in the hills but that, shortly afterwards, the Sgaw arrived and drove the Pwo downstream, 'to drink brackish water.' Today the Pwo tend to be cast as the lowland or coastal people, the Sgaw as the highlanders – although in fact all the Karen are widely distributed throughout large areas of Burma. (ibid)

Such stories, featuring as they do, difficult journeys and strained relations amongst the Karen pervade their lived experience as much as historical conjecture and imagination, nowhere more so than with regard to the pursuit of education. As Falla tells us, the Karen believe they once had a script and a written literature of their own but having lost it are compelled to search for and regain it,

God bestows gifts upon three brothers – a Karen, a Burmese, and the 'white younger brother'. The others take good care of their books, but the Karen places his on a tree stump while he gets on with the rice planting, and the 'white younger brother' removes it overseas. The Karen are thus obliged to wait for the white brother to return, bringing them the Golden Book (which the Baptists equate with the Bible), and the Silver Book, which is often taken to be Education. (ibid: 221)

This is essentially Sgaw Karen ethnohistory, 'the white brother' or British Christian colonists bearing both education and spiritual enlightenment. Plong Karen versions nonetheless feature brothers and books of a similar kind (see Ikeda 2012) but we know that the Christian-colonial encounter was to benefit the Sgaw particularly. It nonetheless confirms that the mythical story of Karen migration is bound up with the story of Karen education - that both are closely associated in the memory – in which they must resolve to either wait or wander for education and its dividends.

Moreover, the thematic introduction of education into these narratives would appear to mark a shift in the dynamics governing these collective migratory trajectories - not only does differential access to education compound difference and conflict between dominant Karen identities as they struggle to (re)gain access to 'the (silver) book' but it suggests that the imperatives driving their movement and mobility might be informed by efforts to redress particular structural deprivations imposed on them. And Falla goes on to suggest that this is most keenly felt by Plong Karen, concluding that nowadays "Among Baptist Karen, literacy is the norm. Among Buddhists and animists it is not" (ibid: 223)¹¹³.

¹¹³ See particularly (Womack 2005) for a compelling assessment of the role and development of literate networks in the creation of Karen intra-ethnic socio-political identities and relations. See also Rajah (2008) for further discussion of Karen migration myths.

These ideas are as relevant today as they have ever been, perhaps more so within the context of a contested peace and convergence process, in which access to quality education has become more, not less, uncertain for Plong Karen communities in southeastern Myanmar. Community leaders in Hpa-an are determined to redress long-standing educational and social deficits whilst maintaining specific ethnoreligious agenda that have served to undermine youth transitions for those identity groups falling outside this agenda in the past.

Furthermore, educational and economic migration to neighbouring Thailand - a symbolic and structural lifeline away from conflict and deprivation to essential amenities and resources, connecting families and friends - has become increasingly precarious over recent years. Legislation enacted by Thailand's military government on the 20th June 2017 and enforced through forceful police crackdowns on the 22nd June 2017 has curtailed the education and employment of undocumented foreign students and workers (Bylander and Reid 2017; Karen News 2017; The Nation 2017). Further restrictions on cross-border migration have been imposed more recently in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic (Reuters 2020), particularly targeting the Moei River (a tributary of the Salween) in Tak Province, northern Thailand, over which many migrants from Myanmar frequently access the country (Bangkok Post 2020)¹¹⁴. These developments significantly temper perceptions of the Thai borderlands as a zone of opportunity and possibility for economic migration today, in response to which efforts to 'help the young people not have to go to Thailand' indefinitely, assume increasing pertinence and urgency.

Specific knowledge domains associated with young people's enhanced mobility elsewhere in the world, not least access to modern languages and information and communication technology, have been difficult to come by in southeastern Myanmar. They are now much sought after by young people situated in a traditional and conservative Buddhist world yet seeking to position themselves in a more globalised economy. Nann Phaw Eah, ('Lovely Flower'), herself a Plong Karen Buddhist, said as much to me when she explained that,

Mostly Christians get more opportunity to study English since they were young; that's why they get ahead before and that's why the monks are aware of that right now and allow the students to study English. Before that *[pausing and smiling to herself at the memory of this]* ...they are *really* traditional – they are *very* conservative – because they used to control the

¹¹⁴ See Lamb (2019) for a consideration of the strategic and symbolic significance of the Salween to the Karen of southeastern Burma/Myanmar.

youth and wouldn't allow us; they were not motivated in this way. But they are now; they also know that the international community is going on and the change is happening and if you don't know English and if you don't know other foreign knowledge you stay behind¹¹⁵.

Amidst the international development infrastructure on the Thai border, access to such knowledge and skills is that much greater and easier to negotiate. The emergence of new learning sites in Hpa-an is therefore both a consequence of historical tensions between Karen communities that has prompted ethnic and educational marginalisation, as it is evidence of a growing appetite and aspiration for specific knowledge domains lacking at this particular historical juncture in the Myanmar's development; both have a bearing on youth transitions in contemporary Hpa-an through which these institutions must navigate a careful line.

In this chapter, I consider how migration to neighbouring Thailand, and mobility across the Karen borderlands more generally, has shaped educational and occupational aspirations. The chapter is divided into three sections: first, I establish the relationship between processes and perspectives of migration and that of education amongst this Karen community, drawing again on the testimony of the scholarship alumni.

In the second section, I turn to more recent theoretical contributions concerning this relationship. I identify how migration and mobility practices, not least migration-for-education, can be seen to structure and supplement youth transitions in profound and particular ways.

In the main body of this chapter, I go on to investigate the specific sites of those vital conjunctures in the Thai border town of Mae Sot and the Thai capital Bangkok in the years immediately before Myanmar's transition. Here, I am particularly interested to identify which specific structures and dynamics substantiate the possibilities that this move presents, and how this movement itself fashions and furthers their transitions.

Learning to leave; leaving to learn: education, migration and memory in the Karen borderlands

The sense that you need to move to gain access to knowledge, and by extension social mobility, was intuitive to many of the young people in this study. It was powerfully articulated by a number of them

¹¹⁵ Interview (F35): 21st November 2016 (respondent's emphasis)

in the previous chapter, in which they explained how they were compelled to go to Thailand to realise educational and occupational ‘opportunities’ unavailable at home. Whilst many have moved and migrated to escape the threat of armed conflict and the constraints imposed on them in government-controlled territory they have done so, in equal measure, in pursuit of aspirations otherwise untainted by these dynamics. In the previous chapter, Nann Phaw Eah (‘Lovely Flower’) told us that she just “went on my own to the border and found my education opportunity there because I don’t like the system of education in the university here – it is closed; a closed system”¹¹⁶.

Others shared her feelings: some criticised the teaching, others the outdated curriculum; many bemoaned the University Matriculation exam which prevented them from accessing relevant courses of study whilst the UDE confounded their academic progress; most of them commented on the poor prospects a university education in Myanmar granted. Those in rural contexts around Hpa-an struggled to access any such opportunities, whilst others also struggled to do so given their ethnicity, their age, the obligations on them as young women to support the family, for example. A range of structural and social constraints had a bearing on their ability to forge viable transitions from education to employment within this context.

It is for this reason that Thailand, and particularly its northern border running alongside eastern Myanmar, emerge as a zone of considerable possibility for many young people in this situation. It is defined less by constraint and deficit around educational and occupational opportunities as by availability and access to them. For those like Hpa-an’s scholarship alumni, struggling to secure viable pathways through state education and amidst compromised zones of relative autonomy at home, the proximity of resources and opportunities, readily accessible via the ‘Asia Highway’¹¹⁷, was to mark the potential fulfilment of educational and occupational aspirations in a parallel Karen domain¹¹⁸.

¹¹⁶ Interview (F35): 21st November 2016

¹¹⁷ At the time of this research, the Myanmar-Thailand migration corridor, part of which connects Hpa-an with Mae Sot in Thailand (see Map 7, p. 182), was the world’s largest inter-regional migration corridor based on foreign-born population data. This migration relates to displacement arising from conflict and violence but encompasses cross-border migration for income generation, family reunion, temporary and permanent labour migration, skilled and student migration (Mcauliffe and Ruhs 2017: 21; see also KHRG et al. 2016).

¹¹⁸ During my fieldwork, this particular section of the ‘highway’ from Hpa-an to the Myanmar border town of Myawaddy right on the Myanmar-Thailand border and less than a mile from Mae Sot, was significantly improved reducing travel time, particularly during the monsoon, from nearly 5 to under 3 hours by taxi, there being no public transport (see also Introduction, p. 16). However, parts of the route and the territory it passes through remains contested by various Karen EAOs and BGFs, and instrumental for the movement of munitions and narcotics which frequently undermines access.



Figure 15. Hpa-an and the Asia Highway: advertised tourism and transport to and from Hpa-an in 2016, featuring the newly resurfaced 'Thai-Myanmar Highway Road' (centre), via which generations of young people in Hpa-an have sought alternative educational and occupational pathways over the border (Picture Source: Yangon Travel Company).

This has proved transformative by providing a strategic platform for developing alternative and creative responses to education and development unconstrained by state repression, parochial and partisan politics at home. Indeed, by migrating across the Karen borderlands at this time we might say that these young people were able to 'thicken' their ability to act within a broad(er) range of options by moving to a context where there was more space to do so than available to them in authoritarian Hpa-an (see Klocker 2007, Chapter 2, p. 83). Whilst this might offer menial and dispiriting work, it presented them with more relevant educational opportunities; whilst they must exist, at least initially, at the margins of Thai society, intra-ethnic tensions do not have such a bearing on the options of specific identity groups outside the refugee camps in this context, and where organisations like the OKRO work in the interests of refugees and migrants alike; rural and urban youth from southeastern Myanmar face much the same constraints and opportunities in this context. Young women, unconstrained by cultural norms and obligations as caregivers at home that might limit their engagement within the knowledge economy, find more space and opportunity to do so here and now.

Indeed, the space and opportunity to act here was more propitious for the scholarship alumni generation than it had been for others in the past, occurring as it did at this particular historical juncture (see Chapter 2, pp. 84-87). As we have seen, international development assistance, funding and technical support to this region from the mid-1990s made the border towns of Mae Sot and Mae Sariang, in particular, thriving hubs for Karen refugee and exile communities (Lang 2002; Payne 2007;

Brees 2010; Horstmann 2011, 2012; Lee 2012). They also saw the development of alternative welfare provision, not all of which existed under the political control and patronage of the KNU and its well-resourced line ministries. The advent of scholarship opportunities through internationally funded university degrees only enhanced the capacity to aspire for a better life in and beyond this location.

Despite, and in fact, because of ‘the struggle and the sadness’ associated with leaving family and home, encounters with such educational responses and structures proved decisive as career, residence and professional identity, otherwise in flux, were

shaped by the increasing promise and the possibility this move presented. I therefore consider these time-spaces on the Thai border and later in Bangkok to be dynamic and decisive settings for evolving responses to education and aspirations for a better life. They are ones that are shaped and ‘bounded’ by the structured past as much as imagined future possibilities (see Evans 2007, Chapter 2, p. 88). In the course of this chapter, I therefore move with Hpa-an’s scholarship alumni and their associates as they navigate this difficult and uncertain transition over space as well as time, leaving their families and friends at home in search of educational and occupational opportunities over the border in Thailand.

In what follows, I argue that this movement across the Karen borderlands and within neighbouring Thailand has shaped the form and focus of their transitions in specific ways. In the first instance, the process of migrating enhances their capacity to aspire and their capability to enact these aspirations. For example, we will observe that Nann Eh Klain (‘Kind’) and others are only able to construct viable aspirations and extend the horizons of these by migrating between Thailand’s unregulated non-state spaces and the expanded zones of possibility prompted by the transition back in Hpa-an. Their trajectories are therefore defined by what is not possible under Myanmar’s state education system as much as by what becomes possible later in its revitalised private sector. The



Map 7: Greater Mekong Subregion East-West Economic Corridor as it passes through Myanmar into Thailand in relation to Hpa-an.

particular process and practice of migrating between these locations unlocks that possibility, shaping aspirations which are marked by what is feared as much as what is hoped for - captured most clearly in Eh Klain's commitment to return as a teacher in order 'to help young people not have to go to Thailand anymore'.

Furthermore, the encounters that this movement prompts shapes the individual and by association the collective identities that these young people assume as they negotiate how best to be 'someone useful for my community'. Specific roles might change as different forms of strategic identification and action are picked up (and discarded) in response to relative constraints and possibilities within these time-spaces: Eh Klain ('Kind') is both social worker and economic migrant in the Karen exile community in Thailand; community youth leader and private education entrepreneur on her return to Myanmar, suggesting that the evolving structural forces shaping these vital conjunctures on both sides of the border are influencing the construction of Karen social (re)identifications and subjectivities in the borderlands today as young people aspire towards *who* as much as *what* they want to be.

In fact, the young people in this study assume more than one identity as they realise their transitions, strategically tracking between them in order to exploit and expand the space in which to act, and so realise shared goals and aspirations. Indeed, as Johnson-Hanks asserts, though life events are themselves discrete and instantaneous "conjunctures have duration [with] multiple outcomes over different time frames" (Johnson-Hanks 2002: 872). This suggests that aspirations and their consequences may fluctuate over this distribution and duration as different goals are framed and different roles (and relationships) picked up through which to pursue them over time and space. Spatial and temporal mobility in this context is integral to the process of becoming as these young people forge their identities from one location and moment to the next, and in response to the past as well as the future.

Karen as a 'migrant class': contesting perceptions of mobility and marginalisation

Long-term migration from Hpa-an to Mae Sot, in particular, has cultivated perceptions of Karen as 'a migrant class', as one of my informants described it (see Chapter 1, p. 42; also below). Pejorative associations between mobility and low socio-economic status have therefore served to diminish the

sense of their agency and aspiration. Young people, in particular, are seemingly compelled 'to go to Thailand' as we have been told. Nann Phaw Eah ('Lovely Flower') described how she 'went to Thailand to work as a migrant worker because at that time I don't have any money and there are job opportunities for Karen people there not here'¹¹⁹.

Migration to Thailand might offer immediate occupational possibilities, such as informal domestic work in a Thai household, possibilities which she and the likes of Nann Eh Klain ('Kind'), on the death of her father, were compelled to respond. Nevertheless, this has also encompassed a range of still more precarious economic opportunities, often centred around illicit practices in the borderlands; as Nann Phaw Eah explains,

...it is helpful for our people – our Burmese people – because they can make black market trade, because some of the people have no option, like the temporary survivor of the war in the border base because they have no place to live here – they are living there as a migrant, as a freak people without state or home – homeless people - you can say that. And if they come back here, they have no chance to do anything, no opportunity, based on the education level actually.¹²⁰

She acknowledges the enduring image of Karen 'as a migrant people without state or home' and 'with no option' but to engage in this kind of illicit activity. This perspective has largely defined the profile and plight of the Karen in the borderlands over recent decades (South 2007a; South, Perhult and Carstensen 2010) (see Chapter 1, pp. 58-61). Indeed, the aspirations of many Karen coming of age during Myanmar's post-conflict transition remain focused on such readily available and easily accessible economic opportunities and activities in the largely unregulated and unrestricted borderlands¹²¹. This has done much to sustain a perception of Karen identity and agency largely consistent with conceptions of other peripheral and border-based peoples, as politically marginal, itinerant and socially inferior (Leach 1960; Mandaville 1999; Grundy-Warr and Yin 2002; Callahan 2004; Alvarez 2012). In this narrative, Karen appear to exist at the edge of two societies without belonging to either – seemingly trapped in a physical and figurative borderland without options otherwise.

However, this kind of economic possibility nonetheless fulfils a pressing and particular need in the face of violent conflict, poverty and structural constraints afflicting youth transitions in Hpa-an. In

¹¹⁹ Interview (F35): 21st November 2016

¹²⁰ Interview (F35): 21st November 2016

¹²¹ See Brenner (2017: 8); see also Meehan (2011) for theoretical basis of this argument.

her work on youth transitions around education amongst Karen children and youth in northern Thailand, Pia Jolliffe (2017) acknowledges the difficulties that many young people have in forging progressive transitions. She suggests that 'horizontal' transitions, by which young men and women routinely shift between various lateral spheres (such as home and school), might also offer strategic vantage points from which to navigate alternative or renegotiate 'vertical' transitions which mark upward shifts in schooling and from domains of schooling to those of employment. I believe engagement within the shadow economy represents a similar kind of adaptive strategy or 'horizontal transition' as many young people from Myanmar find and fund economic independence and educational progress in order to mitigate dispiriting consequences thrown up by the crisis of youth in Hpa-an.

Whilst the economic focus of these particular aspirations represents a means of escaping the crisis of youth in Myanmar, the possibilities and promise Thailand holds for education and personal development figures just as significantly as young people are seen to combine both. A number of those from Hpa-an whom I spoke to in Thailand were involved in some form of trafficking whilst pursuing their studies at one of the migrant learning centres in Mae Sot. Viewed in this way, Karen migration and mobility in the Thailand-Myanmar borderlands might be deemed an expression of strategic detachment and reengagement rather than simply one of compulsion and inevitable compromise (see also Dudley 2006; Scott 2009). None of these young people viewed such 'employment' as anything more than a temporary solution to their current predicament.

However, legacies of family fragmentation, dispossession, and insecurity thrown up over many decades by migration, both voluntary or involuntary, have served to sustain this perception of the Karen as lacking social and economic mobility. Indeed, the parents of many of the students I spoke to had been compelled to leave for informal work in Thailand on the birth of their children, where they continue to work, leaving the next generation to be brought up by aunts, uncles, grandparents and great-grandparents in Hpa-an (see Introduction, p. 4). It was scholarship alumnus Saw Thar Hie ('Beautiful Heart'), now a prominent youth leader in Hpa-an and one of the principal architects of its burgeoning non-state provision, who explained this to me,

Most of the Karen community here [in Hpa-an] are being seen as a ‘migrant class’ – they still don’t have any educated people. In Thai and in Burmese society people see the Karen people as migrant workers; nothing else.¹²²

Very much echoing Nann Phaw Eah’s observations above, a lack of education emerges here as a defining characteristic informing this perception of Karen ‘as a migrant class’. Moreover, as expressed now, its deficiency is associated with a lack of social mobility constraining Karen agency and aspiration in the memory and the moment, in Myanmar and in Thailand, and therefore over time as well as space, prompting Tha Hie to declare,

So for me, my mission was also to get out of that – to provide some inspiration for migrant workers that they will have more motivation and pride and inspiration by seeing many Karen people studying in the university and in the future there is hope for the Karen community – there are more educated people and they become more educated and they will have more self-esteem. Yer, this is why we promote the role of education and are trying to provide a space for educated people to come and to work together and stay together here.

At such points, the aspirations of Hpa-an’s scholarship alumni can be seen to acknowledge and respond directly to these pervasive and pejorative perceptions of Karen as an un/under-educated and un/under-employed ‘migrant class’. Moreover, the aspiration which emerges is framed in direct opposition to this: of Karen as an ‘educated people’ – motivated, proud and inspired - returning from abroad to work together ‘here’ in Myanmar not leaving to remain in Thailand indefinitely, much as Eh Klain (‘Kind’) suggested at the beginning of the last chapter.

It is therefore clear that negative stereotypes of Karen as un/under-educated and itinerant abound into the transition. Moreover, these narratives have served to substantiate an image of Karen peoples in the borderlands today as powerless victims, lacking motivation, aspiration and agency, compelled to leave or wait, much the same as those foundational myths would have us believe.

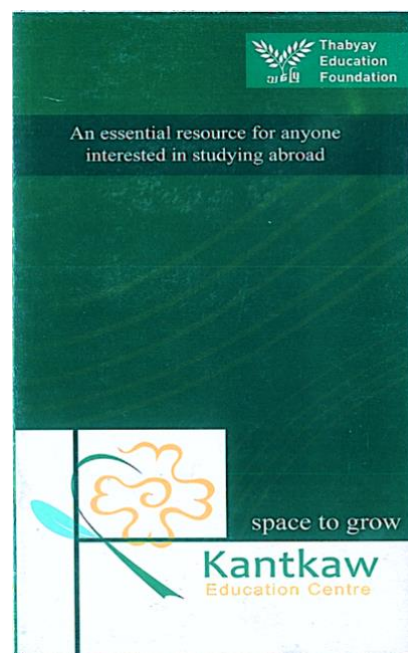


Figure 16. Space to Grow: *facilitating alternative educational and aspirational pathways through migration-for-education-and-return* (Photo: Author).

¹²² Interview (M35): 21st November 2016 (and subsequent quotation)

This 'cultural style' has been internalised by many young Karen (see Chapter 1, pp. 41-42, 57, Chapter 2, pp. 82-83), not least Hpa-an's scholarship alumni, marking their aspirations 'to get out of that' framing, as Saw Tha Hie puts it here. Educational initiatives emerging in contemporary Hpa-an therefore seek to confront these unhelpful perceptions and divisive legacies by cultivating educational opportunities at home which aim to shape aspirations that tend away from this towards processes of migration-for-education *and return* 'to become someone of value in life' rather than simply 'somebody someplace else' (Crivello 2011) (see Chapter 2, p. 83). Indeed, the scholarship alumni are intent on fostering aspirations not just to be educated but well or 'highly' educated, something that has been conspicuously lacking in Karen State more than anywhere else in Myanmar (see Appendix 9, p. 288; also Appendix 8, p. 287).

In next section of this chapter I therefore start to consider how migration and the mobility practices, undertaken by these young people, shape and substantiate the affective character and content of their transitions 'to become someone'.

Strategic moves; silent dimensions: migration and socio-moral mobilities

Tracing alumni mobility around the critical duration following the completion of their education in Myanmar does indeed remind us that for many young people "education both requires mobility and increases one's capacity to be mobile" (Crivello 2011: 407) and, as such, is integral to the process of 'becoming somebody' of value in life. We see them track away from constraints at home to opportunities over the border and on to the Thai capital, before migrating back again with enhanced capacities and amidst new freedoms and opportunities with an increasing resolve 'to be someone useful for my community'.

For those scholarship alumni who grew up in small towns and villages around Hpa-an this often meant similar strategic moves between rural and urban contexts throughout their education, suggesting that for some these dynamics have closely attended transition processes at home and throughout their lives (see also Punch 2007; Boyden 2013). As Crivello (2011) suggests, for those engaged in such strategic moves there is often a corresponding shift in the 'capacity to aspire' (Appadurai 2004) as migration opens up new possibilities and opportunities. And I would add that this

shift shapes the particular *character* and *content* of aspirations substantiating that enhanced capacity as horizons alter and diversify in interaction with others, with particular implications for evolving selves and the situation.

Though undoubtedly successful these transitions have not been easy. We recall, for example, Eh Klain's ('Kind') commitment 'to help young people not have to go to Thailand anymore', such was the struggle and the sadness with which this experience was associated for her: the memory of her departure from home and family; the difficult years in domestic service there. Furthermore, it exposed her and others to a culture of dependency in which migrants are socialised into skilled but cheap employment within a shifting and uncertain development context (see Chapter 1, p. 55) that does little to confront persisting legacies of involuntary and indefinite migration, family fragmentation, itinerant and insecure labour which have long stigmatised Karen communities in the southeast as a 'migrant class'. And yet ultimately, she was to benefit from this move: she found work and education there; she found possibility and purpose through the Karen social welfare organisation through which she encountered the scholarship alumni for the first time; ultimately, she gained a scholarship herself to a prestigious private university in Bangkok where she met her husband.

Indeed, this evolving sense of how 'to be someone useful for my community' in response to these experiences is particularly clear in the critical durations around the completion of education in Thailand. These are imbued with that much more potential and possibility through the acquisition of internationally recognised qualifications and credentials. In fact, this makes them still more complex and difficult to resolve as these young people acknowledge the responsibility that this has placed on them in the face of new and beguiling opportunities. They are often articulated by alumni as another critical dilemma in which they are forced to make a decision about their education and their future (cf. Johnson-Hanks 2002). For example, scholarship alumna Nann Phawt Baung ('Yellow Flower'), an English teacher at EGG, described this dilemma to me in the following terms,

When I finished my degree [in Myanmar] I also have an intention to learn more things and then to come back and serve the community – that sense of service was always there – so I think it hasn't changed after I finished my second degree. But after that [scholarship experience in Thailand] there are many temptations – lots of students stay there in Thailand and they don't come back because the education system is different and then the living standard is quite different; the things that we don't know in Burma - there are many

conveniences in Thailand like the job opportunities and then the salary you can get there is quite high which is quite tempting.¹²³

As framed here, this ‘temptation’ emerges as something of a moral dilemma - one in which Phawt Baung is compelled to make a choice between a life of opportunity and apparent ‘convenience’ abroad in Thailand or one of commitment and service at home in Myanmar – in short, a hard choice between readily accessible and tangible gains in the immediate and uncertain contributions and service in the imagined. I would argue that it is a choice framed by the vantage offered in migrating between these two points and the possibilities they present which illuminates the nature of this choice.

Crucially, this process and the enhanced perspective it now offers appear to animate latent notions of social privilege and responsibility which prove decisive in framing aspirations moving forward. Though Nann Phawt Baung says, ‘that sense of service was always there’, it seems likely that the nature and extent of that commitment was engendered by her physical and metaphysical journey between domains of convenience in Thailand and domains of compromise in Myanmar - that is, her understanding of the extent of that convenience and compromise was thrown into sharp(er) relief by her movement between the two domains. This emerging realisation frequently punctuated my conversations with scholarship alumni suggesting that it is born of a dilemma, thrown up the process of migration itself, the awareness and resolution of which appears to mark a decisive shift in aspiration and intent for many of them.

This moment of realisation came across as something of an epiphany in my conversation with scholarship alumnus Saw Eh Phaung Suu (‘Shine’), a young English teacher at GLC and originally from *Taungoo* in *Bago* Division. In reflecting on the options open to him on graduating from Asia-Pacific International University in Bangkok, he reveals the extent of this dilemma and the moral conundrum it throws up,

After finishing [university in Thailand], I just thought maybe I am just going to find a job and start my life in an easy-going kind of way with a decent salary and move on easily. But at that moment it gave me a thought that there was more to it than that; that I was in a place and [at] a point where I could do something more valuable, so I suppose it did very much shape my goals; maybe we can say that it was the main thing which made me stop and think and come back and help.¹²⁴

¹²³ Interview (F31): 10th November 2016

¹²⁴ Interview (M25): 15th November 2016

As articulated here, choices around remaining in Thailand are framed as ‘easy’, seemingly devoid of possibility for being inevitable, whilst those around returning home to Myanmar emerge as ‘more than that’ – ‘more valuable’ - and therefore more decisive; such reflections seemingly animate the sense of moral dilemma which a journey of this kind has prompted.

Indeed, in revisiting this moment, Eh Phaung Suu apprehends ‘a point and a place’ at which this realisation became decisive in making him ‘stop and think’, suggesting that mobility over time *as well as* space fostered his evolving aspirations and their moral basis ‘to come back and help’. These are just the kind of ‘detours and displacement’, that Henrik Vigh (2006) suggests, the uncertain nature of which prompts these young people to ‘redraw trajectories and tactics’ (see Chapter 2, p. 81) and which are likely to have positive outcomes for them and for others.

Migration within the Karen borderlands clearly figures significantly in the construction of these diverging possibilities, unlocking new (often morally inflected) potential at vital conjunctures for Hpa-an’s scholarship alumni. Alumni tend to be mindful that this dilemma figures as an inevitable consequence of the vital conjuncture that prompted them to migrate to Thailand initially - a lack of opportunities at home serves to prompt migration-for-education making the dilemma of return difficult and therefore that much more decisive. As Saw Eh Phaung Suu (‘Shine’) recognises above, his education and the opportunities it has brought in Thailand, influenced his aspirations in the immediate through the lure of easy economic gains but in so doing threatened to block alternative pathways that promised ‘something more valuable’ in the imagined future.

Significantly, what emerges around this critical dilemma and duration is an awareness of how valuable education is as a mechanism through which to ‘come back and help’, as he puts it; part of a communitarian project at home rather than a life abroad – a means by which ‘to become someone of value in life’ rather than simply ‘somebody someplace else’ (Crivello 2011). Moreover, it emerges as a means through which to exercise and express reciprocal social obligation by those whose education, as Nann Eh Klain (‘Kind’) identified, ‘is supported’ and who therefore have the added responsibility ‘to be

someone useful for my community'¹²⁵; and to do so in that particular domain which impinged on their ability to forge successful transitions in the past.

This awareness is seemingly enhanced by the example of family and friends who have validated migratory pathways by successfully navigating similar migration corridors in the past which, crucially, tend back towards home and service (see Ralph 2008; Jolliffe [née Vogler] 2010; Wyn and Andres 2011; P. Jolliffe 2016). These are poignant and positive recollections in which parents and older siblings leave amidst uncertainty but return for the benefit of family and community; as Nann Phawt Baung ('Yellow Flower') explains,

But I think my mentor is my father... and then I think if I come back I can... maybe I can be a bridge for others - the next generation - but if I stay in a foreign land then maybe I will get many things, but I am going to have to struggle for me alone and myself. That is the philosophy my father gave me, and he is a good example for me because he studied five years in the United States where lots of people do not come back, but he came back – he showed me a good example.¹²⁶

The legacy of migration in this example is a stronger rather than a weaker sense of kin and community relations than the many examples of family fragmentation in Hpa-an might suggest (cf. Crivello 2011; Boyden 2013; Patel 2017); it is one in which narratives of migration-and-return appear redemptive for the evident sacrifice and compromise involved, binding families and communities more closely together as a result.

The presence of this moral dilemma – to stay or return - continues to inform the education and transitions of a new generation of Karen students contemplating multiple often alluring opportunities in transitional Hpa-an and beyond. Scholarship alumni working as teachers and youth leaders around new educational sites in Hpa-an now prompt and guide young people in these very terms, shaping aspirations by what is feared as much as by what is hoped for, in drawing on their own narratives of migration-and-return; we recall the student in the previous chapter commenting on what made her teacher a role model for her. Indeed, a number of others commented, for example, on how

¹²⁵ Notions of moral engagement and citizenship, that is moral citizenship, have assumed increasing critical focus within the context of Myanmar's transition (Walton 2012, 2016a, 2016b; McCarthy 2016, 2018; South and Lall 2018). Gerard McCarthy (2016, 2018) suggests a 'fusing of religion, care and citizenship' as the moral basis of collective engagement and identity around non-state welfare, deriving from *Parahita seit* ('social action') and therefore issuing primarily from a Buddhist cosmological sensibility. However, this frame lacks utility in providing an interpretation of the kind of morally mediated social action and engagement in Burma/Myanmar of those existing outside the spiritual and spatial orbit of this sensibility.

¹²⁶ Interview (F31): 10th November 2016

their teachers frequently presented them with this very dilemma in the classroom, referencing their lived experience and suggesting how easy gains in the immediate might be supplanted with vocational aspirations in the imagined. In this way, they encourage their students to contemplate the dilemma now before having to confront it in the future - in the classroom in Hpa-an rather than on graduating with an attractive job offer in Thailand. As one of Hpa-an's scholarship alumni explained to me, 'I tell my students, "Today you may be my *students* but tomorrow you will be my *colleagues* – we need more people to come back and help - never forget that!"'¹²⁷ (see also Chapter 6, p. 211).

Furthermore, for the likes of Nann Phawt Baung ('Yellow Flower'), her father's example of migration-and-return implicates migratory practices in an increasing sense of social commitment, obligation and responsibility through which she apprehends alternative pathways at home for scholarship alumni 'bridging' different worlds and experiences. Indeed, alumni often described their aspirations to act as a 'bridge' for the next generation by which to assist them in navigating critical durations linking time-spaces and consolidating aspirations and agency. We recall, for example, that Saw Eh So ('Patriot') chose to name the school he established in his village, 'Bridge for All', whilst others offered 'gateways' to 'move forward' (see Chapter 4, pp. 160-162). The use of this particular metaphor exposes alumni aspirations to act as viable (and visible) pathways in the way significant others may have done for them in the past – as a *bridge* between places and people; as a bridge between now, then, and the future.

This was powerfully communicated to me by Saw Thar Hie ('Beautiful Heart') who designed and built YCC on his return from Thailand very much in the style of a traditional Thai stilt house and as a local hub and neutral space for young people to meet, talk and learn (see Introduction, p. 1). He talked about 'balancing' himself between those inside Karen State and those on the border as part of a 'collective vision of responsibility for education', his role within which he described in the following terms,

So I see my role as kind of a connection between university students and the migrant students and between Pwo [Plong] Karen and Sgaw Karen, between the Christian and Buddhists – something like that – you know this motivates me – working together and seeing something happening like this – because we have seen so many conflicts on the religion issue, the ethnic issue and the difference between the educated and the uneducated. We cannot resolve that;

¹²⁷ Interview (M32): Yangon, 11th September 2015 (respondent's emphasis)

so I see myself as making that connection and building bridges within the Karen community and between the Karen exile community and the local community here in Hpa-an.¹²⁸

His aspirations here to act as a 'bridge' appear to assume multiple forms and framings clearly informed and enhanced by the journeys and encounters this facilitated – as a bridge between Karen domains, identities and affiliations; as a bridge between resources and ideas; as a bridge between the present and the future – and to be so in the interests of resolving enduring legacies of difference, conflict and misunderstanding amongst Karen. Significantly, he went on to acknowledge the particular impact of the Karen student network, the KUSA, in shaping this emerging aspiration, its evolving moral basis of obligation and commitment, and the example it provided of 'working together' towards 'a collective vision of responsibility for education'.

In the second half of this chapter, I go on to explore how alumni mobility around specific institutions has drawn them into closer contact with such networks of people, possibilities and purpose. In so doing, I identify how encounters first with significant individuals and then with particular educational institutions have shaped their transitions, particularly in terms of the person to which they aspire to be.

i. Significant others: networks of people, possibility and purpose in Thailand

For those without the benefit of such positive examples and role models as Saw Thar Hie ('Beautiful Heart') to draw on, navigating around the vital conjuncture following the completion of education in Myanmar might prove that much more challenging with the move to Thailand. Indeed, for both him and Eh Klain ('Kind') this was very much the case until they encountered ethnic welfare networks like the KUSA and the OKRO, both of which did much to open up their prospects. For the likes of Nann Phaw Eah ('Lovely Flower'), the move yielded unexpected dividends from the outset in that she entered domestic service for a young foreign couple with a baby and was therefore able to develop her English through that work which proved decisive in eventually gaining a scholarship to Rangsit University near Bangkok. All these experiences and encounters, silently but significantly informed by migratory and mobility practices which exposed these two women to significant institutions and individuals over the border, eased their trajectories and expanded the horizons of their aspirations.

¹²⁸ Interview (M35): 21st November 2016

Indeed, such encounters draw into focus specific institutions, and the individuals coalescing around them, that have considerably expanded the possibilities open to this group of young people in Thailand. Particular informal institutions and border-based structures figure significantly in the experiences of many of Hpa-an's scholarship alumni, actively expanding their sense of what is possible and through education in particular: the Karen social welfare organisation, the OKRO, acts as welfare support mechanism and critical meeting point in Mae Sot and Bangkok as does the KUSA; the migrant schools of Mae Sot as teaching and learning platforms; Thabyay Education Foundation as gateway and conduit for scholarship applications¹²⁹; later, private Thai universities in and around Bangkok act as intercultural contact zones, whilst various migrant boarding houses at the edges of this picture foster enduring collaborations and friendships amongst Karen migrants, activists and scholarship alumni.

Crucially, these institutions provide critical encounters with individuals working in and around education and through whom subsequent pathways are made visible and viable. For example, both Nan Eh Klain ('Kind') and Nann Phaw Eah ('Lovely Flower') cited the support and example of the same friend and teacher encountered through the OKRO in Mae Sot and Bangkok, and now a prominent activist working on gender issues in Myanmar's nationwide peace process; as Eh Klain explained,

She helped me, she motivated me, and she helped me through until I get a scholarship. And she is not the only one who helped me – also other teachers – they are like co-workers you know; like scholarship alumni – a student network; other teachers – one is in Thailand and another one is also in Thailand studying now for a PhD degree.¹³⁰

In a separate interview, Nann Phaw Eah referred to the same person commenting on her in the following terms,

She is my senior; she is the one who invites [encourages] me to go to the university - she is also the Child's Dream alumni as well, so she suggests I apply - she is my friend; my *best friend!* If I don't have that lady and also the guy at Thabyay [Education] Foundation at that time I would not have *known* about the scholarship; I would not have *got* the scholarship.¹³¹

This brings into focus those significant others and the web of social and strategic networks with which they are associated, and which have eased the trajectories and shaped the transitions of a

¹²⁹ Thabyay is a well-regarded post-16 learning centre with a designated scholarship department and administrator. Previously based in Chang Mai in northern Thailand from 1996, it moved to Yangon in 2011. It played an instrumental role in establishing the Hpa-an education network, constituent schools of which are closely modelled on it and remains a prominent network partner today.

¹³⁰ Interview (F29): 17th November 2016

¹³¹ Interview (F35): 21st November 2016 (respondent's emphasis)

number of Hpa-an's scholarship alumni. Indeed, in this case it suggests that specific gender (see Heissler 2013), cultural and ethnic, as well as knowledge and education networks (see Murphy 1995; OECD 2003) are playing a role in shaping aspirations around migration-for-education and their legacies in the Thai borderlands. In so doing, this points to a range of non-economic reasons prompting and shaping migratory pathways, evolving aspirations and their enactment in the Karen borderlands.

For the scholarship alumni, the initial impetus to migrate to Thailand may well have been to access the informal labour market for the purposes of sending remittances back to families in Hpa-an, as it was for Eh Klain ('Kind') and others. However, this imperative is quickly supplemented, suggesting that there are other reasons governing these evolving mobility practices and therefore informing transitions navigated in this way. Migration now emerges as a mechanism to circumvent cultural restrictions and social exclusion at home (see Azaola 2012) whilst strategically navigating Myanmar's uncertain transition from the other side of the border (see Punch 2007) through these evidently more inclusive and accommodating networks.

In the critical durations around the move to Thailand aspirations are increasingly peopled and promoted in collaboration with others, as the examples above confirm (see also Elder 1994; Guyer 1995). This, in turn, can be seen to shape not only the capacity, but the content and character of those aspirations towards a 'collective vision of responsibility for education', as Saw Thar Hie ('Beautiful Heart') described it. In the following and final sections of this chapter, I now explore those critical durations by investigating specific encounters with non-state institutions - migrant schools and private Thai universities - and the social actors and networks associated with them as they shape alumni subjectivities and aspirations further still and to specific ends.

ii. *Politics and possibility: development, democracy and dependency in the migrant schools of northern Thailand*

All Hpa-an's scholarship alumni have some experience of the migrant schools in and around Mae Sot, which for many of them formed the alternative 'education opportunity' to high school and state university in Myanmar, as Nann Phaw Eah ('Lovely Flower') described it. Indeed, for her such an 'opportunity' amounted to the primary incentive for leaving Hpa-an in the first instance, and

encounters with these educational institutions and provision can be seen to mitigate uncertainty, punctuate vital conjunctures, and shape aspirations for many of them.

The proliferation of post-16 migrant schools and learning centres in the border towns of northern Thailand, particularly Mae Sot, has clearly provided the context within which alumni themselves apprehended possibilities around education and started to develop a commitment to it as a vehicle for social change and development (see Chapter 1, pp. 55-56). Indeed, in many ways they have provided a vision of higher education and its role in community development and protection upon which aspects of the Hpa-an education network have been closely modelled, thus shaping youth transitions in this region in the past as much as in the present (see Chapter 6). I therefore suggest that these informal institutions have played a decisive role in shaping their aspirations and the subsequent enactment of these.

On a basic level these institutions clearly fulfilled a specific purpose in providing an alternative means of gaining internationally recognised credentials and accessing overseas higher education. Indeed, on crossing the border many of the scholarship alumni enrolled in a migrant school to complete the General Educational Development (GED) certificate, the US high school equivalent, widely recognised by scholarship providers and private universities. This brought them into contact with western curricula and ideas, teachers and teaching methodology; it therefore expanded their sense of what was possible through education.

Hpa-an's scholarship alumni identify how specific aspects of this educational encounter shaped their aspirations and personal development, whilst acknowledging how it marked their subsequent approach and practices. For example, Saw Eh Phaung Suu ('Shine'), who studied and then did some teaching practice at the migrant school Minmahaw Higher Education Program¹³² in Mae Sot confirmed that,

Minmahaw helped me a lot. Before that I did not have a clear goal but after that experience of teaching there for one month I knew that I have a passion for teaching, so I decided that 'Ok, I'm going to be a teacher'. Then after that, Minmahaw helped me a lot also with some other vocational training like business... one of the teachers from Minmahaw school he –

¹³² Minmahaw was founded in 2007 and now caters for "disadvantaged Burmese [nationality not ethnicity] aged between 17 and 23 years old that have completed compulsory aged education" in order to "empower the new generation to strive towards higher education, to be able to compete internationally with their contemporaries in the information age and to have personal commitment in moving forward Myanmar's Democratization process" (Minmahaw 2020) (see also Purkey 2010).

actually he is from the US – he started a mushroom business near the school – and I was one of his men [giggles] and I helped him as his assistant. After that I apply for higher education and like I had so much to tell [in support of his application].¹³³

Here Eh Phaung Suu's encounters with foreign staff and vocational and experiential learning clearly did much to shape his aspired transition from secondary to higher education. Furthermore, for him the encounter proved decisive in shaping professional aspirations whilst navigating uncertainty following the completion of this education in Thailand.

In a similar vein, Nann Eh Klain ('Kind'), acknowledged that her encounter with foreign teachers preparing her for the GED, again at Minmahaw, had influenced her decision to become a teacher and very much marked her own approach to teaching; as she said,

I learned the essential skills from them - they were very democratic and had very much a student-centred approach you know – so watching that I learned how to lead the students and how to let them lead themselves and their class¹³⁴.

As she articulates it here, the example of this teaching model suggests not just an effective means of classroom management but the assimilation of a specific educational culture and ethos, quite distinct from that of state provision in Myanmar as many alumni experienced it. This more 'democratic' and student-centred approach is seen to be consistent with specific learning outcomes around developing personal initiative and leadership skills through collaborative or student-centred learning - outcomes and aspirations that marked her transitions and would come to define the approach to learning in her own school back in Hpa-an in the years to come. Like Saw Eh Phaung Suu ('Shine') above, Eh Klain ('Kind') suggests that these intercultural learning encounters have shaped her transition from education to employment as she now enacts a similar educational culture and ethos in Hpa-an.

Other scholarship alumni acknowledged the impact of this experience on aspects of school organisation and management. Scholarship alumnus Saw Eh So ('Patriot') remarked that he and his classmates had 'never before experienced the very good relationship with the teachers' they enjoyed at the migrant school Wide Horizons¹³⁵ in Mae Sot, adding,

Not only was the relationship good between teachers and students but in terms of grading or anything – *the system, the way they did things* reflected that – because you know I am very

¹³³ Interview (M25): 15th November 2016

¹³⁴ Interview (F29): 21st November 2016

¹³⁵ Wide Horizons Organizational Development Program was founded in 2006 by the Burmese Migrant Worker's Education Committee and World Education; it is particularly concerned with supporting young people from Burma/Myanmar now working in CBOs in Mae Sot (Wide Horizons 2020).

curious at that time and I was working in the office and I was helping the headmistress with the school and I like the way they run the school – it was *very democratic* you know.¹³⁶

As a consequence of this encounter he deliberately cultivated similarly inclusive relations between staff and students on founding his own school back in Hpa-an, as well as amongst staff through the school's governance system which he felt embodied that 'democratic' ethos at Wide Horizons. In so doing, he encourages his students 'to behave and cooperate with each other'.

In this way, the aspirations of Hpa-an's scholarship alumni appear to be conditioned both pedagogically and politically as they are seen to consciously borrow and transfer models and approaches to education in the borderlands before the transition, which tend away from Myanmar's 'closed system'. Instead, they encourage more inclusive and collaborative approaches inside the country's expanded non-state sector. Indeed, the cross-border educational encounter experienced by Hpa-an's scholarship alumni around these particular institutions appears to have engendered – through the vantage offered by their mobility between those educational structures at home and abroad - an increasing awareness of the shortcomings of education in Myanmar. It has suggested ways in which education might be recalibrated in the future to respond more effectively to the evolving needs of young people; as Nann Phaw Eah ('Lovely Flower') explains,

So, when I got to Thailand, I see that the children or the young people have got a lot of opportunities, including the use of computers and technology you know. Before I was in Thailand, I never used a computer – I never got a *chance!* Since I got to Thailand and I was working I got an old computer from my boss who gave me it to me to practise on and I learn, learn, learn. This is a *real change!*¹³⁷

However, for Saw Thar Hie ('Beautiful Heart'), former head teacher of the Love and Care Learning Center¹³⁸ in Mae Sot, this abundance proved the exception not the rule. His experiences around these institutions nonetheless appear to have granted him much the same insight and impetus, for he was struck by the disparity and therefore inequality around the distribution of technical and financial resources on the border,

My experience when I arrived on the border is one of limitations – limited resources, everything is very underdeveloped back then. At the time I was there we have to find everything for ourselves at the school because the community that I join is different from

¹³⁶ Interview (M34): 9th November 2016 (respondent's emphasis)

¹³⁷ Interview (F34): 21st November 2016 (respondent's emphasis)

¹³⁸ Founded in 2004/05 on much the same mandate as Minmahaw and Wide Horizons it responds directly to the socio-economic consequences of "the political and economic crisis in Burma"; it facilitates pathways in preparation to access the GED programme with an open policy to accept students from all faiths" (Love and Care 2020).

some of the teachers over there – those that I volunteer with in the border areas – so I feel like a kind of pity and sadness for the migrant schools and the condition of them.¹³⁹

Indeed, as he explains it here, issues of community ownership and sustainability closely attend experiences of migration-for-education on the border. The ‘pity and sadness’ he feels over the poor state of migrant schools appears to shape aspirations which will come to inform the sense of social obligation and responsibility shaping his evolving aspirations and transition. Essential to this, as he told us earlier, are understandings of collective action which engage ‘different’ communities and their stakeholders in ensuring equitable and sustainable development. This has come to define approaches to education and its outcomes in transitional Hpa-an, as community leaders like him now struggle to navigate a path back home in Hpa-an between the demands of satisfying traditional and conservative religious values and patronage on the one hand, and on the other the targets and expectations tied to development assistance (see Chapter 6).

Alumni mobility around classrooms and learning spaces within these institutions has clearly provided many with critical insights upon which they might act in the future with respect to the self and the situation. Echoing Saw Eh So’s (‘Patriot’) observations above, many commented on the positive and productive relations with their teachers, amongst whom they invariably cited a specific mentor who encouraged and supported their development. Occasionally, they referred to a foreign teacher, as he did, or to a fellow student as crucial sources of inspiration and reassurance.

However, whilst learning experiences were notably and generally positive some did acknowledge how specific aspects of their encounter with these institutions and their stakeholders were considered less successful. When attending Saw Thar Hie’s (‘Beautiful Heart’) school Love and Care, scholarship alumnus Saw Shar Phaung Khlain (‘Star’) quickly noticed a distinction between himself and his fellow students,

You know normally the students are like – we call them migrant workers – so I don’t think they have a future there and are looking for something different – just *different* - they don’t want *to be something*; I mean not like us. For me and a few others we have our own future, our own goal, but for the other students they don’t want to leave – they want to stay there because their parents sent them to get something there; but they don’t even try – how can you get something if you don’t even try in school?! So, they don’t talk about any future; they talk about playing football, going out, you know, something else – not their future.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Interview (M34): 21st November 2016

¹⁴⁰ Interview (M29): 16th November 2016 and subsequent quotation (respondent’s emphasis)

As far as he is concerned, the migrant school experience has long served a population resigned to a life in Thailand, many of whom have few aspirations to take full advantage of the opportunities it presents (see Chapter 1, p. 55). Indeed, he suggested to me that these institutions have actually done much to entrench this culture of dependency through the availability and access of such support structures. For him at least, by simply offering ‘something different’ - a distraction or escape from the difficult and dispiriting realities many Karen migrant workers face in Thailand – they have nonetheless failed in their mission to empower and cultivate self-sufficiency that would otherwise fuel the need and desire ‘to be something’; as he went on to clarify,

...these kinds of students are always waiting for the support of the teacher, whereas a few students like me don’t want to stay like this – we try something else; we try to connect and organise different activities together. I encourage this in my students today - not to wait for me!

Such testimony suggests that even negative experiences around migrant schooling have the capacity to shape creative and constructive collective responses by prompting likeminded students ‘to connect and organise’ together in reaction. Indeed, it appears that this encounter had an acute effect on Saw Shar Phaung Khlain’s aspirations around education and their subsequent enactment, for it prompted an awareness of the kind of pedagogical dependency that certain types of education might foster (see Arnove, Torres and Franz 2013), how educational provision might collude in the construction of this dependency, and how this might be avoided in the future.

At such points, we gain valuable glimpses of how aspirations during this critical duration are being shaped against the memory and in the moment towards a future possible self. Indeed, this was forcefully communicated to me by Nann Phaw Eah (‘Lovely Flower’) when reflecting on the increasing presence of development agencies and assistance in transitional Hpa-an, “These people are destroying our Burmese people – *our* people – I don’t want those people to be here anymore!” she hissed,

They just want to build the classroom, just build the skills, the capacity – they can do that by themselves! If you come with the money from the top those people will destroy us like they have destroyed the refugees – all the refugees in Thailand are waiting for the money, they are waiting to be fed, they don’t want to do anything, they are lazy! That’s why I don’t want those people here! I want the donor who can assign something to do – ‘I will give you the skills then I will give you the money’ – if they give the money first those people will be destroyed very soon”¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ Interview (F34): 21st November 2016 (respondent’s emphasis)

Whilst many scholarship alumni benefitted from this provision, they are acutely aware that the development assistance that made this education possible has done much to extend a culture of dependency into Myanmar's transition now threatening to undermine initiatives that seek to mitigate the effect of this. Indeed, Nann Phaw Eah clearly frames her aspirations for education in transitional Hpa-an in direct opposition to the mechanisms informing this dependency and the unhelpful legacies it has prompted: she acknowledges the need for funding and support but only in so far as it safeguards community ownership if initiatives like hers and the young people passing through them are to forge strong and independent pathways.

Since much of this kind of technical assistance has now shifted over the border into Myanmar and particularly Hpa-an with the advent of the reform and transition processes, alumni efforts and aspirations are therefore increasingly focused on resisting the transference of this culture and its consequences. However, this is not without its challenges as many consider that the architecture of dependency now also encompasses the employment market with its increasingly well-remunerated jobs at international development agencies in Hpa-an, pathways that tend away from sustainable community development and protection. In the opinion of many whom I spoke to, this burgeoning labour market masquerades as opportunity whilst dispossessing communities of their future teachers, nurses, leaders and welfare entrepreneurs, defusing the aspiration 'to become someone of value'.

These kinds of insights around education, development and dependency provide yet more confirmation that cross-border migration and mobility involving encounters with institutions like the migrant schools of northern Thailand, which are largely sustained by international development assistance, has done much to accentuate aspirations informing a 'collective responsibility for education' amongst this particular group of young people. As I will explore in the final section of this chapter, this responsibility has been shaped further by encounters with those private universities in the Thai capital where fluctuating zones of privilege and prejudice have significantly mediated the scholarship experience.

iii. *Selective cosmopolitans: navigating fluctuating zones of privilege and prejudice in Thailand's private universities*

The scholarship experience itself, and specifically the encounter with private universities in and around the Thai capital Bangkok, emerge as decisive platforms for the shaping and development of alumni aspirations around education and indeed employment. Moreover, they offer insights into the way in which alumni start to move from aspirations in the imagined to those in the immediate, as these evolve in closer temporal proximity to their homecoming and the prospect of change and transition at home. We now see alumni construct their own understandings of the practical significance of this encounter as part of a broader identification with other scholarship students sharing this experience. These reflections therefore suggest how this particular experience has acted as a matrix for a specific kind of collective action around education in Myanmar's expanding private sector.

The encounter offers individuals access to the kinds of practical and technical knowledge and skills with which to act on their imagined aspiration 'to be someone useful for my community', and in assuming 'collective responsibility for education', as many of them embark on first or second degrees directly related to teaching and education. As scholarship alumna Nann Muu Suu ('Peaceful Girl') explained, when reflecting on her experience studying for a Master's degree in English Language Teaching at Assumption University,

When I studied in Bangkok - when I got a scholarship to join the university there - then I realised how I *should* contribute - how I can help my students learn – the *process* of learning inside and outside the classroom.¹⁴²

Though she does not specify here the specific nature of the pedagogical awareness she gained, her reflection points towards a growing commitment to experiential and service learning in which schooling might perform a role both 'inside and outside the classroom'. It also suggests that her aspirations around teaching are, at this point, assuming a broader emphasis in which 'processes' of teaching and learning might support a broader contract of social obligation and commitment between staff and students, schools and communities. We have had glimpses of this amidst the zones of relative local autonomy at home in Hpa-an (see Chapter 4) and in response to the post-16 migrant schooling in Mae Sot, but now the contract appears to come into focus with more clarity and conviction.

¹⁴² Interview (F29): 15th November 2016 (respondent's emphasis)

Indeed, alumni reflections on encounters with these institutions confirm, once again, how movement between school and university, at home and now here in Thailand, has granted them perspectives from which to derive impetus and frame insights moving forward. For example, Nann Phawt Baung ('Yellow Flower') provides further reflections on the structural arrangements facilitating these processes of learning when studying for a Bachelor's degree in Education and Psychology at Asia-Pacific International University in Bangkok,

All the teachers - the professors - they are really very good at training us *to be* a teacher, I think. You know, I learned a lot of *morals* – *good morals* – from them also... They are really good people like even though they are in a really high position as a professor we can always go to see them and meet them and talk to them and talk about our problems – anything like that – because they are very approachable.¹⁴³

Nann Phawt Baung appears to echo those insights around the close and informal nature of staff-student relations in the migrant school encounter above which scholarship alumni identified as an effective instrument of support and social development. However, here she suggests that this relationship is qualitatively enhanced by the notable humility of academic staff who, regardless of their social position and considerable accomplishments, are readily available and approachable. She clearly apprehends this in stark contrast to cultural relations informing state education in Myanmar, specifically higher education, where strict hierarchies and codes of respect mean that staff are traditionally more removed and disengaged from the active construction and development of student knowledge, and/or responsibility for student welfare and progress (see Lall 2011).

The moral content and character of educational encounters, this time within private educational spheres, conflates good people with good teaching in the production of 'democratic' education. Indeed, individual alumni experiences reveal different facets of the moral landscape within which these educational encounters are situated, suggesting how these have played into the construction of aspirations around alternative approaches to education in transitional Hpa-an.

Saw Eh So ('Patriot'), who studied for a Bachelor's degree in English and Psychology at the same university as Nann Eh Klain ('Kind') in Bangkok, suggests something of this through an interesting

¹⁴³ Interview (F31): 17th November 2016 (respondent's emphasis)

portrait of campus life and relations. Having previously commented on the ‘very democratic’ nature of migrant schooling he goes on to say,

The university was not big – about a thousand students – and all the students stayed on the campus. It was founded by SDAs - Seventh Day Adventists – so it has a strong Christian constitution; all the teachers are Christians, but they are more than our teachers - they are like our parents there! And the good thing is that each department has departmental worship because it is a Christian school and university; so every Wednesday we go to our teacher’s house – we sing, they cook food for us, we eat there, and we spend time for like two or three hours - and then we come back to study. We... even though I am not a Christian but Buddhist, I like that because you get to meet with the Faculty in our department – we get to talk together, to enjoy food together, and then all the students from the department they get to meet; so we become very close – *very close* with Faculty and our friends¹⁴⁴.

He then proceeded to attribute the strength of this learning environment to this ‘family style’ as he called it, adding - “even though I am not the same religion as them I still feel included like I am part of the family!”

On a general level, staff-student relations and, specifically, alumni conceptions of the sense of equality and collaboration that inform these, distinguishes this education from the remote and therefore morally dubious substance of state higher education and teaching in Myanmar. It is also deemed to be a more effective learning experience. This is substantiated for Eh So through the manner in which this education fosters and indeed is founded on positive interfaith encounters through which key educational stakeholders – Christian teachers and mostly Buddhist students - can engage and, crucially, emerge with more constructive and durable relationships as a result. Whilst the structural opposition between Karen groups informed educational encounters in authoritarian Hpa-an (see Chapter 1), in this context these are now mediated by positive inter-faith encounters which mark alumni aspirations and the enactment of these in transitional Hpa-an, regardless of the opposition they are receiving (see also Chapter 4).

Indeed, processes of migration and mobility which inform these critical durations around the scholarship experience in the Thai capital clearly foster decisive intercultural encounters for alumni which do much to shape evolving identifications. Mary Louise Pratt’s (1991) concept of the ‘contact zone’ which she describes as, “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical power relations” (ibid: 34) might prove helpful here in

¹⁴⁴ Interview (M34): 11th November 2016 (respondent’s emphasis)

evaluating this encounter. Kadiwal and Rind (2013) signal how this theoretical abstraction has since been enhanced by Singh and Doherty (2004) as ‘global contact zones’, to include sites of international higher education where individuals come with diverse worldviews, histories and educational experiences and contest cross-cultural dilemmas. Kadiwal and Rind (2013) go on to suggest that those educational stakeholders navigating the uneven terrains of these contested intercultural landscapes might be viewed as ‘selective cosmopolitans’ “who, in order to advantageously position themselves in the contemporary globalised world, negotiate between different cultural influences pragmatically, while simultaneously experiencing ambivalence and tensions in terms of their sense of identity. These individuals are inherently reflexive regarding the unavoidable complexity of their situation” (2013: 690) (see Chapter 1, pp. 33-34).

In many ways, alumni can be seen to act reflexively as selective cosmopolitans in navigating the potential conflicts and compromises that the intercultural campus and community imposes. Indeed, they do not simply pick up positive facets such as that described by Saw Eh So (‘Patriot’) whilst discarding others, but appear to derive impetus from the most ambivalent experiences with which they can be seen to frame positive and progressive aspirations and action. For example, Saw Eh Phaung Suu (‘Shine’), who studied for a Bachelor’s degree in Primary Education at Asia-Pacific International University, was struck by those intercultural and associated linguistic differences and tensions marking the learning space which he had to navigate,

Most of the teachers are from different parts of the world – they are not Thai – they are from like twenty different countries – some are from India, some are from the States, some are from Africa... so many different places. At first [*giggling*] I have a big problem with their accents – the different kinds of English – but later I am used to it, I got used to it, and then it was ok, and then I really appreciate their caring and loving attitude and that motivated me also to study, to put effort into my work and study. For me, personally, I feel like APIU is my second home; I feel like that! Yes, that relationship between the student and the teacher plays a big role in our education I think.¹⁴⁵

This suggests further layers of ethno-cultural difference informing these particular learning sites, in the context of which a positive educational encounter and learning experience emerges. Moreover, as articulated here, it suggests that identities and the differences between them are seemingly displaced

¹⁴⁵ Interview (M25): 15th November 2016

through a shared language of communication and instruction, and the conflation of pastoral and academic fields of engagement in cultivating and expanding more inclusive learning spaces.

The moral value of this education is therefore seemingly enhanced through its capacity to acknowledge and reconcile differences which would likely threaten the stability of Karen relations at home, but which work here to good effect. Moreover, it suggests that the scholarship experience, in fostering such encounters, is indeed increasing alumni mobility by cultivating more reflexive and cosmopolitan identities and aspirations, largely derived from reconciling these kinds of intercultural differences and tensions through highly personal educational encounters.

However, not all scholarship experiences fostered such positive intercultural encounters and moral certainties. For example, the scholarship experience inevitably brought alumni into contact with wealthy fee-paying Thai students, which for Nann Phaw Eah ('Lovely Flower') meant navigating fluctuating zones of prejudice and privilege whilst studying for a Bachelor's degree in Communication Arts at Rangsit University, just north of Bangkok. In her experience, the university campus amounted to a field of unequal relations in which socio-economic disparities between affluent local students and increasing numbers of Burmese national scholarship students fostered a climate of mutual suspicion and distrust; as she explained it,

Most of our professors are Thai and since at that time our country is not open yet, they used to give less opportunity or less favour to us but the professors who come from the western countries like Australia, Germany, America, give a lot of privilege to us. They treat us totally differently. The Thai students are very lazy because they are very rich people who come from rich families - they don't do their homework; they don't study when they are supposed to; they don't care about the classroom - but for us we try *hard* and we study *so hard*; we already get, you know, high GPA [Grade Point Average] but at the end the Thai professors favour the Thai students and they still get a good GPA without studying hard and without doing their regular homework – the Thai professor always gives the Thai student the chance. The reason, I think, is money because some of the Thai professors are very biased – I can count who is biased and who is not biased.¹⁴⁶

The extent of institutional prejudice and privilege governing the scholarship experience only confirms the extent of the challenge facing many alumni in successfully overcoming this as part of their education. Significantly, Nann Phaw Eah derived the resilience with which to navigate this contested landscape through an awareness of how this encounter, far from diminishing her position, confirmed

¹⁴⁶ Interview (F34): 21st November 2016, and all subsequent quotations in this chapter unless otherwise stated

the extent of her own privilege and accomplishment in gaining access to these exclusive educational sites through her scholarship. It is a point echoed in Nann Eh Klain's ('Kind') declaration at the beginning of the last chapter that "I feel like I am more privileged than others because my education is supported". It suggests how increasing social and spatial mobility is working to shape the content and character of those evolving aspirations, and the social responsibility and commitment informing transitions. Furthermore, it suggests that intercultural difference and tension might provide alumni with creative and constructive impetus with which to frame positive notions of their future possible selves.

Nevertheless, Nann Phaw Eah ('Lovely Flower') went on to reveal that her personal attempts to overcome this discrimination involved similar forms of collusion which, perhaps unwittingly, played into the broader framework of prejudice and privilege undermining academic relations and the credibility of educational outcomes. She explained how she got into the habit of helping and even doing the homework of some of these wealthy Thai students now panicking as exams drew close, some of whom were from very well-known families in the entertainment industry - "But we are the same in that situation" she observed, bringing her into closer association with these students and the values governing their lives,

After that I make lots of friends [*giggling*]! I have been sitting in the Mercedes car – a very expensive one – because my friend's family own a car company – and every month they can change the car and we go anywhere. It is so very different from Burma; always high consumer, consumer – they use the Smartphone – very expensive phone! Whenever they go with me outside they want to treat me – so we go to Japanese restaurants because they ask me a lot of questions and I give them a lot of help with homework and that type of people do that – when they ask something from us - they treat us, they give us something, and they give me food.

By agreeing to help Thai students with their assignments, Phaw Eah felt she gained respect as well as reward through which she is then able to offset some of the negative impacts of academic discrimination. Moreover, this appears to recast her relationship with those Thai students with whom she engages and allows her to better appraise the cultural differences between local and foreign students and the socio-economic disparity dividing them, as indeed she went on to demonstrate when reflecting that,

It is totally different with our Burma because they can spend the money; they can *waste* the money but here we always *save* our money. *This* is the social difference. We can say it is a social *and* a cultural difference because of the class you know; because of the class of the

people – we are in the lower class, but they are in the higher class; that is the difference. You know, it is very lucky I can meet with these people and I can still *do* what I want to *do* and *be* what I want to *be* in the future – this is my dream come true because after I got the scholarship there and I studied there I learned a lot – many lifestyles, many different situations, different people, different ethical situations, different mind-sets, the different characters of the people – for me this is valuable for changing something in my community you know; you have to make your commitment from all this to be helpful to others because we have a strong social mind-set.

It is clear, therefore, that this particular encounter, for all its moral uncertainty amounted to a positive critical juncture. It afforded Nann Phaw Eah particular insights upon which she was able to base a decision about her own priorities or, as she puts it, ‘to make your commitment from all this’. In reflecting on her mobility abroad around these particular institutions and individuals, she reveals how valuable the intercultural experiences and encounters they have prompted have been in facilitating an awareness of social and cultural difference; as she says, ‘it is very lucky I can meet with these people and I can still *do* what I want to *do* and *be* what I want to *be* in the future’ – closely echoing those notions of reflexive and selective cosmopolitanism described above in terms of the moral certainty this educational encounter has afforded in becoming ‘someone responsible and useful for my community’.

Time as well as place is significant here – when this took place as much as where. Nann Phaw Eah (‘Lovely Flower’) suggests above that these tensions and differences were that much greater at a time when “our country is not open yet” but which are considerably diminished by shifting political developments at home which brought her country to increasing global attention; as she explains,

But there is a change in the whole university after 2010. [*With growing excitement*] A lot of Thai students start wanting to make friends with us and want to visit our country because it is opening up – because in 2010 Aung San Suu Kyi has been invited to the parliamentary seat and at that time the country is opening up a little bit - and it makes us look better to them I think.

This is to suggest that her fluctuating fortunes were bound up with those of her home country at this particular time; that her personal transition in response to this education was marked out by wider political shifts and transitions, which characterised the shared location of the scholarship alumni ‘generation’ within this process “as more fortunate than others”, as Eh Klain (‘Kind’) would have it, since they, unlike others before them, have been given the opportunity to act on these experiences. It therefore becomes easier to see how this set of experiences might act as the basis for a “community of experience” subscribing to a “common destiny” (Moreno and Urraco 2018), shaping the Self amongst others and thereby the situation within which those Selves are situated.

In this way the experiences which inform the Thai-Karen scholarship encounter appear to finally resolve the flux and uncertainty of those critical durations around the completion of education in Myanmar by offering new possibilities and impetus with which to closely frame their personal and professional aspirations and identities. Despite the trials and temptations that these fluctuating zones of privilege and prejudice have imposed, Nann Phaw Eah ('Lovely Flower') recognises that the experience has been 'valuable for changing something in my community' and therefore the extent to which this might now inform more reflexive and inclusive attitudes and aspirations involving education at home. As such, there is now a definite sense that the character and content of these aspirations, compounded by navigating new terrains of privilege and exclusivity in the time-spaces linking Myanmar and Thailand, are evolving from the imagined to the immediate, from the abstract to the agential, as she and her associates are now ready and able to act on them.

Conclusion: mobilising at critical junctures

This chapter has argued that mobility, across time as well as space, has emerged as a significant and strategic dynamic enhancing the capacity to aspire. Whilst migration is undeniably associated with 'the struggle and the sadness' marking youth transitions in which the aspirations of these young people for a better life appear to be confounded through precarious labour compounding images of them as 'a migrant class', it nonetheless allows them to 'thicken' their agency to contest this. It has done so through opportunities afforded within a parallel Karen domain less constrained by ethno-religious difference at home and the cultural norms and values that may inhibit young women or Karen ethnic minorities from accessing alternative provision.

Indeed, these efforts are marked by a stark contrast between struggle and success as they draw strength and purpose from the encounter with migrant schools whilst acknowledging the culture of dependency it furthers. Similarly, they must contend with fluctuating zones of privilege and prejudice within the exclusive enclaves of Bangkok's private universities on gaining their scholarships. However, this movement and the encounters it has involved have clearly shaped their evolving sense of social responsibility informing the socio-moral basis of their aspirations 'to be someone of value in life' and not simply 'someone someplace else' (Crivello 2011). This has served to confirm that migration-for-

education has acted as a mechanism for ultimately circumventing crisis and constraint whilst significantly increasing one's capacity to be mobile through the various moral and intercultural dilemmas it has presented.

Indeed, this discussion has also provided frequent examples of the way in which these young people are making sense of the various experiences and encounters they have had across the Karen borderlands; how the memory of them is having a bearing on the moment, and how the aspirations arising from this have shaped action in the present to respond and redress it in the future. There is indeed a sense of 'common destiny' emerging from their collective response to this specific set of experiences.

As I move my attention in the next chapter to a different group of young people – the students of the scholarship alumni now passing through new learning sites in Hpa-an – I look to explore the legacy of these aspirations and their enactment. Moreover, I do so in order to understand how this group of young people are navigating Myanmar's evolving and increasingly contradictory transition by exploring in still more quotidian detail how they are constructing future possible selves in Hpa-an. In this way, I am interested in what this might tell us about the role of aspirations in framing and furthering their transitions, and the outcomes these constructions are likely to have for the situation as well as the self.

Possible selves: aspirations and agency in transitional Hpa-an

Introduction: *building a dream here*

In a hot and gloomy office in the heart of Myanmar's commercial capital directly opposite Yangon University, the scene of many student uprisings over Myanmar's turbulent history, and a short taxi ride north from the Sule Pagoda where the student protests over the NEL were stamped out (see Chapter 1, pp. 23-24), I met a young Karen teacher. He, along with other scholarship alumni, founded the first academy to be established in Hpa-an in 2012. He is now Principal of one of Yangon's most prestigious private learning centres and though he enjoys his work his heart is in Hpa-an, where the community of students and teachers hold him in high esteem as *Cha Lah* or 'Teacher' in Plong Karen.

He is still very much involved with the school and has high hopes for it, "We want to establish a Community College - our idea is that we want to establish a Community College in Karen State - a foundation will be set up and the school in Hpa-an will be transformed into the Community College" he says with practised assurance.

Now he leans forward his eyes wide with excitement, "I told my students, 'You are my students now, you are my alumni tomorrow and the day after tomorrow you are my colleagues!' I encourage them to develop themselves; we need more people to set that one up." He gives me a conspiratorial grin and then, as if remembering something, he quickly adds, "We have a dream therefore we should go after it!" and thumps the table¹⁴⁷.

The metallic groan of the gridlock on the Pyay Road below fills the silence that follows, and he continues in a stage whisper,

"You know the political situation is moving forward but we cannot do too much even though we have many good ideas because some things are still controlled - they just opened the doors very, very slightly, you cannot push it, you need to be very clever. As educators, we just try to prepare what we are going to do for the future and just build our network under the government."

¹⁴⁷ Testimony taken from an extended semi-structured interview conducted in Yangon on Friday, 11th September 2015.

He holds little hope that the current reform agenda will respond quickly and fully enough and says,

“After ten years I think our country will be more open, the right person will enter politics, everything will change - most especially in education where they will be more flexible; so for now if we want to promote our education system here inside the country, we should think about the private sector to compete with the government.”

* * *

Johnson-Hanks reminds us that “[vital] conjunctures are navigated in reference to their horizons” (2002: 878) and therefore their enactment is contingent on these anticipated outcomes. The dream of the Community College was one I frequently encountered during my fieldwork in Hpa-an, not just in conversation with teachers and community leaders, but with the students and their parents, as well as with a whole range of community stakeholders. All those investing in the network and its ongoing development seemed aware to some extent of the ends to which they were working, often articulating it in similar terms even if their confidence in that destination and how to get there might differ at times.

The basic notion of the Community College expressed here is a model of community-based, locally sustainable post-16 education. It is committed to social change by providing a bridge between education and employment lacking in Myanmar, which abounds in other Southeast Asian countries such as Thailand and Vietnam. It is therefore one worth taking seriously for this community and, moreover, one that reveals much about the kinds of aspirations governing new learning sites in contemporary Hpa-an. It continues to resonate as an aspirational goal for the young people in this study as the community consciously deploys images and incentives around it through local print and social media (see Figure 18, p. 222).

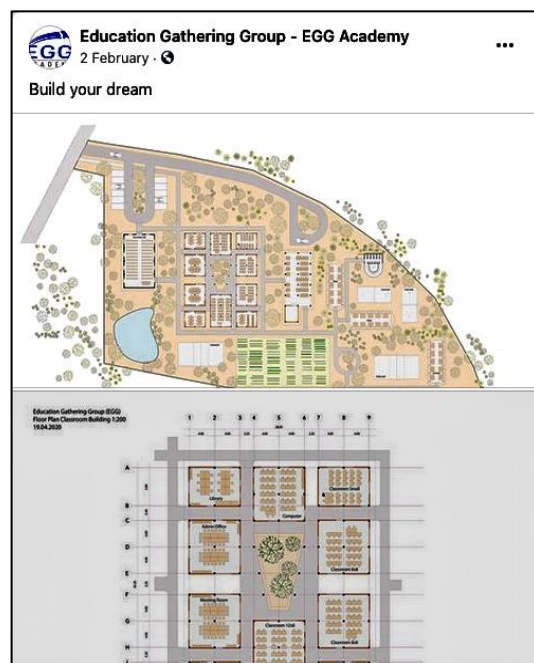


Figure 17. 'Build your dream': recent architectural plan for Hpa-an's Community College (EGG Facebook page, 2nd February 2020)

Indeed, the mission statements guiding these institutions are framed in response to the specific vagaries of the transition in Hpa-an. This educational agenda therefore extends well beyond bridging the educational-occupational disconnect. As one academy asserts, it is “dedicated to social change” by empowering young people to “play an essential role in building a better society” that continues to test young people’s loyalties and affiliations. Furthermore, they enjoin students and alumni to “improve inter-ethnic and inter-religious cooperation in the community” by seeking “to build an awareness and appreciation of differences in an atmosphere of close cooperation between teachers and students”. They do so, as we have seen, amidst the rise of Buddhist nationalism across the country and a resurgence of intra ethno-religious difference and division amongst the Karen in parts of the southeast over recent years, particularly between Karen Buddhist and Christian communities.

The aspirations informing this educational vision extend well beyond the immediate and the local, by envisaging broader social impacts and dividends in their efforts “to support socially engaged Myanmar citizens to make a positive change in their local communities”¹⁴⁸. As such, the aspirations guiding these academies are rooted in notions of critical and transformative pedagogy which identify a specific role for education in broader processes of socio-economic and political change (cf. Friere 1970), unconstrained by narrow interpretations of ethno-religious identity and political affiliation which have long marked education in Myanmar (Cheesman 2003; Salem-Gervais and Metro 2012). By seeking to facilitate youth transitions in this way, I am arguing that these pathways provide an alternative vision and vehicle of social change within Myanmar’s transition.

The aspirations of many students emerging from them are concerned with contributing to this vision of educational self-determination. A number of scholarship alumni including the Principal above are now actively engaged in enhancing their own academic credentials in order to enact this vision within the country’s revitalised private sector¹⁴⁹, as the relative institutional autonomy of state universities and advent of private universities become an increasing possibility within the reform

¹⁴⁸ All statements drawn from Academy websites and Facebook pages accessed 27th March 2017.

¹⁴⁹ Within Myanmar’s meritocratic education system, it requires at least three founding individuals to hold at least a doctoral degree to establish such an institution. It should be added that I could only find anecdotal evidence of this though the commitment of those involved, two of whom were engaged in this pursuit at the time of research, and now a third, suggests that there is some legislative basis for it. This should also be considered in light of Appendix 9, p. 288.

process (Lall 2016b, 2018; Kamibeppu and Chao 2017; Metro 2017c). Much will depend, as the Principal suggests above, on the capacity of the next generation of alumni to realise this vision of educational and social change in the years to come.

In this final empirical chapter, I wish to account for the critical role such new learning sites, as facilitated by Hpa-an's scholarship alumni, are now playing in shaping youth transitions in terms of the aspirations and the agency with which they are being enacted. Specifically, I seek to ascertain which particular aspirations young people currently engaged in and emerging from these institutions attach (and which they do not) to their educational and occupational situations. Moreover, I am interested in what meaning and motivation they bring to these choices and therefore how they view their positions and the possibilities open to them in response to this particular educational encounter.

Whilst for Nann Kaw Kii Suu ('Kindly Flower') (see Introduction, p. 4) the prospect of becoming a teacher appeared to hold uncertain appeal for being, in the words of Pierre Bourdieu (1984), 'the choice of the necessary', her exposure to this education makes it a suitably accessible vehicle by which to realise broader aspirations around the kind of person she envisages herself to be in the service of her community. Her efforts to articulate her aspirations therefore reveal much more about her aspiration for her future 'possible self' (see Chapter 2, pp. 96-99) than simply her choice of career. Furthermore, her explanation of these possibilities does indeed provide us with useful images of potential outcomes motivating her decisions, strategies, and behaviours in the present.

In this way, the chapter seeks to enhance our empirical and theoretical understanding of the role of aspirations in shaping young people's transitions from education to employment within this particular context. Where the two previous chapters largely accounted for this in the years prior to the significant political and economic transformations that marked 2015, this chapter now takes stock of youth mobility after this point for a group of young people now coming of age amidst rapid if uneven socio-economic change. The vital conjuncture lens (Johnson-Hanks 2002) did much to illuminate how a particular social group contended with entrenched structural constraints prior to the transition; now, an understanding of those 'Possible Selves' (Markus and Nurius 1986) emerging within Myanmar's transition promises to reveal the extent to which the educational change facilitated by the scholarship alumni 'generation' is shaping the nature of youth aspirations, actions and identifications today.

The chapter is divided into three key sections: in a brief initial section I establish the theoretical and empirical context within which this chapter is situated, illustrating how closely individual youth transitions remain bound up with Myanmar's ongoing socio-economic transition. This is to suggest that glimpses of possible selves offer compelling critical insights as to the priorities and possibilities driving socio-political and cultural change in provincial urban centres like Hpa-an.

In the main body of the chapter I draw on the testimony of fifty students and alumni from across three of the five academies in and around central Hpa-an to ascertain what aspirations young people coming of age within Myanmar's transition attach to their educational and occupational situations. I am particularly interested in the terms with which they rationalise and justify their aspirations – that is, how they conceive of their possible selves through the meanings and motivations they ascribe to these choices – in order to identify what particular encounters and experiences are shaping these outcomes.

As part of the analysis of these meanings and motivations, I investigate, wherever possible, the extent to which these young people are acting on them. In this way, I seek to reflect on the agency with which aspirations are being mobilised, structural constraints navigated, and possible selves furthered through goal-directed action of different kinds.

In the closing section of the chapter I reflect on what this might suggest about the priorities, possibilities and indeed principles now marking youth transitions in Hpa-an and amidst Myanmar's wider political transition.

Education and the capacity to aspire

Arjun Appadurai reminds us that the capacity to aspire, like any complex cultural capacity “thrives and survives on practice, repetition, exploration, conjecture, and refutation” without the opportunities for which “the capacity itself remains relatively less developed” (Appadurai 2013: 189). This is to suggest that for aspirations to motivate action in the present there need to be opportunities, both educational and experiential, to exercise and explore those horizons – to be picked up and discarded; to be rationalised and rejected; to be tried and tested. Indeed, it is at such points that aspirations inform the process of ‘becoming somebody’ as meaning and motivation is brought to them and steps are taken

to enact them in the present. We saw examples of this in the last two chapters as the scholarship alumni struggled as much as they succeeded in 'becoming someone of value in life' (Crivello 2011).

For young people coming of age in transitional Myanmar educational and occupational pathways remain, for the most part, as constrained and limited as those faced by previous generations, not least in peripheral contexts like Hpa-an and still more for those in surrounding rural contexts, where there exist few such opportunities through which to enhance their capacity to aspire. State education remains poor, vocational training limited, jobs scarce, role models fleeting and insubstantial; specific identity groups based on ethnicity and gender might struggle that much harder to gain traction in such a context. And yet young people in Hpa-an, like in many other parts of the global South today, are increasingly exposed, via international and social media, to images of successful adulthood based upon education and professional employment (Jeffrey 2010a: 496). These images offer beguiling alternatives of success often at odds with local identifications and agenda. New learning sites emerging in Hpa-an endeavour to support young people in navigating this terrain and these influences in forging viable and valuable transitions in response to the self as well as the situation.

As we saw in the Introduction to this thesis, Nann Kaw Kii Suu ('Kindly Flower') ascribed a variety of meanings and motivations to her aspirations to become a teacher. On one level, she deemed it an appropriate choice because she had been exposed to this profession as a student and was therefore familiar with it; she had also gained practical teaching experience by tutoring the younger members of her extended family and by acting as a teacher in the summer school programme in the villages around Hpa-an. She confessed that the aspiration held little appeal, for though accessible and tangible she had no choice otherwise. However, in alighting on the proven and positive example of her teachers and the prospect of contributing to the shared vision of the Community College, her aspiration to become a teacher clearly became that much more compelling for her. Crucially, this aspiration now appears to act as a basis for a range of short- and long-term action, beginning with the current and collective tour group initiative which is driven by a determination to 'go to Bangkok and see with our own eyes the university there'.

This serves to illustrate a number of useful points for the discussion at hand: it exposes the means by which imagined futures become motivational, influencing this young woman's action within

the immediate and toward the imagined. The particular example of two teachers who, in her words, are 'role models' and 'an inspiration' has not only validated this pathway but imbued it with substantial moral credibility. The example of their struggle and triumph provides that inspiration as she and her friends strike out in a similar direction.

The promise of further study abroad provides a viable pathway along which to enact this aspiration, prompting action in the present - the tour group initiative - intended to enhance the skills and resources with which to make their reconnaissance of the university in Bangkok. In this way, they take another step in navigating around those persisting educational and occupational constraints imposed on them and their aspirations.

Indeed, the Gateway Learning Centre, where she initially encountered these people and possibilities continues to provide a literal gateway to other activities and opportunities that frame and further these aspirations in the present. The tour group initiative with her old Gateway school friends is only the latest development in an ongoing strategy to realise these aspirations. Since finishing at GLC, she has returned there for the six-month English Access Programme held in the evenings, attended short courses on Street Law and Human Rights in Hpa-an and Yangon, as well as the US State Department-funded Burma Youth Leadership Programme (BYLP) which took her to the US for a month; she has been involved in many forms of volunteering and fund-raising through her old school.

All such goal-directed action, facilitated by this and other similar learning centres in Hpa-an, has been focused on enhancing her skills and experience and so improving her chances of securing a scholarship to a University in Bangkok whilst very much shaping her sense of who she is and what kind of person she aspires to be. Indeed, the aspiration and agency that emerges is clearly not limited to the profession of teaching alone but to the realisation of other personal and indeed collective horizons captured most clearly in her resolve to 'come back here and be a teacher in the Community College'.

This 'possible self' clearly carries with it notions of the responsible and capable individual acting in the service of her community. Once again, this calls to mind Frye's (2012) Malawian schoolgirls whose aspirations were not necessary based on rational calculations of the future but attempts to make moral claims about their present selves (see Chapter 2, pp. 95-96). In much the same way, its self-conscious mobility is marked by a sense of 'vernacular' cosmopolitanism (Appadurai

2013)¹⁵⁰, aspirations for which do much to orientate her progress as any career choice. Indeed, Nann Kaw Kii Suu's ('Kindly Flower') attempts to negotiate her own transition to adulthood and employment find wider expression in community-based initiatives intended to effect broader socio-economic transitions, now facing a community intent on redressing educational and occupational deficits which have long undermined youth transitions and their outcomes in this particular region. The progress of this young woman towards the fulfilment of her aspirations is therefore framed by herself and others as decisive to the strategic and moral triumph of the wider venture.

With these ideas in mind, in the following section I now explore the various meanings and motivations other young people emerging from these institutions ascribe to their aspirations. The majority recently graduated from three of the five academies in Hpa-an Township including a small number of current students to provide a range of contemporary snapshots of such visions of possible selves 'in motion' (see Chapter 3, pp. 112-115; see Appendix 5, pp. 278-280).

Models and modalities: teaching and socio-moral identifications

Given the potent example set by the scholarship alumni it appears inevitable that many students and alumni emerging from these institutions aspired to become teachers and work in a similar capacity to them. Indeed, the majority of respondents envisaged themselves acting in this particular role in the future and a number of these specifically ascribed this decision to the example set by scholarship alumni teachers at these new learning sites.

Recent GLC alumnus, Saw Htii Tho ('Friend'), confirmed as much declaring, "I want to be an English teacher like my teacher Saw Shar Phaung Khlain ('Star') – teaching English and doing sharing activities like camps and workshops with the students" adding, "But I don't want to be an English teacher under the government – they are too busy to make activities or to share in that way; they just make the students repeat everything they say back to them!"¹⁵¹. So positive was the educational encounter Saw Htii Tho had at GLC, founded as it is on approaches to student-centred and inclusive

¹⁵⁰ Appadurai defines this as "a double-helix between local activism and global networking" (2013b: 190) which, I suggest, very much reflects contemporary outcomes around migration-for-education-and-return amongst these young people who are committed to the former through the exercise of the latter.

¹⁵¹ Interview (M18): 15th November 2016

learning, that for him it exposed the shortcomings of state provision that much more. In this way, he can be seen to frame a notion of his possible self both in the image of his teacher Saw Shar Phaung Khlain ('Star') and, at the same time, in direct opposition to those provided by the state system.

So potent are these particular role models that their example clearly offers more than simply an occupational template. It was quite clear that in reflecting on their aspirations to become teachers many students derived moral impetus from this positive example similar to that which informed scholarship alumni transitions in the past. Current EGG student Nann Eh Da Bo ('Young') explained how committed she was to becoming just such a role model in the future, saying that before she enrolled "I didn't know what we need, what we are doing – we just go normal – when I came here it changed a lot because most of the leaders are trying to develop their community".

As a direct consequence of this positive example she identified a specific role for herself "to develop my community by promoting youth skills" for those many recalcitrant youth back in her home village whom she described as "rude, uneducated, lacking skills and responsibility", and whose occupational horizons do not extend beyond physical labour in Thailand; she went on to justify this aspiration in the following terms,

I want to guide these people who have no one to show them the way; I want to guide the future generation; I really want other people to be successful and happy and to try hard – that's why I will give the force through teaching and also I will try to be their ideal. You know, the youth, if they see someone who is successful, they will be enthusiastic to try hard; that's why I will try for my generation as much as I can!¹⁵²

For this student, the educational encounter did not simply foster aspirations to be a teacher but to be a certain kind of teacher and role model in the service of her community. She appears to respond to a specific set of interrelated issues concerning youth, education, migration, and citizenship informing youth dispossession in rural contexts, in particular. Indeed, this account of her aspirations reveals that her commitment in assuming a role and responsibility to effect social change is at least as important to her as personal accomplishment and development.

Role models associated with the profession of teaching were not limited to figures in authority in these new learning sites, but also included friends and peer group. For example, Zweekabin Myay

¹⁵² Interview (F18) 2nd November 2016

alumnus Saw Kyaw Thar Khlain ('Kind Heart') identified a fellow student as guiding his attitudes and ideas saying,

He Is my friend, my classmate – we are in the same situation together – but he is very active for parts of our community. He works hard and he networks with many people – whenever I call him, he is always busy. I think that's a good example and I learn from him. Yes, he is one of my friends and maybe one of my teachers!¹⁵³

Whilst this role model did not appear to directly shape Saw Kyaw's aspirations 'to become a good teacher' as he told me, he clearly derives inspiration and impetus from this example of hard work, commitment, and community engagement. Indeed, he continues to collaborate with this friend in a variety of initiatives related to youth engagement and teaching in and around Hpa-an. Given that many students and alumni aspire to work in some capacity for their community, the positive influence of friends and peer groups might act as a potent means by which aspirations and actions are being fomented and furthered amongst this group of students who, like their teachers, share a common destiny in response to the opportunities they have received. Since both these young men are now acting on this, it is further confirmation of their commitment to be someone of value within this context.

Poor as much as good examples served to shape choice and action. For instance, in framing his aspirations GLC alumnus Saw Eh Thuu ('Loved One'), was quick to identify "broken schools, broken houses and then homeless people – this is the main thing in our community you know!"¹⁵⁴ but discounted teaching as an effective means for him to address these issues, instead arguing, "I cannot earn a lot of money by being a teacher and so I cannot deal with this that way; also many of my friends want to be teachers so I think I need to choose something that is different from that if we are to solve these problems." Instead, he aspired to facilitate an alternative and inclusive approach to education as something of an entrepreneur; as he went on to explain,

So I am thinking of applying for the scholarship to get the entrepreneurship major as I would like to build a centre – including a school – maybe like a special place for the poor people to develop their skills and then some kind of business for people who are uneducated or who have like mental health problems or have disabilities or something like this.

¹⁵³ Interview (M19): 15th November 2016

¹⁵⁴ Interview (M18): 8th November 2016 (and subsequent quotations)

The example of this young man's efforts to strategically align his considerable aspirations with that of his friends and peers is evidence that young people now coming of age in Hpa-an are keenly aware of the problems facing their community and are involved in coordinating their collective responses to them. Indeed, Eh Thuu is currently engaged in working towards this objective through his involvement in the tour guide initiative mentioned in the Introduction. Furthermore, he is actively engaged in local youth politics as a member of an inter-faith youth platform – an initiative intended to break down barriers of race and religion continuing to afflict Karen inter-communal relations.

These examples suggest that aspirations to be a certain kind of person (committed, aspirational, yet considerate), with a certain set of capacities (accomplished, cosmopolitan, and educated) are perhaps as important if not more so than the job or career that they identify as allowing them to exercise these qualities. Whilst these aspirations are certainly fashioned in the image of others, they nonetheless demonstrate efforts to articulate a sense of independence and selfhood through the specific meanings that are ascribed to these choices by the individuals concerned, and the motivation with which they are setting about enacting them. Indeed, as one student said to me, "We cannot just rely on heroes; we have to try to be heroes!"¹⁵⁵

Motivation as mobility: scholarships as visible and viable pathways

Aspirations around teaching, as well as other professions, entailed pursuing a route along similar lines to that taken by their teachers. That many aspiring teachers should therefore be intent on gaining a scholarship for further study abroad is testimony that teaching is a pathway made visible, viable, as well as venerable by the example of the scholarship alumni who pursued this particular route into the profession. Again, we are reminded of the meaning and motivation Nann Kaw Kii Suu ('Kindly Flower') brought to her aspirations through the example of her teachers who made this a tangible possibility for her. The pathway, and the moral purpose and principle behind it, are closely associated in the minds of many of these young people.

Likewise, the cosmopolitan nature of the scholarship pathway involving migration-for-education is similarly associated with transitions to employment within a communitarian capacity by

¹⁵⁵ Interview (F18): 6th November 2016 (respondent's emphasis)



Figure 18. Aspirational Archetypes: *alternative educational pathways abroad now made visible and viable by Hpa-an's academies* (Picture Source: Academy Facebook page).

returning to act in the service of one's community. Images of success that illustrate educational accomplishment and progress in accessing these scholarship pathways through study abroad are inscribed with these associations, consciously and consistently deployed by the academies and their staff for this very reason, offering particularly beguiling incentives when achieved by the students themselves.

It was therefore in response to these more immediate goals - concerned with securing scholarships to study abroad - that aspirations were seen to motivate decisions, strategies, and behaviours in the present as these young people availed

themselves of opportunities to *practice* and *explore* this vocation (cf. Appadurai 2004). In many cases, the scholarship pathway was seen to act as something of a dynamo prompting action in the present as many pursued relevant work experience, courses and activities in order to bolster their chances of gaining such an opportunity.

There were frequent examples of them engaging in various forms of peer tuition, work experience in local schools and summer school teaching, as well as CV/résumé writing and access programmes facilitated by the academies, which further enhance access to this pathway. For example, since graduating Nann Eh Da Bo ('Young') above, has completed a six-month youth leadership course in Yangon, and is now employed as a teacher at the YLC back in Hpa-an whilst exploring scholarship opportunities for teacher training and further study abroad.

The prospect of gaining a scholarship and becoming a teacher offered many students pathways made visible and viable by the example of their teachers. These teachers were clearly and actively prompting and guiding such aspirations by offering their students very tangible objectives and outcomes to aim towards. In the Introduction, we recall that Nann Kaw Kii Suu ('Kindly Flower') bemoaned the lack of prospects for those in Hpa-an with a university degree - 'some people even

though they finish university they don't have work'. The shared aspiration of the Community College in Hpa-an clearly goes some way to resolving that conundrum and was widely accepted as a tangible occupational prospect, referred to time and again by those passing through these institutions.

For example, Nann Tha Maut Haung ('Unity'), alumna of EGG, explained that, "Our teacher Kyaw Say told me he wanted to build a Community College here, so I decided then that if he builds the Community College, I want to be an English teacher in that college!" adding, "He's like our hero – he supports us a lot and then he always motivates us. He gives us a lot of political ideas, or some ideas to change or improve our community like this Community College idea."¹⁵⁶ In a similar vein, Nann Hti Klain Phaung ('Lovely'), a student currently enrolled at the same academy, identified the same role model as driving her ambitions to teach despite having never met him.

There is a sense, for these young people at least, that the burgeoning non-state education sector in Hpa-an promises definite and exciting potential opportunities within which to develop their possible selves, staffed as it is by those with progressive aspirations to ensure that. Indeed, a firmly and freely stated commitment to working in private or non-state service delivery, be it teaching or nursing, marked the aspirations of the majority of young people emerging from these institutions. This very much derived from their positive and therefore decisive educational encounters with institutions and their staff in this sector, not least the academies. It may appear inevitable that good students want to emulate good teachers, but it was the conviction with which these aspirations were stated and the efforts to enact these through relevant goal-directed activity that suggested that this was nonetheless an expression of self-motivation and an effort towards self-improvement.

A number of recent students, like GLC alumnus Saw Htii Tho ('Friend') above, cited particular and positive features of the pedagogical encounter as contributing significantly to their motivation to join the school initially and ultimately work within the non-state sector on graduating from it. He, for example, identified the preponderance of student-centred approaches to teaching and learning and the teaching of English in particular. It was on these points that aspirations were often seen to be framed in direct opposition to state sector employment for offering comparatively ineffective approaches to teaching and learning, especially for academic disciplines with practice-based content.

¹⁵⁶ Interview (F20): 12th November 2016

For example, Zweekabin Myay alumna Nann Hie Chant Phaung ('Beautiful') expressed an interest in founding a school in a similar style to Zweekabin but in so describing it was adamant what it should not be like, saying,

The government school offers no skills so I would provide those. Also, the relationship between the teacher and student is different in Zweekabin to the government; Zweekabin is more like a family – we are more open and able to talk and exchange ideas. We don't need to be afraid of the teacher - we have no fear, so we can learn more¹⁵⁷.

There is a sense here that she is very much articulating her aspirations in strategic opposition to the educational encounter she experienced through the state, as much as the positive encounter she subsequently had through the Zweekabin Myay Education Project.

Moreover, this attitude was not limited to aspiring teachers. The aspirations of EGG alumna Nann Chanug Phawt Suu ('Snow') were very much framed in opposition to the state provision through which she had struggled and failed to enact an aspiration to become a nurse; as she explained,

I don't want to work in any part of the government system because I don't like the government education system - it is teacher-centred learning which means that everything that the teacher teaches is correct – the students don't have any chance to talk or share their opinion. After I passed [completed] the matriculation exam, I tried to apply for a diploma in midwifery so many times, but I didn't get that because my matriculation score was too low – because of that there was *no way* towards what I wanted to do - I don't want to work in that world!¹⁵⁸

This suggests that aspirations to work in private or non-state service delivery develop in the face of persisting state-managed structural constraints. Amidst this provision, pathways are constrained – even blocked - 'there was no way', as Nann Chanug Phawt Suu ('Snow') explained. These anxieties-aspirations are informed by a pervasive distrust of government service which continues to fail to meet the needs of young people coming of age in transitional Hpa-an. We recall that government teachers emerged as weak and constrained in the narratives of the teachers of these students in Chapter 4. It therefore suggests that visions of what these young people *do not* aspire towards are often as potent in shaping and driving possible selves as that to which they *do* aspire (cf. Markus and Nurius 1986; Johnson-Hanks 2002; Evans 2007).

¹⁵⁷ Interview (F24): 9th November 2016

¹⁵⁸ Interview (F25): 13th November 2016 (respondent's emphasis)

There were, however, instances in which respondents, albeit a small number, actually aspired to government service whilst acknowledging similarly negative experiences of that provision. In these instances, young people were seen to frame a positive and progressive personal agenda in which their intimate knowledge of state institutional weakness was allied to newly acquired skills and an increasing sense of service.

For example, like many others, Zweekabin Myay alumna Nann Phawt Cha Chan ('Rain') bemoaned the teaching she had received at high school in which rote learning predominated whilst applauding the kind of tuition she experienced at the academy,

Yes, it was very student-centred! I really like that because it is part of my vision to be a good teacher. Before that I just thought I will teach the curriculum in my own way but when I learn at Zweekabin Myay I got an idea of *how* to teach and what kind of *style* I will teach in – not reading by heart but to *know* the word or *know* the subject through some exercise that is maybe fun and useful - if you're happy when you learn, you learn more!¹⁵⁹

The educational encounter clearly offered her significant and positive pedagogical insights fundamental to the formation of her attitude to and aspirations around teaching and its potential. There is a sense of her gaining in strength as a teacher not just as a student through this encounter, at least in hindsight. And like others, she stresses the importance of wellbeing to this increasing strength which appears to amount to an intrinsic dynamic accommodating and accompanying these aspirations around education and teaching (see Chase 2020).

Furthermore, as Phawt Cha Chan went on to reveal, she clearly felt that this enhanced awareness placed her in a privileged position from which to effect change where it was most lacking and most needed; as she explained,

I would like to work in the government school because now they are trying to change things. It will be difficult, and it will take a long time to be like, for example, the teaching style at Zweekabin Myay – maybe many years and much time – but I have the idea to go back to my village before then and teach grammar or speaking; basic reading and writing – to prepare myself for that as well as to help them and their school. So, I really want to promote that style. I want to give that teaching style to my village because we don't have that.

Nann Phawt Cha Chan has undoubtedly made a conscious decision, as a result of the education she received at Zweekabin Myay, to apply her new skills and understanding in a context which she is keenly

¹⁵⁹ Interview (F21): 7th November 2016 (respondent's emphasis)

aware lacks these approaches but which now, after many decades of state neglect, might accommodate change and reform. Her plans in the meantime - to return to her village and put some of this awareness into action - are evidence of her commitment to this aspiration and a strategic response in navigating around those structural impediments currently limiting that action. In this respect, it might be described as something of a 'horizontal transition' (P. Jolliffe 2017) (see Chapter 5, p. 185) with which to effect a more complete and substantial transition at a later point as she seeks to reshape some of the very structures that have served to dictate her position in the past.

Furthermore, this commitment appears to issue from a similar awareness of her privileged position in being able to act in this way, as we have heard others articulate in previous chapters. Much the same as Nann Eh Da Bo's ('Young') aspirations above, Nann Phawt Cha Chan's ('Rain') response here suggests that her aspirations are being driven by a deeper impulse to effect social change rather than simply occupational preferences, a point articulated concisely by EGG alumna Nann Chaung Chuu Klaine ('Sweetness') who said, "I want to be a teacher because this is a kind of support for community development – that's what I think – so even if I'm not a teacher one day, I want to support the development of my community"¹⁶⁰.

By aspiring to work within the government system, these students provide alternative and no less valuable (and viable) understandings of how best to support the development of their community in the face of persisting structural constraints. Their commitment to a broader set of socially informed objectives governing their career aspirations appears to give them the conviction and resilience to navigate current impediments and uncertainty which they are quick to acknowledge. Moreover, this suggests how evolving transitions and identities are being shaped and substantiated by academy provision with the potential to transform the structural context within which these young people are situated, and to do so in ways which attest to their own volition and vocation in doing so.

This was also reflected in the aspirations of Saw Lar Phaung ('Kindly One'), a current student at EGG, who at 26 years of age was himself an experienced former teacher at nearby Taungalay monastic school. Whilst tempted in the future to "create a school like EGG like the others want", he conceded that,

¹⁶⁰ Interview (F20): 4th November 2016

Actually, I think I will get back to my parents in Taungalay and go back to work at the monastic school. Though we didn't get much salary most of the teachers there are not educated so I think if I can develop my skills here, for the next two years, I will be more useful to help them there.¹⁶¹

Again, like others, he specifically cited the kind of student-centred approaches to teaching and learning he is exposed to at EGG as being of particular value to monastic education. Furthermore, whilst still at the academy this student had made definite steps in enhancing his knowledge and skills towards this end. As student representative on EGG's Academy Committee, he has learned much about the management of the school whilst also attending a short 'TOT' or 'Training the Teacher' course, which was facilitated by EGG and delivered by the Yangon-based curriculum provider and teacher training agency Mote Oo.

In a still more startling example, Zweekabin Myay alumna, Nann Eah Tha Mhawt ('Unity') expressed an aspiration to be the state government's Education Minister, or at the very least, an advisor on state education declaring, "I would like to work for *all* people not just *some*. The government has power, and we need *power* to change things" ¹⁶². She went on to explain that she is currently working for an NGO seeking to improve approaches to state education in the local area but that they struggle to effect change for lacking the necessary 'power' to do so, insisting that, "Karen people lack education and do not have much knowledge by themselves. The government has a duty to care for us and we need more of this kind of power to make sure that happens!"

It appears that the actions and aspirations of those students and alumni like Saw Lar Phaung ('Kindly One') and Nann Eah Tha Mhawt ('Unity'), with their intimate knowledge of the structural constraints derived from having worked within these structures, were thrown into perspective by their positive encounter with Hpa-an's academies and the possibilities surrounding this kind of education. Therefore, whilst aspirations are often framed in strategic opposition to state provision there are occasions when they seek to respond directly to slow and uncertain institutional change by aspiring to contribute directly to that process through their enhanced capacities and commitment. Like Nan

¹⁶¹ Interview (M26): 11th November 2016

¹⁶² Interview (F23): 7th November 2016 (respondent's emphasis) and subsequent quotation

Phawt Cha Chan ('Rain') above, these young people frame positive conceptions of their possible selves in direct response to the negative encounter they had with state education.

At such moments 'what is hoped for' and 'what is feared' combine to shape possible selves intent on affirmative action. Indeed, in all three of these instances above, aspirations to effect change within the government system are founded on an intimate understanding of those specific educational deficits which persist for many into the transition, not least for those living in outlying suburban and rural contexts and without access to alternative provision, as one current student told me, "Nowadays young people in our Karen state are very active, but only in the urban community, not in the rural community"¹⁶³.

It therefore appears that the Community College aspiration, shared by many, may nevertheless lack pertinence for some who see other avenues offering the potential for more pertinent and lasting change. It also suggests that notions of self and service, as expressed through their aspirations, differ among Hpa-an's young people today pointing to different and at times diverging priorities and principles informing youth aspirations and agency.

These nonetheless appear to account for equally effective personal transitions in seeking to increase local access to quality education by contesting dominant structures in different ways. It therefore suggests that education to employment transitions in this context might be prompting different forms of action to close the gap between those who have access to academy education and those who do not - those with the capacity to aspire and those without access to this opportunity.

Articulating cosmopolitanism: English-speaking Karen in the wider world

For almost every respondent the motivation to maintain and to use English in some capacity in the future was seen to drive their aspirations. Given the emphasis on English within the academy curriculum, both as a discrete subject and as medium of instruction, it appears only natural that students and their aspirations should be influenced in some way by this; it might form the basis of specific career aspirations to become an English teacher like many of those above or to replicate this very model of schooling along the lines that Nann Hie Chant Phaung ('Beautiful') described. However,

¹⁶³ Interview (F20): 12th November 2016

given the frequency with which it was cited by all students as informing choices to a greater or lesser extent, in the short term and long term, it might be considered fundamental to most aspirations and especially so at this particular juncture in Myanmar's history.

The perceived dividends that the acquisition of English promised, offer compelling insights as to the way young people emerging from these institutions now apprehend their futures and possible selves in relation to their community and the wider world. Asked why she felt the need to enrol at Zwegabin Myay, alumna Nann Lar Suu Klain ('Cool') responded by saying,

I wanted to speak English but even when we graduate here [from the state university] we cannot, and we don't know grammar, so I didn't know anything and I'm very poor at English; that's why in my dreams I am always watching a movie – a movie in English – only watching but *never* understanding! I also really like songs in English – like Avril Lavigne and Taylor Swift – but I'm sad because I cannot understand them.

Her dream to speak English (or fear of a future in which she continues to lack this capacity), and the western cultural references she deploys to illustrate what this means to her, point towards those

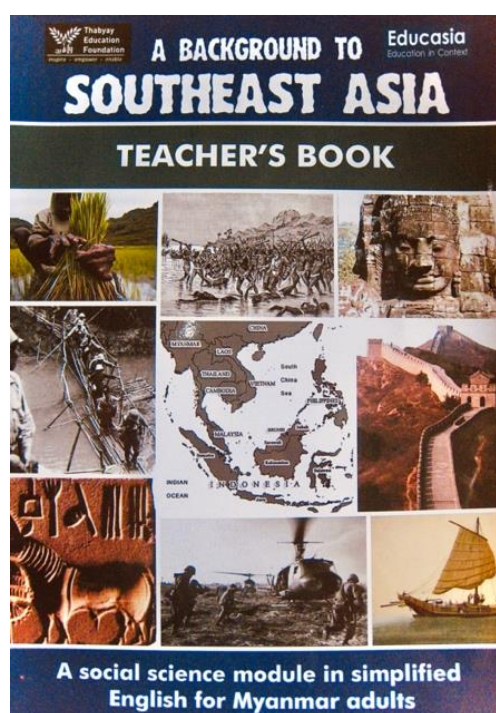


Figure 19. Context 'specific' Textbook (Thabyay/ Educasia; author photo)

increasing cosmopolitan influences shaping youth transitions within a community now open to these influences after decades of austerity and isolation. Moreover, these influences are increasingly generated from within this locality rather than accessed from outside alone or exclusively through social media. Indeed, the academies themselves are very much a conduit for these influences through aspects of policy and practice, namely their student-centred pedagogy (see Lall 2010) and use of curriculum materials inscribed with globalised

values and associations (see Dale 1999; Gledhill, Dolan and Snyder 2019). Education that does not serve this purpose is seen to be wanting and aspirations for this knowledge and the mobility it provides now drive choices around education at critical junctures in young people's lives in this context.

It is not insignificant that Nann Lar Suu Klain ('Cool') struggled to articulate a clear aspiration beyond this, such was the importance of learning English to her identity and development; she was

adamant that “I want to be very professional to speak English” adding, “Also, I would like to speak to the foreigner - a lot of young people here in Hpa-an want to be able to do this because we don’t have the opportunity” ¹⁶⁴. This firm and oft-repeated desire to be able to ‘speak to foreigners’ whilst struggling to acquire the skills and confidence to do so is further confirmation of the significant cultural shifts and persisting educational deficits marking the lives and aspirations of many young people coming of age in transitional Hpa-an. Again, this was keenly felt by those in rural contexts with less opportunity to access such skills whose visits to town only increased their frustration where increasing numbers of tourists and guesthouses, students and academies emphasised this inequality.

It therefore had a significant bearing on youth aspirations across both urban and rural settings, informing choice and action around them to meet the mounting expectations placed on them in which a command of English was often all that mattered to them.

Indeed, the very presence of these new learning sites is testimony to the demand for a more relevant and responsive education, very much acting here as ‘a strategy’ in the struggle to construct a life (Wyn 2014: 11) by serving the particular needs of young people navigating the country’s wider socio-economic transition within an increasingly cosmopolitan context.

This was substantiated further by the considerable number of students emerging from these learning sites who confirmed that their educational aspirations had been initially frustrated or foreclosed by the

high school matriculation exam which prevented them from pursuing their English studies as part of a university degree.

The aspiration to learn and improve their English also arose in response friends and peer group who appeared to be making more progress on this front than they were, as many were seemingly

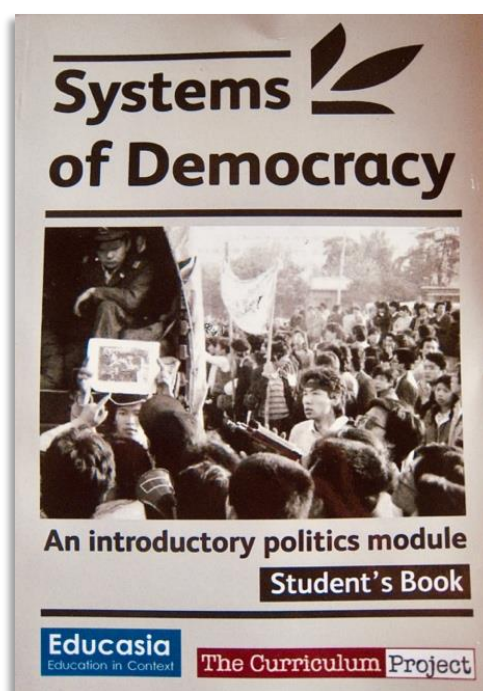


Figure 20. Politics of Pedagogy: *access to previously 'prohibited' ideas* (Educasia/ Curriculum Project; author photo)

¹⁶⁴ Interview (F26): 7th November 2016 (respondent’s emphasis)

driven by association. As such, it suggests that the acquisition of English and its perceived dividends is increasingly driving the anxieties as much as the aspirations of many young people in contemporary Hpa-an. As we identified in the previous chapter, this aspiration is widely shared across the community as all stakeholders recognise the importance of knowledge and skills domains such as English and ICT to redress long-standing socio-economic deprivations endured by this particular community.

Beyond this, respondents valued the command of ‘a global language’, as one current EGG student described it. This promised to grant them access to a broader range of resources and information than previously available; as Nann Hie Chant Phaung (‘Beautiful’) asserted, “If we know English, we can learn a lot – we can use the internet better and we can learn about other subjects” concluding that “in fact everything we want to learn is written in English!”¹⁶⁵.

Indeed, the role of English in facilitating further study abroad and thereby furthering their spatial as well as social mobility was intuitive to most respondents who had previously or were currently attending one of the academies. This was most clear amongst those who specifically aspired to gain scholarships for bachelor and master’s degree programmes at overseas universities for which a relative command of English is a prerequisite. We are, of course, reminded here, of Nann Kaw Kii Suu (‘Kindly Flower’) and her continued efforts to develop her English in order to enact her aspiration to study abroad.

Furthermore, students and alumni with these aspirations often conflated the desire to learn English with the desire to study abroad in retrospect, suggesting that the acquisition of English represents both a means and an end driving their evolving conception of their possible selves. For example, GLC alumna Nann Kaw Kit Awar (‘White Star’), when asked why she had decided to enrol at Gateway replied, “Actually, I want to improve my English skill but also they give many scholarship opportunities, and they tell us about the universities for foreigners”¹⁶⁶.

In such cases, we gain definite glimpses of young people’s efforts to both frame and further their aspirations by recognising the academies as providing pathways via which to access desirable skills as well as opportunities for upward social and educational mobility, thereby furthering their

¹⁶⁵ Interview (F24): 9th November 2016

¹⁶⁶ Interview (F17): 14th November 2016

transitions through the credentials that these very skills confer. Indeed, EGG alumnus Saw Hie ('Handsome') suggested as much when asked why he enrolled at the academy, "Because I have a goal, I have a plan to study abroad, and I need to improve my English"¹⁶⁷ he said, whilst current EGG student Saw Thwee Ah Nie ('Brave'), reflecting on his first year at the academy, described it in the following terms, "This kind of education is very useful and in fact it is so useful I think this step is the first step in my education to progress and go abroad" adding, "because I want to go abroad and study in a different country."¹⁶⁸

The metaphor of 'taking a step forward' through this education was applied by students and alumni on a number of occasions. It effectively captures their understanding of the literal and figurative mobility that these pathways, not least with a command of English, offer them in navigating the transition from youth towards adulthood and employment, as well as between the locality and the wider world.

Indeed, when asked what he envisaged doing in the future, Saw Thwee Ah Nie ('Brave') went on to explain, "I don't have much chance to choose but with this school *behind* us, we can choose it!" whilst another current EGG student Nann Eh Da Bo ('Young') articulated it in a similar fashion by saying, "Now I have got the skills right? So it's easier to *go forward*"¹⁶⁹, suggesting that these students envisage the mobility that this education and these skills have granted their possible selves, both in the immediate and in the imagined future, and are very much engaged in acting on this. As we have seen, this notion of educational mobility is enshrined and echoed in the names and mission statements guiding these institutions.

Significantly, and for many of these young people, proficiency and progress in English was deemed, more important than a command of other Karen languages. They often described how they struggled to communicate with either Plong or Sgaw-speaking villagers (depending on their own Karen language) when engaged in service learning as part of the academy curriculum, since aspirations associated with a command of English often appeared to supersede those that involving local

¹⁶⁷ Interview (M27): 9th November 2016

¹⁶⁸ Interview (M20): 16th November 2016 (and subsequent quotation; my emphasis)

¹⁶⁹ Interview (F18): 2nd November 2016 (my emphasis)

languages and traditions. In seeking to rationalise this preference one student explained that whilst a command of Karen languages might be considered just as important to her as English, she nonetheless prioritised the latter, and did not consider Burmese to be as useful as English, “Because we can only use it in our country – we cannot use it in other countries – but English is an international language so if we want to go, and if we want to communicate with other people from foreign countries we need this language”¹⁷⁰

These educational and aspirational preferences, fostering the desire for a more global and cosmopolitan outlook, clearly extend beyond language to other markers of cultural distinction. For



Figure 21. Intercultural Encounters: *beyond the parameters of community and country* (Photograph: Author)



example, in reflecting on her experience and progress at Zwekabin Myay Education Project Nann Klain Shuu (‘Peaceful’) observed that

she rarely wears the brightly coloured *htamein* traditionally worn by Karen women¹⁷¹ except during Karen cultural festivals but now wears jeans like her other female friends from the academy, adding,

My family are very traditional Karen people – a girl wears a *htamein* and a boy wears a *longyi*. They believe a *good* girl wears a *htamein* – she moves slowly, and she speaks slowly, and she is very quiet when men are around; if she smiles, she does so gently. They think if a girl wears trousers she looks like a backpacker – like western people – and she is not good. Before, if they tell me something, even if it is wrong, I didn’t say anything, and our parents do everything for us, but when I went to Zwekabin Myay I changed a lot. Now, everything is controlled by me. In the past, I wanted to work and go by myself, but they didn’t allow me but now I can give them a strong reason for doing it my way¹⁷².

These inclinations, prompted by growing confidence and self-sufficiency as a result of this particular education encounter, clearly have a significant bearing on youth aspirations and transitions as young

¹⁷⁰ Interview (F18) 2nd November 2016

¹⁷¹ Similar to a boy’s *longyi* (see Chapter 4, p. 141, footnote 74)

¹⁷² Interview (F20): 8th November 2016 (respondent’s emphasis)

men and women re-envision their possible selves in response, and often in opposition, to normative cultural values and assumptions maintained by their families and communities.

Young women, in particular, are seen to contest these normative stereotypes, as Nann Klain Shuu explains, by appearing and acting differently, exerting their increasing individuality and independence through this act of cultural transgression as they appear to behave more like foreigners and less like Karen females. However, the transformation was rarely complete with both young men and women choosing to 'cut and mix' through a preference for jeans and trousers whilst retaining their brightly coloured Karen shirts and blouses. These were striking and visible markers of more 'interactional' ethnic identities emerging as part of youth transitions in this shifting context (see Chapter 1, pp. 33-34).

These inclinations also expressed themselves through changing attitudes and affiliations. In a series of focus group discussions in which students of these institutions were asked to comment on how they viewed their identity and ethnicity at this point in their lives, the majority of them were reluctant to adhere to a particular Karen ethno-religious identity, so divisive were the intra-ethnic associations governing this context. Instead, many of them expressed a preference to be identified as a Myanmar citizen first and Karen second, which they saw as a broader and more inclusive moniker; others rejected this completely for associations around a specific role or function within the community¹⁷³.

Such expressions of self and becoming are redolent of what Homi Bhabha (1994) describes as efforts to inhabit 'a third space' which might signify the strategic disavowal of dominant social and cultural discourses maintained by older generations and dominant ethnic groups in this region (see also Jolliffe 2016). Perhaps, they might be more accurately described as an expression of 'vernacular' cosmopolitanism to capture young people's globalised-but-localised appropriations within this particular context (see also Werbner 2006; Appadurai 2013).

¹⁷³ Focus group discussions: 13th March 2015 – 20th November 2016. On this point it is interesting to note that Falla (1991), in his aforementioned ethnography (see Chapter 5, pp. 176-177), observes that "it was often difficult for me to establish whether friends considered themselves to be Sgaw or Pwo [Plong] or something else" (ibid: 16). He was writing at the height of the Karen civil war when these identifications were particularly divisive, as indeed they continue to be for young people in contemporary Hpa-an, which may account for a similar disavowal of these labels and their associations.

Notwithstanding the various theoretical contentions behind the use of such discursive labels, it is clear that youth transitions in Hpa-an, especially at this particular historical juncture, are motivated by strategic reidentifications that encompass a different and more diverse set of ideas and orientations than those hitherto governing the context within which they are situated. This is, in no small part, a reflection of the efforts of these young people to counter dominant discourses to which youth in Hpa-an are expected to confirm, in an effort to break with a difficult past.

Being and belonging: community development and protection

Significantly, however, respondents rarely attributed their desire to acquire a command of global languages and technologies to opportunities and aspirations within the broader national or, for that matter, international labour markets. For most of them, aspirations attached to the acquisition of English, for example, were focused in the short term at least, and rarely extended beyond securing scholarship opportunities for further study abroad.

Therefore, whilst aspirations to study abroad might suggest an increasingly cosmopolitan outlook lending itself to educational and economic migration, in the overwhelming majority of cases the aspirations that emerged did not threaten to draw them away from Hpa-an and abroad indefinitely. On the contrary, this was seen as a necessary mechanism through which to enhance their capacity to serve their community on their return. As Saw Hie ('Handsome') explained it,

So my dream - if I got a master's degree from a foreign country - would be to come back here as it would be great for me to serve my community. As you know, in our townships, we can see that there are only a few people who have graduated from other countries and since our education system is weak if we learn from others we can practise to promote our communities with this knowledge – our ethnic people in our villages – to improve their capacity.”¹⁷⁴

Indeed, students and alumni emerging from these new learning sites in Hpa-an frequently framed their aspirations in close association to the context within which they live and learn. There were many instances in which aspirations were seen to respond directly to their lived experiences revealing a remarkably close commitment to community and service. Migration-for-education, for all its apparent allure, is simply perceived as a means of socio-spatial navigation as these young people

¹⁷⁴ Interview (M27): 9th November 2016

determine how best to 'be someone useful for my community'. This might assume a broad and at times indefinite sense of (future) self and service as in the case of one current EGG student who remarked,

A teacher kind of supports community development but even if I'm not a teacher I want to support my community and its development – it's important now in Myanmar, right? It is not yet developed; we can say that it is only a *developing country*, so this is important for our community development.¹⁷⁵

This sounds much as if they are repeating what they have been told, perhaps in class. However, there is an undeniable sense here of the broader goal to which this young person is striving to commit themselves albeit without certainty and specificity at this stage.

Indeed, a role of 'some kind' in support of community development nonetheless assumed considerable and consistent profile within the aspirations of many. We are reminded of both Nann Eh Da Bo ('Young') and Nann Kaw Kii Suu ('Kindly Flower') for whom the inclination to effect social change was at least as important as career choice. Moreover, this often reflected a keen awareness of those dominant social and economic constraints continuing to structure young people's lives and hamper their transitions, even if it did not reflect an awareness of the specific possibilities through which to enact these changes.

Aspirations around community development assumed a specific focus in response to other issues perceived to impinge on this community's development and progress. Indeed, a number of students and alumni appeared to frame their aspirations in response to the issue of youth dispossession in Hpa-an's outlying villages which they had direct experience of, and in so doing aspired to respond to persisting inequalities governing young lives in rural contexts. For example, Zweekabin Myay alumnus Saw Hei Hei Phaung ('Light') appeared to rehearse his evolving aspirations in response to a constellation of pressures and possibilities facing young people in his village saying,

Most of the youth in our village are not interested in anything. I would like to change their opinion but I'm still thinking about how to do that. I need something different from Zweekabin; I just want to make a space like 'Veranda' [YCC] – a tea shop - that kind of thing. I have some books and I will make a small library. The problem is they are not interested in reading. When I went back to my home, looking around my village, I met some youth who were still using drugs. I'm going to talk to them because sometimes when we are talking about politics or something they are really interested. If we meet every day, I think I can do that, slowly and with time, I can get them to listen.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Interview (F20): 4th November 2016 (respondent's emphasis)

¹⁷⁶ Interview (M31) 5th November 2016

Of particular significance here is the increasing sense of how his actions might work in response to this particular set of interrelated problems. Though he is uncertain how best to engage those recalcitrant youngsters in his village who have not benefitted from the positive educational encounter he has had, he is clearly drawing on the example of that encounter and that of YCC in finding ways to address their needs – through the cultivation of a designated informal learning platform with a focus on the cultivation of life skills; above all through his own example and intervention. Indeed, it is a vision he has since made efforts to enact by establishing the library he mentions above in his local monastery and meeting with local youth in the way he suggests.

There were a small but significant group of students and alumni who aspired to confront issues of social injustice and inequality and contribute to community development through established formal mechanisms. Amongst these were those who aspired to be lawyers and advocates working on behalf of the poor and disenfranchised. After a difficult and frustrating internship in a public construction company, in which she witnessed first-hand the forced appropriation of farmland by local authorities, EGG alumna Nann Phawt Ni Mu ('Two Flowers') resolved to become a lawyer,

I want to help people as they're afraid to go to the office and complain. They cannot afford the court costs and they are afraid of what will happen, but they want to solve their own problems in their community. The fee for a good lawyer is so expensive. The court case also takes a very long time, so they don't want to come. In some cases, there is no support for the poor villagers – the government just walks over them – so they just don't bother. When I saw that in the community, that is not fair; I want to represent those people¹⁷⁷.

This determination and resolve were gleaned through experiential and service learning in outlying towns and villages, which has clearly brought young people like Phawt Ni Mu into close contact with the kinds of difficult realities governing the context within which they are privileged to access a relevant education. The appraisal of these realities, and particularly how they have been configured, has clearly prompted aspirations that seek in some way to redress them by responding directly to the unjust nature of that configuration.

¹⁷⁷ Interview (F23): 3rd November 2016

In a similar vein, GLC alumnus Saw Thar Eh Khone ('Loved') expressed the intention of becoming a lawyer in response to what he sees as endemic cycles of corruption and malpractice around local law enforcement and the justice system saying,

Here, as you know, most of the youth suffer from drug abuse. Drugs is a big problem in the villages and most of the police or lawyers, I believe, are corrupt because of the drug problem. I hate that! I want to change that! I dream of becoming a lawyer so I can change that fact and I will work for the poor people who do not have access to legal services because I was born into the middle class, so I know¹⁷⁸.

Clearly a passionate and a keen awareness of his privileged social position informs the construction of this aspiration, redolent of that experienced and expressed by the scholarship alumni. Furthermore, there is an apparently determined commitment here to effect the necessary change to the public sector by working within it. Indeed, Saw Thar Eh Khone ('Loved') has since acted on this by attending courses on street law, youth leadership and a work experience placement at a local law firm whilst continuing to explore various scholarship options to enhance his academic credentials. These aspirations, whether realistic or not within the constrained opportunity structures with which he must contend, have motivated definite and determined action in the present with an eye on the future. Moreover, they have the potential to be transformative by responding directly to the constraints governing his structured position and that of the villagers he aspires to represent.

Relative aspirations: kinship and community networks

Throughout this discussion the construction of possible selves has been articulated with reference to the social and strategic relations maintained by these young people. This calls to mind previous work which emphasises this relational dynamic of youth transitions as pathways are made more visible and therefore viable through the example of family members and the support of community networks (see Smith 2012; Hardgrove, Rootham and McDowell 2015; Patel 2017). We frequently observe how these young people are guided by the positive example of family members, aspiring to follow in the footsteps of brothers and sisters, parents and grandparents, who have pursued specific educational and occupational pathways.

¹⁷⁸ Interview (M18): 10th November 2016 (respondent's emphasis)

For example, GLC alumnus Saw Eh Soul ('Peace') cited the example of his grandmother who had been a refugee in the camps on the Thai border for eight years before being granted asylum in the United States at the height of the Karen civil war. She has since returned to Hlaingbwe, the small town just outside Hpa-an where he and his family come from. It was she who heard about GLC, informed him about the opportunities, and encouraged him to attend following his high school matriculation. Saw Eh Soul acknowledged that "One day I would like to go to America and study there like my grandmother did – she speaks some English and she talks about it to me so I hope I will be able to do that one day."¹⁷⁹

In this instance, the example and intervention, of one family member did much to validate a comparatively unconventional pathway for a student from a remote part of Hpa-an township, where aspirations to study abroad extend no further than Thailand. Moreover, it has prompted efforts and actions to realise this in the present, as he now embarks on the six-month English Access programme and applies to the US State Department-funded Burma Youth Leadership Programme.

Indeed, various family members do much to expose and validate these particular educational pathways for youth struggling to find purpose following matriculation from high school. GLC alumnus Saw Shar Phoe ('Starling') was, for example, quick to attribute his aspirations to pursue his education at the academy and therefore his ongoing efforts to become an English teacher, to the combined influence of his brothers who told him about the six-month programme at GLC adding,

He [one of his brothers] also really wants to study abroad so what he needs is to improve his English; so he heard about the school from my elder brother and said, 'Hey bro, do you want to go to this English course with me? You need this if you want to be a teacher one day!' Also his friend was studying there so I said, 'Of course, I will join with you!' so it is kind of like everyone is doing the same thing."¹⁸⁰

There is a clear sense here that aspirations and efforts to enact them are, at key junctures, shared and shaped by peer and family support mechanisms, apparently as part of a collective commitment to utilise those available educational opportunities that present themselves.

Of particular significance is the way in which these influences appear to shape the growing self-awareness or 'self-concept' (Markus and Nurius 1986; see Chapter 2, p. 96, footnote 67)

¹⁷⁹ Interview (M19): 15th November 2016

¹⁸⁰ Interview (M17): 12th November 2016

motivating these young people to regulate their behaviour. Moreover, in subscribing to a similar course of action, often governed by similar moral imperatives, it has the potential for wider change and transformation, not just to the individuals involved but to the structures they contend with, as these are shared more widely by more like-minded individuals. Indeed, this is perhaps still more clear in those cases in which aspirations were clearly framed in contradiction to the attitudes and actions of family and caregivers. In these instances, possible selves marked a definite break with the past as young people are seen to strike out often in opposition to normative values and attitudes.

For example, in a series of poignant reflections on her struggle to pursue her education GLC alumna Nann Paw Mu Shart ('Tiger Lady') revealed how her access to and aspirations around education were mediated by both personal and political contradictions within the context of Myanmar's wider transition; "Our country has started to develop so we have to change our minds" she told me,

Now the people do not think about education; as for my family - they don't think about education; they think it's not important; they think that graduation is just about the photo – that it is not good for your life, that it's not going to help us – but our country is starting to change and we have to know that education changes as well – we have to think about our knowledge and many knowledges [sic]; we have to give *effort* and *time* to our education but our students and our people are not like this - they do not think like this.¹⁸¹

As Nann Paw Mu Shart identifies here, more progressive approaches to (non-state) education now emerging within Myanmar's transition are liable to be conflated with this (state) provision and its superficial dividends. As such, 'the graduation photo' symbolises something of a fault line within families - between parents who deemed it an essential marker of achievement and students emerging from these academies who now place more value on the substance of the education, the skills and opportunities it provides; as EGG alumna Nann Muu Ywut Phaung ('Sunrise') commented,

Some people do the university degree here – the government university thing – just because their parents will be happy: [*sarcastically with a cheeky giggle*] you get a nice piece of paper – a certificate – and you have a degree! But really you just want to do the non-formal subjects, like social science, where you can *really* learn – and you can actually *use* this in the community to improve the situation.¹⁸²

Diverging attitudes and aspirations around education were not always consistently maintained across generations. There were a number of instances in which students and alumni acknowledged the support of some family members whilst others objected to them investing more time in education.

¹⁸¹ Interview (F19): 16th November 2016 (respondent's emphasis)

¹⁸² Interview (F22): 21st November 2016 (respondent's emphasis)

EGG alumna Saw Eh Phaung Suu ('Shine') described how he moved from *Bago*, a town near Myanmar's commercial capital Yangon to Hpa-an, over a hundred miles to the southeast, where his grandfather lived because his parents "did not want to support my further education and forced me to work" ¹⁸³.

His grandfather proved instrumental in his progress, drawing his attention to EGG and encouraging him to make the most of the opportunities there. Clearly this intervention served Saw Eh Phaung Suu well and suggests that an older generation, who benefitted from informal education available through Baptist missions and local monasteries before the *coup d'état* in 1962, might therefore value education more than their offspring who had more dispiriting experiences after that date.

Indeed, in this way academy education in Hpa-an might be regarded as a strategic response by a younger generation to the apathy of an older generation, who either question the value of education or regard it as valuable only in so far as it is a positional good (Hirsch 1977) rather than something of more substantive value. Active engagement by these young people in this particular educational domain, with its close association to social change and transformation, is therefore seen as emblematic of a more discerning and expansive response to education and the possibilities around it, marking them out from previous generations (see Chapter 2, pp. 84-87).

As such, possible selves founded upon an association with this particular expression of social and educational intent are consciously and collectively projected in the face of what might be perceived as dated and superficial perceptions of education. Expressing a preference to work within this domain alongside others in the future is therefore still greater confirmation of this intent to regulate their aspirations and behaviours in relation to this context and in relation others. Identifications and ideals informing evolving possible selves are very much constructed through the exercise of this association, as this education is deemed a credible livelihood as well as learning opportunity to this generation, many of whom now aspire to work in Hpa-an's first Community College.

However, there were cases in which parents did genuinely support their children's education and appeared to invest their own aspirations and anxieties around education in those possible futures. In a moving extended testimony, Zweekabin Myay alumna Nann Eah Tha Mhawt ('Unity'), whom we

¹⁸³ Interview (M21): 3rd November 2016

met above with aspirations to be the Karen State Education Minister, described how her parents' commitment to her education had come at considerable expense to them and the family. Her account of this is well worth quoting at some length for the insights it offers of the struggles and sacrifices around education made by one generation for the next:

My parents are really good to me even when things are difficult and there is little money for the family: they never take me out of school; they send me to school. In our community many just quit school because they say they have to earn money for their family because many families are big with younger brothers and sisters and that's a lot of people to look after. My mother passed grade six; my father has just passed grade nine – they can write and they can read but just the basics. They cannot do more because in our country given the political situation the cost of living is expensive – food, good water is so expensive. So they don't have time for reading, time to study; they just earn money for their family; so they don't have any time to continue their education and to develop so they would like to develop *us* – they want *us* to be educated people so we can understand what is going on and what we need; they want *us* to become like that.¹⁸⁴

Eah Tha Mhawt recognises the extent of the sacrifice made by her parents for their family and the considerable difficulty it has caused. This struggle does much to influence both their aspirations for their children amidst new possibilities made available by Myanmar's transition and, in turn, Eah Tha Mhawt's aspirations to 'develop' herself (and the state education policy) to ensure greater access to quality education in the future. It also speaks of a more enlightened awareness of the importance of girls' and young women's education despite the difference in experiences and attitudes around education between these different generations¹⁸⁵.

Conclusion: visions of self and service in transition

In exploring the aspirations and agency of these young people to enact visions of their possible selves, this chapter has sought to determine how they are exploiting the capacity to aspire and exercising the capability to do so. The meanings and motivations they ascribe to their aspirations and the range of relevant activities in which they are engaged attest to this increasing capacity and capability. For the

¹⁸⁴ Interview (F23): 7th November 2016 (respondent's emphasis)

¹⁸⁵ Pia Jolliffe (2016) has explored the prominent role of education in reciprocal intergenerational relations and amongst Karen communities in a range of contexts with Shirley Worland (2018). This work suggests that education for many Karen communities acts as conduit through which one generation confers honour on the next in the giving and receiving of that education. In aspiring to make use of the 'gift' of education in the service of their communities, the young people in this study seemingly perpetuate that gift exchange in honouring their elders as well as generations to come.

most part, they articulate clear and realistic visions, through their keen awareness of the significant constraints that continue to structure their lives and delimit the possibilities around them. Moreover, this awareness is seen to motivate decisions, strategies, and behaviours as they embark on various forms of goal-directed action intent on overcoming these constraints in the present.

This involves a range of action associated with service learning, volunteering, community service and work experience within the community, as well as engagement with the peace process and national political dialogue in the form of the NYP. That many of these young people are able to bring their aspirations to bear around formal processes of socio-political change at such a critical juncture in their history as well as that of their country's wider socio-economic and political transition, suggests that youth transitions are closely associated with wider transitions and transformations in this context at this time. They are well aware of this and we observe how they are building momentum through the opportunities this historical juncture presents by acquiring relevant skills and expanding their networks as they move from education and into employment in their bid to be someone of value.

These possible selves are overwhelmingly concerned with working in the service of their community in the long term. Images of teachers and nurses, welfare entrepreneurs, youth leaders, lawyers and local government officials confirm as much. In this regard, their aspirations and actions appear to reflect an intuitive commitment to redress the socio-economic vicissitudes of Myanmar's transition in Hpa-an in the future. However, in the short term their aspirations appear to lead away from their communities as they prioritise the learning of English and study abroad. As such, they appear to be orientated by a different set of concerns affecting the way they behave and even the way they dress. However, far from militating against each other, these possible selves and cosmopolitan inclinations remain grounded in a commitment to the communitarian project (Appadurai 2013), which frequently finds symbolic expression in the shared aspiration of the Community College, or at least a commitment to improve provision where, to their mind, it is most needed.

Moreover, these possible selves appear to be driven by their need to enhance their social mobility if they are to enhance their capability to serve their community in these capacities. Notions of self and service were predominantly informed by allusions to personal sacrifice, social responsibility, self-confidence and self-sufficiency, qualities frequently associated with migration-for-education.

These young people often cited the example of their teachers whose spatial trajectory was seen to have enhanced their social trajectory. In this way, emerging possible selves were defined as much by socio-moral identifications around the type of person they envisaged themselves to be in the future, as they were by specific educational options and career choices (see Frye 2012). This suggests that these young people, coming of age within Myanmar's volatile and uneven transition, recognise that the moral as much as the material basis of their aspirations will provide them with the means to navigate an uncertain future, still more so if they are to define that future in the years to come.

PART III

CONCLUSIONS



Figure 22. *Moving Forward: Plong Karen boatmen emerging from Sadan Cave south of Hpa-an*
(Photograph: Author)

Conclusions and contributions:

This thesis set out to investigate how young people in Hpa-an township navigate their structured positions to enhance their transitions from education to employment. It has been observed in other contexts around the world that processes of urbanisation and globalisation have had a significant impact on young people's life courses in the global South, raising their aspirations around future employment and career prospects that they then struggle to realise (Blossfeld *et al.* 2005; Lloyd 2005; Cole and Durham 2007, 2008). Moreover, transitional societies emerging from sustained periods of austerity and undergoing rapid and significant socio-economic flux and change, have served to exacerbate complications around youth transitions, by making it that much more difficult for young people to realise employment aspirations commensurate with educational attainment (Jeffrey 2009; Tzenis 2018). The knowledge, skills and aptitudes that such attainment constitutes often appear incompatible with the diversification of labour market opportunities accompanying processes of economic liberalisation. Education emerges as a 'contradictory resource' (Jeffrey, Jeffery and Jeffery 2007), leaving a generation of educated youth un/under-employed and struggling to move forward.

The testimony gathered here identifies the formidable social and structural constraints determining the positions of two groups of young Plong Karen coming of age over the past 20 years. These impediments were considerable in authoritarian Hpa-an. Within the context of Myanmar's political transition these persist. Indeed, in many ways, youth transitions in transitional Hpa-an appear that much more fraught.

The slow and uncertain pace of educational reform and a rapidly changing labour market have served to amplify young people's struggle to envisage viable pathways through state education and into employment. Higher education, in particular, fails to equip young people with the knowledge and skills necessary to respond to the demands of emerging employment opportunities, and the country's growing aspiration for change. The peace process has reignited ethno-religious tensions between Buddhist and Christian communities, deferring the convergence of state and non-state education systems and complicating access to community-based provision more generally. The Thai border no longer represents a viable zone of possibility within which to address immediate educational and

occupational needs, given more recent constraints on migrant mobility and services. The 'crisis' of youth looks likely to get worse before it gets better in parts of provincial Myanmar like Hpa-an.

Indeed, youth transitions in Hpa-an are now marked by new contradictions and challenges. Educational and occupational pathways may well appear more visible and varied within the country's revitalised private sector, but not necessarily more viable for many young people, who lack the basic skills and qualifications to access both. Youth in rural locations, already poorly served, are that much more conspicuously neglected. Specific identity groups, namely young women and Karen ethno-religious minority youth, whose profile has been discursively enhanced within the transition, continue to be marginalised through patriarchal and partisan agenda. Young people in Hpa-an, as elsewhere in contemporary Myanmar, are presented with new and beguiling possibilities beyond the constraints and concerns of their communities through better access to information, technology, and available education. They are, however, under increasing pressure to play a role in redressing those particular constraints and concerns.

Indeed, public and political discourse in Myanmar identifies young people as the key to resolving many of the country's problems, entreating them to maximise their potential whilst failing to recognise and resolve persisting impediments which might enable them to do so. For historically marginalised communities like the Plong Karen of southeastern Myanmar, seeking to redress enduring educational deficits which have had such a bearing on youth transitions over successive generations, it is that much more challenging. Indeed, it is young people from regions conspicuously lagging behind other parts of the country on whom the weight of expectation is perhaps greatest. They must nevertheless forge pathways through complex and contested peace and reform processes in order to realise a better future for themselves and their communities.

And yet collective action around new forms of community-based education in Hpa-an is responding directly to this. It is doing so by providing viable pathways between education and employment imbued with moral credibility through the example of those staffing them who have overcome such obstacles in the past. Fluctuating zones of privilege and prejudice thrown up by the transition, accounting for successes as well as struggles around education amongst these stakeholders, now inform a powerful narrative of collective social responsibility intent on safeguarding the legacy of

this agenda. As young people emerging from these institutions aspire to contribute to this as community leaders and welfare entrepreneurs in the future, this collective action promises to enhance both the self and the situation.

In this concluding chapter, I reflect on the ways in which the young people involved in this endeavour are navigating their transitions amidst a constellation of enduring constraints and emerging contradictions. I consider how these findings might contribute to our understanding of how young people realise their transitions from education to a life of value and meaning within such challenging and uncertain contexts. In so doing, I consider what the consequences of such transitions might be for these young people and the context within which they are situated. These conclusions are divided into three broad sections – empirical, theoretical/conceptual, and ethnographic.

Initially, I review and reflect on the empirical findings and what these tell us about these young people, how they are navigating their transitions within this particular context at the time of this research.

In the second section, I suggest how these insights might contribute to our theoretical understanding of youth transitions from education to employment, and specifically the role aspirations play in furthering (and, for that matter, frustrating) these transitions. I also reflect here on those key concepts I have employed in the study of youth transitions, suggesting ways in which these might be enhanced as part of further research of this kind.

In the final section, I consider those ethnographic insights this enquiry has afforded the study of Kwaegabon Plong Karen youth of southeastern Myanmar. I conclude with a short section outlining some prospective areas for further research in these three areas.

Empirical: temporal and socio-spatial mobilities in the Karen borderlands

The two groups of young people we have considered as part of this study are united by their shared engagement around new learning sites in Hpa-an: the scholarship alumni who established them and now work as teachers, headteachers and youth leaders in and around these institutions, and the students and academy alumni passing through them. Both groups are still involved in realising their transitions as they enhance their education and the possibilities around it. These distinct ‘communities

of experience' nonetheless have different relationships to constraint and opportunity around education and employment. Together they offer different glimpses of youth transitions before Myanmar's political transition, when Hpa-an languished under government control, and now amidst rapid socio-economic change and development.

It is clear that despite the stark and significant changes to this context over the intervening period, the testimony of those coming of age in 2014-2016 (Chapter 6) bears a striking resemblance to that of their teachers over a decade before (Chapters 4). The memory of them prompted equally strong emotional responses amongst both groups. Whilst, Ha-an's academies now provide their students with a means of navigating around state provision and the need to migrate to neighbouring Thailand, 'the struggle and the sadness' lingers, even if this has a slightly different basis now than it did then. The experiences of both these groups of young people illustrate how they have drawn on various time-space strategies to navigate through and around these evolving impediments.

Temporal mobilities: responding to 'the struggle and the sadness' now and in the future

The high aspirations that frequently attend the completion of education were often quickly and decisively frustrated or foreclosed for these young people. Time and again we hear the despondency in the voices of those emerging from education in Hpa-an, especially before the transition - how they were compelled to leave home and migrate in search of available work only made these disappointments harder to bear as families looked to them for support. Some of them obviously saw this coming, dropping out of school and university before time, and making for the border where there were at least prospects, albeit bleak ones. As they were forced to assume menial undocumented labour lacking rights and recognition from the Thai authorities, disappointments around education and employment were closely associated in the memory for these young people. In this respect, the 'crisis of youth' is consistent with that described elsewhere in the global South as these young people emerge from education un/under-employed.

Indeed, these transitions are so profoundly marked by 'the struggle and the sadness', as Nann Eh Klain ('Kind') described it, that anxieties as much as their aspirations – what is feared as much as what is hoped for - marks and mediates these transitions. The past as well as the future resonates here to such an extent that aspirations are based on deep fears and anxieties which now drive their actions

to enact a future devoid of these for Hpa-an youth today. Particularly traumatic experiences around involuntary and indefinite migration, insecure labour, and the loneliness, isolation, and vulnerability this entails – in short, ‘having to go to Thailand’ rather than choosing to do so - punctuated their memories. Anxieties-as-aspirations therefore act as a means of social navigation by animating efforts in the present or ‘the immediate’ to avoid this happening again in the future or ‘the imagined’ (Vigh 2006).

Projections of possible selves amongst a younger group coming of age within Myanmar’s transition bear the spectre of this struggle and sadness. Much the same social and structural forces governing their education and the possibilities around it continue to exert constraints on their ability to forge pathways into the future. The prospect of change rather than the concrete expression of it arguably makes this more dispiriting and more debilitating. Whilst there might be more employment prospects there is a sense that employment options remain limited or prescribed. Families are fragmented and youth dispossession looms at the margins of this picture as a direct result of historical educational deficits in this region. Similar anxieties therefore propel this group of young people towards imaginings of self and service that seek to respond to these deficits as they bemoan the choice of the necessary.

However, images abound of possible future selves acting as potent assertions of moral identity that motivate a variety of action in the present, intent on realising that conception of themselves in the future. Far from being confounded by structural constraints in the present, these transitions derive impetus from aspirations towards a life of value and meaning in the same place at a later point in time. This can be seen to prompt a range of motivational action in the present, as the young people in this study exploit their enhanced profile within public and political discourse to contribute to community welfare initiatives and engage in national political reform processes. In this way, they exercise and enhance their capability to aspire towards a better future for themselves and their communities over time rather than becoming captive to the context and the moment.

Social mobilities: on ‘being someone useful for my community’

The transitions of those coming of age before Myanmar’s transition assume multiple forms as more than one life domain came into close association – career, residence and professional identity. This was

to have a profound effect on their emerging identities and values, shaping their sense of how 'to be someone useful for my community'. In authoritarian Hpa-an, zones of relative local autonomy in which they encountered alternative education through churches and monasteries were limited and liable to be compromised by ethno-religious prejudice. In Thailand, educational encounters in Bangkok's private universities were marked by similar forms of social and cultural prejudice as more affluent local students were favoured over them, threatening to confound their progress and undermine their confidence in education.

These transitions therefore involved navigating different cultural contexts and with that difficult moral choices and challenges: to leave loved ones to work abroad or remain and struggle to support their families at home? To complete their education at home in Myanmar and graduate with a recognisable credential, or to pursue their education elsewhere for an internationally recognisable credential? To remain in Thailand for a better career and income or return and support their families and rebuild their communities? In seeking to provide answers to such difficult questions these young people were not just seeking to resolve practical problems associated with completing their education and finding a job. Instead, they were asking of themselves what kind of person they wanted to be in the future, what role they intended to fulfil, and what community they envisaged being a part of.

As members of an historically marginalised community both within the country and the Karen ethnic group, access to viable educational and occupational pathways for these young people has always remained that much harder for the religion they practise, the language they speak, the village they come from. For young Karen women it has long proved more challenging to complete their education and aspire to a role other than that prescribed for them. However, the extended intercultural pathways that these young people embarked upon when they did, were to result in successes around education that singled them out as more fortunate than many others left behind at home. That these transitions should be marked so profoundly by extremes of prejudice on the one hand and privilege on the other has clearly done much to shape a sense of social responsibility and obligation. Furthermore, these experiences have brought into focus the nature of that social mobility 'as one more fortunate than others because my education is supported', informing collective aspirations and action around education in particular.

The evolving character of this social obligation is clear to see amongst those coming of age within Myanmar's transition. We only have to look at the possible selves they articulate and the efforts they are engaged in to enact aspirations as teachers, education officials, youth leaders, and health workers – the very roles and responsibilities still lacking in transitional Hpa-an. These do not just involve education but acting in the interests of the welfare and development of young people more generally; they respond to a broader set of social and cultural inequalities than their teachers imagined.

These projections are seen to provide them with a 'moral anchor' (Parekh 2004: 207) against the lure of well-paid jobs in the service of international development agencies, which threaten to perpetuate a culture of dependency and itinerancy that has fuelled the perception of Karen in the southeast as 'a migrant class'. The shared dream of Hpa-an's Community College is therefore a potent one for providing both stability and incentive around which educational and employment transitions amongst many of the stakeholders involved in Hpa-an's academies are fashioned and furthered.

Young people emerging from new learning sites in Hpa-an are engaged in a variety of constructive 'horizontal' transitions (Jolliffe 2017) as they enhance their educational and occupational mobility through relevant vocational training, work experience, and various forms of volunteering. Many of them are involved in peace monitoring and regional representation around the National Youth Policy. These particular young people are therefore involved in the kinds of socio-political action that few young people would otherwise have an opportunity to be involved in. These experiences and encounters undoubtedly enhance their sense of social obligation and the social mobility with which to act on this commitment.

Socio-spatial mobilities: migration and morality across the Karen borderlands

Spatial mobilities have significantly enhanced the social mobility of these young people. Whilst migration is heavily implicated in 'the struggle and the sadness', it ultimately allows the scholarship alumni to grow in strength. The very act of migrating appears to have fostered more plural and less partisan inclinations amongst young people from a context marked by entrenched ethno-religious affiliations and agenda. Migration-for-education to the Thai capital, in particular, involved encounters with staff and students from a wide variety of social and cultural backgrounds inevitably imbuing these young people with more cosmopolitan ideals and dispositions. Positive inter-faith encounters within

private Christian universities clearly had a profound effect on young Buddhist students for whom education has historically and traditionally been undermined by ethno-religious identifications and affiliations. They emerge as 'selective cosmopolitans' (see Kadiwal and Rind 2013) deftly negotiating tensions around their identity as 'a migrant class'. This only adds to their resolve in confronting the dictates of Buddhist hegemony around community-based education back in transitional Hpa-an.

Their decision to return home to act on these experiences through community-based education in Hpa-an is, I suggest, a reflection of the pragmatism and innovation prompted by these enhanced socio-spatial mobilities. This decision defines them as 'role models' for a younger generation of Karen now confronted by an array of cosmopolitan influences within a context marked by entrenched and powerful localisms. It is not insignificant that some of these young people resisted obvious ethno-religious identifications and affiliations in favour of possible selves based on social and civic identities and aspirations. Nor is it surprising that they are committed to realising transitions that involve study abroad and gainful employment at home, as they follow pathways made increasingly visible and viable by the example of their teachers. Amidst various recent scholarly debates around the moral basis of citizenship in Myanmar (see McCarthy 2018, 2019) these young citizens are as aspirational as they are altruistic. However, they hesitate to attribute this to anything more than their avowed intention 'to be someone useful for my community', so divisive is the morally inflected basis of Buddhist socio-political action in this region.¹⁸⁶

In this way, migration-for-education-*and-return* is cast as something of a strategic victory over 'the struggle and the sadness' incurred by migration in the past. Indeed, *this* migration is recast as a socio-spatial strategy by which to enhance transitions and their outcomes for this community rather than any other. These outcomes are not limited to educational and economic domains but include social and cultural impediments that threaten to curtail the social mobility of this particular community into Myanmar's transition. It is therefore an increasingly potent aspiration amongst the young students and alumni who feature in Chapter 6. Invariably it drives their aspirations in the short term but is

¹⁸⁶ I would tentatively suggest that this amounts to the kind of sub-activism deemed to create new biographies of citizenship self-consciously intent on exceeding the parochial confines of class, religion and ethnicity (see Bosch 2017: 230). I do so whilst recognising that the young people embedded within this context struggle to disaggregate themselves from powerful associations related to these attributes.

nonetheless regarded by them as a means by which to enhance their capacity to work in the service of their community in the long term – to become someone of value rather than simply ‘someone someplace else’ (Crivello 2011).

Theoretical: the affective-ideational dimensions of youth transitions

In this thesis, I have shed more light on young people’s capacity to further their transitions through various time-space strategies. Far from being captive to time as the literature on the ‘crisis of youth’ suggests (see Jeffrey 2010; Mains 2012; Dungey and Meinert 2017; Finn and Oldfield 2019), these young people utilise time itself as part of affirmative action to envisage and enact a better future for themselves and their community. By illustrating as much, I have sought to make a number of theoretical contributions to debates on youth transitions and specifically the role of aspirations within youth transitions.

I have argued that youth transitions are neither universal nor teleological, still less for young people attempting to navigate complex contexts undergoing rapid and uncertain change. Whilst work on aspirations has highlighted the role of temporality in navigating such contexts and transitions over time, the role of aspirations in shaping the outcomes of these endeavours is less clear. My research has shown that aspirations offer these young people a form of social navigation by which to mobilise in both the immediate and the imagined (Vigh 2006, 2009a, 2009b), as they undertake action in the present with an eye to the future.

Their tactics and strategies in the present are contingent on those aspirations, so they move to a place at a particular point in time that allows them to act in response to those aspirations (Klocker 2007). Otherwise they undertake specific forms of activity that allow them to work towards that desired outcome, even if the prospect remains remote and restricted in a given place and time (Evans 2007, 2017). In this way, I have demonstrated how temporal mobilities are closely associated with socio-spatial mobilities.

All too often in the literature on aspirations we are reminded that inflated aspirations which remain out of reach are likely to have a dispiriting effect on young people struggling to plot a way forward, prompting negative social outcomes. My research suggests that enhancing aspirations around

education and employment in contexts where transitions between these domains are complex and contested, can provide young people with impetus and resilience to navigate uncertainty and insecurity, provided they have suitable opportunities to develop that capacity. It has shown that such aspirations whether realistic or not offer powerful forms of incentive or a 'moral anchor' with which to navigate that uncertainty and insecurity.

Indeed, this research has shown that this very uncertainty and insecurity can prompt positive rather than negative outcomes. Anxieties as well, if not more than aspirations, can play a positive role in youth transitions. The 'struggle and the sadness' negotiated by many of the young people in this study, which was to have such an impact on their futures, suggests that we need to work with a more expansive understanding of aspirations if we are to see how they figure in youth transitions. The past is as important as the future in motivating action in the present (see Evans 2007, 2017) as dispiriting past experiences around education and the struggle to act on its (broken) promises, inform alternative conceptions of the future intent on alleviating the basis of these anxieties. Indeed, anxieties-as-aspirations are a potent form of incentive to change the conditions that substantiated them, and therefore the very basis for constructive and transformative action to change both 'the situation and the self' (Whyte 2009).

So potent are these anxieties for many of the young people in this study, that they have served to define their aspirations – not simply what job or career they want to have but what kind of person they want to be or, indeed, do not want to be – in a word, their identity. These evolving identities, as well as the increasingly cosmopolitan affiliations emerging from them, have played a decisive role in their transitions from education to employment, as they aspire to make transitions consistent with that conception of their futures selves. Indeed, the experiences and encounters substantiating and shaping these transitions have imbued these 'becomings' with a sense of moral purpose or social obligation that has come to define those evolving identities 'as someone useful for my community'. My research therefore draws attention to the affective and ideational dynamics of youth transitions which continue to receive scant regard – namely, how identities are shaped and shape these transitions, their outcomes, and social impact (see also Jolliffe [née Vogler] 2010; Crivello 2011; Frye 2012).

This has a bearing on the situation as well as the self. We have seen how this particular set of morally inflected aspirations, arising from struggles and successes around education shared amongst a specific group of young people coming of age at a particular point in Myanmar's history, is having a bearing on this context. These experiences inform a potent collective narrative marked by experiences of social privilege and prejudice which seek to advance a more inclusive social and educational agenda in a context hitherto defined in terms of privilege and prejudice (see Walton 2013).

Alternative educational and occupational pathways have emerged where they have been lacking before. Education is no longer a contradictory resource, promising outcomes it cannot deliver on, but a space of connection and inclusion as young people forge relationships with a like-minded generation (Wyn 2014). Many young women and Karen ethnic minorities have gained traction in a context where it was more difficult to do so in the past. Young people have found hope and purpose through this ideational agenda with which to navigate the vagaries of both their and their country's transition. In this way, this community have set about re-evaluating the socio-educational 'inventory' an aging generation have successively maintained. My research has therefore emphasised the relational, and specifically the generational, basis of youth transitions to suggest the wider import that socio-spatial and temporal mobilities of this 'community of experience' are having on the context within which they are situated. This approach illustrates specifically how young people are located in relation to historical processes of social change, how this relationship shapes their engagement and with what effect, so often lost amidst a preoccupation with their (frustrated) role in spontaneous protest and contentious contemporary politics (cf. Honwana 2019).

But there is an undeniably dark side to this as we see a generation of fortunate, largely urban middle-class, educated and predominantly Buddhist students, gaining access to this education and its dividends in this context. As the capacity to aspire is enhanced for these young people, for many others it remains unattainable despite its apparent proximity. Frustrated aspirations are liable to be that much more dispiriting as rural youth, those without a basic grasp of English, ethnic minorities like Karen Muslims, young women from patriarchal households and communities, struggle at the margins of this picture yet within apparent reach of its rewards. Therefore, this research would seem to confirm that aspirations 'are not simply like so many precious stones gathered together in a basket' (Jeffrey in

Unterhalter, Ladwig and Jeffrey 2014: 144), but enhancing aspirations for some is liable to constrain other people's choices unless availability translates into access (see Gledhill, Dolan and Snyder 2019). This might otherwise sustain debilitating associations between education, gender, ethnicity and class in which particular identity groups struggle to harness the capacity to aspire for a better life, accounting for widening social and intra-generational disparities within a context like Hpa-an.

Possible selves at vital conjunctures: from theoretical insights to conceptual innovations

These theoretical contributions have been made possible by conceptual innovations in the anthropology of youth transitions that foreground the role of aspirations in young people's transitions. These innovations have considerably enhanced our understanding of youth transitions in contexts where pathways from education and into employment are neither secure nor assured. In the following section I therefore wish to reflect briefly on the value of those analytical concepts I have employed and the contributions this research might make in enhancing them in the future.

Jennifer Johnson-Hanks's (2002) concept of 'vital conjunctures' has drawn attention to the role of temporality in youth transitions by suggesting that critical junctures in the lives of young people amount to a 'socially structured zone of possibility' or 'a nexus of potential futures' (2002: 871). This focus on specific critical junctures around the completion of high school or university has allowed me to identify those many and various structural and social forces shaping the positions of the young people in this study. It has allowed me to gain a fuller understanding of the context within which their transitions are taking place by reading off young people's aspirations and anxieties in response to this. In aspiring to avoid some outcomes whilst realising others, these anxieties-aspirations amount to rich constellations of intent and initiative. At times, they appear to be little more than opaque unformed projections of identity but nonetheless act as potent markers driving action in the present.

I would therefore argue that, as a conceptual tool, 'vital conjunctures' needs to respond more closely to the increasing debate around what amounts to a viable aspiration in the study of young people's transitions. This debate has involved more established conceptual models involving aspirations such as 'Possible Selves' (Markus and Nurius 1986), which I have also employed as part of my analysis. Some authors have sought to delimit what does and does not count as a viable aspiration (see Hardgrove, Rootham and McDowell 2015) diminishing, I argue, its heuristic potential as a result.

The testimony gathered here vindicates the need for a broad and reflexive working definition of aspirations if we are to apprehend the full import of these possible selves and their affective dimensions, as young people lay claim to *who* not just *what* they want to be in the future.

Indeed, the profile of temporality within the concept of 'vital conjunctures' is in danger of distracting from and even diminishing the importance of young people's social and spatial mobilities as they seek to enact their transitions. We have seen how migration from one place to another has figured prominently in the lives of the young people in this study; how the experiences and encounters it has involved have enhanced their social mobility within and beyond those places. My research has therefore shown how movement over space as well as time figures in young people's transitions as they move from education into employment. We need a more robust understanding of these time-space mobilities rather than holding space apart from time as we evaluate an individual's capacity to navigate a specific context at a specific juncture in time.

Finally, a valuable opportunity has yet to be fully realised by exploring how vital conjunctures might situate young people in processes of social change. The concept has emphasised how youth transitions have the potential to be transformative by rightly arguing that the confluence of possibilities at these critical junctures amount to 'periods of potential transformation in a life or *lives*' (2002: 871; my emphasis). Since vital conjunctures are spread across social groups, as Johnson-Hanks suggests here, youth transitions have a common generational basis. Despite this awareness, the social implications of these transformations on the situation within which these lives unfold has yet to be full harnessed (see Woodman and Wyn 2015; Moreno and Urraco 2018).

By exposing how the group of young people at the centre of this study share a common location in Myanmar's historical process, I have shown how processes of 'becoming' are intimately linked with wider shifts in the political economy affecting those transitions. Struggles and successes around education have mobilised anxieties-as-aspirations shared by this social generation that has served to shape the form and focus of collective action in response. Exploring youth transitions through the vital conjunctures that define them therefore suggests how personal transitions have the potential to be socially transformative, as young people set about altering the very structures that delimit their positions and dictate their transitions (see Dolan forthcoming).

Regarding young people's transitions through the 'vital conjunctures' that punctuate them allows for a more nuanced appraisal of young people's role in social change. This role involves the kind of affirmative action around education we have seen, as well as engagement in contentious politics and popular protest occurring at this time elsewhere in Myanmar and around the world. The important thing is that it enhances our understanding of the social basis of youth transitions and therefore how this might figure in young people's efforts to change or modify the context in ways that have a bearing on those transitions now and in the future.

Ethnographic: contesting discursive framings of the Karen in contemporary Myanmar

This enquiry has allowed for one further set of contributions - to the ethnography of the Karen in Myanmar, their education and young people. I have drawn attention to a Karen community hitherto largely neglected by research on the Karen and Myanmar youth more generally. In so doing, I have sought to contest dominant narratives of the Karen identified at the beginning of this thesis which tend to conflate their imaginaries and interests and to do so in largely pejorative terms. My focus on the Kwaegabon Plong Karen of Hpa-an district has provided another perspective on the Karen other than that represented in the headlines or sustained by those engaged in contentious politics. Instead, it has drawn attention to those Karen communities outside Myanmar's metropolitan centres and at the margins of the state, now emerging from decades of government control and surveillance, yet largely without a formal presence within peace and convergence processes.

In so doing, this research has sought to contest the discursive framing of the Karen and the predominantly Christian Sgaw dominated historiography that has accreted around them for well over half a century. In this respect, it derives impetus from the work of Mikael Gravers (Gravers 2010, 2012a, 2012b) and Japanese scholars Yoko Hayami (1996, 2002, 2008, 2011) and Ikeda Kazuto (2012) whose ethnographic work amongst Buddhist Plong Karen communities in this region has done much to signal the need for this corrective. With improved research access to Karen-populated regions now emerging from conflict and government control, this research contributes to renewed efforts to resituate Buddhist Plong communities more firmly within narratives of the Karen in contemporary and

transitional Myanmar (Balčaitė 2019a, 2019b; Chambers 2019b; Hedström 2020; Hedström and Olivius 2020; Dolan forthcoming).

Karen children and youth and their education within such contexts in Myanmar have received scant regard until more recently (see Jolliffe 2014; Lall and South 2014; Lenkova 2015; McCormick 2020). It has been assumed that work on so-called ethnic education ‘regimes’ associated with EAOs such as the KNU has encompassed non-state provision (see South and Lall 2015, 2016; Lall 2016, 2018). However, these contributions have neglected to account for increasing engagement around community-based education outside the purview of peace and convergence processes but within the revitalised non-state and private sector (see McCarthy 2016), though there have been some attempts to expand the terms of reference at the very least (see Jolliffe and Speers Mears 2016).

The continued focus on education ‘regimes’ at the expense of other initiatives is misleading. The educational landscape in contemporary Myanmar is at once more varied and complex than this work suggests. Moreover, this narrow articulation of ethnic-based education has (unwittingly) colluded with the aforementioned research agenda to diminish the presence and indeed possibility of other educational avenues and aspirations, associated with different Karen communities, now finding traction within Myanmar’s transition. Moreover, the preoccupation with education systems and structures, and the discursive frames and terms that have been conscientiously erected to demarcate the geography of this research agenda (see South and Lall 2016: iii–iv), have occluded our view of the people and pathways navigating between these domains. Furthermore, it has failed to capture the more fluid (though no less complex) landscape across which young people seek to enact their aspirations and transitions around education. As we have seen, this changing context marks youth transitions with new challenges and contradictions.

My focus on the community in Hpa-an, its young people and their transitions has highlighted the way in which these Karen youth are struggling to break free of the discursive frames imposed on them, both ethnographic and educational. They are doing so whilst contending with legacies of conflict and displacement which have formed the basis of these assumptions even though the nature of this conflict and displacement has itself changed. So-called ‘communities of interpretation’, coalescing around research on particular ethnic groups, interests, and sets of ideas in the study of contemporary

Burma/Myanmar (cf. Aung-Thwin 2008; Chit Hlaing 2008; Schober 2008), threaten to obscure alternative positions, possibilities and pathways unless sufficiently interrogated at this juncture in the country's history. The young people at the heart of this study clearly defy easy categorisation as they seek to forge transitions into a largely uncharted and uncertain future. This thesis has attempted to capture these aspirations and their enactment and so illustrate how they have the potential to transform the context within which they are situated.

Future directions

At the time of this research, still more so today, young people and education have assumed the focus of increasing attention in public and policy debates in Myanmar. All manner of education and employment initiatives, intended to enhance the capabilities of a generation of young people coming of age within Myanmar's transition, have been established. This suggests that there is considerable public and political consensus on the need to develop opportunities for Myanmar youth and enhance their participation as part of this. However, without an appreciation of the diverse ways in which young people forge pathways amidst considerable complexity and constraint, especially within the country's ethnic populated states and regions contending with legacies of conflict and austerity, these developments risk undermining community-based initiatives.

This research has therefore provided valuable insights for policy makers and practitioners alike, as to the ways in which young people navigate complex and volatile contexts in order to realise their transitions from education into work. It has illustrated how possible selves and potential futures, though shaped by such contexts, are nonetheless susceptible to the exercise of young people's aspirations and actions. Furthermore, it has illustrated how youth transitions inform collective aspirations and action around alternative educational and occupational pathways intended to redress endemic social and cultural deficits that have long afflicted this community.

I believe these insights will be of value and interest to those working with young people and around education and vocational training both in Myanmar and other transitional contexts. Indeed, towards the end of my fieldwork in late 2016, I attended a meeting in Yangon convened by UNHCR for local and international development agencies involved in education and service delivery in the

southeastern Myanmar. This forum identified the community at the heart of this study as emblematic of the kind of cross-border community-based responses intended to enhance education and youth mobilities. It was suggested that this kind of initiative might play a more significant role in the faltering peace and convergence process, though the scale of it was questioned and little was known about it at the time.

Though my study draws attention to youth transitions in an otherwise neglected part of provincial Myanmar, it is nonetheless limited to a concern with urban educated youth within that context based on a relatively small sample. I mentioned the practical and logistical difficulties of including rural youth in this study (see Chapter 3), but further research might seek to include them more fully. However, many of the young people in this study were originally from outlying towns and villages who had moved to Hpa-an to find work and further their education, but what of those who could not make this transition? How do they navigate those contexts and what implications does it have for their transitions? What of these young people, seemingly ‘condemned to hope’ (Wannous 2019), who aspire to further their education but do not have access to it? These are just some of the questions that further research might respond to in an effort to acknowledge that such initiatives, whilst expanding the horizons of some inevitably constrain those of others.

Indeed, given the prominence of young people’s socio-spatial mobilities in effecting and enhancing their transitions within this study, including youth from different spatial and social contexts might offer valuable comparative insights. One such opportunity for a comparative study of this nature is readily available through the wider education network to which Hpa-an’s academies are affiliated. The MCAP network facilitates alternative educational pathways of a similar kind to the one in Hpa-an in different ethnic populated parts of Myanmar. This research would contribute significantly to our understanding of how youth transitions interact with wider social shifts in the political economy of these very different ethnic regions and their role in shaping the future of these contexts. Such a research agenda would bring one of the fastest growing, and yet least understood sectors of educational development, into closer and broader focus. It would account for the role this sector is playing in shaping and substantiating the transitions of a new generation of young people facing unprecedented change and persistent challenges.

Increasing opportunities to realise aspirations around education and credentials, valued and prioritised by this new generation, have profound implications for other conventional transition markers as educational trajectories extend and diversify over young people's lives. Marriage, childbirth, and family are clearly being deferred as youth invest in alternative social and economic strategies throughout their 20s and often their 30s with which to secure their futures. This stands to affect the social and cultural context within which successive generations live, learn, and forge livelihoods. A useful avenue for further research might therefore explore how enhanced transitions from education to employment in places like Hpa-an are shaping the evolving social, cultural and demographic character of transitional Myanmar, and what implications this has for the currency of educational credentials and the employment market, for example.

I stressed in the Introduction to this thesis that my research is concerned with education in so far as it is focused on activity *around* education rather than on the *content* of it. Subsequent research might account more closely for the latter by exploring, for example, how aspirations are mediated through teaching and learning processes and what effect this has on young people's aspirations for the future. It is quite clear that this education, encoded to some extent with values and objectives consistent with neoliberal development interventions, so often held responsible for young people's poor socio-economic stasis in the global South (Mains 2007), is in fact, proving helpful to these young people and their transitions. Such an enquiry might therefore shed further light on how encounters with this educational content is acting in this way, and what specific aspects of these narratives are proving so helpful to these young people.

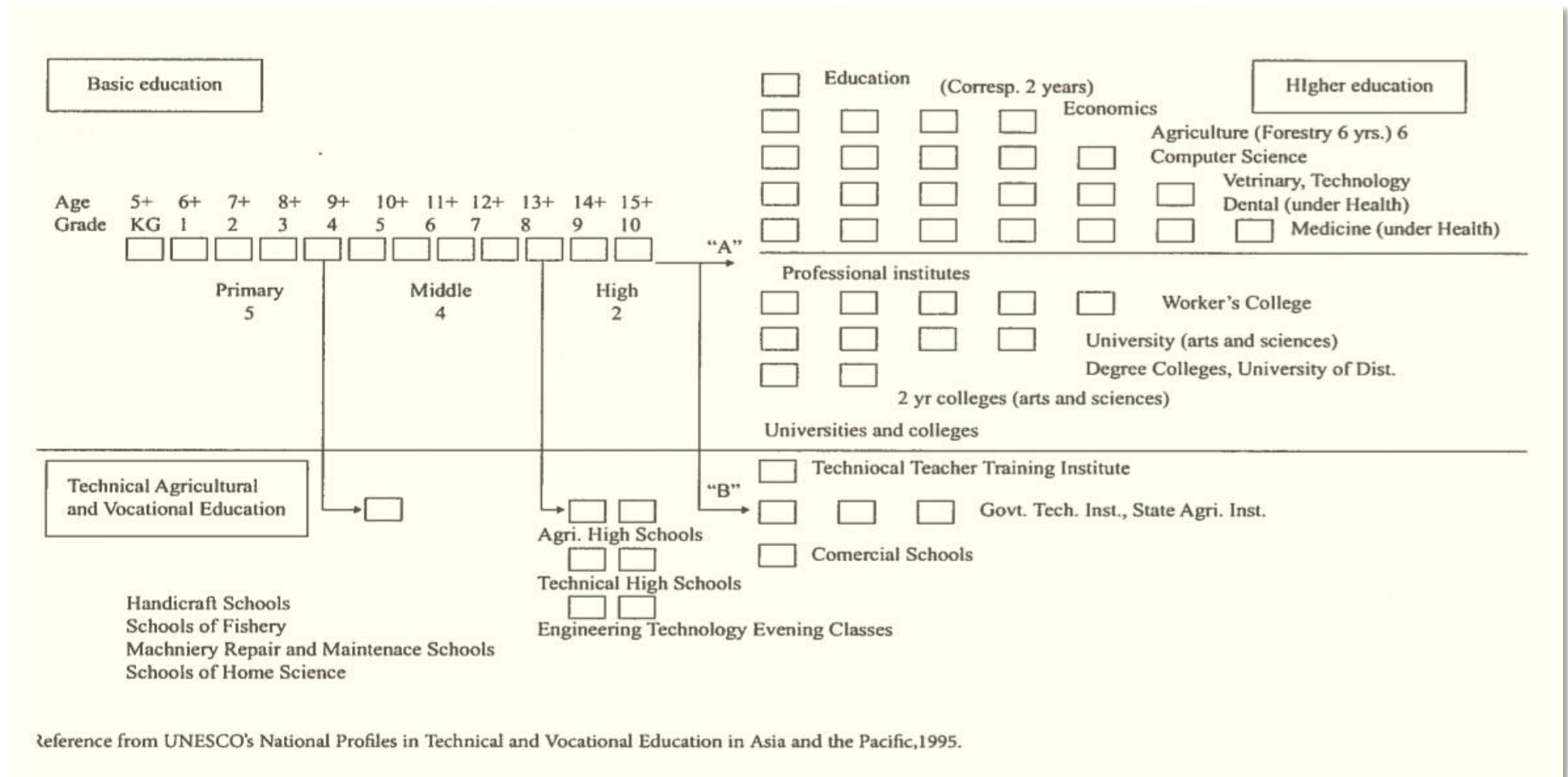
Since all these young people have had such profound encounters with state education, this research agenda might involve state structures more fully, should restrictions on research access be lifted in the future. Opening up the 'black box' of state provision and pedagogy would bring the 'micro' processes of teaching and learning into conversation with the 'macro' processes of youth transitions and their outcomes. In this way, we might gain a fuller understanding of what bearing this has on those outcomes and transitions. Indeed, given the preference for this kind of classroom-based ethnography, it might provide an opportunity to develop a more holistic research agenda around educational spaces and the highly varied cultural contexts within which they are situated.

Appendices



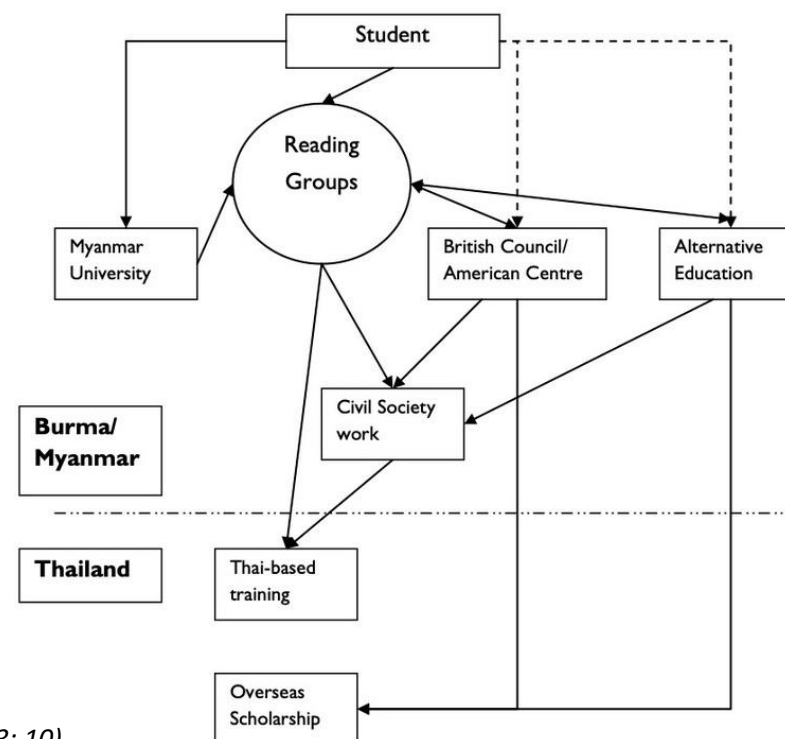
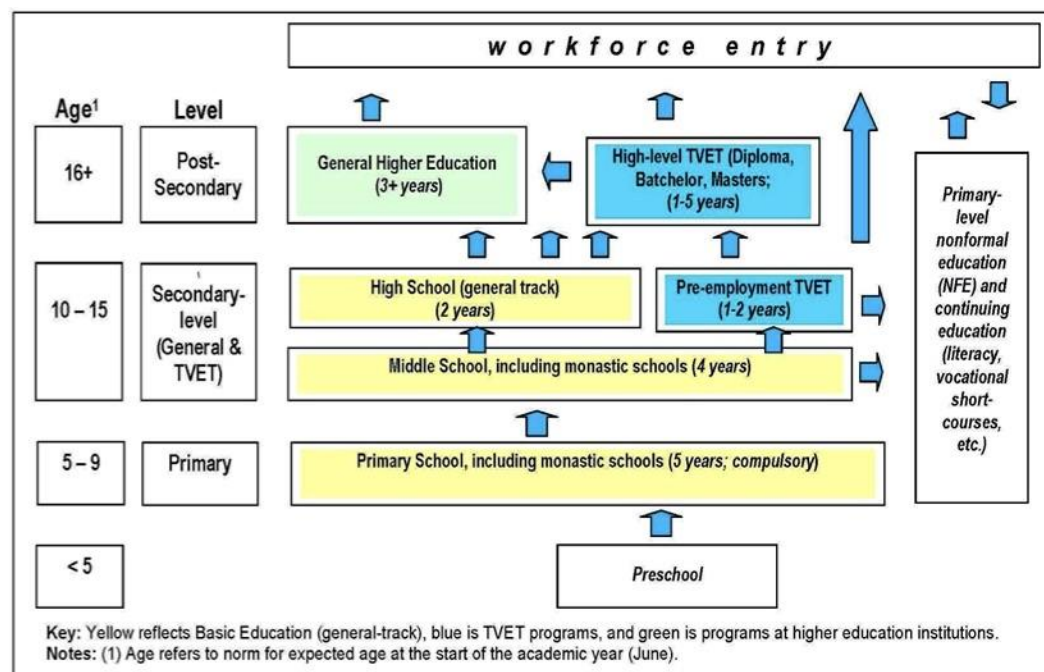
Figure 23. 'Twilight' (2015) by Nann Phawt Hsaung Khoo ('Lonely Flower') at YCC
(Photograph: Author)

Appendix 1: Structure of Myanmar's State Education System* (UNESCO 1995: 5 cited in Martin 2013: 179)



* Myanmar's state education system as structured from the mid 1980s to 2015 when the young people in this study navigated through it and largely as it remains today.

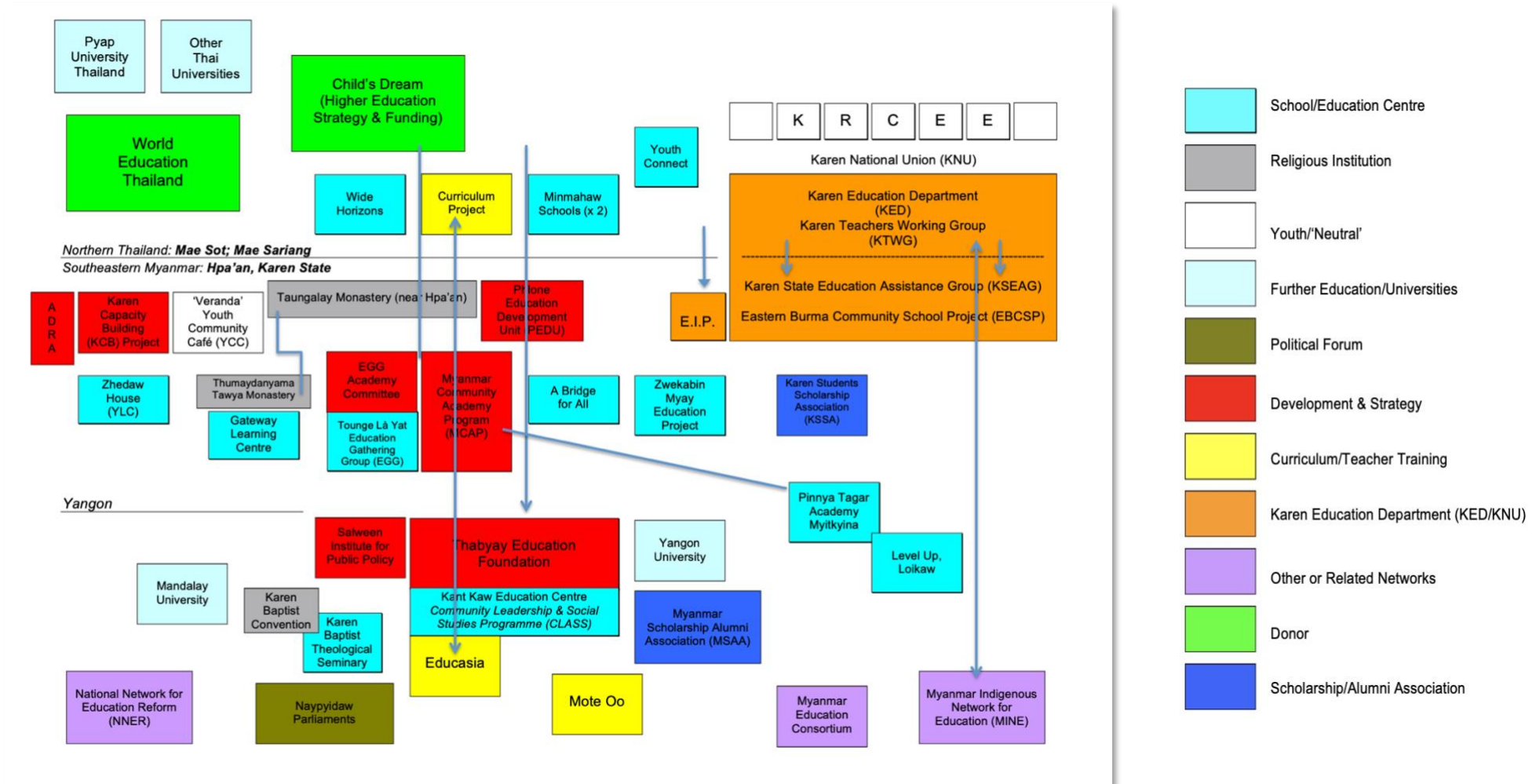
Appendix 1a. **Alternative pathways:** schematic diagram of the Myanmar education system and alternative pathways through civil society mechanisms



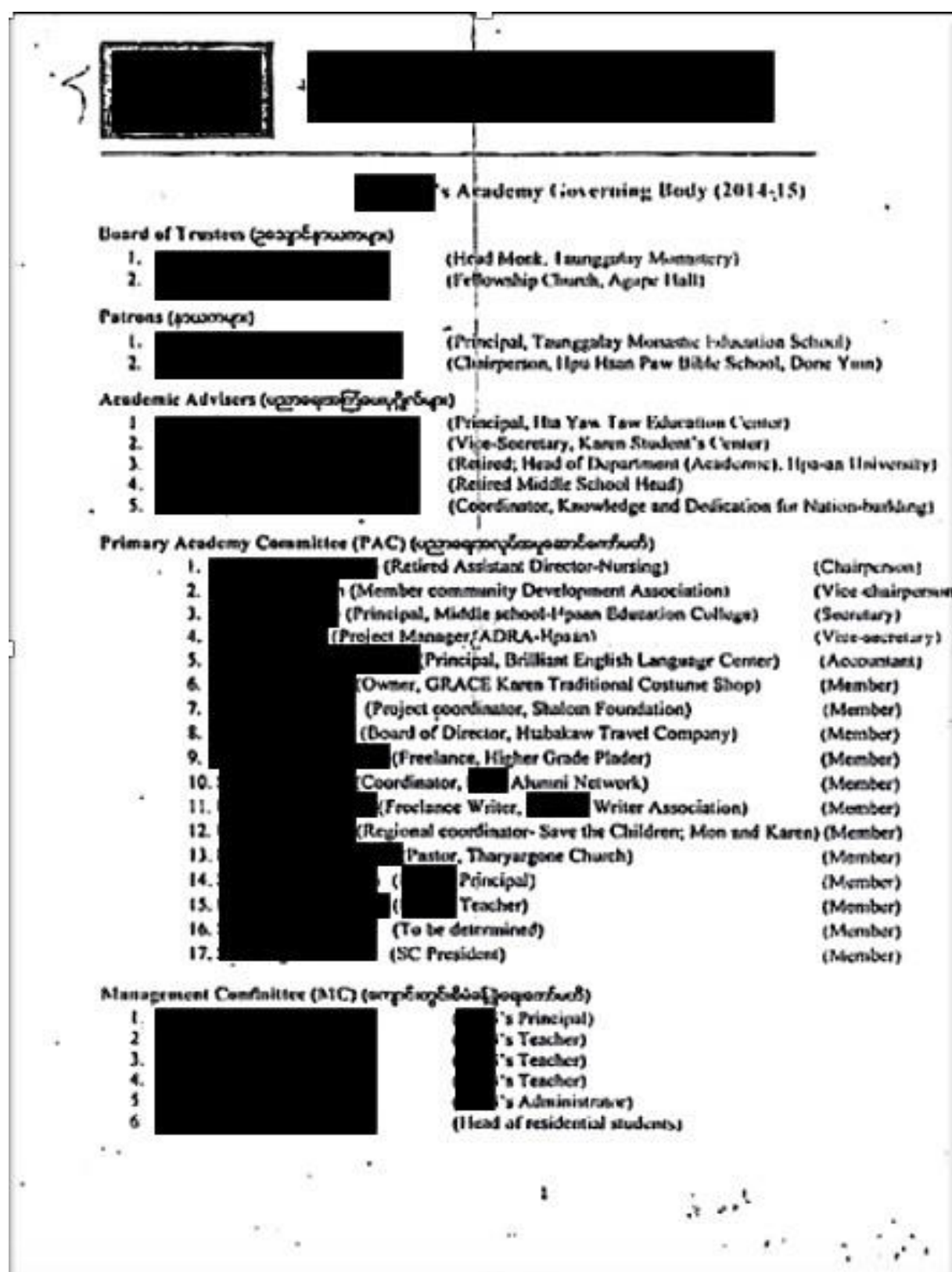
Left: Schematic diagram of Myanmar education system including key 'transition points' (ADB 2013: 10)

Right: Alternative pathways through civil society mechanisms before 2012 (Buzzi, Hayes and Mullen 2012: 26)

Appendix 2. Organogram of Hpa-an Education Network 2014-2016*



* Author's working draft (2014-2016) including the locations and, where known, the institutional and cross-border relationships of most non-state actors involved with the education network in Hpa-an, as well as many institutional actors referred to in this thesis.



* A governing body (redacted) responsible for the strategic direction of community-based academies in Hpa-an, displaying the nature and extent of community representation and comprising Primary Academic (PAC) and Management Committees (MC).

Appendix 4. Interview and Focus Group Participant Information

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD
Social Sciences Division

OXFORD DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
Queen Elizabeth House
3 Mansfield Road, OX1 3TB



Participant Information

Non-State Education and Civic Engagement in Transitional Myanmar
(C2 14-015)

About me and my research:

My name is Richard Dolan; I am a doctoral/PhD student at the University of Oxford's Department of International Development with an interest in non-state education. Before this I was a teacher and curriculum coordinator in schools in the UK, Brazil and China; more recently, I worked as a development professional for the United Nations and here in Burma on a number of local training initiatives. Last year, I taught students at EGG and at YCC on a couple of occasions so am already very familiar with your school.

My research focuses on the relationship between the non-state education sector in Hpa-an, Karen State and community engagement. This work explores what educational initiatives and networks have emerged in this part of the country over recent years, in what specific ways these are preparing young people to engage with these changes, and with what effect. Should you require any more information about this research before agreeing to take part please do not hesitate to ask me.

Reasons for selecting you:

I have invited you to take part because I am particularly interested to learn how education is viewed and valued by students themselves, what kind of activities you have been involved in within your community. I am also interested in what ways these experiences have influenced your ideas and aspirations. I have selected you because you are currently enrolled on or have completed the course at [name of academy].

Do I have to take part?

You do not have to take part unless you are happy to do so. Should you choose to withdraw at any point during or after the interview/focus group you are free to do so without justification and I will destroy all information you provided. You do not have to answer questions if you are not comfortable to answer them; again, you do not have to justify yourself in not answering and you can ask for the recorder to be switched off at any point during the interview. Taking part in this study will in no way affect your position or performance on the course you are currently taking.

What will happen in this study?

Providing you are happy to take part in this study you will be required to answer a series of questions as part of an interview which will last for between 20 minutes to 30 minutes. You may also or otherwise be required to take part in a focus group discussion with some other participants which will involve a series of questions to which any of you may respond; this will take about one hour. Interviews and focus group discussions will be conducted in English but if you feel more comfortable speaking in your own language we can arrange for this; they will be held in a suitable location to ensure your privacy.

Are there any potential risks in taking part?

There are no risks in taking part in this research. I will ensure that all information collected from you will remain confidential in accordance with the UK's current Data Protection Act. I will anonymise your name and any information that may identify you in all interview/focus group transcripts or publications.

What happens to the research data provided?

If you agree to participate in this project, I will record our conversations and take notes in a notebook to remember what you told me. Ultimately, the research will be written up as a thesis and deposited both in print and online in the University archives to facilitate future research in this area and to increase the likely impact of that research in the future; the thesis will be published with open access and available to every Internet user. This project has been reviewed by and received ethical clearance through the University of Oxford Research Ethics Committee (CUREC); two academic supervisors and two independent examiners have also reviewed it.

Who do I contact if I have a concern about the study or if I wish to complain?

If you have questions or concerns at any time about any aspect of this project you can contact me by email at richard.dolan@geh.ox.ac.uk or on the following phone numbers: (in Myanmar) 92 5252 6695; (in the UK) 0044 7972 613974. I will endeavour to respond to your concern as soon as possible and within 10 working days. If you remain unhappy or wish to register a formal complaint, please contact the Chairman, Social Sciences & Humanities Inter-Divisional Research Ethics Committee; Email: ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk; Address: Research Services, University of Oxford, Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JD who will seek to resolve the matter for you.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet

အော့စဖို့ဒ် ဘာ-စံင်မင်လင်သာ
အိုလူ-ထိုက (သိပ) လင်ဌါနိ.

ထိုင်ဂွးဟိုင် ထင်းစါထင်းထင် အော့စဖို့ဒ်လင်ထင်
အဲလိုဆုံဘက် စဉ္ဇာမူး အိုဟိုင်
၃ မေန်းဖီး ဖိုင်သာ၊ 0x1 3TB



နက်ပါလင် ဆိုပိုလိုင်း အိုဒီးအစို

ခါနိ-ပိုယင် ခ်ဒူးဘင်းလင်သာခါ လိုမှဲဆုံပိုကြိုပညာဟောင်းစး ခေ ဂိုမှိုင်ဆုံနက်ပါလင်
(C2 14-015)

ယိုကင်ဆာအဟိုင်-အိုကျင်း ခေ ယိုကျင်သွာဆုံမာ

ယိုမင်မွဲဒေ ရဲဉ်ချေန်ဒိုင်လိုင်း (Richard Dolan) ဆေဝ်-လှ်။ ယိုကျ်မွဲဒေ ယိုထင်းဘာ-စံင်မင် ဒုဂ်တာအထင်လှ် အော့စဖို့ဒ် ဘာ-စံင်မင်၊ ထိုင်ဂွးဟိုင်ထင်းစါထင်းထင်လင်-သွာဟိုင် ယိုသာဇာတ်လှ် ခါနိ-ပိုကြိုပညာဟောင်းစး ဆုံမာလောဟ် ပညာဟောင်းစးလှ်။ ကိုလာလိုယိုထင်းစး ဘာ-စံင်မင်အိုခါ ယိုမာဇာတ်အိုတာ လိုဏ်ဍုင်ဘာ-ဒြာ ခေ လိုက်မာလောဟ် အိုဇောဟ်ထိုင်အိုတာ ကိုဆာ- လိုယူကောဘာ၊ ဘာစီး ဘာ- ခေ တိုရိုဂ် ဘာ- ကိုဆေဝ်-လှ်။ အိုမေယာခါယိုဝ်ဇာတ် ယိုကိုလှ် ဆုံမာမွဲဒေ ဆုံမာထင်းထင်ဆုံလင်သာ ပညာဆာ-ဒြာ လှ် (United Nations) အေဟိုင် လှ်ခါနိ-ပိုယင်ခေသီးသိုင် ယိုအင်းတိုင် ဖေလင် ထးဝယ် ဂိုမှိုင်အဟိုင်-သွေင်-သယ် အးအးလေးလှ်။ ဩဉ်ခိုက်လိုဏ်ခါဇာတ် ယိုမာလောဟ်လိုက် လ EGG ခေ YCC ဆုံမာလောဟ်လင်သာဖိုင် ကိုင်ဖိုင်ခေဟိုင် ယိုသေယာထးဝယ်ဒေ အိုသီး ဆုံလင်-သွာသယ် အိုသီးဘာ-အိုဟောင်းအကျင်းသယ်ဇာတ်လှ်။

ယိုဆုံဇာတ်-သာဇာတ် မွဲဒေဖုံထိုခါနိ-ကွင်၊ ချိုထိုအင်လိုခေ လိုမှဲတယ်ဆုံပိုကြိုပညာဟောင်းစး ခေ ဂိုမှိုင်ဆုံပုဂ် ထိုင်စုဂ်အင်းထိုင် အိုဟောင်းသယ် ကိုဆေဝ်-လှ်။ ကိုလှ်ယိုဝ်ဇာတ် မွဲဒေ ထိုင်လိုခိုက် လာအိုဇာတ်ခါ ခုးအိုဝ် လှ်ထိုခါနိ-ဖိုင် စးဆိုင်ခေ ဆုံမာလောဟ်ပညာ ဖိုင်မိုထင်းထင်ထင်းခါ ခေ အဖူအခွင်း ဖုတ်ထင်းခါအထင်-ဖိုင်၊ လှ်ဆုံအင်းလယ်သာ အခါ မိုစးလေဝ် ထိုင်စုဂ်ပသေယာဇာတ် သာစင်းဖေဟ်သယ မွဲအင်းတိုင်လင်သာ ဓေသေယာဇာတ်အဟိုင် မွဲမိုဇာတ် ဆုံဃုဝ် ဓေသေယာဇာတ်။ ကိုလာလိုအင်းစာစး လိုက်အင်းစာသယ်လိုဇး ကိုအေမိုစးသာ ဆူလင်ဆုံအိုဟောင်းအကျင်း စးဆိုင်ခေ ယို ကျင်သွာ (Research) လှ်မိုင်မိုင်ဆုံဝိုင် ကိုအင်းစာထင်းယိုဇာတ်-လှ်။

ဟိုလွဲတိုင်ဇာတ်-ကို ဟိုဆုံပိုယေဝ်

ဟိုလွဲတိုင်ကိုဇာတ် စးဇာတ်ယိုကျ်ခိုဝ် ယိုသာဇာတ်လှ် ကျင်-သာမာလောဟ်ပညာအဖုံခေါဟ် ခေ အိုသီးဆုံခိုဝ်၊ အိုသီး ပါဇောဟ်ယိုယါနိ ဓေသိလှ်ဇာတ် ယိုမိုသီးယာစးသာဒေ အိုခေါဟ်ကျင်ဇာတ်လှ်။ အေဟိုင်သိုင် လှ်ဇာတ်လင်သာလှ်ခေ ကို ကိုမာခိုဝ်မာဆိုင်စး ဆုံဇာတ်မိုင်မိုင်လှ်။ ယိုဒေ ယိုစးသာသေယာဇာတ် ကိုဖင်းကိုလှ် ဆုံဟောင်းလိုကျင်းဇာတ် မွဲဇာတ်အင်းတိုင် ဓေသေယာဇာတ် မွဲဇာတ်ဖေလင် ဆုံဉာဉ်ဓေသေယာဇာတ် ယိုစးသာသေယာဇာတ် မွဲခိုဝ်လှ်။ အခါယိုဝ် ယိုလွဲတိုင်ဇာတ်-ဇာတ် ယိုဆုံပိုယေဝ်ဇာတ် မွဲဇာတ်လှ်ဆုံခိုဝ် အိုခါယိုဝ်ဇာတ် ဇာတ်ဇာတ်ထင်းဘာ-လိုဆုံလင်သာ လှ်မွဲခိုဝ် ကိုထင်းကျင်ဟိုင်ခိုက် လှ်ဆုံ လင်သာ မွဲခိုဝ်လှ်။ (ပညာလင်သာ အိုမိုင်)

ယိုစးမာဇာတ်- အိုတာ အိုမိုင်မိုင်ဆေဝ်-ဟူး

ကိုဖင်းဇာတ်-အိုတာ ကိုမာခိုဝ် ကိုသာလိုဇာတ်လောဇာတ်သီး လှ်စးဇာတ်မိုင်စး။ လှ်ယိုအင်းစာဇာတ်လိုက် လှ်မွဲခိုဝ် ပုံဆုံဇာတ် လင်ထိုင်ဆုံအိုဟောင်း အိုထင်-ဖိုင်-ကို ကိုမိုလင်ထင်းထိုင် ကိုသာလိုပါစးလောဇာတ်သီး လှ်စးဇာတ်မိုင်စး။ လှ်ကို ဖေလင်ထးဝယ်ယို လှ်အိုမေယာအိုတင်လိုကျင်းဇာတ် ယိုမိုမာလင်မာ-ခိုက် မွဲခိုဝ်လှ်။ ကိုစးဖေလင်ဆုံအိုတင် ကိုသာလိုဇာတ်လောဇာတ်သီး ကိုစး လင်ဖုတ်လိုအိုစး။ လှ်ဝိုင်သိုင် လှ်ကိုဖေလင် ဆုံအိုတင်လိုကဲစး အိုဟိုင်-အကျင်းဇာတ်သီး ကိုစးလင်ဖုတ်လိုအိုစး အေဟိုင် ကိုအင်းမိုင်ဆုံအင်းဆာကိုဆာ- ပက်ခိုက်ဆုံဖင်းလှ် ဆုံမာလိုဇးဇာတ်သီးဇာတ်-လှ်။ ကိုမာခိုဝ် ဆုံမာလိုကျင်းယိုဝ် လှ်စးပိုင်ပုဂ် လှ်ကိုဆုံမာလောဟ်အိုဟောင်း လှ်ကိုကိုလှ်-အိုဟောင်း လှ်ကိုဆုံဖုံဉာဉ်အိုဟောင်း လှ်အိုဇာတ် မိုင်စး မွဲခိုဝ်လှ်။

ကျပ်သွားဆိုမာယိုင် မွှာဆိုကျလယ်။

ထင်အိုထင်-ဖိုင်ယိုင် ကိုစးလင်ဆိုအိုတင်၊ ဆိုအင်းစာဆိုမာလ်ဖးကို အေဟိုင်သုင် ဆိုအင်းစာ ခေ ဆိုဖေလင်အိုတင် နာဒီအခါ မိုစးဝေ လိုအိုမီးဏီး ၂၀ လိုမွှာစိုဝ် ၃၀ အထင်ဖိုင်ကျလ်။ လိုအိုဖူအဟူဟူသီး အေသေ့အေစး ကိုစး မာစိုဝ်မာဆိုင် စးလင်ထိုင်ဆိုအိုဟောင်းအိုဆေဝ်။ အေလိုမွှာစးသီး လိုဆိုအိုဖူအိုဟူဟူ အင်းစာထင်းဆိုအင်းစာ လိုမိုင်မိုင်ကိုသး ကိုစးမာစိုဝ် အသီး အိုဝေဆေဝ်-လ်။ အခိုင်အိုခါ အဆိုဝ်အထင်-ကို မိုစးဝေ ၁ နာဒီ အထင်-ဖိုင်ကိုလ်။ ဆိုအင်းစာဆိုအိုဟောင်း ခေ ဆိုအင်းစာဆိုအိုဖူ ဆိုသုင်ဆိုကျလ်ကို မိုအင်းစာဝေ လိုခိုင်လာအွာ ဆိုခိုင်ကိုမွှာစိုဝ်လ်။ လာဏင်စိုဝ်သီး ကိုမိုအင်းစာစးသာ လိုကိုသာကို ဆိုခိုင်လ်ဖးကိုသီး ဟိုအင်းတိုင်ဖေကို ကေဝ်-ဝေလ်။ ဓေကိုဏင်ဆာ အိုဟိုင်-အိုကျင်းသယ် ဟိုလိုထုဂ်ဖူစး အေဟိုင် ဓေအိုဖူလ်သီးယာစးသိုင် ဟိုမိုအိုကျေဖေကို လိုဆိုလင်ဆိုကျလ် အိုသေ့အိုစးကို မွှာစိုဝ်လ်။

ဟ်မာစိုဝ်ဆိုမာလ်ကျင်းယိုင် မွှာမိုစးခင် ဆိုကးဆိုဟယ်၊ အံင်တိုရယ်၊ ဆိုပိုင်ပုဂ် အိုမိုင်မိုင်ဆေဝ်-ဟး

ဆိုကျပ်သွားဆိုအင်းစာ လိုက်ဖူယိုင် မိုစးခင်ဆိုကးဆိုဟယ်သယ် ဆိုပိုင်ပုဂ်သယ် လိုအိုဏင်မိုင်အေ။ စးဆိုဝ်ခေ ကိုဖေဟောင်း- ဖေရာ ဆိုအင်းစာသယ်လ်ဖးကို ဟိုမိုအိုကျေ လိုယူကေ ဆိုခေါဟ်ခါဆိုပိုင်လိုင် ဆိုလင်သု (UK's current Data Protection Act) ဆိုသုင်ဆိုကျလ် အိုလင်-ဖိုင်ကိုဆေဝ်-လ်။ လက်ဖေလင်ထးဝယ် ဆိုအိုတင်၊ အိုဖူအလွဲ အင်းစာဆိုမာ ခေ ဟိုမိုထုဂ်ထင်း လိုက်မေဖူအိုဟိုင် လိုကျင်းဏသီး စးဆိုဝ်ခေ ကိုမိုင်၊ ကိုအိုဟောင်းအိုကျင်းသယ် လ်ဖးကိုသီး ဟိုလိုထုဂ်ဖူစး ကိုဆေဝ်-လ်။

ဖေလင်ထးဝယ် ကျပ်သွားလိုက် ဆိုအိုဟောင်း-လိုကျင်းယိုင် မွှာခေသေ့လယ်

ကိုသာကိုအေပါလိုဟို ဆိုမာဆေဝ်-ကျပ်စိုဝ် ယိုမိုမာဏေဝ် ကိုလူ၊ ခေ ဆိုမာဏါး ဓေကိုလင်ဆိုသယ်လ်ဖးကို ဓေယိုလိုသာဏင်းစးသိုင် ယိုမိုမာဏေဝ်-အိုဏါးလ်။ အေဟိုင်သုင် ဟိုမိုကေဝ်ကျပ်သွားလိုက်ဖူ အေဟိုင် ဟိုမိုအိုကျေ လိုဘာ-စံင်မံင် လိုကတုဂ်၊ ဟိုမိုထုဂ်ဖူစးထင်းလ် အံင်လိုင် လိုက်မေဖူ၊ လိုဖူယာခေါဟ်အိုဟိုင် လိုက်ကျပ်သွား ဆိုမာသယ် ဓေမိုမာဏေဝ်-အိုခိုင် မိုဏေဝ်-ယဝ်ယဝ်သိုင် ဓေကျပ်သွားလိုက်ဖူမိုထင်းထင်အိုဟိုင်-သိုင်ကို ဆေဝ်-လ်။ လိုက်လ်ဖးယိုင်ကို ဓေဟိုမိုဏီ-ကိုဟောခေ မိုဏေဝ်-သိုင် ဟိုမိုထုဂ်ဖူစးထင်းလ် အိုင်တာနဲလိုက်မေဖူ ဖိုင်ယိုင်ကို ဆေဝ်-လ်။ ဟိုဖင်းဆိုမာ လိုကျင်းယိုင် လိုအေ့စိုဝ် ဘာ-စံင်မံင် အဖူအိုခိုင် အလွဲသယ် (University of Oxford Research ethics Committee (CUREC))၊ ကျပ်သွားကိုဆာ-သယ်၊ မိုယူ-ဝေ၊ အေဟိုင်သုင် စးဆိုဝ်လိုမာဏေဝ်-အိုတာ ပညာတြာဏီဟော ခေ ဆိုယေဝ်ထိုင်ကိုဆာ- ပညာတြာဏီဟော ကိုသီး မိုထိုင်ယူ၊ မိုထိုင်ဖာထိုင်ဝေ လိုက်ဖူသယ် လိုကျင်းကို ဆေဝ်-လ်။

အေမိုစးသာအင်းဆာ ဆိုလိုမိုင်မိုင်သယ် လိုမွှာစိုဝ် အေမိုလင်စးသာဆိုလိုမိုင်မိုင်ဆာစိုဝ် စးအင်းဆာ စးလေဝ်ထိုင်ထိုင်- ဓေသေ့လယ်

ကိုအေမိုအင်းဆာစးသာ ဆိုလိုမိုင်မိုင် လိုမွှာစိုဝ် အေမိုသေ့ယာစးသာ ယိုဆိုမာအဟောင်း-အကျင်းလိုမိုင်မိုင်ဏ ကိုဟယ့်အင်းစာ ဟယ့်ထိုင်ထိုင်-ခေယိုဏေဝ်-လ။ ယိုအိုမေလ် Richard.dolan@geh.ox.ac.uk လိုမွှာစိုဝ် ယိုလီ-ချု အိုဏါး (ပိုယင်) ၉၂၅၂၅၂၆၆၉၅ လိုယူကေ ၀၀၄၄ ၇၉၇၇၂ ၆၃၃၉၇၄။ ကိုအင်းစာဆိုလ်ဖးကို ယိုထိုင်ခွယိုကိုသာ ကိုလိုက်လိုအိုဖူ အိုဆိုဝ်အိုထင်-ကို အိုသင်လိုဆိုဖိုင်ကိုဆေဝ်-လ်။ အင်းစာထိုင်ထိုင်-ခေယို အေလိုလင်ဆိကံစး ကိုသာစး ဆာစိုဝ် ကိုလေဝ်ထိုင်ထိုင်-အင်းဆာ လိုအိုလူ-ထိုဏ အိုခေါဟ်ဂြိုဏ် (Social Sciences & Humanities Inter-Divisional Research Ethics Committee;) သီးဏေဝ်-လ်။ အိုမေလ် ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk, လိုကဒူ- ဆိုဖေလင်ကျပ်သွားဆိုမာစိုဝ် အေ့စိုဝ်ဘာ-စံင်မံင် (University Of Oxford), ဝေလိုတင်လင်သု (Wellington Square), Oxford OX1 2JD လိုဟိုဖူမိုအင်းတိုင်မိုမာစိုဝ်ဖေကို ဆိုကးဆိုဟယ် မွှာဝေ အိုဆိုလင်ဆိုကျလ် လ်ဖးကို ဆေဝ်-လ်။

ကိုဖာဖေဟိုလိုက်ဆိုပိုင်အိုဒီးအေ့ါ ခေ ကိုဖေလင်ဟိုအိုခိုင်အေ့ါ သယ်လ်ဖးကို ဆိုဂုဏ်ဆိုတာသေ့ဟ်မာ-လ်

Appendix 4b. Interview and Focus Group Participant Information: Sgaw Karen

အီးစမီး ဖုန်စိမိ

တၢ်ဘၣ်ထွဲလိာ်သးစဲအံၤတၢ်မၤလိာ်ကျိၤ

အီးစမီးထံၣ်ဂၤကိၤတၢ်ဘၣ်ထွဲလိာ်သးတၢ်ဒိၣ်ထီၣ်ထီၣ်တၢ်မၤလိာ်ကျိၤ

နီၣ်ပၤမုၢ်အဲလံးစးဟံၣ်

၃ မဲနံၣ်ဖံလံကျဲ, OX1 3TB



ပၤလၢကစံးကတိၤသကိးတၢ်အဂီၢ်တၢ်ဟ့ၣ်သ့ၣ်ညါအလံာ်က့

တၢ်မၤလိာ်အသနၢၣ်လၢအတဘၣ်ထွဲဘၣ်ဒီးထံၣ်ဂၤပဒိၣ်တၢ်မၤလိာ်ကျိၤလၢအအိၣ်ဝဲလၢကိၤပယီၤပူၤဆၢကတိၢ်
ဖဲတၢ်ဆိတလဲဘၣ်စၢၤအဆၢကတိၢ်
(C2 14-015)

ယမုၢ်မတၤလဲၣ်ဒီးယတၢ်ယုသ့ၣ်ညါတၢ်မၤလိာ်အဂီၢ်အကျိၤ

ယမံၤမုၢ်ဝဲ ရဲးဒုးဒိၣ်လဲ (Richard Dolan) န့ၣ်လီၤ. ယမုၢ်ပၤမၤလိာ်တၢ်ဖိလၢအမုၢ်ဝဲ မၤလိာ်ဖျိးစိ (PhD) ဘၣ်ထွဲဒီးတၢ်ဒိၣ်ထီၣ်ထီၣ်တၢ်မၤလိာ်ကျိၤလၢအအိၣ်ဝဲဒၣ်ဖဲ အီးစမီးဖုန်စိမိ ဒီးယသးအိၣ်မၤလိာ်ဘၣ်ယးဒီး တၢ်မၤလိာ်အသနၢၣ်လၢအတဘၣ်ထွဲဘၣ်ဒီးထံၣ်ဂၤပဒိၣ်တၢ်မၤလိာ်ကျိၤန့ၣ်လီၤ. တချုးလၢယမၤလိာ်ဒီးဘၣ်တၢ်ဖဲအံၤန့ၣ်ယမုၢ်ဝဲဒၣ်ပၤတၢ်လၢအသိၣ်လိာ်ဒီးအမုၢ် သရၣ်တၢ်ယုဒီးသးကျဲထုးထီၣ်တၢ်မၤလိာ်လံာ်လဲၣ်သ့ၣ်တဖၣ်လၢတၢ်မၤလိာ်သ့ၣ်တဖၣ်အဂီၢ်ဒီး ယမၤတၢ်တၢ်လၢတၢ်မၤလိာ်သ့ၣ်တဖၣ်လၢအအိၣ်ဝဲဒၣ်လၢကိၤအဲးကလံး, ကိၢ်ဘရုဒုလိဒီးတရုးကိၢ်သ့ၣ်တဖၣ်န့ၣ်လီၤ. ဆၢကတိၢ်ခဲအံၤယမၤတၢ်ဒိၣ်ထီၣ်ထီၣ်ပၤဖဲဒီးတၢ်ဘၣ်ထွဲဒီးဟီၣ်ခိၣ်ဒိၣ်ဘၣ်စၢၤဖျိၣ်ကရၢ (United Nations) လၢကိၢ်ပယီၤပူၤဘၣ်ယးဒီးတၢ်ဟ့ၣ်တၢ်မၤလိာ် တၢ်ဟ့ၣ်တၢ်ဂဲၤ အခိၣ်ထံးခိၣ်ဘိသ့ၣ်တဖၣ်န့ၣ်လီၤ. ဖဲအပူၤကွံာ်တနံၣ် ယကတိၤရူလိာ်သကိးလိာ်သးဘၣ်တၢ်ဒီး ပၤမၤလိာ်တဖၣ် EGG ဒီး YCC တၢ်မၤလိာ်အံၤတဘျုးဘျီအယိယနီၢ်ကစၢ်ဒၣ်ယဲယသ့ၣ်ညါတၢ်မၤလိာ်ကျိၤလၢ အဘၣ်ယးဒီးနၤ လီၤတံၢ်လီၤဆဲးန့ၣ်လီၤ.

ယတၢ်ယုသ့ၣ်ညါတၢ်မၤလိာ်တဘျီအံၤအတၢ်ပညိၣ်မုၢ်ဝဲဒၣ် တၢ်ဘၣ်ထွဲအဘၣ်စၢၤလၢအမုၢ်ဝဲ တၢ်မၤလိာ်အသနၢၣ်လၢအတဘၣ်ထွဲဘၣ်ဒီးထံၣ်ဂၤပဒိၣ်အတၢ်မၤလိာ်ကျိၤဒီး ထံၣ်ဂၤဖိလၢအအိၣ်ဝဲဒၣ်လၢထံၣ်ဂၤလိာ်ပူၤလၢအိၣ်ဝဲဒၣ်ဖဲ ဝုၢ်ဖၣ်အံၤ, ကညီကိၢ်န့ၣ်လီၤ. ယတၢ်မၤလိာ်တဘျီအံၤ ယအဲၣ်ဒီးယသ့ၣ်ညါဘၣ်ထွဲစ့ၢ်ကိးဒီးတၢ်မၤလိာ်အကျိၤအကွံာ်လီၤတံၢ်လီၤဆဲး လၢအဟဲအိၣ်ထီၣ်ဖဲန့ၣ်လၢအပူၤကွံာ်သ့ၣ်တဖၣ်အပူၤလၢအကထီၣ်ဒီးကဲဘျုးကဲဖျိၣ်စ့ၢ်ကိးလၢတၢ်ကတဲၣ်ကတိၤ လၢပၤသးစၢ်ဖိသ့ၣ်တဖၣ်အဂီၢ် ဒ်သိးဒီးကကွံာ်ဆၢၣ်မဲၣ်ဒီးထံၣ်ဂၤလိာ်ပူၤ တၢ်ဆိတလဲသးသ့ၣ်တဖၣ်န့ၣ်လီၤ. တချုးလၢပလဲၣ်ဒီးဘၣ်ဆူတၢ်အၢၣ်လီၤလၢနကစံးကတိၤသကိးဒီးဘၣ်န့ၣ်နမုၢ်အဲၣ်ဒီးသ့ၣ်ညါအါထီၣ် ဘၣ်ယးဒီးယတၢ်ယုသ့ၣ်ညါတၢ်မၤလိာ်တဘျီအံၤန့ၣ် ဝံသးစူၤသံကွၢ်ဘၣ်ယၢန့ၣ်တက့ၢ်.

ဘၣ်မနုၤလၢနဘၣ်တၢ်ယုထၢထီၣ်န့ၣ်လၢနကစံးကတိၤသကိးန့ၣ်လဲၣ်

ယကွဲမုၢ်ဘၣ်န့ၣ်လၢ နကစံးကတိၤသကိးတၢ်ဒီးယၢအဂီၢ်အကျိၤန့ၣ်မုၢ်ဒ်အံၤလီၤ. ယနီၢ်ကစၢ်ဒၣ်ယဲယသးအိၣ်ယုသ့ၣ်ညါလီၤတံၢ် လီၤဆဲးဘၣ်ယးဒီးပၤမၤလိာ်တဖၣ်သ့ၣ်တဖၣ်အတၢ်ထံၣ်ဒီး အတၢ်ပၣ်လုၢ်ပၣ်ပူၤလၢတၢ်ကူၣ်ဘၣ်ကူၣ်သ့ၣ်အဖီခိၣ်, နနီၢ်ကစၢ်ဒၣ်နဲစ့ၢ်ကိးနတၢ်ဘၣ်ထွဲမၤသကိးတၢ်ဒီး ထံၣ်ဂၤဖိလၢအအိၣ်ဝဲလၢနတၢ်အိၣ်တၢ်ဆိးအလီၢ် ဒီဖျိတၢ်ဖဲတၢ်မၤတမံၤမံၤမုၢ်ဝဲ တၢ်ဟ့ၣ်တၢ်ဂဲၤတမံၤမံၤမုၢ်ဝဲန့ၣ်လီၤ. ယသးအိၣ်ယုသ့ၣ်ညါစ့ၢ်ကိး နတၢ်လဲၣ်ဒီဖျိသ့ၣ်တဖၣ်န့ၣ်မၤဆူၣ်ထီၣ်နတၢ်ဆိကမိၢ်ဆိကမးသ့ၣ် တဖၣ်ဒီးနတၢ်ကူၣ်တၢ်ဆးလၢ နတၢ်ပၣ်သ့ၣ်တဖၣ်ဒ်လဲၣ်စ့ၢ်ကိးန့ၣ်လီၤ. ယယုထၢထီၣ်န့ၣ်လၢနကစံးကတိၤသကိးတၢ် မုၢ်လၢ တၢ်မၤလိာ်အံၤယုထၢထီၣ်န့ၣ်လၢနကမၤလိာ်ဒီးတၢ်မုတမုၢ်ဘၣ်ဒီး နမၤလိာ်ဒီးတၢ်ဖဲ တၢ်မၤလိာ်အံၤအယိန့ၣ်လီၤ. [တၢ်မၤလိာ်အံၤ]

မုၢ်ယဘၣ်စံးကတိၤသကိးတၢ်အလီၢ်အိၣ်ဝဲန့ၣ်စါ

နသးမုၢ်တအိၣ်လၢနကစံးကတိၤသကိးတၢ်န့ၣ်အတုးတအိၣ်ဘၣ်. နဆိကတိၢ်ကွံာ်နတၢ်စံးကတိၤသ့ၣ်ကိးဆၢကတိၢ်ဒဲး ဖဲတၢ်သံကွၢ်စံးဆၢစံးကတိၤတၢ်အကတိၢ် မုတမုၢ်ဘၣ်ဒီး ဖဲတၢ်သံကွၢ်စံးဆၢစံးကတိၤဝံၤဝဲအဆၢကတိၢ်စ့ၢ်ကိးန့ၣ်လီၤ. နတဘၣ်ဟ့ၣ်တၢ်ဂုၢ်တၢ်ကျိၤလၢတၢ်အံၤအဖီခိၣ်ဘၣ်. နတၢ်စံးဆၢသ့ၣ်တဖၣ်မုၢ်ဝဲ နတၢ်စံးတၢ်ကတိၤသ့ၣ်တဖၣ်မုၢ်ဝဲ လၢနစံးကတိၤတၢ်သ့ၣ်တဖၣ်န့ၣ် ကဘၣ်တၢ်မၤဟးဂီၤကွံာ်အံၤခဲလၢန့ၣ်လီၤ. နသးမုၢ်တအိၣ်ဘၣ်လၢ နကစံးဆၢတၢ်သံကွၢ်သ့ၣ်တဖၣ်န့ၣ်နအိၣ်သ့ၣ်လီၤ. နတဘၣ်ဟ့ၣ်စ့ၢ်ကိးတၢ်ဂုၢ်တၢ်ကျိၤလၢတၢ်အံၤအဂီၢ်ဘၣ်. ဒီးနယုလၢပၤကဆိကတိၢ်ကွံာ်တၢ်ဖိၣ်ကလုၢ်သ့ၣ်ဖဲတၢ်သံကွၢ်စံးဆၢကတိၢ်တတိၤလီၤန့ၣ်လီၤ. နတၢ်စံးကတိၤတၢ်တဘျီအံၤတဘၣ်ဒိဘၣ်ထံးဘၣ် နတၢ်ဖဲတၢ်မၤမုၢ်ဝဲ နတၢ်ဘၣ်ထွဲသ့ၣ်တဖၣ်မုၢ်ဝဲနီၣ်တမံၤဘၣ်န့ၣ်လီၤ.

တၢ်ယုသ့ၣ်ညါတၢ်မၤလိအံၤမ့ၢ်ဝဲဒ်လဲၣ်

နသးမ့ၢ်အိၣ်လၢနကစံးကတိၤသကိးတၢ်လၢတၢ်မၤလိအံၤဒီး ကပိၣ်ထွဲထီၣ်အသးဒီးတၢ်သံကွၢ်သ့ၣ်တဖၣ်န့ၣ်လီၤ. တၢ်သံကွၢ်စံးဆၢအဂီၢ်တၢ်ဆၢကတိၢ်ကလၢဝဲ ၂၀ မံးနံး ဆူ ၃၀ မံးနံးအဘျီတၢ်စၢန့ၣ်လီၤ. အဝဲအံၤန့ၣ်မ့ၢ်ဝဲတၢ်သံကွၢ်စံးဆၢဒီးနၤတၢ်န့ၣ်လီၤ. အလီၢ်အိၣ်စ့ၢ်ကိးလၢနကတၢ်စံးကတိၤတၢ်ဒီးကရူၢ် ဒီဖျိတၢ်သံကွၢ်သ့ၣ်တဖၣ်လၢပလိၣ်ဘၣ်နတၢ်စံးဆၢသ့ၣ်တဖၣ်ဒီး တၢ်အံၤအဂီၢ်တၢ်ဆၢကတိၢ်ကလၢဝဲဝဲဒၣ်တန့ၣ်ရံၣ်န့ၣ်လီၤ. တၢ်သံကွၢ်စံးကတိၤဒီးနၤတၢ်န့ၣ်လီၤမ့ၢ်ဝဲ ဒီးကရူၢ်မ့ၢ်ဝဲန့ၣ်ကဘၣ်တၢ် ကစံးကတိၤဝဲဒၣ်လၢအဲကလံးကျိၣ်န့ၣ်လီၤ. ဘၣ်ဆၣ်ဒီးနသးမ့ၢ်အိၣ်စံးကတိၤတၢ်ဒီးနကျိၣ်ဒၣ်ဝဲန့ၣ် ပကသုးကျဲၤန့ၣ်နၤစ့ၢ်ကိးန့ၣ်လီၤ. တၢ်စံးတၢ်ကတိၤအသန့ၣ်အံၤကဘၣ်တၢ်မၤအံၤလၢတၢ်ဘျီတၢ်ဘျီအလီၢ်ဒ်သိးဒီးတၢ်ဘၣ်လိၣ်ဘၣ်စးကအိၣ်လၢနဂီၢ်န့ၣ်လီၤ.

လၢတၢ်မၤလိအံၤအယိတၢ်ဘၣ်ဒ်ဘၣ်ထံးအိၣ်ထီၣ်သ့တမံၤမံၤဒါ

လၢတၢ်မၤလိအံၤအယိတၢ်ဘၣ်ဒ်ဘၣ်ထံးတအိၣ်ဘၣ်နီတမံၤဘၣ်. ယအၢၣ်လီၤယသးလၢတၢ်ဂ့ၢ်တၢ်ကျိၤသ့ၣ်တဖၣ်လၢယမၤန့ၢ်ဒီဖျိလၢတၢ်စံးကတိၤသ့ၣ်တဖၣ်အံၤန့ၣ်ကဘၣ်တၢ်ဒ်ဒါအံၤဒီဖျိ ကီၢ်အဲကလံးအတၢ်ဘၣ်တၢ်ဘၢအတၢ်ဘျီ (UK's current Data Protection Act) န့ၣ်လီၤ. နမံၤမ့ၢ်ဝဲ နတၢ်စံးကတိၤသ့ၣ်တဖၣ်မ့ၢ်ဝဲ လၢနတဲဖျါထီၣ်သ့ၣ်တဖၣ်န့ၣ်ကဘၣ်တၢ်ဒ်ဒါအံၤ. ဖဲတၢ်ကွဲးလံၣ်လဲၣ်အဆၢကတိၢ်မ့ၢ်ဝဲ. တၢ်ထုးထီၣ်ရၤလီၤလံၣ်လဲၣ်အဆၢကတိၢ်မ့ၢ်ဝဲန့ၣ်လီၤ.

တၢ်မၤလိအံၤအဂီၢ်တၢ်မၤန့ၣ်ကမၤအသးလၢတၢ်ဂ့ၢ်တၢ်ကျိၤသ့ၣ်တဖၣ်လၢယစံးကတိၤအယိလဲၣ်

နသးမ့ၢ်အိၣ်လၢနကစံးကတိၤသကိးတၢ်လၢ တၢ်မၤတခါအံၤအဖီခိၣ်အယိသတးဒီး ယသးအိၣ်လၢယကဖီၣ်တၢ်ကလုၢ်ဒီးကွဲးနီၣ်ယးနတၢ်စံးကတိၤသ့ၣ်တဖၣ် ဒ်သိးဒီးယတသးပုၤနီၣ်ဘၣ်န့ၣ်လီၤ. အါန့ၣ်အန့ၢ်န့ၣ် တၢ်ယုသ့ၣ်ညါတၢ်မၤလိတဘျီအံၤ ကဘၣ်တၢ်ကွဲးအသး ဒ်ပုၤမၤလိတၢ်ဖိအတၢ်ကွဲး ဒီးကဘၣ်တၢ်စံးကလံးအံၤ ဒ်အမ့ၢ်လံၣ်လဲၣ်မ့ၢ်ဝဲ, တၢ်ယုထံၣ်အီၤလၢ (online) မ့ၢ်ဝဲ လၢဖျိစိမိၤတၢ်ယုထံၣ်သ့ၣ်ညါအဝဲကျိၤအဖီလၢ ဒ်သိးဒီးကကဲဘျီကဲဖျိလၢခါဆူညါ တၢ်ယုထံၣ်သ့ၣ်ညါတၢ်မၤလိအဂီၢ် န့ၣ်လီၤ. တၢ်ယုထံၣ်သ့ၣ်ညါတၢ်မၤလိအတၢ်ကွဲးအံၤကဘၣ်တၢ်စံးကလံးဒီး ထုးထီၣ်ရၤလီၤအီၤဆူပုၤအါဂၤအအိၣ် ဒီဖျိအုၤထၢနံး (internet) န့ၣ်လီၤ. ပုၤသ့ၣ်အုၤထၢနံး (internet) ဖိကိးဂၤကမၤန့ၢ်တၢ်ခွဲးတၢ်ယၢ လၢကဖးဘၣ်တၢ်ကွဲးအံၤအကလီန့ၣ်လီၤ. တၢ်ယုသ့ၣ်ညါတၢ်မၤလိအံၤဘၣ်တၢ်သမံသမိးအံၤဒီးမၤန့ၢ်တၢ်ပျဲလၢအီးစဖိးဖျိစိမိၤတၢ်ယုသ့ၣ်ညါတၢ်မၤလိတၢ်သမံသမိးကမံးတံၣ် (University of Oxford Research Ethics Committee (CUREC)), တၢ်မၤလိပုၤဟ့ၣ်ကူၣ်ဟ့ၣ်ဖးတၢ်ခဲဂၤဒီးတၢ်မၤလိတၢ်သံကွၢ်သ့ၣ်ရၢခဲဂၤလၢအတမ့ၢ်ဘၣ်လၢဖျိစိမိၤန့ၣ်လီၤ.

ယမ့ၢ်အိၣ်ဒီးသံကွၢ်ဘၣ်ထွဲဒီးတၢ်မၤလိအံၤအဂီၢ်မုတမ့ၢ်ဘၣ်ဒီးယမ့ၢ်အိၣ်ဒီးစံးကတိၤတၢ်တမံၤမံၤန့ၣ်ပုၤလၢယကဘၣ်သံကွၢ်စံးကတိၤတၢ်န့ၣ်မ့ၢ်မတၤသ့ၣ်တဖၣ်လဲၣ်

နသးမ့ၢ်အိၣ်သံကွၢ်တၢ်သံကွၢ်တမံၤမံၤ မုတမ့ၢ်ဘၣ်ဒီး နသးအိၣ်စံးကတိၤတၢ်တမံၤမံၤဘၣ်ထွဲဒီးတၢ်မၤလိအံၤန့ၣ် နသံကွၢ်ယၤသုကိးဆၢကတိၢ်ဒီဖျိအံၤမုလ် (email) အံၤ richard.dolan@geh.ox.ac.uk မုတမ့ၢ်ဘၣ်ဒီး ကလံၤဒါအံၤ (လၢကီၢ်ပယီၤပုၤ) ၉၂ ၅၂၅၂ ၆၆၉၅, (လၢယုၣ်က့ၣ်) ၀၀၄၄ ၇၉၇၂ ၆၁၉၇၄န့ၣ်လီၤ. ယကစံးဆၢက့ၤနတၢ်သံကွၢ်လၢအဆိအချူ အဘူးကတၢ် အသီတဆံအတီၢ်ပုၤန့ၣ်လီၤ. လၢယတၢ်စံးဆၢအဖီခိၣ်နသးမ့ၢ်တမံ မုတမ့ၢ်ဘၣ်ဒီး နမ့ၢ်အိၣ်ဒီးသ့ၣ်ညါလီၤတၢ်လီၤဆဲးအါန့ၣ် အလီၢ်ဒီးဝဲသးစူၤသံကွၢ်စံးကတိၤဘၣ်ဆူပုၤပၤလီၤဆူၣ်နီၤ, တၢ်ဘၣ်ထွဲလိၣ်သးစဲအုၣ်ဒီးတၢ်မၤလၢဘၣ်ထွဲဒီးပုၤကညီတဖၣ်တၢ် မၤဝဲဒါဒီးတၢ်ယုသ့ၣ်ညါတၢ်မၤလိသမံသမိးကမံးတံၣ် (Social Science & Humanities Inter-Divisional Research Ethics Committee), အံၤမုလ် Email: ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk, တၢ်လီၢ်တၢ်က့ၤမ့ၢ်ဝဲ တၢ်ယုသ့ၣ်ညါတၢ်မၤလိဝဲကျိၤ, အီးစဖိးဖျိစိမိၤ (University of Oxford) , ဝဲလုတၢ်စကွဲ (Wellington Square), အီးစဖိး (Oxford) OX1 2JD န့ၣ်တက့ၢ်. ဒီးတၢ်လီၢ်အံၤမ့ၢ်ဝဲ အကြးကတၢ်လၢကစံးဆၢဒီးကမၤဘၣ်လီၣ်နတၢ်သံကွၢ်သ့ၣ်တဖၣ်န့ၣ်လီၤ.

တၢ်ဘျီဒိၣ်မးလၢနဟ့ၣ်တၢ်ဆၢကတိၢ်လၢနတၢ်ဖးတၢ်ဟ့ၣ်သ့ၣ်ညါလံၣ်က့ၤအံၤန့ၣ်လီၤ.

အောက်စဖို့ တက္ကသိုလ်
လူမှုရေးသိပ္ပံ ဘာသာရပ်ခွဲ
အောက်စဖို့ တက္ကသိုလ်၏ နိုင်ငံတကာဖွံ့ဖြိုးရေး ဌာန
အယ်လီစဘက် ဘုရင်မနေအိမ်
မန်ဗီး ၃ လမ်း, OX1 3TB



ပါဝင်ဖြေဆိုသူ အချက်အလက်

မြန်မာနိုင်ငံအသွင်ကူးပြောင်းရေးကာလတွင် အစိုးရနှင့် မသက်ဆိုင်သောပညာရေး နှင့် လူထုပါဝင်မှု
(C2 14-015)

ကျွန်ုပ် နှင့်ကျွန်ုပ်၏ သုတေသနအကြောင်း ။

ကျွန်ုပ်နာမည်မှာ ရစ်ချက်ဒ်လန် ဖြစ်ပါတယ်။ ကျွန်ုပ်သည် အောက်စဖို့ဒ် အပြည်ပြည်ဆိုင်ရာ ဖွံ့ဖြိုးရေးဌာနမှ ပါရဂူဘွဲ့ ကျောင်းသားတစ်ဦးဖြစ်ပြီး အစိုးရနှင့်မသက်ဆိုင်သော ပညာရေးကို စိတ်ဝင်စားသည်။ ယခင်ကကျွန်ုပ်သည်ယူကေ၊ ဘရာဇီး နှင့် တရုတ်နိုင်ငံတို့ရှိ ကျောင်းများတွင် ဆရာ နှင့် သင်ရိုးညွှန်းတမ်းညှိနှိုင်းရေးမှူးတစ်ဦးအဖြစ်လည်းကောင်း၊ မကြာသေးမီက ကျွန်ုပ်သည် ကုလသမဂ္ဂဖွံ့ဖြိုးတိုးတက်ရေးဆိုင်ရာ ကျွမ်းကျင်သူအဖြစ် နှင့် ဒေသတွင်း၌ လေ့ကျင့်သင်ကြားပေးမှုများ စတင်ပြုလုပ်ခဲ့သည်။ ပြီးခဲ့သည့်နှစ်က EGG နှင့် YCC တွင်ကျောင်းသားများကို အကြိမ်ကြိမ် စာသင်ပေးကြားခဲ့သည်။ ထို့ကြောင့် သင်၏ကျောင်း နှင့် ကျွန်ုပ်အလွန်ရင်းနှီး နှင့်နေပြီးဖြစ်သည်။

ကျွန်ုပ်၏သုတေသနသည် ဘားအံ၊ ကရင်ပြည်နယ် ဒေသအတွင်းရှိ အစိုးရနှင့်မသက်ဆိုင်သောပညာရေးကဏ္ဍ နှင့် လူထုပါဝင်မှုများအကြား ဆက်နွှယ်မှုကို ဦးတည်လေ့လာသည်။ ဤလုပ်ငန်းသည် မကြာသေးမီနှစ်များအတွင်း နိုင်ငံ၏ ပညာရေးပိုင်းတွင် ပညာရေးဆိုင်ရာ အစပျိုးမှု နှင့် ကွန်ရက်များ ပေါ်ထွက်လာခြင်းများသည် လူငယ်များအား မည်သည့် တိကျသောနည်းလမ်းများဖြင့် ဤပြောင်းလဲမှုများ နှင့် ပါဝင်ရန်ပြင်ဆင်ခြင်းကို ဖော်ထုတ်လေ့လာထားသည်။ သင်၏သုတေသန နှင့် ပတ်သက်၍ မပါဝင်မှီ နောက်ထပ်သတင်းအချက်အလက်များကို ပိုမိုသိလိုရန်လိုအပ်ပါက ပါဝင်မှုသဘောတူညီခြင်းမပြုမီ ကျေးဇူးပြု၍ ကျွန်ုပ်အားမေးမြန်းရန် မနှောင့်နှေးပါနှင့်။

သင့်ကိုရွေးချယ်ရသည့် အကြောင်းရင်းများ -

ကျွန်ုပ်သင့်အား သုတေသနတွင် ပါဝင်ရန် ဖိတ်ခေါ်ခြင်းအကြောင်းအရင်းမှာ ကျွန်ုပ်သည် ကျောင်းသူ၊ ကျောင်းသားများက ပညာရေးကို မည်သို့မြင်သည်၊ တန်ဖိုးထားသည်ကို သိမြင်ချင်ကာ သင်၏ပတ်ဝန်းကျင်အဖွဲ့အစည်းအတွင်း သင်မည်သည့် ကူညီလှုပ်ရှားမှုများတွင် ပါဝင်သည်ကို လေ့လာရန် အထူးစိတ်ဝင်စားသောကြောင့်ဖြစ်သည်။ ယခုအတွေ့အကြုံတွေက သင်၏အတွေးအမြင် နဲ့ မျှော်မှန်းချက်တွေကို ဘယ်လိုလွှမ်းမိုးခဲ့သလဲဆိုတာ ကျွန်ုပ်စိတ်ဝင်စားပါသည်။ သင့်ကိုအခု မေးခွန်းမေးမြန်မည့် စာရင်းထဲတွင် ထည့်သွင်းထားရခြင်း အကြောင်းအရင်းမှာ သင်သည် [ကျောင်းနာမည်] မှာ ကျောင်းဝင်ခွင့်ရနေပြီး (သို့) ထိုကျောင်းတွင် ကျောင်းပြီးမြောက် ခဲ့သောကြောင့်ဖြစ်သည်။

ကျွန်ုပ်အနေဖြင့် ဤလေ့လာမှုတွင် ပါဝင်ရမလား။

သင့်အနေဖြင့် မပါဝင်လိုလျှင် မပါဝင်ဘဲနေနိုင်သည်။ သင့်အနေဖြင့် အင်တာဗျူး / အဖွဲ့လိုက်မေးမြန်းခြင်း ပြုလုပ်နေစဉ်တွင် သို့မဟုတ် မေးပြီးနောက်မည်သည့်အချိန်တွင်မဆို ရပ်တန့်လိုက်ရန် ရွေးချယ်ပါက သင်သည်အကြောင်းပြချက်မရှိဘဲ လွတ်လွတ်လပ်လပ် လုပ်ပိုင်ခွင့်ရှိပြီး သင်ပေးသောသတင်းအချက်အလက် အားလုံးကို ကျွန်ုပ်ဖျောက်ဖျက်လိုက်မည်ဖြစ်သည်။ သင်ဖြေဆိုရန်

အဆင်မပြေပါက မေးခွန်းများကို ဖြေကြားရန်မလိုပါ။ ထပ်မံ၍ သင်အနေဖြင့် သင်မဖြေဆိုလိုခြင်းအကြောင်းကို အကြောင်းပြချက် ပြစရာမလိုဘဲ အင်တာဗျူးနေ့စဉ်အတွင်း အသံဖမ်းစက်ကို ပိတ်ထားရန် တောင်းဆိုနိုင်သည်။ ဤလေ့လာမှုတွင် ပါဝင်ခြင်းသည် သင်လက်ရှိသင်ကြားနေသော သင်ခန်းစာများအပေါ် သင်ရပ်တည်မှု နှင့် စွမ်းဆောင်ရည်ကို မည်သည့်နည်းဖြင့်မျှ ထိခိုက်လိမ့်မည်မဟုတ်ပါ။

ဒီလေ့လာမှုမှာ ဘာတွေဖြစ်မလဲ

သင်ဤလေ့လာမှုတွင် ပါဝင်ရန်သင်လက်ခံသည်ဆိုပါက အင်တာဗျူးတစ်ခုအနေဖြင့်မိနစ် ၂၀ မှ မိနစ် ၃၀ အကြား အစဉ်လိုက်ဖြစ်သောမေးခွန်းများကို ဖြေဆိုရန်လိုအပ်လိမ့်မည်။ အခြားအဖွဲ့များ နှင့်လည်း တွေ့ဆုံဆွေးနွေးခြင်းတွင်ပါဝင်ရန် သင်လိုအပ်ကောင်း လိုအပ်နိုင်သည်။ ၎င်းတွင်သင်နှင့် မည်သူတုံ့ပြန်နိုင်သည်ဆိုသည့် မေးခွန်းများပါဝင်နိုင်ပြီး တစ်နာရီခန့်ကြာလိမ့်မည်ဖြစ်သည်။ တွေ့ဆုံမေးမြန်းခြင်း နှင့် အဖွဲ့လိုက်ဆွေးနွေးခြင်းများကို အင်္ဂလိပ်ဘာသာဖြင့် ပြုလုပ်သွားမည်ဖြစ်သော်လည်း သင်၏ဘာသာစကားဖြင့်ပြောဆိုခြင်းအတွက် ပိုမိုအဆင်ပြေမှုရှိပါက ကျွန်ုပ်တို့စီစဉ်နိုင်သည်။ သင်၏ ကိုယ်ရေးကိုယ်တာ လျှို့ဝှက်ထား၍ရခြင်း ကိုသေချာစေရန် မေးခွန်း အမေးအဖြေ တို့ကိုသင့်တော်သောနေရာတွင် ပြုလုပ်လိမ့်မည်ဖြစ်သည်။

လေ့လာမှုတွင်ပါဝင်ခြင်းတွင် ဖြစ်နိုင်ခြေရှိသော အန္တရာယ်များရှိပါသလား။

ဤသုတေသနတွင် ပါဝင်ခြင်းတွင် သင်အတွက်မည်သို့မျှ အန္တရာယ်မရှိပါ။ သင့်ထံမှ မေးမြန်းစုဆောင်းထားသော သတင်းအချက်အလက်အားလုံးသည် ယူကေနိုင်ငံ၏ လက်ရှိဒေတာကာကွယ်ရေး အက်ဥပဒေ နှင့် အညီ လျှို့ဝှက်ထားလိမ့်မည်ဟု ကျွန်ုပ်အာမခံပါမည်။ သင်၏အမည် နှင့် တွေ့ဆုံမေးမြန်းခြင်း / အဖွဲ့လိုက်မှတ်တမ်း သို့မဟုတ် စာပေအားလုံးတွင် သင့်အားဖော်ထုတ်နိုင်သည့် မည်သည့်အချက်အလက်ကိုမဆို အမည်မသိဖြင့် ထားပေးမည်ဖြစ်သည်။

ပေးထားသော သုတေသနအချက်အလက်များသည် ဘာဖြစ်သွားမည်နည်း။

အကယ်၍ သင်သည်ဤ စီမံကိန်းတွင်ပါဝင်ရန် သင်သဘောတူပါက ကျွန်ုပ်တို့၏ အချင်းချင်းစကားပြောဆိုမှုများကို မှတ်တမ်းတင်ပြီး သင်ပြောခဲ့သည့်အရာများကို မှတ်သားရန် မှတ်စုစာအုပ်ထဲတွင် ရေးမှတ်ခြင်းဖြင့် အချက်အလက်ရယူပေမည်။ နောက်ဆုံးတွင် ဤသုတေသနကို စာတမ်းအဖြစ်ရေးသားပြီး တက္ကသိုလ်၏ မော်ကွန်းတိုက်တွင် ပုံနှိပ်ခြင်းနှင့်အွန်လိုင်း၌ ထားရှိခြင်းဖြင့် ယခုနယ်ပယ်အတွက် အနာဂတ်သုတေသနကို လွယ်ကူချောမွေ့စေရန် နှင့် အနာဂတ်တွင် ထိုသုတေသန၏ အကျိုးသက်ရောက်မှုကို တိုးမြှင့်နိုင်သည်။ ဒီစာတမ်းကို လက်လှမ်းမီသောနေရာတွင် အင်တာနက်အသုံးပြုသူတိုင်း ရရှိနိုင်မည်ဖြစ်သည်။ ဤစီမံကိန်းကို အောက်စဖို့ဒ်သုတေသန ကျင့်ဝတ်ကော်မတီ (CUREC) မှ ပြန်လည်ကြည့်ရှုစစ်ဆေးပြီး ကျင့်ဝတ်ဆိုင်ရာ ရှင်းလင်းချက်ကို လက်ခံရရှိခဲ့သည်။ ပညာရေးဆိုင်ရာ ကြီးကြပ်သူနှစ်ဦး နှင့် အပြင်မှ စာစစ်ဆေးသူနှစ်ဦး တို့သည်လည်း ယင်းကိုပြန်လည် သုံးသပ်ခဲ့ပြီးဖြစ်သည်။

ကျွန်ုပ်သည်လေ့လာမှု နှင့် ပတ်သက်၍ စိုးရိမ်စရာရှိပါက (သို့မဟုတ်) တိုင်ကြားလိုပါက မည်သူ့ကို ဆက်သွယ်ရမည်နည်း။

ဤစီမံကိန်း၏ မည်သည့်ရှုထောင့် နှင့် ပတ်သက်၍ မဆို အချိန်မရွေးမေးမြန်းလိုပါက richard.dolan@qeh.ox.ac.uk သို့မဟုတ် အောက်ပါ ဖုန်းနံပါတ်များ (သို့) အီးမေးလ်ဖြင့် ဆက်သွယ်နိုင်ပါသည်။ မြန်မာနိုင်ငံ ဖုန်းနံပါတ်- 92 5252 6695; ယူကေနိုင်ငံ ဖုန်းနံပါတ် 0044 7972 613974 ဖြင့်ဆက်သွယ်နိုင်ပြီး သင်၏စိုးရိမ်ပူပန်မှုကို တတ်နိုင်သမျှအမြန်ဆုံး နှင့် ၁၀ရက်အတွင်းတုံ့ပြန်ရန် ကျွန်ုပ်ကြိုးပမ်းမည်။ အကယ်၍ သင်မကျေနပ်ပါက (သို့မဟုတ်) တရားဝင်တိုင်ကြားချက်ကို မှတ်ပုံတင်လိုပါက ဥက္ကဋ္ဌ၊ လူမှုသိပ္ပံ နှင့် လူသားချင်းစာနာမှုဆိုင်ရာဌာနဆိုင်ရာ သုတေသနကျင့်ဝတ်ကော်မတီ သို့ဆက်သွယ်ပါ။ အီးမေးလ်လိပ်စာမှာ ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk ဖြစ်ပါသည်။ လိပ်စာ - သုတေသနဝန်ဆောင်မှုများ၊ အောက်စဖို့ဒ်တက္ကသိုလ်၊ ဝဲလင်တန်ရပ်ပြင်၊ အောက်စဖို့ဒ် OX1 2JD သင့်အတွက် အရေးကိစ္စကို ဖြေရှင်းရန်ကြိုးစားလိမ့်မည်။

ဤအချက်အလက်စာကို ဖတ်ရန်အချိန်ယူသည့်အတွက် ကျေးဇူးတင်ပါသည်။

Appendix 5: Individual Attribute Data (IAD) of principal and secondary informants interviewed and engaged in focus group discussions

A. Scholarship Alumni Interviews: referred to in Chapters 4 and 5

Interviews with Scholarship Alumni were conducted between August 2015 and March 2017 in person in Hpa-an unless otherwise stated; date of interview indicated beside gender.

Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Religion	Township	Current Job Title/Role ^f	Institution/Scholarship	Academic Qualification
F (250815)	32	Plong Karen	Buddhist	Kawkareik	Social Science Teacher	Rangsit University, Bangkok (Scholarship: Prospect Burma)	BA Politics, Philosophy, and Economics (PPE); MA in American Economic Policy
M (110915) ^q	32	Plong Karen	Buddhist	Kawkareik	School Manager, Yangon	Ramkhamhaeng University, Bangkok (Scholarship: Prospect Burma)	MEd Educational Administration
F (101116)	31	Sgaw Karen	Christian	Insein, Yangon	English Teacher	Assumption University, Bangkok (Scholarship: SGPB/A ^Ω)	MA English Language Teaching
M (111116)	34	Plong Karen	Buddhist	Tantaroo Village, Hpa-An	Headteacher/English Teacher	Asia-Pacific International University (Scholarship: Child's Dream)	BA Education and Psychology
F (151116)	31	Plong Karen	Christian	Hpa-an	Headteacher /English Teacher	Assumption University, Bangkok (Scholarship: SGPB/A)	MA English Language Teaching
M (151116)	25	Ke'ba Karen	Christian	Taungoo, Bago Division	English Teacher	Asia-Pacific International University (Scholarship: Child's Dream)	BA in Primary Education
M (161116)	29	Plong Karen	Christian	Nat Kyun Village, Hpa-an	Headteacher/English Teacher	Asia-Pacific International University (Scholarship: Child's Dream)	BA Education and Psychology
F (171116)	29	Plong Karen	Buddhist	Ein-Du Village, Hpa-an Tsp.	Headteacher/English Teacher	Asia-Pacific International University (Scholarship: Child's Dream)	BA Education and Psychology
M (181116)	33	Plong Karen	Buddhist	Hpa-an	ICT Teacher	Assumption university, Bangkok (Scholarship: Prospect Burma)	MSc Telecommunication Science
M (211116)	35	Plong Karen	Christian	Doung Young	KCB Project Manager	Assumption University, Bangkok (Scholarship: SGPB/A)	BArch (Architecture)
F (211116)	35	Plong Karen	Buddhist	Ein-du	KCB Project Assistant	Rangsit University, Bangkok (Scholarship: Child Dream)	BA Communication Arts
M (030517) [#]	35	Plong & Sgaw Karen	Christian	Kawkareik	Scholarship Coordinator, Yangon	Assumption University, Bangkok (Scholarship: Prospect Burma and B K Kee Foundation)	MA Education & Psychology; First Year PhD in Educational Leadership

^f Institutional affiliations have been left out to protect anonymity which might otherwise be compromised for these respondents.

^q Interview conducted in person in Yangon.

^Ω At the time of research the SGPB/A was no longer issuing scholarships.

[#] Interview conducted via Skype between UK and Thailand.

B. Academy Student/Alumni Interviews: referred to in Chapter 6 (see also Map 6 therein, p. 115)

All academy students and alumni were individually interviewed in Hpa-an between 2nd and 16th November 2016; date of interview indicated beside institution with which informant is associated. In many cases the families of these students were also engaged as part of this research.

Academy	Gender	Age	Batch ⁺	Ethnicity	Religion	Township ^φ	University/Degree Course/Qualification
EGG (021116)	F	21	1	Plong Karen	Buddhist	Kawkareik	Third Year Law, Hpa-an University (UDE)
EGG (031116)	M	24	2	Plong/Sgaw	Buddhist	Hlaingbwe	Third Year Geography, Hpa-an University (UDE)
EGG (031116)	M	21	1	Sgaw Karen	Buddhist	Hpa-an	Third Year English, Hpa-an University (UDE)
EGG (031116)	F	23	1	Plong Karen	Christian	Hpa-an	Second Year Law, Hpa-an University (UDE)
EGG (041116)	F	22	2	Plong Karen	Buddhist	Thermanya, Hpa-an	Third Year Myanmar Language, Hpa-an University
EGG (041116)	F	20	2	Plong Karen	Buddhist	Mi Zan Village, Hpa-an	Third Year Geography, Hpa-an University (UDE)
EGG (041116)	F	19	2	Sgaw Karen	Buddhist	Kawkareik	Third Year History, Hpa-an University (UDE)
EGG (051116)	F	25	2	Plong Karen	Buddhist	Kyaimayaw	BA Myanmar Media, Hpa-an University
EGG (091116)	M	27	1	Sgaw Karen	Christian	Minze Village, Hpa-an	BA Library and Information Studies, University of East Yangon
EGG (111116)	F	19	2	Plong Karen	Buddhist	Yaw Kine KOUNG Village, Hlaing Bwe Township	Third Year Myanmar Language, Hpa-an University (UDE)
EGG (121116)	F	20	2	Plong Karen	Buddhist	Taung Kyar Inn Village, Kawkareik Township	Fourth Year English, Hpa-an University (UDE)
EGG (1511160)	F	25	1	Plong Karen	Buddhist	Long Kaing Village, Kawkareik Township	BA Myanmar Language, Hpa-an University (UDE)
EGG (211116)	F	22	2	Plong Karen	Buddhist	Hpa-an	BSc Chemistry, Hpa-an University
*EGG (021116)	F	18	4	Sgaw Karen	Buddhist	Ta Kaung Boe Village, Hpa-an	Second Year English, Hpa-an University (UDE)
*EGG (061116)	M	20	4	Sgaw Karen	Buddhist	Kamamaung, Hpa-pon Tsp.	Second Year English, Hpa-an University (UDE)
GLC (081116)	M	18	1	Plong Karen	Buddhist	Hlaingbwe	Second Year BSc Physics, Hpa-an University
GLC (101116)	M	18	1	Plong Karen	Buddhist	Hpa-an No. 7 ward	Second Year BSc Chemistry, Hpa-an University
GLC (121116)	F	18	1	Plong Karen	Buddhist	Hpa-an No. 4 ward	Second Year English, Hpa-an University
GLC (121116)	M	19	1	Plong Karen	Buddhist	Hpa -an No. 7 ward	Second Year Botany, Hpa-an University
GLC (121116)	M	17	3	Plong Karen	Buddhist	No. 4 ward Hpa-an	Second Year Chemistry, Hpa-an University
GLC (131116)	F	18	1	Plong Karen	Buddhist	Ein-Du Village, Hpa-an	Second Year Chemistry, Hpa-an University
GLC (131116)	F	18	4	Pa-O	Buddhist	Hpa-an	First Year Botany, Hpa-an University (UDE)
GLC (141116)	F	17	3	Sgaw Karen	Christian	Hpa-an No. 4 ward	First Year English, Hpa-an University
GLC (151116)	M	18	3	Plong Karen	Buddhist	Hpa-an No. 7 ward	First Year English, Hpa-an University
GLC (151116)	F	20	4	Sgaw Karen/Mon	Christian	Hpa-an No.4 ward	BA English, Hpa-an University
GLC (151116)	M	19	5	Plong Karen	Buddhist	Hlaingbwe, Hpa-an No. 9 ward	Second Year Myanmar Language, Hpa-an University (UDE)
GLC (161116)	F	19	1	Plong Karen/Mon	Buddhist	Hlaingbwe/Hpa-an No. 7 ward	Second Year Botany, Hpa-an University

⁺ 'Batch' refers to the specific year group an individual joined following the opening of a given academy.

* Indicates a student currently enrolled at an academy; otherwise all others are alumni of these institutions.

^φ Spelling of towns, villages and village tracts in and around Hpa-an Township given phonetically in most cases as vernacular spellings in English differ considerably.

Academy	Gender	Age	Batch	Ethnicity	Religion	Township	University/Degree Course/Qualification
GLC	M	21	2	Pa-O	Buddhist	Hpa -an No. 7 ward	BSc Biology, Hpa-an University
*GLC (061116)	F	22	4	Sgaw Karen	Christian	Pantanaw Township, Ayeyarwady Division	BA Geography, Mau Bin University
*GLC (061116)	F	22	4	Pa-O	Buddhist	Hpa-an	BSc Physics, Hpa-an University
ZKBN (041116)	M	31	1	Plong Karen/Pa-O	Buddhist	Ein-Du Village, Hpa-An Tsp.	Third Year Geography, Hpa-an University (UDE)
ZKBN (051116)	M	31	1	Plong Karen	Buddhist	Ein-Du Village, Hpa-An Tsp.	First Year Zoology, Hpa-an University (UDE)
ZKBN (051116)	F	22	1	Plong Karen	Buddhist	Takwet Phoe Village, Hlaing Bwe Township	BA English, Hpa-an University
ZKBN (051116)	M	28	1	Plong Karen	Buddhist	Hpa-an Township	Second Year Law, Hpa-an University (UDE)
ZKBN (071116)	M	22	3	Pa-O	Buddhist	KanKa Ye Village Hpa-an	Final Year Law, Hpa-an University
ZKBN (071116)	F	26	1	Sgaw Karen	Buddhist	Kaw Yin Village Hpa-an Tsp.	BSc Zoology, Hpa-an University
ZKBN (071116)	F	23	2	Burmese	Buddhist	Hpa-an Township	BSc Zoology, Hpa-an University (UDE)
ZKBN (071116)	F	21	3	Sgaw Karen	Christian	Taung Khin Village, Kyauk Ta Gar Township, Bago Division	BA English, Hpa-an University
ZKBN (081116)	F	20	3	Plong Karen	Christian	Done Yin village, Hpa-an	Second Year English, Hpa-an University (UDE)
ZKBN (081116)	M	25	2	Plong Karen	Buddhist	Kyondoe Village, Kawkareik	BSc Geology, Hpa-an University
ZKBN (091116)	F	24	1	Plong Karen	Buddhist	Kamamaung, Hpa-Hpon	BSc Chemistry, Hpa-an University
ZKBN (141116)	F	25	2	Plong Karen	Islam	Hpa-Hpon Tsp.	Bachelor of Civil Engineering, Hpa-an Technology University
ZKBN (161116)	M	23	4	Plong Karen	Buddhist	Hpa-an	Fourth Year Myanmar Language (UDE)
*ZKBN (111116)	M	26	4	Plong Karen	Buddhist	Taungalay Village, Hpa-an	Third Year Geography, Hpa-an University (UDE)
*ZKBN (121116)	F	20	4	Sgaw Karen	Christian	Kyar Inn Gyi village, Kyarin Seikkyl Township	Third Year English, Hpa-an university (UDE)

C. Academy Student/Alumni Focus Group Discussions: referred to in Chapter 6

Focus Group Discussions took place in Hpa-an on Saturday, 19th & Sunday, 20th November 2016.

Focus Group 1 (191116)

Academy	Gender	Age	Batch	Ethnicity	Religion	Township	University/Degree Course/Qualification
EGG*	F	22	4	Sgaw Karen	Christian	Pantanaw Township, Ayeyarwady Division	BA Geography, Maubin University, Ayeyarwady
EGG*	F	22	4	Pa-O	Buddhist	Hpa-an	BSc Physics, Hpa-an University
GLC	M	17	3	Plong Karen	Buddhist	No. 4 ward, Hpa-an	Second Year Chemistry, Hpa-an University
GLC	M	18	3	Plong Karen	Buddhist	No. 7 ward, Hpa-an,	First Year English, Hpa-an University

Focus Group 2 (201116)

ZKBN	F	21	3	Sgaw Karen	Christian	Taung Khin Village, Kyauk Ta Gar Township, Bago Division	BA English, Hpa-an University
GLC	M	18	1	Plong Karen	Buddhist	Hlaingbwe	Second Year BSc Physics, Hpa-an University
EGG*	M	20	4	Sgaw Karen	Buddhist	Kamamaung, Hpa-Hpon Tsp.	Second Year English, Hpa-an University (UDE)
ZKBN	F	20	3	Plong Karen	Christian	Done Yin village, Hpa-an	Second Year English, Hpa-an University (UDE)

Focus Group 3 (201116)

EGG*	F	18	4	Sgaw Karen	Buddhist	Ta Kaung Boe Village, Hpa-an	Second Year English, Hpa-an University (UDE)
GLC	F	18	1	Plong Karen	Buddhist	No. 4 ward, Hpa-an	Second Year English, Hpa-an University
GLC	M	18	1	Plong Karen	Buddhist	No. 7 ward, Hpa-an	Second Year BSc Chemistry, Hpa-an University
EGG	M	21	1	Sgaw Karen	Buddhist	Hpa-an	Third Year English, Hpa-an University (UDE)

D. Community and Civil Society Stakeholder Interviews

A range of community stakeholders associated with the following institutions and organisations in Hpa-an and Yangon, and in Mae Sot and Bangkok in Thailand were interviewed as part of this study between October 2014 and December 2016.

a. Network Partners

Hpa-an:

Organisation	Type	Purpose
ADRA: Karen Capacity Building Programme	INGO/Karen CBO	Education; Social Welfare
Karen Affairs Committee (KAC) inc. KAC Youth Network	Karen CBO	Social Welfare
Karen Culture and Literature Association	Karen CBO/NGO	Education; Social Welfare
Karen State Civil Society Network (KSCSN)	Karen CBO	Non-State Education
Karen University Students Association (KUSA)	Karen CBO	Non-State Education
Kyar Taw Ya Monastery	Religious Institution/Inter-faith CBO	Social Welfare; Education
Phlone Education Development Unit (PEDU)	Karen/Buddhist CBO	Education
Project for Local Empowerment – Payap University, Chang Mai Thailand	INGO/CBO	Education; Capacity-Building; Vocational Training; Community Development
Taungalay Monastery, nr. Hpa-an	Religious Institution/Karen CBO	Social Welfare; Education
Veranda – Youth Community Café (YCC)	CBO	Social Welfare; Vocational Training
Zedaw House – Youth Learning Centre (YLC)	CBO	Education

Yangon:

Organisation	Type	Purpose
Child's Dream Foundation	INGO	Donor/Scholarship Provider
Educasia/Curriculum Project at Thabyay	(I)NGO/CBO	Teacher Training/Curriculum Provider
Myanmar Indigenous Network for Education (MINE)	Ethnic Nationality NGO (Network)	Political Representation
Mote Oo	(I)NGO	Teacher Training/Curriculum Provider
Myanmar Community Academies Programme (MCAP)	NGO	Education; Youth Empowerment
Myanmar Scholarship Alumni Association (MSAA)	NGO	Non-State Higher Education; Social Welfare
Thabyay Education Foundation and Kant Kaw Education Center	NGO	Non-State Higher Education/Study Abroad

Mae Sot, Thailand:

World Education	INGO	Non-state Education Donor

b. Secondary Sources: representatives of the following organisations, whose activities were of relevance to the educational engagement in Hpa-an and elsewhere in the Karen borderlands, were interviewed between October 2014 and December 2016; the institution might not be based in this location but the representative was engaged there.

Hpa-an:

Organisation	Type	Purpose
Educational Initiatives	Myanmar NGO	Non-State Education
Hpa-an University	State HEI	Degree courses in Sciences and Liberal Arts
Research Institute of Society and Ecology (RISE)	Karen NGO	Social Welfare including Education
Karen Development Network (Hpa-an Project Office)	Karen NGO	Non-State Education; Training; Peace Education
Karen National Union (KNU)	EAO	Political Representation at Peace & Convergence Processes
Karen Students Centre (KSC)	Non-State HEI	Non-State/Karen Education
Karen Women's Empowerment Group (KWEG)	Karen NGO	Women & Youth Education and Social Welfare
Phlone Sqaw Democratic Party (PSDP)	Karen Political Party	Political & Educational Rights & Representation
Thoolei Foundation	NGO	Research & Development
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)	INGO	Education in Southeastern Myanmar
World Vision	INGO	Education in Southeastern Myanmar

Mawlamyine:

Jeepyah Civil Society Development Organisation	Karen CBO	Non-State Education
Local Resource Centre (LRC)	NGO	Research & Development
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	INGO	Research & Development

Taungoo:

Hsar Mu Htaw	Karen CBO	Non-State/Ethnic Education; Social Welfare & Development

Yangon:

Organisation	Type	Purpose
ActionAid	INGO	Non-State Education
American Center Yangon, U.S. Embassy in Burma	INGO/Embassy	Education, Social Welfare & Development; Research
Asia Foundation	INGO	Civic Education & Values
British Council	INGO	Non-State Education; Social Welfare
Charity-Orientated Myanmar (COM)	NGO	Education & Training
Hope International	INGO	Vocational Training
Karen Baptist Theological Seminary	Non-State HEI	Spiritual vocational training; Liberal Arts degree courses
Karen Development Network (KDN) HQ	Karen NGO	Social Welfare & Development
Karena Myanmar Social Service (KMSS)	CBO/NGO	Social Welfare & Development
Karen National Party (KNP)	Karen Political Party	Political & Educational Rights & Representation
Karen People's Party (KPP)	Karen Political Party	Political & Educational Rights & Representation
Karen Unity and Peace Committee (KUPC)	Karen Political Party	Political & Educational Rights & Representation
Myanmar Egress	NGO	CBO/NGO Research & Analysis
Pandita	Burmese NGO	Education; Vocational Training; Social Welfare
Salween Institute for Public Policy	NGO	Analysis & Research
Search for Common Ground	INGO	Children & Youth; Social Cohesion
The Shalom (Nyein) Foundation	(Kachin) NGO	Peace/Non-State Education
UNICEF	INGO	Child & Youth Protection; Education

In Thailand

Mae Sot:

Organisation	Type	Purpose
Karen Education Department (KED)	Karen NGO (KNU line ministry)	Non-State Education; Political Representation at Peace & Convergence Processes
Karen Environment and Social Action Network (KESAN)	Karen NGO	Social Welfare
Karen State Education Assistance Group (KSEAG)	Karen NGO	Non-State Education
Minmehaw School/Minmehaw Education Foundation	Migrant School	Migrant/Non-State Education
Picturebook Guesthouse	Social Business	Vocational Training; Career Development
Wide Horizons Organizational Development Program	Migrant School	Migrant/Non-State Education
Youth Connect Foundation	Migrant CBO	Social Welfare; Vocational Training

Bangkok:

Organisation	Type	Purpose
Overseas Karen Refugee Organisation (OKRO)	Karen CBO	Karen Migrant Social Welfare
The Border Consortium (TBC)	INGO	Refugee/Migrant Welfare

Appendix 6: Estimated Primary-Middle and Middle-High School Transition Rates by State and Region (using EMIS and IHLCS)

	PANEL A: Primary-Middle School Transition Rates			PANEL B: Middle-High School Transition Rates		
	EMIS (2011-12)	IHLCS 2009/10 (age 16-20 respondents)	IHLCS obs. (age 16-20)	EMIS (2011-12)	IHLCS 2009/10 (age 18-22 respondents)	IHLCS obs. (age 18-22)
UNION	79.34%	80.2%	10,064	83.54%	84.6%	9,440
Rural	69.03%	75.3%	7,485	61.27%	80.1%	6,972
Urban	113.32%	95.0%	2,579	108.50%	92.5%	2,468
By Region/State						
Kachin	93.64%	93%	390	80.56%	84%	378
Kayah	91.19%	98%	80	77.37%	89%	74
Kayin	79.05%	83%	416	69.49%	81%	364
Chin	89.56%	89%	228	76.54%	84%	203
Sagaing	87.47%	77%	1,220	79.91%	82%	1,178
Taninthayi	83.11%	89%	478	77.77%	74%	446
Bago (East)	82.53%	84%	513	77.43%	82%	506
Bago (West)	78.02%	63%	318	85.24%	80%	296
Magwe	83.70%	70%	874	83.99%	80%	834
Mandalay	86.68%	80%	1,390	87.12%	85%	1,294
Mon	82.82%	90%	435	78.73%	81%	411
Rakhine	53.83%	76%	900	92.33%	85%	847
Yangon	93.52%	95%	529	94.37%	93%	478
Shan (South)	79.12%	84%	365	75.72%	85%	345
Shan (North)	77.97%	73%	542	76.31%	87%	501
Shan (East)	80.65%	83%	293	78.75%	84%	259
Ayeyarwady	58.95%	74%	1,093	80.03%	85%	1,026

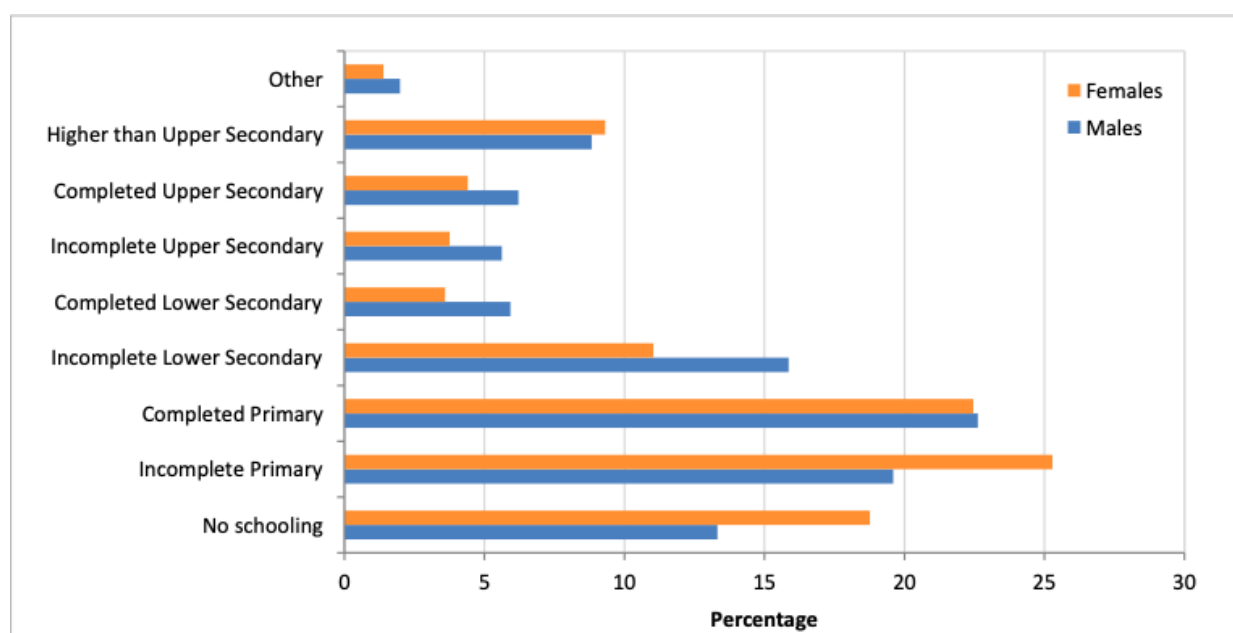
Notes: (1) The IHLCS is not intended to be representative at a state/region level, and estimates are subject to greater statistical imprecision due to small sub-sample size. Number of IHLCS observations shown in the right (grey) column of each panel.

(2) EMIS estimates are based on school (not household) locations, hence rural/urban transition rates are subject to errors.

(Speers Mears et al. 2015: 50)

Appendix 7: Population aged 25 and over by highest grade/education level completed by sex, 2014 Census

Educational attainment level [and allocated code]	Sex						Sex distribution	
	Both sexes		Males		Females		Males	Females
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	%	%
None (00)	4,369,423	16.2	1,671,231	13.3	2,698,192	18.8	38.2	61.8
Incomplete primary (01)	339,185	1.3	130,641	1.0	208,544	1.5	38.5	61.5
Incomplete primary (02)	939,239	3.5	346,758	2.8	592,481	4.1	36.9	63.1
Incomplete primary (03)	1,811,005	6.7	699,483	5.6	1,111,522	7.7	38.6	61.4
Incomplete primary (04)	3,003,595	11.2	1,282,215	10.2	1,721,380	12.0	42.7	57.3
Completed primary (05)	6,067,151	22.5	2,839,697	22.6	3,227,454	22.5	46.8	53.2
Incomplete lower secondary (06)	1,371,794	5.1	710,651	5.7	661,143	4.6	51.8	48.2
Incomplete lower secondary(07)	1,043,187	3.9	593,265	4.7	449,922	3.1	56.9	43.1
Incomplete lower secondary (08)	1,162,945	4.3	687,374	5.5	475,571	3.3	59.1	40.9
Completed lower secondary (09)	1,261,514	4.7	744,663	5.9	516,851	3.6	59	41
Incomplete upper secondary (10)	1,245,632	4.6	706,013	5.6	539,619	3.8	56.7	43.3
Completed upper secondary (11)	1,412,870	5.2	779,912	6.2	632,958	4.4	55.2	44.8
Higher than upper secondary (12-18)	2,446,943	9.1	1,108,363	8.8	1,338,580	9.3	45.3	54.7
Other	448,790	1.7	249,021	2.0	199,769	1.4	55.5	44.5
Total	26,923,273	100	12,549,287	100	14,373,986	100	46.6	53.4



(Department of Population/UNFPA 2017: 51–52)

Appendix 7a: Percentage of population aged 25 and over by highest completed level of education by sex, States/Regions, 2014 Census

State/Region	Completed education (percentage)							Total
	No education	Incomplete primary	Completed primary	Incomplete secondary	Completed upper secondary	Higher than upper secondary	Other	
Both Sexes								
Union	16.2	22.6	22.5	22.6	5.2	9.1	1.7	100
Kachin	12.3	19.2	19.6	31.9	7.6	8.5	0.9	100
Kayah	22.6	21.7	13.1	25.3	8.5	8.1	0.7	100
Kayin	31.8	25.4	13.1	19.4	3.9	4.5	1.8	100
Chin	25.8	18.6	17.5	23.7	7.9	6.5	0.1	100
Sagaing	11.9	21.5	33.7	19.1	4.0	7.2	2.6	100
Tanintharyi	10.3	27.9	22.7	25.2	5.9	6.8	1.2	100
Bago	10.9	30.5	23.1	23.3	3.8	7.0	1.5	100
Magway	19.3	20.4	29.6	18.9	4.0	6.7	1.2	100
Mandalay	12.5	23.4	24.8	22.5	4.9	10.7	1.2	100
Mon	17.2	28.7	17.8	22.5	5.1	7.6	1.1	100
Rakhine	20.2	30.4	20.9	18.7	4.0	5.4	0.4	100
Yangon	5.9	17.0	14.9	31.9	9.8	19.3	1.0	100
Shan	44.9	17.0	12.1	15.8	3.7	5.1	1.4	100
Ayeyawady	12.3	25.0	29.2	20.6	3.8	5.5	3.7	100
Nay Pyi Taw	8.1	21.1	22.7	24.6	6.7	14.6	2.1	100
Total (number)	4,369,423	6,093,024	6,067,151	6,085,072	1,412,870	2,446,943	448,790	26,923,273
Males								
Union	13.3	19.6	22.6	27.4	6.2	8.8	2.0	100
Kachin	9.6	17.1	19.9	36.0	8.2	8.1	1.1	100
Kayah	16.1	22.9	14.5	29.5	8.6	7.6	0.8	100
Kayin	27.6	25.1	13.3	22.6	4.4	4.4	2.5	100
Chin	14.1	17.1	20.0	30.7	9.9	8.1	0.1	100
Sagaing	8.8	17.8	34.1	23.9	5.0	7.5	2.9	100
Tanintharyi	9.1	24.3	22.5	29.6	6.5	6.3	1.7	100
Bago	8.5	26.0	23.1	29.3	4.7	6.6	1.8	100
Magway	16.7	15.7	30.1	24.3	5.1	6.7	1.4	100
Mandalay	8.8	19.5	24.9	28.4	6.1	11.0	1.4	100
Mon	14.8	26.5	17.5	26.8	5.9	6.6	1.8	100
Rakhine	12.8	26.4	24.1	24.7	5.1	6.2	0.6	100
Yangon	4.4	14.1	13.9	36.4	11.5	18.6	1.2	100
Shan	39.7	17.8	13.1	18.5	4.0	4.9	1.9	100
Ayeyawady	10.3	21.6	29.1	25.5	4.4	4.9	4.0	100
Nay Pyi Taw	3.9	16.9	23.2	30.8	8.2	14.7	2.3	100
Total (number)	1,671,231	2,459,097	2,839,697	3,441,966	779,912	1,108,363	249,021	12,549,287
Females								
Union	18.8	25.3	22.5	18.4	4.4	9.3	1.4	100
Kachin	15.2	21.4	19.3	27.6	7.1	8.8	0.6	100
Kayah	28.9	20.5	11.8	21.3	8.5	8.6	0.5	100
Kayin	35.6	25.7	13.0	16.5	3.5	4.7	1.0	100
Chin	35.7	19.8	15.4	17.7	6.3	5.1	0.0	100
Sagaing	14.4	24.6	33.4	15.1	3.2	7.0	2.4	100
Tanintharyi	11.5	31.4	22.9	21.0	5.2	7.3	0.8	100
Bago	12.9	34.4	23.1	18.1	3.0	7.3	1.3	100
Magway	21.3	24.1	29.2	14.5	3.1	6.8	1.0	100
Mandalay	15.5	26.6	24.7	17.6	4.0	10.5	1.0	100
Mon	19.3	30.5	18.0	18.9	4.4	8.4	0.5	100
Rakhine	26.3	33.7	18.2	13.7	3.1	4.8	0.2	100
Yangon	7.1	19.6	15.9	28.1	8.4	20.0	0.9	100
Shan	49.8	16.3	11.0	13.3	3.4	5.4	0.8	100
Ayeyawady	14.0	28.1	29.3	16.1	3.1	6.0	3.5	100
Nay Pyi Taw	11.9	24.9	22.3	19.0	5.4	14.5	2.0	100
Total (number)	2,698,192	3,633,927	3,227,454	2,643,106	632,958	1,338,580	199,769	14,3739,86

(Department of Population/UNFPA 2017: 56–57)

Appendix 8: Youth literacy rates by sex, States/Regions, 2014 Census

State/Region	Youth literacy rates (percentage)		
	Both sexes	Males	Females
UNION	94.0	94.5	93.5
Kachin	97.8	97.8	97.8
Kayah	94.5	95.2	93.7
Kayin	86.8	86.0	87.5
Chin	93.3	95.7	91.2
Sagaing	97.4	97.7	97.2
Tanintharyi	96.1	95.9	96.1
Bago	96.7	97.1	96.3
Magway	97.1	97.6	96.7
Mandalay	97.6	98.0	97.2
Mon	93.8	93.5	94.1
Rakhine	91.3	94.1	89.1
Yangon	97.9	98.1	97.7
Shan	76.8	78.4	75.3
Ayeyawady	95.9	96.3	95.5
Nay Pyi Taw	97.3	98.2	96.6
Total numbers (=100%)	7,688,530	3,636,485	4,052,045

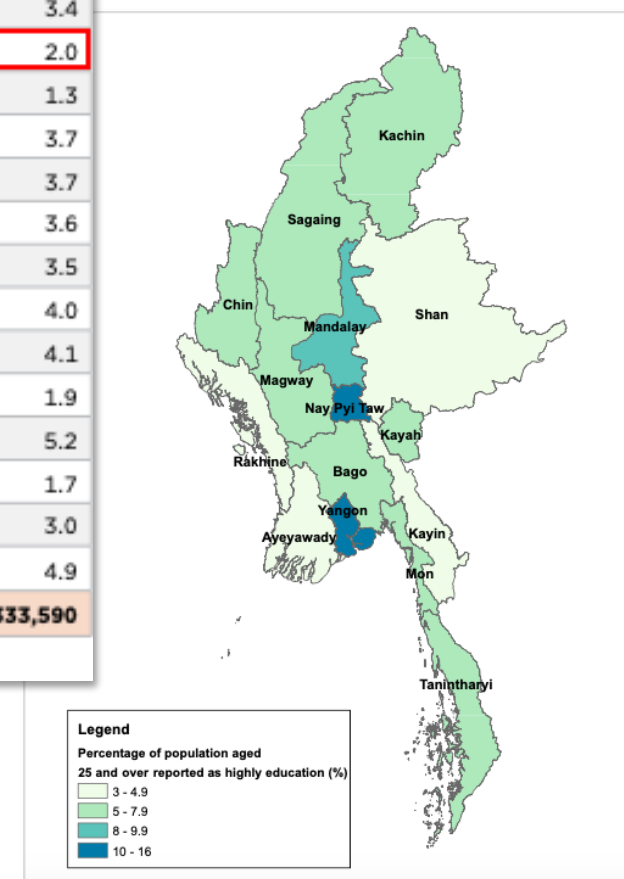
(Department of Population/UNFPA 2017: 26)

“All States and Regions had youth literacy rates well over 90 per cent, with the exception of Kayin [Karen] (86.8 per cent) and Shan (76.8 per cent)” (ibid: 25).

Appendix 9: Proportion of population aged 25 and over recorded as highly educated* by sex, urban and rural areas, States/Regions 2014 Census

State/Region	Total (%)			Urban (%)			Rural (%)		
	Both sexes	Males	Females	Both sexes	Males	Females	Both sexes	Males	Females
UNION	7.3	6.4	8.1	16.8	14.8	18.4	3.1	2.8	3.4
Kachin	6.7	5.8	7.6	11.7	10.3	13.1	3.8	3.4	4.2
Kayah	6.5	5.5	7.3	15.2	13.2	17.0	3.0	2.6	3.4
Kayin	3.6	3.1	4.0	9.5	8.3	10.6	1.8	1.5	2.0
Chin	5.1	6.3	4.0	14.9	17.7	12.6	2.1	2.9	1.3
Sagaing	5.8	5.5	6.1	16.3	15.3	17.1	3.6	3.4	3.7
Tanintharyi	5.6	4.7	6.4	12.1	10.1	13.9	3.3	2.8	3.7
Bago	5.6	4.7	6.3	13.6	12.0	14.9	3.1	2.6	3.6
Magway	5.4	4.8	5.8	16.8	15.2	18.1	3.3	3.0	3.5
Mandalay	8.7	8.0	9.2	17.6	16.0	18.9	3.9	3.7	4.0
Mon	6.2	4.7	7.5	12.8	9.9	15.2	3.4	2.5	4.1
Rakhine	4.2	4.4	4.0	13.1	12.9	13.3	2.2	2.5	1.9
Yangon	15.9	13.8	17.8	20.4	17.8	22.5	4.6	4.0	5.2
Shan	4.0	3.5	4.5	11.1	9.8	12.3	1.6	1.4	1.7
Ayeyawady	4.3	3.5	5.1	14.2	12.0	16.0	2.5	2.0	3.0
Nay Pyi Taw	12.0	11.2	12.8	26.0	23.8	28.0	4.8	4.7	4.9
Total	1,978,256	807,258	1,170,998	1,404,636	567,228	837,408	573,620	240,030	333,590

*Highly educated are graduates, and those with a postgraduate diploma, master's degree, or PhD.

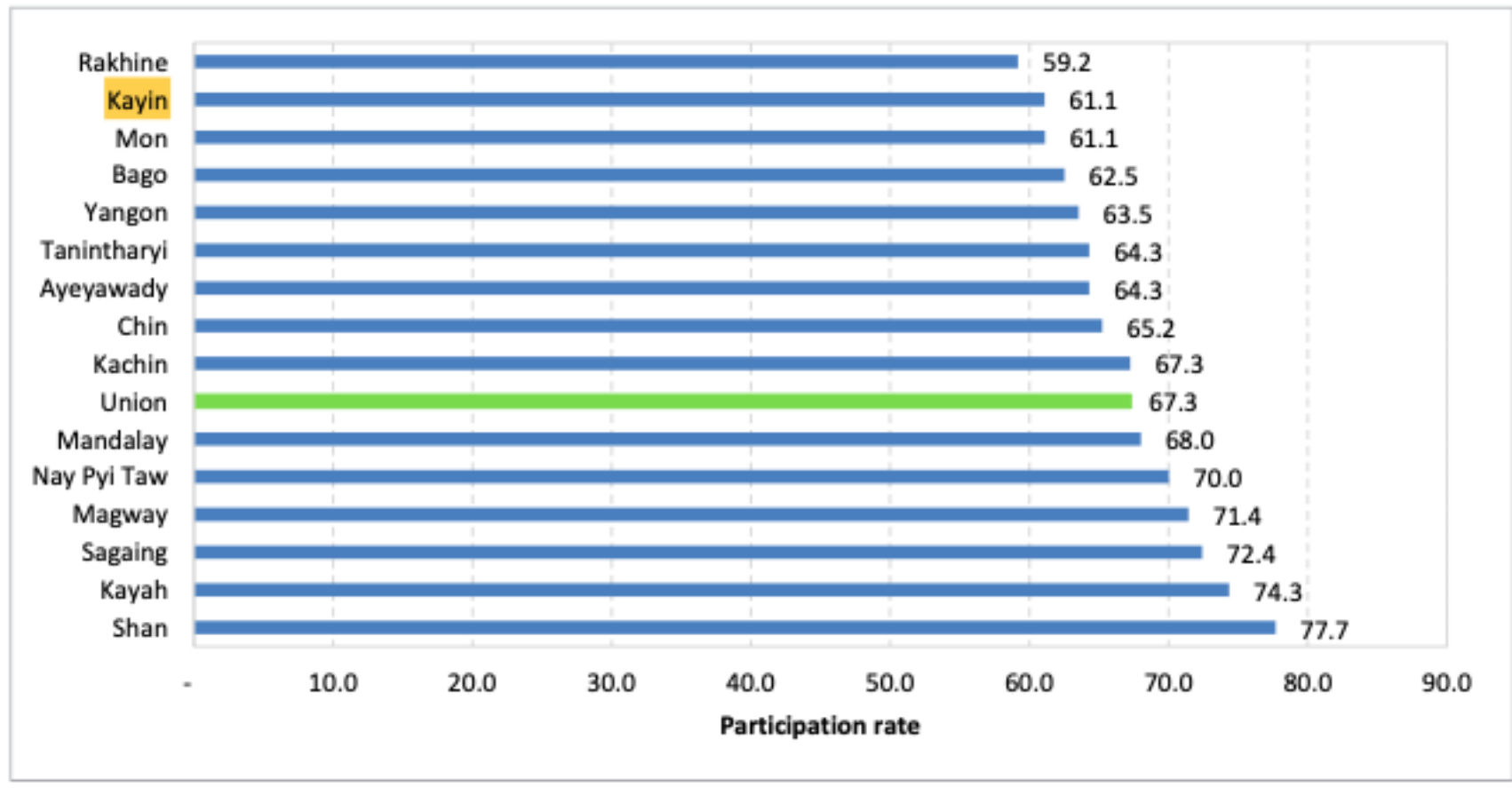


(Department of Population/UNFPA 2017: 64–65)

Appendix 10. Employed population aged 10 and over in conventional households by industry category, States/Regions, 2014 census (Department of Population 2017b: 176)

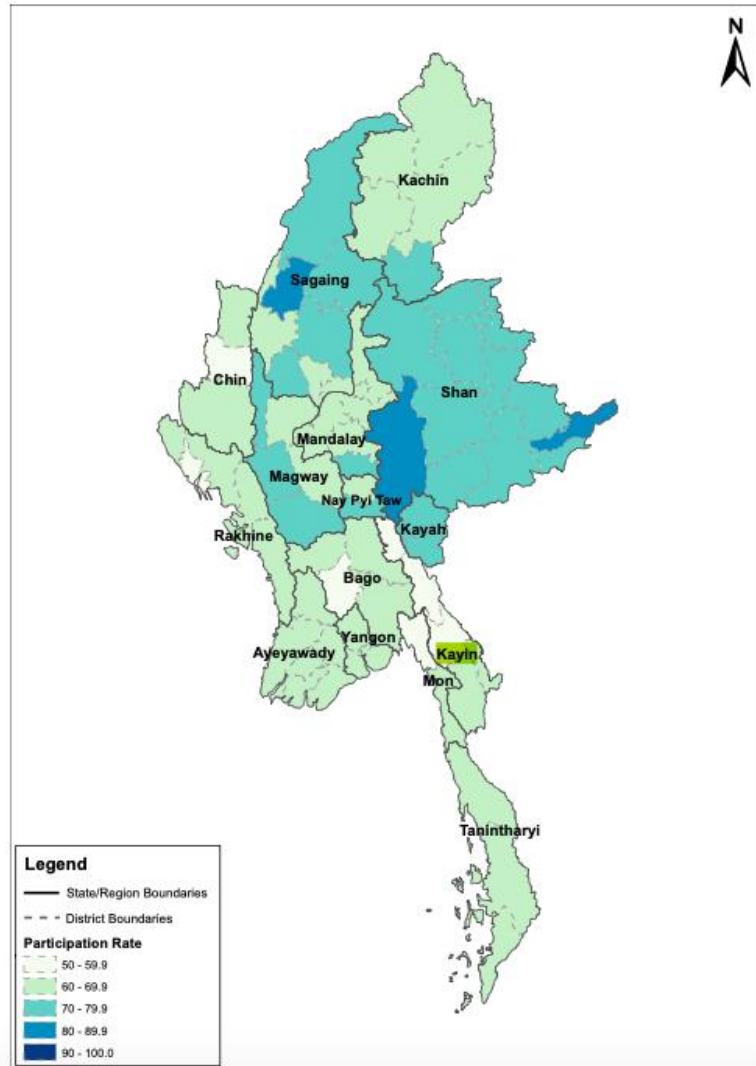
Industry	Union	Kachin	Kayah	Kayin	Chin	Sagaing	Tanintharyi	Bago	Magway	Mandalay	Mon	Rakhine	Yangon	Shan	Ayeyawady	Nay Pyi Taw
A - Agriculture, forestry and fishing	11,051,145	264,416	78,670	286,950	122,952	1,492,380	282,981	1,132,114	1,203,089	1,087,943	338,842	360,838	446,564	2,060,783	1,680,700	211,923
Total primary sector	11,051,145	264,416	78,670	286,950	122,952	1,492,380	282,981	1,132,114	1,203,089	1,087,943	338,842	360,838	446,564	2,060,783	1,680,700	211,923
B - Mining and quarrying	168,381	30,777	3,722	1,166	117	39,463	1,469	9,901	12,973	43,325	2,129	1,692	3,968	10,677	4,202	2,800
C - Manufacturing	1,435,071	16,732	2,679	21,913	1,593	149,484	24,107	123,308	86,087	291,881	46,420	22,932	446,553	61,019	120,791	19,572
D - Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply	44,849	608	76	296	28	1,796	803	2,053	1,097	8,144	1,241	513	22,358	1,764	2,862	1,210
E - Water supply; sewerage, waste management & remediation activities	26,522	524	66	471	9	2,215	614	2,578	1,372	4,426	626	193	8,277	1,677	2,413	1,061
F - Construction	960,478	20,992	6,099	22,832	3,203	75,511	29,187	75,937	46,347	159,655	48,071	22,770	265,669	92,163	61,347	30,695
Total secondary sector	2,635,301	69,633	12,642	46,678	4,950	268,469	56,180	213,777	147,876	507,431	98,487	48,100	746,825	167,300	191,615	55,338
G - Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	1,956,096	64,976	7,671	44,752	3,094	163,788	57,168	164,460	109,626	313,385	87,161	49,082	479,206	161,485	202,547	47,695
H - Transportation and storage	817,749	16,865	3,177	23,487	1,094	50,297	24,137	72,911	35,684	105,713	37,791	21,546	277,402	54,884	73,301	19,460
I - Accommodation and food service activities	986,092	22,079	2,520	15,318	660	76,447	20,823	90,840	50,380	168,071	46,301	25,270	284,041	60,975	99,423	22,944
J - Information and communication	48,212	755	118	722	215	2,049	628	2,245	1,618	6,202	1,068	614	26,862	2,437	1,844	835
K - Financial and insurance activities	42,942	536	173	527	180	2,015	892	2,768	2,357	6,588	1,233	1,042	17,564	2,759	2,892	1,416
L - Real estate activities	10,936	134	13	30	-	106	29	186	47	2,261	69	20	7,161	640	133	107
M - Professional, scientific and technical activities	29,701	670	91	324	29	2,142	707	2,024	1,470	5,476	1,134	518	10,805	1,747	1,831	733
N - Administrative and support service activities	250,169	2,452	450	3,046	170	11,257	6,150	9,131	6,781	28,969	3,182	2,667	151,221	9,464	7,526	7,703
O - Public administration and defence; compulsory social security	619,981	16,619	6,009	13,011	7,169	43,146	14,081	59,173	53,668	75,298	19,457	22,736	139,379	56,065	40,924	53,246
P - Education	391,170	12,696	2,875	9,098	5,240	42,401	11,241	38,804	32,763	51,794	17,828	18,369	64,978	30,406	45,259	7,418
Q - Human health and social work activities	116,580	5,531	1,112	2,403	1,745	9,736	2,761	8,740	6,393	14,621	4,578	3,102	33,825	10,580	9,209	2,244
R - Arts, entertainment and recreation	59,030	846	113	912	36	4,024	628	3,644	2,695	15,626	1,535	535	20,187	3,148	3,529	1,572
S - Other service activities	490,755	9,367	1,855	7,149	3,652	35,071	5,128	27,715	29,963	83,457	17,365	24,058	102,812	42,112	80,886	20,165
T - Activities of households as employers; undifferentiated goods and services	295,227	6,716	942	6,123	461	46,807	6,909	48,306	39,831	52,618	7,378	13,265	33,791	9,559	17,704	4,817
U - Activities of extraterritorial organizations and bodies	2,950	169	34	28	34	64	60	31	156	203	73	70	1,658	158	184	28
Total tertiary sector	6,117,590	160,411	27,153	126,930	23,779	489,350	151,342	530,978	373,432	930,282	246,153	182,894	1,650,892	446,419	587,192	190,383
Not stated	2,377,648	64,697	7,391	99,671	20,573	212,023	52,538	203,751	152,707	285,145	114,174	180,292	366,658	238,283	325,094	54,651
Total	41,985,720	1,053,617	244,321	1,020,787	323,935	4,712,421	1,033,544	3,957,489	3,601,501	5,336,457	1,481,138	1,363,956	6,055,220	5,587,287	5,244,108	969,939

Appendix 11. Labour force participation rates for persons aged 15-64, States/Regions, 2014 Census (Department of Population 2017b: 17)

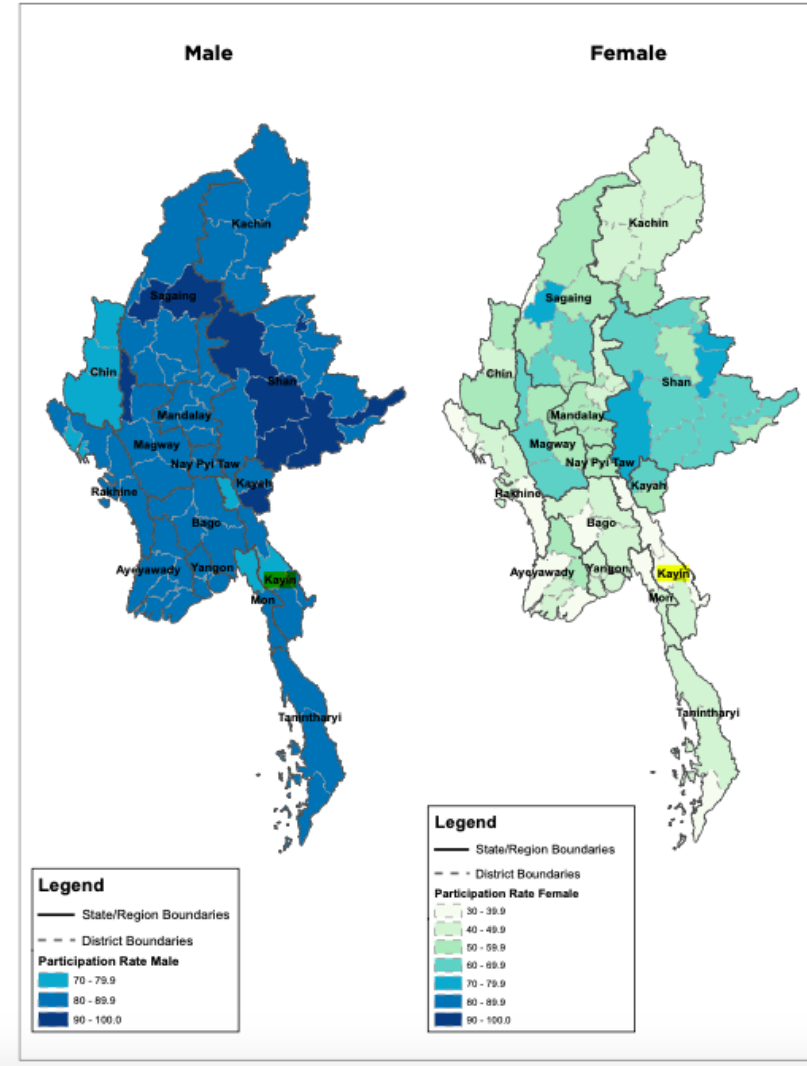


Appendix 11a. Labour Force Participation Rates: States/Regions and by gender, 2014 Census (Department of Population 2017b: 18–19)

Labour force participation rates, Districts, 2014 Census



Labour force participation rates by sex, Districts, 2014 Census



Bibliography

- Adams, L. D. and Kirova, A.** (2006) *Global migration and education: schools, children and families*. New Jersey: Laurence Erlbaum Associates.
- ADB** (2013) *Myanmar Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR): Technical Annex on the Secondary Education Subsector*. Yangon: Asian Development Bank.
- Aikman, S.** (1994) *Intercultural Education and Harakmbut Identity: A Case Study of the Community of San Jose in Southeastern Peru*. Unpublished PhD Thesis. Institute of Education, University of London.
- Alexander, P., Loewenthal, J. and Butt, G.** (2020) ‘“Fuck It, Shit Happens (FISH)”: a social generations approach to understanding young people’s imaginings of life after school in 2016–2017’, *Journal of Youth Studies*. Taylor & Francis, 23(1), pp. 109–126. DOI: 10.1080/13676261.2019.1704406.
- Alkire, S.** (2002) *Valuing Freedoms: Sen’s Capability Approach and Poverty Reduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Alonso, A. and Mische, A.** (2017) ‘Changing Repertoires and Partisan Ambivalence in the New Brazilian Protests’, *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 36(2), pp. 144–159. DOI: 10.1111/blar.12470.
- Alvarez, R.** (2012) ‘Borders and Bridges: Exploring a New Conceptual Architecture for (U.S.-Mexico) Border Studies’, *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology*, 17(1), pp. 24–40. DOI: 10.1111/j.1935-4940.2012.01191.x.
- Anderson-Levitt, K. M.** (2012) *Anthropologies of Education: A Global Guide to Ethnographic Studies of Learning and Schooling*. Edited by K. M. Anderson-Levitt. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Anderson, B.** (1983) *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Ang, A. U., Dinar, S. and Lucas, R. E.** (2014) ‘Protests by the young and digitally restless: The means, motives, and opportunities of anti-government demonstrations’, *Information Communication and Society*, 17(10), pp. 1228–1249. DOI: 10.1080/1369118X.2014.918635.
- Ansell, N., van Blerk, L., Hajdu, F., et al.** (2011) ‘Spaces, times, and critical moments: A relational time - space analysis of the impacts of AIDS on rural youth in Malawi and Lesotho’, *Environment and Planning A*, 43(3), pp. 525–544. DOI: 10.1068/a4363.
- Appadurai, A.** (1990) ‘Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Economy’, in *Theory, Culture & Society*. London: SAGE Publications, pp. 295–310.
- Appadurai, A.** (2004a) ‘Cosmopolitanism from Below: Some Ethical lessons from the Slums of Mumbai’, *The Salon: Volume Four*, 4, pp. 32–43.
- Appadurai, A.** (2004b) ‘The Capacity to Aspire: Culture and the Terms of Recognition’, in Rao, V. and Walton, M. (eds) *Culture and Public Action*. Stamford: Stamford University Press, pp. 59–84.
- Appadurai, A.** (2013) ‘Cosmopolitanism from Below: Some Ethical Lessons from the Slums of Mumbai’, in *The Future as Cultural Fact: Essays on the Global Condition*. London & New York: Verso, pp. 197–214.
- Archer, L., Hollingworth, S. and Mendrick, H.** (2010) ‘Aspirations and “the future”’, in Grace, G., Maguire, M., and Menter, I. (eds) *Urban Youth and Schooling: The Experiences and Identities of Educationally ‘at Risk’ Young People (Education in an Urbanised Society)*. Maidenhead: Open University Press, pp. 78–97.
- Arnett, J. J.** (2000) ‘Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties’, *American Psychologist*, 55(5), pp. 469–480. DOI: 10.1037/0003-066X.55.5.469.
- Arnett, J. J.** (2004) *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Arnove, R. F., Torres, C. A. and Franz, S.** (2013) *Comparative Education: The Dialectic of the Global and the Local*. 4th edn. Edited by R. F. Arnove, C. A. Torres, and S. Franz. Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, INC.
- Aung-Thwin, M.** (2002) ‘Parochial Universalism, Democracy Jihad, and the Orientalist Image of Burma: The New Evangelism’, *Pacific Affairs*, 74(4), pp. 483–505.
- Aung-Thwin, M.** (2008) ‘Introduction: Communities of interpretation and the construction of modern Myanmar’, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 39(2), pp. 187–192. DOI: 10.1017/S0022463408000167.

- Azaola, M. C.** (2012) 'Becoming a migrant: Aspirations of youths during their transition to adulthood in rural Mexico', *Journal of Youth Studies*, 15(7), pp. 875–889. DOI: 10.1080/13676261.2012.677813.
- Baek, G.** (2016) *The Black Zone*. USA, Australia, Myanmar, Thailand: Madrone Films, Inc.
- Bagnoli, A. and Clark, A.** (2010) 'Focus groups with young people: A participatory approach to research planning', *Journal of Youth Studies*, 13(1), pp. 101–119. DOI: 10.1080/13676260903173504.
- Balčaitė, I.** (2019a) 'Flows making places, borders making flows: The Rise of Mae Sot-Myawaddy hub in the Thai-Burmese borderland', in Gerrard, J. and Mikhailova, E. (eds) *Twin Cities: Urban Communities, Borders and Relationships Over Time*. London & New York: Routledge, pp. 301–312.
- Balčaitė, I.** (2019b) 'Networks of Resilience: Legal Precarity and Transborder Citizenship among the Karen from Myanmar in Thailand', *TRaNS: Trans-Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia*, 7(1), pp. 63–89. DOI: 10.1017/trn.2018.12.
- Balčaitė, I.** (2014) 'The Inaccessible Phlong: Religious, Linguistic and Socio-economic Hurdles for an Outsider', *SOAS Journal of Postgraduate Research*, 6, pp. 99–115.
- Bangkok Post** (2020) 'Border areas on high alert after Covid cases surge in Myanmar', *Bangkok Post*, 8 September.
- Banki, S.** (2009) 'Contested Regimes, Aid Flows, and Refugee Flows: The Case of Burma', *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 28(2), pp. 47–73. DOI: 10.1177/186810340902800204.
- Barriball, K. L. and While, A.** (1994) 'Collecting data using a semi-structured interview: a discussion paper', *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 19, pp. 328–335.
- Beck, U.** (1992) *Risk society: Towards a new modernity*. London: Sage.
- Beck, U.** (2000) *The Brave New World of Work*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Beck, U. and Beck-Gernsheim, E.** (2009) 'Global generations and the trap of methodological nationalism for a cosmopolitan turn in the sociology of youth and generation', *European Sociological Review*, 25(1), pp. 25–36. DOI: 10.1093/esr/jcn032.
- Becker, S. A.** (2015) 'The "missing million": Fewer than one in five graduate high school', *Myanmar Times*, 18 May.
- Bellei, C., Cabalin, C. and Orellana, V.** (2014) 'The 2011 Chilean student movement against neoliberal educational policies', *Studies in Higher Education*, 39(3), pp. 426–440. DOI: 10.1080/03075079.2014.896179.
- Benasso, S.** (2013) *Generazione shuffle: Traiettorie biografiche tra reversibilità e progetto*. Roma: Aracne.
- Bernard, T., Taffesse, A. S. and Dercon, S.** (2008) *Aspirations Failure and Well-Being Outcomes in Ethiopia: Towards an Empirical Exploration*, Food Policy Research Institute Discussion Paper. 01190. London: UK Department for International Development (DfID).
- Bhabha, H.** (1994) *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Blatterer, H.** (2007) *Coming of Age in Times of Uncertainty*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Bleming, T. J.** (2009) *War In Karen Country: Armed Struggle For A Free And Independent Karen State In Southeast Asia*. Bloomington, Indiana: iUniverse.
- Bloom, D. E., Canning, D. and Sevilla, J.** (2003) *The Demographic Dividend: A New Perspective on the Economic Consequences of Population Change*. Arlington, VA: RAND Corporation. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-25948-2_3.
- Blossfeld, H.-P., Klijzing, E., Mills, M., et al.** (2005) *Globalization, Uncertainty, and Youth in Society: The Losers in a Globalising World*. Edited by H.-P. Blossfeld, E. Klijzing, M. Mills, et al. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Bodhi, B.** (2005) *In the Buddha's Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pāli Canon*. Edited by B. Bodhi. Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications.
- Bois-Reymond, M. du** (2009) 'Models of navigation and life management', in Furlong, A. (ed.) *Handbook of Youth and Young Adulthood: New perspectives and agendas*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 31–38.
- Bois-Reymond, M. du and Stauber, B.** (2005) 'Biographical Turning Points in Young People's Transitions to Work across Europe', in Helve, H. and Holm, G. (eds) *Contemporary Youth Research: Local Expressions and Global Connections*. Aldershot: Ashgate, pp. 63–75.

- Bosch, T.** (2017) 'Twitter activism and youth in South Africa: the case of #RhodesMustFall', *Information Communication and Society*, 20(2), pp. 221–232. DOI: 10.1080/1369118X.2016.1162829.
- Bourdieu, P.** (1972) *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P.** (1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bourdieu, P.** (1986) 'The Forms of Capital', in Richardson, J. G. (ed.) *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, pp. 241–258.
- Bourdieu, P.** (1993) "'Youth" is Just a Word', in *Sociology in Question*. London: Sage Publications, pp. 94–102.
- Boyden, J.** (2001) 'Conducting Research with War-affected and Displaced Children: Ethics and Methods', in *Filling Knowledge Gaps: A Research Agenda on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children (Background Conference Papers)*. Florence: Istituto degli Innocenti, pp. 73–82.
- Boyden, J.** (2013) "'We're not going to suffer like this in the mud": Educational aspirations, social mobility and independent child migration among populations living in poverty', *Compare*, 43(5), pp. 580–600. DOI: 10.1080/03057925.2013.821317.
- Boyden, J., Berry, J. de, Feeny, T., et al.** (2002) 'Children Affected by Armed Conflict in South Asia: A Review of Trends and Issues Identified Through Secondary Research', *Forced Migration Review*, (7), pp. 1–83.
- Boyden, J. and Ennew, J.** (1997) 'Children in Focus: A Manual for Participatory Research with Children'. Edited by J. Boyden and J. Ennew. Stockholm: Save the Children Sweden, pp. 1–191.
- Brees, I.** (2010) 'Refugees and transnationalism on the Thai–Burmese border', *Global Networks*, 10(2), pp. 282–299.
- Brenner, D.** (2017) 'Inside the Karen Insurgency: Explaining Conflict and Conciliation in Myanmar's Changing Borderlands', *Asian Security*, pp. 1–17. DOI: 10.1080/14799855.2017.1293657.
- Briggart, A. and Walther, A.** (2006) 'Coping with yo-yo-Transitions: Young Adults' Struggle for Support between Family and State in Comparative Perspective', in Leccardi, C. and Ruspini, E. (eds) *A New Youth? Young People, Generations and Family Life*. Aldershot: Ashgate, pp. 41–62.
- British Council/VSO** (2019) *Next Generation Myanmar*. London & Yangon: British Council.
- British Council** (2013) *Empowering Higher Education: A Vision for Myanmar's Universities*, British Council: Partners for Change. Yangon: British Council.
- Brown, P.** (2003) *The Opportunity Trap: Education and Employment in a Global Economy*, Working Paper Series: 32. Cardiff: Cardiff University.
- Brown, S.** (2012) *Youths in non-military roles in an armed opposition group on the Burmese-Thai border*. Unpublished PhD Thesis: School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London.
- Brown, T., Scrase, T. J. and Ganguly-Scrase, R.** (2017) 'Globalised dreams, local constraints: migration and youth aspirations in an Indian regional town', *Children's Geographies*, 15(5), pp. 531–544. DOI: 10.1080/14733285.2016.1274948.
- Bryman, A.** (2016) *Social Research Methods*. 5th edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Burke, A., Williams, N., Barron, P., et al.** (2017) *The Contested Areas of Myanmar: Subnational Conflict, Aid, and Development*. San Francisco: The Asia Foundation.
- Burma Partnership** (2015) *National Education Law - Student Protests*, Burma Partnership. Available at: <http://www.burmapartnership.org/updates-national-education-law-student-protest/> (Accessed: 12 February 2018).
- Bush, K. D. and Saltarelli, D.** (2000) *The Two Faces of Education in Ethnic Conflict: Towards a Peacebuilding Education for Children*. Florence: UNICEF; Innocenti Research Centre.
- Buzzi, C., Hayes, M. and Mullen, M.** (2012) *Education in Transition: A Preliminary Study of Capacity Development for Civil Society Actors in Burma/Myanmar*. Bangkok: Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University.
- Bylander, M. and Reid, G.** (2017) *Criminalizing Irregular Migrant Labor: Thailand's Crackdown in Context*. Washington D.C.: Migration Policy Institute.
- Bynner, J.** (2005) 'Rethinking the youth phase of the life-course: The case for Emerging Adulthood?', *Journal of Youth Studies*, 8(4), pp. 367–384. DOI: 10.1080/13676260500431628.

- Callahan, M. P.** (2000) 'Cracks in the Edifice? Military-Society Relations in Burma Since 1988', in Pedersen, M. B., Rudland, E., and May, R. J. (eds) *Burma/Myanmar: Strong Regime Weak State?* Adelaide: Crawford House Publishing, pp. 22–51.
- Callahan, M. P.** (2004) 'Making Myanmars: Language, Territory, and Belonging in Post-Socialist Burma', in Joel S Migdal (ed.) *Boundaries and belonging: states and societies in the struggle to shape identities and local practices*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 99–120.
- Campbell, S.** (2018) *Border Capitalism, Disrupted: Precarity and Struggle in a Southeast Asian Industrial Zone*. Ithaca and London: ILR Press.
- Carling, J. and Schewel, K.** (2018) 'Revisiting aspiration and ability in international migration', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 44(6), pp. 945–963. DOI: 10.1080/1369183X.2017.1384146.
- de Certeau, M.** (1984) *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- CESR** (2013) *The Higher Education Sub-Sector. Phase 1 Rapid Assessment. Burma Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR)*. Rangoon: Myanmar Ministry of Education.
- Chambers, J.** (2019a) 'Enacting Morality on Shifting Moral Ground: Young Plong Karen Women in Southeastern Myanmar', *Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*, 20(3), pp. 261–277. DOI: 10.1080/14442213.2019.1609572.
- Chambers, J.** (2019b) 'Towards a Moral Understanding of Karen State's Paradoxical Buddhist Strongmen', *Sojourn*, 34(2), pp. 258–289. DOI: 10.1355/sj34-2b.
- Chambers, J. and Cheesman, N.** (2019) 'Introduction: Coming to terms with moral authorities in Myanmar', *Sojourn*, 34(2), pp. 231–257. DOI: 10.1355/sj34-2a.
- Charmaz, K.** (2000) 'Grounded theory: Objectivist and Constructivist Methods', in Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (eds) *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, pp. 509–535.
- Charney, M. W.** (2004) *The Bibliography of Burma (Myanmar) Research: The Secondary Literature, SOAS Bulletin of Burma Research: Bibliographic Supplement 8484*. London: SOAS Bulletin of Burma Research.
- Chase, E.** (2020) 'Transitions, capabilities and wellbeing: how Afghan unaccompanied young people experience becoming "adult" in the UK and beyond', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 46(2), pp. 439–456. DOI: 10.1080/1369183X.2019.1584704.
- Chatterjee, P.** (1991) 'Whose Imagined Community?', *Millennium - Journal of International Studies*, 20(3), pp. 521–525. DOI: 10.1177/03058298910200030601.
- Chatty, D.** (2010) 'Palestinian refugee youth: Agency and Aspiration', *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 28(2–3), pp. 318–338. DOI: 10.1093/rsq/hdp043.
- Chatty, D.** (2017) 'An anthropological approach to understanding perceptions, aspirations and behaviour of refugees, practitioners and host community members in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey', *Middle East Journal of Refugee Studies*, 2(1), pp. 35–49. DOI: 10.12738/mejrs.2017.2.1.0104.
- Cheesman, N.** (2002) 'Seeing "Karen" in the Union of Myanmar', *Asian Ethnicity*, (July 2011), pp. 37–41. DOI: 10.1080/1463136022013273.
- Cheesman, N.** (2003) 'School, State and Sangha in Burma', *Comparative Education*, 39(1), pp. 45–63. DOI: 10.1080/0305006032000044931.
- Cheesman, N.** (2017) 'How in Myanmar "National Races" Came to Surpass Citizenship and Exclude Rohingya', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 47(3), pp. 461–483. DOI: 10.1080/00472336.2017.1297476.
- Child's Dream** (2019) *University Scholarship Programme - Myanmar (Mekong Sub-Regional Leadership Development Programme)*. Chang Mai: Child's Dream.
- Chinelone** (2018) *Myanmar's Higher Education Reform: Which Way Forward?* Bologna: ALMA MATER STUDIORUM - Università di Bologna.
- Chit Hlaing, U.** (2008) 'Anthropological communities of interpretation for Burma: An overview', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 39(2), pp. 239–254. DOI: 10.1017/s0022463408000192.
- Christie, C. J.** (1996) 'Anatomy of a Betrayal: the Karens of Burma', in *A Modern History of Southeast Asia: Decolonization, Nationalism and Separatism*. London: Tauris, pp. 53–80.
- Clausen, J. S.** (1991) 'Adolsecnt Competence and the Shaping of the Life Course', *American Journal of Sociology*, 96(4), pp. 805–842.
- Cockett, R.** (2015) *Blood, Dreams and Gold: The Changing Face of Burma*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press.

- Cole, J.** (2007) 'Fresh Contact in Tamatave, Madagascar: Sex, Money and Intergenerational Transformation', in Cole, J. and Durham, D. (eds) *Generations and globalization: Youth, age, and family in the new world economy*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, pp. 74–101.
- Cole, J. and Durham, D.** (2007) 'Introduction: Age, Regeneration, and the Intimate Politics of Globalization', in Cole, J. and Durham, D. (eds) *Generations and globalization: Youth, age, and family in the new world economy*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, pp. 1–28.
- Cole, J. and Durham, D.** (2008) 'Introduction: Globalization and the Temporality of Children and Youth', in Cole, J. and Durham, D. (eds) *Figuring the Future: Globalization and the Temporalities of Children and Youth*. Santa Fe, New Mexico: School for Advanced Research Press, pp. 3–23.
- Comaroff, Jean and Comaroff, John** (2005) 'Reflections on Youth from the Past to the Postcolony', in *Makers & Breakers: Children & Youth in Postcolonial Africa*. Oxford: James Currey, pp. 19–30.
- Conciliation Resources** (2018) *Youth aspirations for peace and security*. London: Conciliations Resources.
- Connelly, K.** (2010) *Burmese Lessons: A True Love Story*. New York: Nan A. Talese.
- Conradie, I. and Robeyns, I.** (2013) 'Aspirations and Human Development Interventions', *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 14(4), pp. 559–580. DOI: 10.1080/19452829.2013.827637.
- Cooper, A., Swartz, S. and Mahali, A.** (2019) 'Disentangled, decentred and democratised: Youth Studies for the global South', *Journal of Youth Studies*, 22(1), pp. 29–45. DOI: 10.1080/13676261.2018.1471199.
- Cooper, E. and Pratten, D.** (2015) 'Ethnographies of Uncertainty in Africa: An Introduction', in Cooper, E. and Pratten, D. (eds) *Ethnographies of Uncertainty in Africa: Anthropology, Change and Development*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 1–16.
- Côté, J. E.** (2000) *Arrested adulthood: The changing nature of maturity and identity*. New York: New York University Press.
- Côté, J. E.** (2014) 'Towards a new political economy of youth', *Journal of Youth Studies*, 17(4), pp. 527–543. DOI: 10.1080/13676261.2013.836592.
- Côté, J. E.** (2016) 'A new political economy of youth reprised: rejoinder to France and Threadgold', *Journal of Youth Studies*, 19(6), pp. 852–868. DOI: 10.1080/13676261.2015.1136058.
- Craig, C.** (2018) *Miss Burma*. New York: Grove Press.
- Crivello, G.** (2011) "'Becoming somebody": youth transitions through education and migration in Peru', *Journal of Youth Studies*, 14(4), pp. 395–411. DOI: 10.1080/13676261.2010.538043.
- Crivello, G.** (2015) "'There's no future here": The time and place of children's migration aspirations in Peru', *Geoforum*, 62, pp. 38–46. DOI: 10.1016/j.geoforum.2015.03.016.
- Cross, E. B.** (1854) 'On the Karens', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 4(1854), pp. 289–316.
- CUREC** (2019) *Central University Research Ethics Committee - Glossary*. Available at: <https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/governance/ethics/faqs-glossary/glossary#research> (Accessed: 15 November 2019).
- Dale, R.** (1999) 'Specifying globalization effects on national policy: a focus on the mechanisms', *Journal of Education Policy*, 14(1), pp. 1–17. DOI: 10.1080/026809399286468.
- Dalton, P. S., Ghosal, S. and Mani, A.** (2016) 'Poverty and Aspirations Failure', *Economic Journal*, 126(590), pp. 165–188. DOI: 10.1111/ecoj.12210.
- Demerath, P.** (2003) 'Negotiating Individualist and Collectivist Futures: Emerging Subjectivities and Social Forms in Papua New Guinean High Schools', *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 34(2), pp. 136–157.
- Deneulin, S.** (2009) *An Introduction to the Human Development and Capability Approach: Freedom and Agency*. Edited by S. Deneulin. Abingdon: Earthscan.
- Department of Higher Education** (2012) *Panorama of Myanmar Higher Education*, Ministry of Education. Available at: <http://203.81.81.180/dhel/panorama-of-myanmar-higher-education/the-organization-structure-and-management-of-the-education-system/> (Accessed: 12 February 2018).
- Department of Population/UNFPA** (2017) *Thematic Report on Education - Census Report Volume 4-H*. Nay Pyi Taw: Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population, Government of Myanmar.
- Department of Population** (2015) *2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census, The Union Report: Census Report Volume 2*. Nay Pyi Taw: Ministry of Immigration and Population, Government of Myanmar.

- Department of Population** (2016) *The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census: Thematic Report on Population Dynamics*. Nay Pyi Taw: Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population, Government of Myanmar.
- Department of Population** (2017a) *The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Report: Thematic Report on Children and Youth*. Nay Pyi Taw: Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population, Government of Myanmar.
- Department of Population** (2017b) *Thematic Report on Labour Force. Census Report Volume 4-G*. Nay Pyi Taw: Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population, Government of Myanmar. DOI: 10.1002/jcb.21165.
- Dietz, G.** (2009) *Multiculturalism, Interculturality and Diversity in Education: An Anthropological Approach*. Munich & New York: Waxmann.
- Dolan, R.** (2011) *Ethnicity, Education & Ethno-nationalism: Constructing Identity in the Karen Classroom*. Unpublished MA Thesis: University of East Anglia.
- Dolan, R.** (2015a) 'Karen parties and the vote', *New Mandala: New Perspectives on Southeast Asia*, 7 November, pp. 1–6.
- Dolan, R.** (2015b) 'Keeping afloat after the "red wave"', *Myanmar Times*, 2 December, pp. 7–8.
- Dolan, R.** (2015c) 'Roots of difference', *New Mandala: New Perspectives on Southeast Asia*, 6 October, pp. 1–4.
- Dolan, R.** (2016a) *Political Inclusion: Ethnic Parties and Politicians*. Oxford: The Oxford-Myanmar Policy Brief Series (1.1).
- Dolan, R.** (2016b) 'The Problem with the 21st Century Panglong Conference', *The Diplomat*, 6 August, pp. 1–4.
- Dolan, R.** (forthcoming) 'Vital conjunctures: education, aspiration and mobility in the Karen borderlands', in Chambers, J., Gravers, M., and Walton, M. J. (eds) *Ceasefire Aspirations and Anxieties Among the Karen in Myanmar*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press.
- Dolińska, J.** (2017) *Taking a bet on TVET in education?*, *Tea Circle - A Forum for New Perspectives on Burma/Myanmar*. Available at: <https://teacircleoxford.com/2018/05/16/taking-a-bet-on-tvet-in-education/> (Accessed: 31 July 2019).
- Dudley, S.** (2006) 'Reshaping Karenni-ness in Exile: Education, Nationalism and Being in the Wider World', in Gravers, M. (ed.) *Exploring Ethnic Diversity in Burma*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press, pp. 77–106.
- Duiker, K. S.** (2001) *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*. Cape Town: Kwela Books.
- Dungey, C. E. and Meinert, L.** (2017) 'Learning to Wait: Schooling and the Instability of Adulthood for Young Men in Uganda', in Durham, D. and Solway, J. (eds) *Elusive Adulthoods: An Anthropology of New Maturities*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, pp. 83–104.
- Durham, D.** (2008) 'Apathy and Agency: The Romance of Agency and Youth in Botswana', in Cole, J. and Durham, D. (eds) *Figuring the Future: Globalization and the Temporalities of Children and Youth*. Santa Fe, New Mexico: School for Advanced Research Press, pp. 151–178.
- Durham, D.** (2017) 'Elusive Adulthoods: Introduction', in Durham, D. and Solway, J. (eds) *Elusive Adulthoods: An Anthropology of New Maturities*. Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, pp. 1–38.
- Dyson, J.** (2019) 'Fresh contact: Youth, migration, and atmospheres in India', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 37(2), pp. 313–330. DOI: 10.1177/0263775818816318.
- Ei Shwe Phyu** (2017a) 'Alternative Education department Receives K2 billion', *Myanmar Times*, 19 June.
- Ei Shwe Phyu** (2017b) 'Why Private Schools are the Better Choice', *Myanmar Times*, 15 May.
- Elder, G. H.** (1994) 'Time, Human Agency, and Social Change: Perspectives on the Life Course', *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 57(1), p. 4. DOI: 10.2307/2786971.
- Elder, G. H. and Shanahan, M. J.** (1998) 'The lifecourse and human development', in Lerner, R. M. (ed.) *Handbook of Child Psychology Volume 1: Theoretical Models of Human Development*. New York: W. W. Norton, pp. 665–715.
- Elder, S.** (2014) *Labour market transitions of young women and men in Asia and the Pacific*. Geneva: International Labor Organization.
- Evans, B.** (2008) 'Geographies of youth/young people', *Geography Compass*, 2(5), pp. 1659–1680. DOI: 10.1111/j.1749-8198.2008.00147.x.

- Evans, K.** (2007) 'Concepts of bounded agency in education, work, and the personal lives of young adults', *International Journal of Psychology*, 42(2), pp. 85–93. DOI: 10.1080/00207590600991237.
- Evans, K.** (2017) 'Bounded Agency in Professional Lives', in Goller, M. and Paloniemi, S. (eds) *Agency at Work: An Agentic Perspective on Professional Learning and Development*. Cham: Springer, pp. 17–36. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-60943-0_2.
- Evans, K. and Furlong, Andy** (1997) 'Metaphors of youth transitions: niches, pathways, trajectories or navigations', in Bynner, J., Chisholm, L., and Furlong, A. (eds) *Youth, citizenship and social change in a European context*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, pp. 54–78.
- Falla, J.** (1991) *True Love and Bartholomew: Rebels on the Burmese Border*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fanon, F.** (1968) *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press.
- Farrugia, D.** (2014) 'Towards a spatialised youth sociology: The rural and the urban in times of change', *Journal of Youth Studies*, 17(3), pp. 293–307. DOI: 10.1080/13676261.2013.830700.
- Felzmann, H.** (2009) 'Ethical issues in school-based research', *Research Ethics Review*, 5(3), pp. 104–109.
- Ferguson, J.** (1999a) *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Ferguson, J.** (1999b) 'Rural Connections, Urban Styles: Theorizing Cultural Dualism', in Ferguson, J. (ed.) *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 82–122.
- Findlay, A. M., King, R., Smith, F. M., et al.** (2012) 'World Class? An investigation of globalisation, difference and international student mobility', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 37(1), pp. 118–131. DOI: 10.1111/j.1475-5661.2011.00454.x.
- Finn, B. and Oldfield, S.** (2019) 'Straining: Young Men Working through Waithood in Freetown, Sierra Leone', *Africa Spectrum*, 50(3), pp. 29–48. DOI: 10.1177/000203971505000302.
- Flechtner, S.** (2014) *Aspiration Traps: When Poverty Stifles Hope, Inequality in Focus: 84370*. Washington D.C.: World Bank. DOI: 10.4324/9781351258968-9.
- Foley, D. E.** (1991) 'Reconsidering Anthropological Explanations of Ethnic School Failure', *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 22(1), pp. 60–86.
- Foster, K. R. and Spencer, D.** (2011) 'At risk of what? Possibilities over probabilities in the study of young lives', *Journal of Youth Studies*, 14(1), pp. 125–143. DOI: 10.1080/13676261.2010.506527.
- Foucault, M.** (1987) *Mental Illness and Psychology*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Fourie-Malherbe, M. and Schreiber, B.** (2019) 'International Youth Alienation and Disengagement: Are "Care-Less" Institutions to Blame?', *Journal of College and Character*, 20(4), pp. 352–358. DOI: 10.1080/2194587x.2019.1669468.
- France, A. and Threadgold, S.** (2016) 'Youth and political economy: towards a Bourdieusian approach', *Journal of Youth Studies*, 19(5), pp. 612–628. DOI: 10.1080/13676261.2015.1098779.
- Frawley, J., Larkin, S. and Smith, J. A.** (2017) *Indigenous Pathways, Transitions and Participation in Higher Education: From Policy to Practice*. Edited by J. Frawley, S. Larkin, and J. A. Smith. Singapore: SpringerOpen.
- Frederiksen, M. D.** (2013) *Young Men, Time and Boredom in the Republic of Georgia*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Frewer, T.** (2017) 'The Politics of Aid in Myanmar', in Crouch, M. (ed.) *The Business of Transition: Law Reform, Development and Economics in Myanmar*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 255–276.
- Friere, P.** (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Froerer, P.** (2011) 'Education, inequality and social mobility in central India', *European Journal of Development Research*, 23(5), pp. 695–711. DOI: 10.1057/ejdr.2011.43.
- Frye, M.** (2012) 'Bright Futures in Malawi's New Dawn: Educational Aspirations as Assertions of Identity', *American Journal of Sociology*, 117(6), pp. 1565–1624. DOI: 10.1086/664542.
- Furlong, A. and Biggart, A.** (2007) 'Framing "Choices": a longitudinal study of occupational aspirations among 13- to 16-year-olds', *Journal of Education and Work*, 12(1), pp. 21–35. DOI: 10.1080/1363908990120102.

- Furlong, A. and Cartmel, F.** (2007) *Young People and Social Change: New Perspectives*. 2nd edn. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill/Open University Press.
- Furlong, A., Woodman, D. and Wyn, J.** (2011) 'Changing times, changing perspectives: Reconciling "transition" and "cultural" perspectives on youth and young adulthood', *Journal of Sociology*, 47(4), pp. 355–370. DOI: 10.1177/1440783311420787.
- Garbagni, G. and Walton, M. J.** (2020) 'Imagining Kawthoolei: Strategies of petitioning for Karen statehood in Burma in the first half of the 20th century', *Nations and Nationalism*, 26(3), pp. 759–774. DOI: 10.1111/nana.12613.
- Geertz, C.** (1998) 'Deep Hanging Out', *The New York Review of Books*, 45(16), pp. 69–72.
- Ghorashi, H.** (2008) 'Giving silence a chance: The importance of life stories for research on refugees', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 21(1), pp. 117–132. DOI: 10.1093/jrs/fem033.
- Gibson, F.** (2007) 'Conducting focus groups with children and young people: strategies for success', *Journal of Research in Nursing*, 12(5), pp. 473–483. DOI: 10.1177/17449871079791.
- Giddens, A.** (1984) *The Constitution of a Society*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Giddens, A.** (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Policy Press.
- Ginwright, S. and James, T.** (2002) 'From assets to agents of change: Social justice, organizing, and youth development', *New Directions for Youth Development*, (96), pp. 27–46.
- Glaser, B. G. and Strauss, A. L.** (1967) *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing.
- Gledhill, J., Dolan, R. and Snyder, J.** (2019) 'Availability without access? Globalization and socio-political cleavages in emerging economies', *Globalizations*, 16(1), pp. 83–103. DOI: 10.1080/14747731.2018.1529523.
- Goldstone, J. A.** (2011) 'Understanding the Revolutions of 2011: Weakness and Resilience in Middle Eastern Autocracies', *Foreign Affairs*, 90(3), pp. 8–16.
- Gomer, S.** (2017) *All Saints*. USA: Affirm Films; Provident Films.
- Gorden, R. L.** (1987) *Interviewing: Strategy, Techniques and Tactics*. 4th edn. Illinois: Dorsey Press.
- Gordon, L.** (1984) 'Paul Willis: Education, Cultural Production and Social Reproduction', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 5(2), pp. 105–115.
- Gowen, A.** (2015) 'Here's why students in Burma are taking to the streets', *The Washington Post*, 10 March.
- Gradin Franzén, A.** (2015) 'Responsibilization and Discipline: Subject Positioning at a Youth Detention Home', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 44(3), pp. 251–279. DOI: 10.1177/0891241613520455.
- Graham, A., Powell, M. A. and Taylor, N.** (2015) 'Ethical Research Involving Children: Encouraging Reflexive Engagement in Research with Children and Young People', *Children and Society*, 29(5), pp. 331–343. DOI: 10.1111/chso.12089.
- Gravers, M.** (1996) 'The Karen Making of a Nation', in Tønnesson, S. and Antlöv, H. (eds) *Asian Forms of the Nation*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press, pp. 237–269.
- Gravers, M.** (2007a) 'Conversion and Identity: Religion and the Formation of Karen Ethnic Identity in Burma', in Gravers, M. (ed.) *Exploring Ethnic Diversity in Burma*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press (NIAS Studies in Asian Topics, 39), pp. 227–254.
- Gravers, M.** (2007b) *Exploring Ethnic Diversity in Burma*. Edited by M. Gravers. Copenhagen: NIAS Press. DOI: 10.1355/sj25-2h.
- Gravers, M.** (2012a) 'Monks, morality and military. The struggle for moral power in Burma—and Buddhism's uneasy relation with lay power', *Contemporary Buddhism*, 13(1), pp. 1–33. DOI: 10.1080/14639947.2012.669278.
- Gravers, M.** (2012b) 'Waiting for a righteous ruler: The Karen royal imaginary in Thailand and Burma', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 43(02), pp. 340–363. DOI: 10.1017/S0022463412000094.
- Gravers, M. and Jørgensen, A. B.** (2020) 'Being excluded - Muslim and Hindu communities in Karen State', in Kyed, H. M. (ed.) *Everyday Justice in Myanmar: Informal Resolutions and State Evasion in a Time of Contested Transition*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press, pp. 219–254.
- Grizelj, I.** (2017) *The Youth Space of Dialogue and Mediation in Myanmar*. Berlin: Berghof Foundation.

- Grundy-Warr, C. and Yin, E. W. S.** (2002) 'Geographies of Displacement: The Karenni and The Shan Across The Myanmar-Thailand Border', *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, 23(1), pp. 93–122.
- Guerrero, G., Sugimaru, C., Cussianovich, A., et al.** (2016) *Education Aspirations among Young People in Peru and their Perceptions of Barriers to Higher Education*. 148. Oxford: Young Lives, Oxford Department of International Development.
- Guinard, C.** (2006) 'Promising "Education for All" in Thailand: what are the true benefits for migrant children behind this new policy?', *Burma Issues: Volume 16; Number 2*, February, pp. 6–7.
- Gupta, A. and Ferguson, J.** (1992) 'Beyond "Culture": Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference', *Cultural Anthropology*, 7(1), pp. 6–23.
- Gupta, A. and Ferguson, J.** (1997) 'Discipline and Practice: "The Field" as Site, Method, and Location in Anthropology', in Gupta, A. and Ferguson, J. (eds) *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science*. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, pp. 1–47.
- Gusterson, H.** (1997) 'Studying Up Revisited', *Legal Anthropology Review*, 20(1), pp. 114–19.
- Gutman, L. M. and Akerman, R.** (2008) *Determinants of aspirations*. London: Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning, Institute of Education, University of London.
- Guyer, J. I.** (1995) 'Wealth in People, Wealth in Things – Introduction', *The Journal of African History*, 36(01), pp. 83–90. DOI: 10.1017/S0021853700026980.
- Hackstaff, K. B., Kupferberg, F. and Négroni, C.** (2012) *Biography and turning points in Europe and America*. Edited by K. B. Hackstaff, F. Kupferberg, and C. Négroni. Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Hage, G.** (2016) 'Questions Concerning a Future-Politics', *History and Anthropology*, 27(4), pp. 465–467. DOI: 10.1080/02757206.2016.1206896.
- Hammersley, M. and Traianou, A.** (2012) *Ethics and Educational Research*, *British Educational Research Association*. Available at: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/ethics-and-educational-research> (Accessed: 2 December 2019).
- Han Tin** (2004) *Education in Myanmar*. Canberra: ANU E Press.
- Hannerz, U.** (2003) 'Being there ... and there ... and there! Reflections on multi-site ethnography', *Ethnography*, 4(2), pp. 201–216. DOI: 10.4324/9780429456534-10.
- Harber, C.** (1991) 'Schools and Political Learning in Africa: themes and issues', *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 21(1), pp. 61–72. DOI: 10.1080/0305792910210105.
- Hardgrove, A.** (2012) *Life after Guns: The Life Chances and Trajectories of Ex-Combatant and Other Post-War Youth in Monrovia, Liberia*. Unpublished DPhil Thesis: University of Oxford. DOI: 10.2307/816594.
- Hardgrove, A., Rootham, E. and McDowell, L.** (2015) 'Possible selves in a precarious labour market: Youth, imagined futures, and transitions to work in the UK', *Geoforum*, 60, pp. 163–171. DOI: 10.1016/j.geoforum.2015.01.014.
- Harriden, J.** (2002) '"Making a Name for Themselves": Karen Identity and the Politicization of Ethnicity in Burma', *Journal of Burma Studies*, 7, pp. 84–144.
- Harrison, N. and Waller, R.** (2018a) 'Challenging discourses of aspiration: The role of expectations and attainment in access to higher education', *British Educational Research Journal*, 44(5), pp. 914–938. DOI: 10.1002/berj.3475.
- Harrison, N. and Waller, R.** (2018b) 'Challenging discourses of aspiration: The role of expectations and attainment in access to higher education', *British Educational Research Journal*, 44(5), pp. 914–938. DOI: 10.1002/berj.3475.
- Hart, C. S.** (2012) *Aspirations, Education and Social Justice: Applying Sen and Bourdieu*. London & New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Hart, C. S.** (2016) 'How Do Aspirations Matter?', *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 17(3), pp. 324–341. DOI: 10.1080/19452829.2016.1199540.
- Hart, J.** (2008) 'Introduction', in Hart, J. (ed.) *Years of Conflict: Adolescence, Political Violence and Displacement*. Oxford & New York: Berghahn Books, pp. 1–20.
- Hart, J. and Tyrer, B.** (2006) *Research with Children Living in Situations of Armed Conflict: Concepts, Ethics & Methods*, *RSC Working Paper*. 30. Oxford: Refugee Studies Centre, Oxford Department of International Development. DOI: 10.1136/bmj.2.2436.566.
- Hayami, Y.** (1996) 'Karen Tradition According to Christ or Buddha: The Implications of Multiple Reinterpretations for a Minority Ethnic Group in Thailand', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 27(2), pp. 334–349.

- Hayami, Y.** (2002) 'Embodied Power of Prophets and Monks: Dynamics of Religion among Karen in Thailand', in Hayashi, Y. and Wichienkeo, A. (eds) *Inter-Ethnic Relations in the Making of Mainland Southeast Asia and Southwestern China*. Kyoto: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, University of Kyoto, p. lxviii.
- Hayami, Y.** (2004) *Between Hills and Plains: Power and Practice in Socio-Religious Dynamics among Karen*. Tokyo: Trans Pacific Press.
- Hayami, Y.** (2008) *Pagodas and Wedding Vows: Buddhist and Sectarian Practices in Karen State, Kyoto Working Paper on Area Studies*. 8. Kyoto: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, University of Kyoto.
- Hayami, Y.** (2011) 'Pagodas and Prophets: Contesting Sacred Space and Power among Buddhist Karen in Karen State', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 70(04), pp. 1083–1105. DOI: 10.1017/S0021911811001574.
- Hayami, Y.** (2018) 'Karen culture of evangelism and early baptist mission in nineteenth century Burma', *Social Sciences and Missions*, 31(3–4), pp. 251–283. DOI: 10.1163/18748945-03103006.
- Hayden, M. and Martin, R.** (2013) 'Recovery of the Education System in Myanmar', *Journal of International and Comparative Education*, 2(2), pp. 47–57.
- Head, J.** (2012) 'Building new opportunities in Burma's Karen State', *BBC News Online*, 20 December.
- Hearn, J. C.** (1992) 'Emerging Variations in Post-secondary Attendance Patterns: An Investigation of Part-Time, Delayed, and Nondegree Enrollment', *Research in Higher Education*, 33(6), pp. 657–687.
- Heater, D.** (2002) *World Citizenship: Cosmopolitan Thinking and its Opponents*. London & New York: Continuum.
- Hedström, J.** (2020) 'Militarized social reproduction: women's labour and parastate armed conflict', *Critical Military Studies*, pp. 1–19. DOI: 10.1080/23337486.2020.1715056.
- Hedström, J. and Olivius, E.** (2020) 'Insecurity, Dispossession, Depletion: Women's Experiences of Post-War Development in Myanmar', *European Journal of Development Research*, 32(2), pp. 379–403. DOI: 10.1057/s41287-020-00255-2.
- Heidel, B.** (2006) *The Growth of Civil Society in Myanmar*. Bangalore: Books for Change.
- Heinrich Boell Foundation** (2006) *Active Citizens under Political Wraps: Experiences from Myanmar/Burma and Vietnam*. Edited by Heinrich Boell Foundation. Chang Mai: Heinrich Boell Foundation.
- Heinz, W. R.** (2009a) 'Structure and agency in transition research', *Journal of Education and Work*, 22(5), pp. 391–404. DOI: 10.1080/13639080903454027.
- Heinz, W. R.** (2009b) 'Youth transitions in an age of uncertainty', in Furlong, A. (ed.) *Handbook of Youth and Young Adulthood: New perspectives and agendas*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 3–13.
- Heissler, K. A.** (2013) 'Rethinking "trafficking" in children's migratory processes: the role of social networks in child labour migration in Bangladesh', *Children's Geographies*, 11(1), pp. 89–101. DOI: 10.1080/14733285.2013.743283.
- Hilal, A. H. and Alabri, S. S.** (2013) 'Using Nvivo for Data Analysis in Qualitative Research', *International Interdisciplinary Journal of Education*, 2(2), pp. 181–186. DOI: 10.12816/0002914.
- Hinton, P.** (1986) 'Do the Karen Really Exist?', in McKinnon, J. and Bhruksasri, W. (eds) *Highlanders of Thailand*. Oxford & Singapore: Oxford University Press, pp. 155–168.
- Hirsch, F.** (1977) *The Social Limits of Growth*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.
- Hlaing, K. Y.** (2004) 'Burma: Civil Society Skirting Regime Rules', in Alagappa, M. (ed.) *Civil Society and Political Change in Asia: Expanding and Contracting Democratic Space*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, pp. 389–418.
- Hlaing, K. Y.** (2007a) 'Associational Life in Myanmar: Past and Present', in Ganesan, N. and Hlaing, K. Y. (eds) *Myanmar: State, Society and Ethnicity*. Singapore: ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute, pp. 144–171.
- Hlaing, K. Y.** (2007b) 'The politics of state-society relations in Burma', *South East Asia Research*, 15(2), pp. 213–254. DOI: 10.5367/000000007781509571.
- Hoffman, M. and Jamal, A.** (2012) 'The youth and the Arab spring: Cohort Differences and Similarities', *Middle East Law and Governance* 4, 4(1), pp. 168–188. DOI: 10.1163/187633712X632399.

- Holdsworth, C.** (2009) “‘Going away to uni’: Mobility, modernity, and independence of English higher education students’, *Environment and Planning A*, 41(8), pp. 1849–1864. DOI: 10.1068/a411177.
- Holloway, S. L. and Pimlott-Wilson, H.** (2011) ‘The politics of aspiration: Neo-liberal education policy, “low” parental aspirations, and primary school extended services in disadvantaged communities’, *Children’s Geographies*, 9(1), pp. 79–94. DOI: 10.1080/14733285.2011.540441.
- Honwana, A. M. and De Boeck, F.** (2005) *Makers & Breakers: Children and Youth in Postcolonial Africa*. Edited by A. M. R. M. Honwana and F. De Boeck. Woodbridge: James Currey.
- Honwana, A. M.** (2014) ‘Youth, Waithood, and Protest Movements in Africa’, in *African Dynamics in a Multipolar World (5th European Conference on African Studies)*. Lisbon: ECAS, pp. 2428–2446.
- Honwana, A. M.** (2019) ‘Youth struggles: From the Arab spring to black lives matter and beyond’, *African Studies Review*, 62(1), pp. 8–21. DOI: 10.1017/asr.2018.144.
- Hopkins, P. and Pain, R.** (2007) ‘Geographies of age: thinking relationally’, *Area*, 39(August), pp. 287–294.
- Horstmann, A.** (2011) *Stretching the Border: Confinement and Mobility among Baptist Karen Refugees across the Thailand-Myanmar Border*. 22. Göttingen: Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity.
- Horstmann, A.** (2012) *Creating Non-State Spaces: Interfaces of Humanitarianism and Self-Government of Karen-Refugee Migrants in Thai Burmese Border Spaces*. 12–17. Göttingen: Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity.
- Hoskins, K. and Barker, B.** (2017) ‘Aspirations and Young People’s Constructions of Their Futures: Investigating Social Mobility and Social Reproduction’, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 65(1), pp. 45–67. DOI: 10.1080/00071005.2016.1182616.
- Houtman, G.** (1999) *Mental Culture in Burmese Crisis Politics: Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy*. Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies.
- Hsa Doe Doh Moo** (2012) ‘The Price of Higher Education in Karen Refugee Camps’, *Burma Issues: Volume 26; Numbers 17-18*, pp. 6–7.
- ICG** (2017) *Buddhism and State Power in Myanmar, Asia Report No.290*. Brussels: International Crisis Group.
- IDC** (2014) *DFID Assistance to Burmese Internally Displaced People and Refugees on the Thai-Burma Border, International Development Committee, Parliament UK*. London: International Development Committee, House of Commons.
- IHRC/FR** (2015) *Crackdown at Letpadan: Excessive Force and Violations of the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Expression*. Cambridge, MA: International Human Rights Clinic; Fortify Rights.
- IIE** (2013) *Investing in the Future: Rebuilding Higher Education in Myanmar*. New York: Institute of International Education.
- Ikeda, K.** (2012) ‘Two Versions of Buddhist Karen History of the Late British Colonial Period in Burma: Kayin Chronicle (1929) and Kuyin Great Chronicle (1931)’, *Southeast Asian Studies*, 1(3), pp. 431–460.
- ILO** (2017) *The establishment of the Global Commission on the Future of Work in Addressing the situation and aspirations of youth*. Geneva: International Labour Organization.
- ILO** (2019) *Employment and environmental protection, International Labour Organization*. Geneva: International Labour Organization.
- IOM** (2017) ‘Migration and Migrants: Regional Dimensions and Developments’, in *World Migration Report 2018*. Geneva: International Organization for Migration, pp. 1–71.
- IYF** (2018) *Cohort 2030: Brief*. Baltimore, MD: International Youth Foundation.
- Jackson, B. and Marsden, D.** (1973) *Education and the Working Class*. London: Penguin Books.
- James, A.** (1994) *Childhood Identities: Self and Social Relationships in the Experience of Childhood*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- James, A. and Prout, A.** (1990) *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Jansen, S.** (2016) ‘For a Relational, Historical Ethnography of Hope: Indeterminacy and Determination in the Bosnian and Herzegovinian Meantime’, *History and Anthropology*, 27(4), pp. 447–464. DOI: 10.1080/02757206.2016.1201481.

- Jeffrey, C.** (2009) 'Fixing Futures: Educated Unemployment through a North Indian Lens', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 51(1), pp. 182–211. DOI: 10.1017/s0010417509000085.
- Jeffrey, C.** (2010a) 'Geographies of children and youth I: eroding maps of life', *Progress in Human Geography*, 34(4), pp. 496–505. DOI: 10.1177/0309132509348533.
- Jeffrey, C.** (2010b) 'Timepass: Youth, class, and time among unemployed young men in India', *American Ethnologist*, 37(3), pp. 465–481. DOI: 10.1111/j.1548-1425.2010.01266.x.
- Jeffrey, C.** (2012) 'Geographies of children and youth II: Global youth agency', *Progress in Human Geography*, 37(1), pp. 245–253. DOI: 10.1177/0309132511434902.
- Jeffrey, C.** (2013) 'Geographies of children and youth III: Alchemists of the revolution?', *Progress in Human Geography*, 37(1), pp. 145–152. DOI: 10.1177/0309132511434902.
- Jeffrey, C. and Dyson, J.** (2017a) 'Active Partners: Rethinking the Educated Unemployed in India', in Kumar, K. (ed.) *Routledge Handbook of Education in India: Debates, Practices, and Policies*. Delhi: Routledge India.
- Jeffrey, C. and Dyson, J.** (2017b) 'How Hope Can Solve the Crisis Facing India's Youth: Doing Nothing and Being Nothing', *Economic & Political Weekly*, 27 May.
- Jeffrey, C., Jeffery, P. and Jeffery, R.** (2007) *Degrees Without Freedom?: Education, Masculinities, and Unemployment in North India*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Jeffrey, C. and McDowell, L.** (2004) 'Youth in a Comparative Perspective', *Youth & Society*, 36(2), pp. 131–142. DOI: 10.1177/0044118x04268375.
- JICA** (2013) *Data Collection Survey on Education Sector in Myanmar: Final Report*. Tokyo: Padeco Co., Ltd.
- Johansson, T.** (2017) 'Youth studies in transition: theoretical explorations', *International Review of Sociology*, 27(3), pp. 510–524. DOI: 10.1080/03906701.2016.1261499.
- Johnson-Hanks, J.** (2002) 'On the Limits of Life Stages in Ethnography: Towards a Theory of Vital Conjunctions', *American Anthropologist*, 104(3), pp. 865–880.
- Johnson-Hanks, J.** (2005) 'When the Future Decides: Uncertainty and Intentional Action in Contemporary Cameroon', *Current Anthropology*, 46(3), pp. 363–385. DOI: 10.1086/428799.
- Johnson, C. and Tonkiss, F.** (2002) 'The third influence: the Blair government and Australian Labor', *Policy & Politics*, 30(1), pp. 5–18.
- Jolliffe, K.** (2014) *Ethnic Conflict and Social Services in Myanmar's Contested Regions*. Bangkok: The Asia Foundation.
- Jolliffe, K.** (2015) *Ethnic Armed Conflict and Territorial Administration in Myanmar*. Bangkok: The Asia Foundation.
- Jolliffe, K.** (2016) *Ceasefires, Governance and Development: The Karen National Union in Times of Change*. Bangkok: The Asia Foundation.
- Jolliffe, K.** (2017) 'A new chapter for the Karen movement', *Frontier Myanmar*, 26 April.
- Jolliffe, K. and Speers Mears, E.** (2016) *Strength in diversity: Towards Universal Education in Myanmar's Ethnic Areas*. Bangkok: The Asia Foundation.
- Jolliffe [née Vogler], P.** (2010) *Translocal Identities: An Ethnographic Account of the Political Economy of Childhood Transitions in Northern Thailand*. Unpublished DPhil Thesis: University of Oxford.
- Jolliffe, P.** (2016) *Learning, Migration and Intergenerational Relations: The Karen and the Gift of Education*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: 10.1057/978-1-137-57218-9.
- Jolliffe, P.** (2017) 'Karen Youth transitions at the Thai-Myanmar border', *Journal of Youth Studies*, 6261(May), pp. 1–15. DOI: 10.1080/13676261.2017.1333581.
- Jolliffe, P. and Worland, S.** (2018) 'Honouring the elders: The common good among Karen communities – a multi-sited ethnography', *Australian Journal of Anthropology*, 29(2), pp. 158–170. DOI: 10.1111/taja.12275.
- Juris, J. S. and Pleyers, G. H.** (2009) 'Alter-activism: emerging cultures of participation among young global justice activists', *Journal of Youth Studies*, 12(1), pp. 57–75. DOI: 10.1080/13676260802345765.
- Kadiwal, L. and Rind, I. A.** (2013) "'Selective cosmopolitans": tutors' and students' experience of offshore higher education in Dubai', *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 43(5), pp. 689–711. DOI: 10.1080/03057925.2013.821338.

- Kamibeppu, T. and Chao, R. Y.** (2017) 'Higher Education and Myanmar's Economic and Democratic Development.', *International Higher Education*, 88, pp. 19–20.
- Karen News** (2017) 'Thai Crackdown Disrupting Burma Migrant Schools: Burmese Migrant Teachers Association', *Karen News*, 4 July.
- Karen News** (2019) 'New Year Starts with Armed Conflict Between Karen and Burma Armies in Northern Karen State', *Karen News*, 16 January.
- Karl, T. L. and Schmitter, P. C.** (2002) 'Concepts, Assumptions & Hypotheses about Democratization: Reflections on "Stretching" from South to East', in *Regime Transitions: Transitions from Communist Rule in Comparative Perspective*. Stanford University: Unpublished Conference Paper, pp. 1–9.
- Kasasa** (2020) *Boomers, Gen X, Gen Y, and Gen Z Explained*, Kasasa. Available at: <https://www.kasasa.com/articles/generations/gen-x-gen-y-gen-z> (Accessed: 3 August 2020).
- Kedmey, D.** (2014) 'Global Youth Population Swells to Record 1.8 Billion', *Time*, 14 November.
- Keyes, C. F.** (1979) *Ethnic Adaptation and Identity: The Karen on the Thai Frontier with Burma*. Edited by C. F. Keyes. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues.
- King, E. M. and Hill, M. A.** (1993) *Women's Education in Developing Countries: Barriers, Benefits and Policies*. Edited by E. M. King and M. A. Hill. Washington D.C.: The International Bank of Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank.
- Kleist, N. and Jansen, S.** (2016) 'Introduction: Hope over Time—Crisis, Immobility and Future-Making', *History and Anthropology*, 27(4), pp. 373–392. DOI: 10.1080/02757206.2016.1207636.
- Klocker, N.** (2007) 'An example of "thin" agency: Child domestic workers in Tanzania', in Panelli, R., Punch, S., and Robson, E. (eds) *Global Perspectives on Rural Childhood and Youth: Young Rural Lives*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 83–94.
- Ko Ko Thett and Byrne, J.** (2012) *Bones Will Grow: 15 Contemporary Burmese Poets*. Edited by Ko Ko Thett and J. Byrne. Todmorden: Arc Publications.
- Kobori, E., Visrutaratna, S., Maeda, Y., et al.** (2009) 'Methamphetamine use and correlates in two villages of the highland ethnic Karen minority in northern Thailand: A cross sectional study', *BMC International Health and Human Rights*, 9(1), pp. 1–7. DOI: 10.1186/1472-698X-9-11.
- Koenig, W. J.** (1990) *The Burmese Polity, 1752–1819: Politics, Administration, and Social Organization in the Early Kon-baung Period*, *Michigan Papers on South & Southeast Asia*. 34. Michigan: Center for South & Southeast Asian Studies, University of Michigan.
- Kölbel, A.** (2015) *Youth, Aspiration, and Mobility: Young People Debating their Potential Futures in Nepal*. Unpublished DPhil Thesis: University of Oxford.
- Kramer, T.** (2011) *Civil Society Gaining Ground: Opportunities for Change and Development in Burma*. Amsterdam: The Transnational Institute.
- Kramer, T. and Vervest, P.** (1999) 'Introduction', in Kramer, T. and Vervest, P. (eds) *Strengthening Civil Society in Burma: Possibilities and Dilemmas for International NGOs*. Chang Mai: Silkworm Books, pp. v–xii.
- Kunstadter, P.** (1967) 'Burma: Introduction', in Kunstadter, P. (ed.) *Southeast Asian Tribes, Minorities, and Nations (Volume 1)*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, pp. 75–91.
- Kunstadter, P.** (1979) 'Ethnic Group, Category, and Identity: Karen in Northern Thailand', in Keyes, C. F. (ed.) *Ethnic Adaptation and Identity: The Karen on the Thai Frontier with Burma*. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, pp. 119–163.
- Kwanchewan, B.** (2005) 'Urban Migration and Hill Tribe Youth in Chiang Mai', *Indigenous Affairs*, 3–4(5), pp. 42–49.
- Lall, M.** (2010) *Child centred learning and teaching approaches in Myanmar*. Yangon: British Council.
- Lall, M.** (2011) 'Pushing the child centred approach in Myanmar: the role of cross national policy networks and the effects in the classroom', *Critical Studies in Education*, 52(3), pp. 219–233. DOI: 10.1080/17508487.2011.604072.
- Lall, M.** (2016a) *Education Challenges for Myanmar's New NLD Government*. Oxford: The Oxford–Myanmar Policy Brief Series (1.1).
- Lall, M.** (2016b) *Understanding Reform in Myanmar: People and Society in the Wake of Military Rule*. London: C Hurst & Company.
- Lall, M.** (2018) 'Education', in Simpson, A., Farrelly, N., and Holliday, I. (eds) *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Myanmar*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 268–278.

- Lall, M. and South, A.** (2014) 'Comparing Models of Non-state Ethnic Education in Myanmar: The Mon and Karen National Education Regimes', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 44(2), pp. 298–321. DOI: 10.1080/00472336.2013.823534.
- Lamb, V.** (2019) 'Salween: What's in a Name?', in Middleton, C. and Lamb, V. (eds) *Knowing the Salween River: Resource Politics of a Contested Transboundary River*. Cham: SpringerOpen, pp. 17–25.
- Lambrecht, C. W.** (2004) 'Oxymoronic Development: The Military as Benefactor in the Border Regions of Burma', in Duncan, C. R. (ed.) *Civilizing the Margins: Southeast Asian Government Policies for the Development of Minorities*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, pp. 150–181.
- Lang, H. J.** (2002) *Fear and Sanctuary: Burmese Refugees in Thailand*. New York: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications.
- Lave, J. and Wenger, E.** (1991) *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Leach, E. R.** (1960) 'The Frontiers of "Burma"', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 3(01), pp. 49–68. DOI: 10.1017/S0010417500000992.
- Leavy, J. and Smith, S.** (2010) *Future Farmers: Youth Aspirations, Expectations and Life Choices*. 013. London: UK Department for International Development.
- Lee, S. K.** (2012) 'Scattered but Connected: Karen Refugees' Networking in and beyond the Thailand-Burma Borderland', *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, 21(2), pp. 263–285.
- Lee, S. K.** (2014) 'Migrant schools in the Thailand-Burma borderland: from the informal to the formal', *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 34(1), pp. 125–138. DOI: 10.1080/02188791.2013.803458.
- Lehman, F. K.** (1979) 'Who are the Karen, and If So, Why? Karen Ethnohistory and a Formal Theory of Ethnicity', in Keyes, C. F. (ed.) *Ethnic Adaptation and Identity: The Karen on the Thai Frontier with Burma*. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, pp. 215–253.
- Lenkova, P.** (2015a) *Conflict Sensitivity in Education Provision in Karen State*. Yangon: Thabyay Education Foundation.
- Lenkova, P.** (2015b) 'Hpa-an cafe serves up a future for Karen youth', *Myanmar Times*, 31 July.
- Lesko, N.** (1996) 'Denaturalizing Adolescence: The Politics of Contemporary Representations', *Youth & Society*, 28(2), pp. 139–161.
- Levinson, B. A. and Pollack, M.** (2016) *A Companion to the Anthropology of Education*. Edited by B. A. Levinson and M. Pollack. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Liddell, Z.** (1999) 'No Room to Move: Legal Constraints on Civil Society in Burma', in Kramer, T. and Vervest, P. (eds) *Strengthening Civil Society in Burma: Possibilities and Dilemmas for International NGOs*. Chang Mai: Silkworm Books, pp. 54–68.
- Ling, T. O.** (1988) 'Religious Minorities in Burma in the Contemporary Period', in Silva, K. M. de, Duke, P., Goldberg, E. S., et al. (eds) *Ethnic Conflict in Buddhist Societies: Sri Lanka, Thailand and Burma*. London: Printer Publishers Limited, pp. 172–186.
- Lintner, B.** (2015) 'History Lessons', *The Irrawaddy*, 13 April.
- Lloyd, C. B.** (2005) *Growing up Global: The Changing Transitions to Adulthood in Developing Countries*. Edited by C. B. Lloyd. Washington D.C.: The National Academies Press. DOI: 10.17226/11174.
- Loizos, P.** (1994) 'Confessions of a Vampire Anthropologist', *Anthropological Journal of European Studies*, 3(2), pp. 39–53.
- Lorch, J.** (2007) 'Myanmar's Civil Society - a Patch for the National Education System? The Emergence of Civil Society in Areas of State Weakness', *Südostasien aktuell (Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs)*, 3, pp. 54–88.
- Lorch, J.** (2008) 'The (re)-emergence of civil society in areas of state weakness: The case of education in Burma/Myanmar', in Skidmore, M. and Wilson, T. (eds) *Dictatorship, Disorder and Decline in Myanmar*. Canberra: ANU E Press, pp. 151–176.
- Love and Care** (2020) *Why we exist?*, Love and Care Learning Center. Available at: <https://loveandcareschool.wordpress.com/who-are-we/> (Accessed: 12 September 2020).
- Luithui, E. D.** (1979) 'Education, unemployment and youth unrest: the South Asia syndrome', *Prospects - Quarterly Review of Education*, IX(I), pp. 85–90.

- Maber, E. J. T.** (2016) 'Cross-border transitions: navigating conflict and political change through community education practices in Myanmar and the Thai border', *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 14(3), pp. 374–389. DOI: 10.1080/14767724.2016.1175923.
- Macey, D.** (2000) *Dictionary of Critical Theory*. London: Penguin.
- MacLure, M., Holmes, R., Jones, L., et al.** (2010) 'Silence as resistance to analysis: Or, on not opening one's mouth properly', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(6), pp. 492–500. DOI: 10.1177/1077800410364349.
- Mains, D.** (2007) 'Neoliberal Times: Progress, Boredom, and Shame Among Young Men in Urban Ethiopia', *American Ethnologist*, 34(4), pp. 659–673.
- Mains, D.** (2012) *Hope Is Cut: Youth, Unemployment, and the Future in Urban Ethiopia*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. DOI: 10.1111/amet.12029_3.
- Malkki, L.** (2001) 'Figures of the future: Dystopia and Subjectivity in the Social Imagination of the Future', in Holland, D. and Lave, J. (eds) *History in Person: Enduring Struggles, Contentious Practice, Intimate Identities*. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, pp. 325–348.
- Mand, K.** (2011) 'Researching Lives in Motion: Multi-sited Strategies in a Transnational Context', in Coleman, S. and Hellermann, P. von (eds) *Multi-Sited Ethnography: Problems and Possibilities in the Translocation of Research Methods*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 41–53.
- Mandaville, P. G.** (1999) 'Territory and Translocality: Discrepant Idioms of Political Identity', *Millennium - Journal of International Studies*, 28(3), pp. 653–673. DOI: 10.1177/03058298990280030201.
- Mannheim, K.** (1927) 'The Problem of Generations', in Kecskemeti, P. (ed.) *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*. London: Routledge, pp. 276–322. DOI: 10.1016/s0168-8227(00)00198-4.
- Marcus, G. E.** (1995) 'Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 24(1995), pp. 95–117. DOI: 10.1177/1463499605059232.
- Markus, H. and Nurius, P.** (1986) 'Possible selves', *American Psychologist*, 41(9), pp. 954–969.
- Marshall, H. I.** (1922) *The Karen people of Burma: a study in anthropology and ethnology*. Columbus: The University of Ohio Press.
- Martin, R.** (2013) 'Myanmar: Governance, Civil Society and the Developments in Education', in Symaco, L. P. (ed.) *Education in South-East Asia*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 174–189.
- Mason, E.** (1862) *Civilizing Mountain Men or Sketches of Mission Work Among the Karens*. London: James Nisbet & Co.
- Mason, F.** (1834) 'Traditions of the Karens', *Baptist Missionary Magazine*. Boston: The American Baptist Missionary Union, xiv, pp. 382–393.
- Mason, F.** (1843) *The Karen Apostle: or Memoir of Ko Thabyu*. Boston: Gould, Kendall and Lincoln.
- Mason, F.** (1850) *The New Testament of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in Sgau Karen*. Maulmain: American Mission Press.
- Mazumdar, S.** (2019) 'The post-independence history of student movements in India and the ongoing protests', *Postcolonial Studies*, 22(1), pp. 16–29. DOI: 10.1080/13688790.2019.1568166.
- McCarthy, G.** (2016a) 'Buddhist Welfare and the Limits of Big "P" Politics in Provincial Myanmar', in Cheesman, N. and Farrelly, N. (eds) *Conflict in Myanmar: War, Politics, Religion*. Singapore: ISEAS Publishing.
- McCarthy, G.** (2016b) *Building on what's there: Insights on social protection and public goods provision from central-east Myanmar*. S-53308-MYA-1. London: International Growth Centre.
- McCarthy, G.** (2018) '"The Value of Life": Citizenship, Entitlement and Moral Legibility in Provincial Myanmar', in South, A. and Lall, M. (eds) *Citizenship in Myanmar: Ways of Being in and from Burma*. Chang Mai: ISEAS Publishing & Chang Mai University Press, pp. 167–187.
- McCarthy, G.** (2019) 'Democratic deservingness and self-reliance in contemporary Myanmar', *Sojourn*, 34(2), pp. 327–365. DOI: 10.1355/sj34-2d.
- McClelland, M.** (2010) *For Us Surrender is Out of the Question: A story from Burma's never-ending war*. Berkeley: Shoemaker & Hoard.
- McConnachie, K.** (2012) 'Rethinking the "Refugee Warrior": The Karen National Union and Refugee Protection on the Thai-Burma Border', *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, 4(1), pp. 30–56. DOI: 10.1093/jhuman/hus005.

- McCormick, P.** (2020) 'Ethnic Education Systems in Burma: Possibilities for Harmonization and Integration', in Chachavalpongpun, P., Prasse-Freeman, E., and Strefford, P. (eds) *Unraveling Myanmar's Transition: Progress, Retrenchment and Ambiguity Amidst Liberalization*. Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, pp. 190–208.
- McDowell, C.** (1996) 'Politics in Exile: The Profits of Inertia', in *A Tamil Asylum Diaspora: Sri Lankan Migration, Settlement and Politics in Switzerland*. Providence: Berghahn Books (Refugee and Forced Migration Studies), pp. 252–266.
- McMahon, A. R.** (1876) *The Karens of the Golden Chersonese*. London: Harrison & Sons.
- Meehan, P.** (2011) 'Drugs, insurgency and state-building in Burma: Why the drugs trade is central to Burma's changing political order', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 42(03), pp. 376–404. DOI: 10.1017/S0022463411000336.
- Metro, R.** (2011) *History Curricula and the Reconciliation of Ethnic Conflict: A Collaborative Project with Burmese Migrants and Refugees in Thailand*. Unpublished PhD Thesis: Cornell University.
- Metro, R.** (2013) 'Postconflict History Curriculum Revision as an "Intergroup Encounter": Promoting Interethnic Reconciliation among Burmese Migrants and Refugees in Thailand', *Comparative Education Review*, 57(1), pp. 145–168.
- Metro, R.** (2017a) 'The Divided Discipline of Burma/Myanmar Studies: Writing a dissertation during the 2010 election', *Southeast Asia Program Bulletin*, pp. 8–13.
- Metro, R.** (2017b) 'The Gift: Research as the Exchange of Heavy Objects', *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 10(3), pp. 272–282.
- Metro, R.** (2017c) 'Whose Democracy? The university student protests in Burma/Myanmar, 2014–2016', in Millican, J. (ed.) *Universities and Conflict: The Role of Higher Education in Peacebuilding and Resistance*. London & New York: Routledge.
- MIMU** (2016) *Situation Analysis - Southeastern Myanmar*. Yangon: Myanmar Information Management Unit/Peace Support Fund.
- Minmahaw** (2020) *About Us, The Minmahaw Education Foundation*. Available at: <https://minmahawschool.org/> (Accessed: 12 March 2019).
- Mische, A.** (2009) 'Projects and possibilities: Researching futures in action', *Sociological Forum*, 24(3), pp. 694–704. DOI: 10.1111/j.1573-7861.2009.01127.x.
- MOE** (2019) *Panorama of Myanmar Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Department of Higher Education (Lower Myanmar)*. Available at: <http://203.81.81.180/dhel/panorama-of-myanmar-higher-education/the-organization-structure-and-management-of-the-education-system/> (Accessed: 2 September 2019).
- Moo, S. L. E. and Daly, C.** (2016) *School Committees and Community Engagement in Education in Karen State*. Chang Mai: World Education.
- Moreno, A. and Urraco, M.** (2018) 'The Generational Dimension in Transitions: A Theoretical Review', *Societies*, 8(3), p. 49. DOI: 10.3390/soc8030049.
- Morrison, A.** (2014) 'Hegemony through Responsibilisation: Getting Working-Class Students into Higher Education in the United Kingdom', *Power and Education*, 6(2), pp. 118–129. DOI: 10.2304/power.2014.6.2.118.
- Mote Oo** (2020) *About Us, Mote Oo Education*. Available at: <https://moteoo.org/en/about-us> (Accessed: 12 September 2020).
- MPM** (2019) *Stalled Peace Talks Adds to Refugee Worries – Can't Go Home, Aids Cuts, Shelter and Security at Risk – Karen Network Urge UK, EU and other Aid Donors to Resume Support, Myanmar Peace Monitor*. Available at: <https://www.mmpeacemonitor.org/2081> (Accessed: 28 April 2020).
- Muiya, B. M.** (2014) 'The Nature, Challenges and Consequences of Urban Youth Unemployment: A Case of Nairobi City, Kenya', *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 2(7), pp. 495–503. DOI: 10.13189/ujer.2014.020701.
- Murphy, Z.** (1995) *Networks for Environmental Education*. Bradford: European Research and Training Centre on Environmental Education, University of Bradford.
- Myo Oo** (2012) 'Colonial Knowledge Transmitted in British Burma: An Analysis of Civic Textbook Prescribed in National School', *The Kanda Journal of Global and Area Studies*, 3, pp. 121–140.
- Newman, K. S.** (1999) *No Shame in My Game: The Working Poor in the Inner City*. New York: Vintage Books.

- Newman, K. S.** (2008) *Chutes and Ladders: Navigating the Low-Wage Labour Market*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Nilan, P.** (2011) 'Youth sociology must cross cultures', *Youth Studies Australia*, 30(3), pp. 20–26.
- Nussbaum, M. C.** (2011) *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Nyein Nyein** (2018) 'Youth Should Be Encouraged to Take Part in Peace Process, Camp Participants Say', *The Irrawaddy*, 13 August.
- Nyumba, T. O., Wilson, K., Derrick, C. J., et al.** (2018) 'The use of focus group discussion methodology: Insights from two decades of application in conservation', *Methods in Ecology and Evolution*, 9(1), pp. 20–32. DOI: 10.1111/2041-210X.12860.
- OECD** (2003) *Networks of Innovation: Towards New Models For Managing Schools and Systems*. Paris: The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199694945.013.027.
- OECD** (2017) *Youth Aspirations and the Reality of Jobs in Developing Countries: Mind the Gap*. Paris: Development Centre Studies, OECD Publishing.
- Ogbu, J. U.** (1987) 'Variability in Minority School Performance: A Problem in Search of an Explanation', *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 18(4), pp. 312–334.
- Oh, S.-A.** (2016) 'Navigating Learning, Employment and Economies in the Mae Sot-Myawaddy Borderland', in Oh, S.-A. (ed.) *Myanmar's Mountain and Maritime Borderscapes: Local Practices, Boundary-Making and Figured Worlds*. Singapore: ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute, pp. 191–211.
- Oommen, T. K.** (2004) 'New Nationalisms and Collective Rights: the case of South Asia', in Stephen, M., Modood, T., and Squires, J. (eds) *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Minority Rights*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 121–143.
- OPHI** (2017) *OPHI Country Briefing: Myanmar*. Oxford: Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, Oxford Department of International Development, University of Oxford.
- Oyefusi, A.** (2010) 'Oil, youths, and civil unrest in Nigeria's delta: The role of schooling, educational attainments, earnings, and unemployment', *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 27(4), pp. 326–346. DOI: 10.1177/0738894210374399.
- Parekh, B.** (2004) 'From redistribution to recognition? A misguided debate', in Stephen, M., Modood, T., and Squires, J. (eds) *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Minority Rights*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 199–213.
- Patel, V.** (2017) 'Parents, permission, and possibility: Young women, college, and imagined futures in Gujarat, India', *Geoforum*, 80, pp. 39–48. DOI: 10.1016/j.geoforum.2017.01.008.
- Payne, S.** (2007) *Migrating Knowledge: Schooling, Statelessness and Safety at the Thailand-Burma Border*. Unpublished PhD Thesis: University of Maryland.
- Pedersen, D.** (2011) *Secret Genocide: Voices of the Karen of Burma*. Dublin: Maverick House.
- Pederson, R.** (2015) *The Burma Spring: Aung San Suu Kyi and the New Struggle for the Soul of a Nation*. Cambridge: Pegasus Books.
- Perkins, M.** (2010) *Bamboo People: A Novel*. Watertown: Charlesbridge Publishing.
- Petrie, C. and South, A.** (2014) 'Development of Civil Society in Myanmar', in Gravers, M. and Ytzen, F. (eds) *Burma/Myanmar: Where Now?* Copenhagen: NIAS Press, pp. 86–94.
- Petry, J. L.** (1993) *The Sword and the Spirit: Christians, Karens, colonialists, and the creation of a nation of Burma*. Unpublished PhD Thesis: Rice University.
- Phan, Z.** (2009) *Little daughter: a memoir of survival in Burma and the West*. London: London : Simon & Schuster.
- Pilger, J.** (1998) 'Inside Burma: We Shall Have Our Time', in *Hidden Agendas*. London: Vintage Books, pp. 190–221.
- Po Po Thaug Win** (2015) 'An Overview of Higher Education Reform in Myanmar', in *Burma/Myanmar in Transition: Connectivity, Changes and Challenges*. Chang Mai: International Conference on Burma/Myanmar Studies, Chang Mai University, pp. 1–16.
- Prasse-Freeman, E., Chachavalpongpun, P. and Strefford, P.** (2020) 'Introduction', in Chachavalpongpun, P., Prasse-Freeman, E., and Strefford, P. (eds) *Unraveling Myanmar's Transition: Progress, Retrenchment and Ambiguity Amidst Liberalization*. Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, pp. 1–17.

- Pratt, M. L.** (1991) 'Arts of the Contact Zone', *Profession*, pp. 33–40. DOI: 10.2307/25595469.
- Prospect Burma** (2021) 'Prospect Burma: an educational journey', in *Britain-Burma Society (Zoom) Presentation*. London: Britain-Burma Society.
- Punch, S.** (2007) 'Negotiating migrant identities: Young people in Bolivia and Argentina', *Children's Geographies*, 5(1–2), pp. 95–112. DOI: 10.1080/14733280601108213.
- Punch, S.** (2015) 'Youth transitions and migration: negotiated and constrained interdependencies within and across generations', *Journal of Youth Studies*, 18(2), pp. 262–276.
- Purkey, M.** (2010) 'Paths to a future for youth in protracted refugee situations: A view from the Thai-Burmese border', *Refuge*, 27(2), pp. 97–102.
- Quadrini, M.** (2020) 'As donor priorities shift, Myanmar's refugees are left wanting', *Southeast Asia Globe*, 22 April.
- Raco, M.** (2012) 'Neoliberal Urban Policy, Aspirational Citizenship and the Uses of Cultural Distinction', in Tasan-Kok, T. and Baeten, G. (eds) *Contradictions of Neoliberal Planning: Cities, Policies, and Politics*. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, pp. 43–59. DOI: 10.1007/978-90-481-8924-3_3.
- Rajah, A.** (1990) 'Ethnicity, Nationalism, and the Nation-State: The Karen in Burma and Thailand', in Wijeyewardene, G. (ed.) *Ethnic Groups across National Boundaries in Mainland Southeast Asia*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, pp. 102–133.
- Rajah, A.** (2008) 'Appendix I. The Origin of the Karen: An "Official" History', in *Remaining Karen: A Study of Cultural Reproduction and the Maintenance of Identity*. Canberra: ANU Press, pp. 307–311.
- Ralph, M.** (2008) 'Killing Time', *Social Text*, 26(4), pp. 1–30. DOI: 10.1525/aeq.2003.34.2.136.
- Ralph, S. and Sheera, N.** (2020) *Fifty Years in the Karen Revolution in Burma: The Soldier and the Teacher*. Edited by S. Olinga-Shannon. Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program Publications.
- Ray, D.** (2006) 'Aspirations, Poverty and Economic Change', in Banerjee, A. V., Benabou, R., and Mookherjee, D. (eds) *Understanding Poverty*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 409–422.
- Raynaud, M.** (2014) 'Education protests offer lessons', *Myanmar Times*, 24 November.
- Reay, D.** (2017) *Miseducation: Inequality, Education and the Working Classes*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Renard, R. D.** (1988) 'Minorities in Burmese History', in Silva, K. M. de, Duke, P., Goldberg, E. S., et al. (eds) *Ethnic Conflict in Buddhist Societies: Sri Lanka, Thailand and Burma*. London: Printer Publishers Limited, pp. 77–91.
- Renard, R. D.** (2003) 'Studying Peoples often called Karen', in Delang, C. O. (ed.) *Living at the edge of Thai society: the Karen in the Highlands of Northern Thailand*. London: RoutledgeCurzon (RoutledgeCurzon Research on Southeast Asia), pp. 1–15.
- Reuters** (2020) 'Thailand tightens border surveillance as Myanmar infections rise', *Reuters World News*, 11 September.
- Richards, P.** (1995) 'Rebellion in Liberia and Sierra Leone: A Crisis of Youth?', in Furley, O. (ed.) *Conflict in Africa*. London: I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd, pp. 122–137.
- Risør, H. and Arteaga Pérez, I.** (2018) 'Disjunctive belongings and the utopia of intimacy: violence, love and friendship among poor urban youth in neoliberal Chile', *Identities*, 25(2), pp. 228–244. DOI: 10.1080/1070289X.2017.1400278.
- Rives, N. M. L.** (2014) *University Student Activism in Burma/Myanmar During the 1980s*. Unpublished PhD Thesis: University of Kansas.
- Robben, A. C. G. M.** (2012) 'Introduction: Multi-sited Fieldwork', in Robben, A. C. G. M. and Sluka, J. A. (eds) *Ethnographic Fieldwork: An Anthropological Reader*. 2nd edn. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Rogers, B.** (2004) *A Land Without Evil: Stopping the Genocide of Burma's Karen People*. London & New York: Monarch.
- Rogers, B.** (2012) *Burma: A Nation at the Crossroads*. London: Rider.
- Rogers, B.** (2015) *From Burma to Rome: A Journey into the Catholic Church*. Leominster: Gracewing.
- Romei, V. and Reed, J.** (2019) 'The Asian Century is set to begin', *Financial Times*, 26 March.
- Routledge, P.** (2004) 'Reflections on the G8 protests: An interview with General Unrest of the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army (CIRCA)', *Acme*, 3(2), pp. 112–120.

- Rozenberg, G.** (2010) 'Activities That Certify', in *Renunciation and Power: The Quest for Sainthood in Contemporary Burma (Monograph 59/ Yale Southeast Asia Studies)*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies (Translated from the French by Jessica L. Hackett et alia), pp. 69–71.
- Russell, R.** (2014) *Burma's Spring: Real Lives in Turbulent Times*. London: Thistle Publishing.
- Salem-Gervais, N. and Metro, R.** (2012) 'A Textbook Case of Nation-Building: The Evolution of History Curricula in Myanmar', *Journal of Burma Studies*, 16(1), pp. 27–78. DOI: 10.1353/jbs.2012.0003.
- Salemink, O., Bregnbæk, S. and Hirsland, D. V.** (2018) 'Introduction: youth, subjectivity and Utopia – ethnographic perspectives from the Global South', *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, 25(2), pp. 125–139. DOI: 10.1080/1070289X.2017.1400280.
- Sau Kau-Too** (1847) *Thesaurus of Karen Knowledge, Comprising Traditions, Legends or Fables, Poetry, Customs, Superstitions, Demonology, Therapeutics, etc., Alphabetically Arranged and Forming a Complete Native Karen Dictionary, with Definitions and Examples...* Tavoy: Karen Mission Press (compiled by Jonathan Wade).
- Scalmer, S.** (2005) 'Searching for the aspirational', *Overland*, 180, pp. 5–6.
- Schaefer, I.** (2018) *Political Revolt and Youth Unemployment in Tunisia: Exploring the Education-Employment Mismatch*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Schmitter, P. C.** (2010) 'Twenty-five years, fifteen findings', *Journal of Democracy*, 21(1), pp. 17–28. DOI: 10.1353/jod.0.0144.
- Schober, J.** (2008) 'Communities of interpretation in the study of religion in Burma', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 39(2), pp. 255–267. DOI: 10.1017/S0022463408000209.
- Schober, J.** (2011a) 'Civil Buddhism in a Colonial Context', in *Modern Buddhist Conjectures in Myanmar: Cultural Narratives, Colonial Legacies, and Civil Society*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, pp. 1–207.
- Schober, J.** (2011b) 'Educating the Other: Buddhism and Colonial Knowledge', in *Modern Buddhist Conjectures in Myanmar: Cultural Narratives, Colonial Legacies, and Civil Society*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, pp. 1–207.
- Schonthal, B. and Walton, M. J.** (2016) 'The (new) Buddhist Nationalisms? Symmetries and Specificities in Sri Lanka and Myanmar', *Contemporary Buddhism*, 17(1), pp. 81–115. DOI: 10.1080/14639947.2016.1162419.
- Schoon, I. and Lyons-Amos, M.** (2016) 'Diverse pathways in becoming an adult: The role of structure, agency and context', *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, 46, pp. 11–20. DOI: 10.1016/j.rssm.2016.02.008.
- Scott, J. C.** (2009) *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press (Yale Agrarian Studies.).
- Selth, A.** (2010) 'Modern Burma Studies: A Survey of the Field', *Modern Asian Studies*, 44(2), pp. 401–440. DOI: 10.1017/S0026749X08003508.
- Selth, A.** (2018) *Burma (Myanmar) since the 1988 uprising: A select bibliography*. Brisbane: Griffith Asia Institute, Griffith University. DOI: 10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004.
- Selwyn, N.** (2013) *Education in a Digital World: Global Perspectives on Technology and Education*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Sen, A.** (1999) *Development as Freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sewell, W. H. J.** (1992) 'A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation', *The American Journal of Sociology*, 98(1), pp. 1–29. DOI: 10.1086/229967.
- Sewell, W. H. J. and Hauser, R. M.** (1980) 'The Wisconsin Longitudinal Study of Social and Psychological Factors in Aspirations and Achievements', *Research in Sociology and Education*, 1, pp. 58–99.
- Sharples, R.** (2017) 'To be Karen in the Thai–Burma borderlands: identity formation through the prism of a human rights discourse', *Asian Ethnicity*, 18(1), pp. 74–94. DOI: 10.1080/14631369.2015.1088378.
- Sherrod, L. R.** (2007) 'Civic engagement as an expression of positive youth development', in Silbereisen, R. K. and Lerner, R. M. (eds) *Approaches to Positive Youth Development*. London: SAGE Publications, pp. 59–74. DOI: 10.4135/9781446213803.n3.

- Sherrod, L. R., Torney-Purta, J. and Flanagan, C. A.** (2010) *Handbook of Research on Civic Engagement in Youth*. Edited by L. R. Sherrod, J. Torney-Purta, and C. A. Flanagan. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons.
- Sherrod, Lonnie R., Flanagan, C. A., Kassimir, R., et al.** (2005) *Youth Activism: An International Encyclopedia*. Edited by Leonnie R. Sherrod, C. A. Flanagan, R. Kassimir, et al. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Shultz, L.** (2007) 'Educating for Global Citizenship: Conflicting Agendas and Understandings', *The Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 53(3), pp. 248–258.
- Shwe Yee Saw Myint and Htoo Thant** (2015) 'Anger as government restricts NGO registration with by-law', *Myanmar Times*, 24 July.
- Singh, P. and Doherty, C.** (2004) 'Global Cultural Flows and Pedagogic Dilemmas: Teaching in the Global University Contact Zone', *TESOL Quarterly*, 38(1), pp. 9–42. DOI: 10.2307/3588257.
- Sithu Aung Myint** (2016) 'Of pagodas, churches and mosques', *Frontier Myanmar*, 15 May.
- Sladkova, J.** (2007) 'Expectations and Motivations of Hondurans Migrating to the United States', *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 17, pp. 432–446. DOI: 10.1002/casp.
- Smeaton, D. M.** (1920) *The Loyal Karens of Burma*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co.
- Smith, M.** (1991) *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*. London: Zed Books.
- Smith, M.** (1994) *Ethnic Groups in Burma: Development, Democracy and Human Rights*. London: Anti-Slavery International.
- Smith, S. H.** (2012) "'In the heart, there's nothing": Unruly youth, generational vertigo and territory', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 38(4), pp. 572–585. DOI: 10.1111/j.1475-5661.2012.00547.x.
- Smith, S. H. and Gergan, M.** (2015) 'The diaspora within: Himalayan youth, education-driven migration, and future aspirations in India', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 33(1), pp. 119–135. DOI: 10.1068/d13152p.
- South, A.** (2007a) *Burma: The Changing Nature of Displacement Crises*. 39. Oxford: Refugee Studies Centre, Oxford Department of International Development.
- South, A.** (2007b) 'Karen Nationalist Communities: The "Problem" of Diversity', *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 29(1), pp. 55–76.
- South, A.** (2008) *Civil Society in Burma: The Development of Democracy amidst Conflict*. Washington D.C.: East-West Center.
- South, A.** (2011) *Burma's Longest War: Anatomy of the Karen Conflict*. Amsterdam: Transnational Institute/Burma Center Netherlands.
- South, A. and Lall, M.** (2015) 'The peace process and ethnic education in Burma', *Democratic Voice of Burma*, 18 October, pp. 1–4.
- South, A. and Lall, M.** (2016) *Schooling and Conflict: Ethnic Education and Mother-Tongue-based Teaching in Myanmar*. Bangkok: The Asia Foundation.
- South, A. and Lall, M.** (2018) *Citizenship in Myanmar: Ways of Being in and from Burma*. Edited by A. South and M. Lall. Chang Mai: ISEAS Publishing; Chang Mai University Press.
- South, A., Perhult, M. and Carstensen, N.** (2010) *Conflict and Survival: Self-protection in south-east Burma*, *Chatham House Asia Programme Paper*. ASP PP 2010/04. London: Chatham House.
- Speers Mears, E., Rasmussen, P. E., Liza May Thet Thet Oo, et al.** (2015) *Analysis of Education Services in Contested Regions of Myanmar*. Yangon: Myanmar Education Consortium.
- Spurlock, M. and Windle, J.** (2017) *All Saints: The Surprising True Story of How Refugees from Burma Brought Life to a Dying Church*. Bloomington, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers.
- Spyrou, S.** (2016) 'Researching children's silences: Exploring the fullness of voice in childhood research', *Childhood*, 23(1), pp. 7–21. DOI: 10.1177/0907568215571618.
- Stambach, A.** (2016) 'Student Futures and the Politics of Possibility: An Introduction', in Stambach, A. and Hall, K. D. (eds) *Anthropological Perspectives on Student Futures: Youth and the Politics of Possibility*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 1–16.
- State Councillor Office** (2018) *Myanmar Youth Policy Released, State Councillor Office, The Republic of the Union of Myanmar*. Available at: <https://www.statecounsellor.gov.mm/en/node/1578> (Accessed: 25 April 2020).
- Steinberg, D. I.** (1992) 'The Role of International Aid in Myanmar's Development', *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 13(4), pp. 415–432. DOI: 10.1355/cs13-4e.

- Steinberg, D. I.** (1999) 'A Void in Myanmar - Civil Society in Burma', in Kramer, T. and Vervest, P. (eds) *Strengthening Civil Society in Burma: Possibilities and Dilemmas for International NGOs*. Chang Mai: Silkworm Books, pp. 1–14.
- Stern, T.** (1979) 'A People Between: The Pwo Karen of Western Thailand', in Keyes, C. F. (ed.) *Ethnic Adaptation and Identity: The Karen on the Thai Frontier with Burma*. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, pp. 63–80.
- Strefford, P.** (2020) 'The Post-2011 Transition in Myanmar - Donor-driven Aid and Donor Capacity Deficit', in Chachavalpongpun, P., Prasse-Freeman, E., and Strefford, P. (eds) *Unraveling Myanmar's Transition: Progress, Retrenchment and Ambiguity Amidst Liberalization*. Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, pp. 167–189.
- Sukarieh, M. and Tannock, S.** (2015) *Youth Rising? The Politics of Youth in the Global Economy*. London: Routledge.
- Sukarieh, M. and Tannock, S.** (2016) 'On the political economy of youth: a comment', *Journal of Youth Studies*, 19(9), pp. 1281–1289. DOI: 10.1080/13676261.2016.1206869.
- Swartz, S., Harding, J. H. and de Lannoy, A.** (2012) 'Ikasi style and the quiet violence of dreams: A critique of youth belonging in post-Apartheid South Africa', *Comparative Education*, 48(1), pp. 27–40. DOI: 10.1080/03050068.2011.637761.
- Tan, A.** (2006) *Saving Fish From Drowning*. New York: Harper Perennial.
- Tanner, J. L. and Arnett, J. J.** (2009) 'The emergence of "emerging adulthood": the new life stage between adolescence and young adulthood', in Furlong, A. (ed.) *Handbook of Youth and Young Adulthood: New perspectives and agendas*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 39–45.
- Taylor, R. H.** (2007) 'British Policy towards Myanmar and the Creation of the "Burma Problem"', in Ganesan, N. and Hlaing, K. Y. (eds) *Myanmar: State, Society and Ethnicity*. Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, pp. 70–95.
- TBBC** (2010) *3 Sides to Every Story: A Profile of Muslim Communities in the Refugee Camps on the Thailand Burma Border*. Bangkok: Thailand Burma Border Consortium.
- TBC** (2018) *Human Security in South Eastern Myanmar*. Bangkok: Wanida Press for The Border Consortium.
- TBC** (2019) *Refugee Camp Populations: January 2019*. Bangkok: The Border Consortium.
- Thant Myint-U** (2004) *The Making of Modern Burma*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Thant Myint-U** (2008) *The River of Lost Footsteps: A Personal History of Burma*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Thawngmung, A. M.** (2008) *The Karen Revolution in Burma: Diverse Voices, Uncertain Ends*. Policy Studies 45. Washington D.C.: East-West Center.
- Thawngmung, A. M.** (2012) *The 'other' Karen in Myanmar: ethnic minorities and the struggle without arms*. Lanham: Lexington Books.
- Thawngmung, A. M.** (2017) 'Signs of life in Myanmar's nationwide ceasefire agreement? Finding a way forward', *Critical Asian Studies*, 49(3), pp. 379–395. DOI: 10.1080/14672715.2017.1341180.
- The Asia Foundation** (2014) *Myanmar 2014: Civic Knowledge and Values in a Changing Society*. San Francisco: The Asia Foundation.
- The Economist** (2015) 'A closer look at Myanmar's demographics', *The Economist*, 3 June.
- The Global New Light of Myanmar** (2018) 'Myanmar Youth Policy released', *The Global New Light of Myanmar*, 6 January, pp. 1–2.
- The Irrawaddy** (2014) 'Union Parliament Passed NGO Law', *The Irrawaddy*, 1 July.
- The Nation** (2017) 'Schools for migrant workers' children close along Myanmar-Thai border', *The Nation - Thailand Portal*, 5 July.
- Thomson, R., Bell, R., Holland, J., et al.** (2002) 'Critical Moments: Choice, Chance and Opportunity in Young People's Narratives of Transition', *Sociology*, 36(2), pp. 335–354. DOI: 10.1177/0038038502036002006.
- Threadgold, S.** (2020) 'Figures of youth: on the very object of Youth Studies', *Journal of Youth Studies*, 23(6), pp. 686–701. DOI: 10.1080/13676261.2019.1636014.
- Tosa, K.** (2009) 'The Cult of Thamanya Sayadaw', *Asian Ethnology*, 68(2), pp. 239–264.
- Tucker, M.** (2003) *The Long Patrol: With Karen Guerrillas in Burma*. Bangkok: Asia Books.
- Tucker, S.** (2001) *Among insurgents: walking through Burma*. London: Flamingo.
- Turner, V.** (1969) *The Ritual Process*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

- Turner, V.** (1974) *Drama, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Tzenis, J. A.** (2018) 'Campus Immersion: Supporting Youth Agency and Aspirations for Higher Education', *Journal of Youth Development*, 13(4), pp. 134–148. DOI: 10.5195/jyd.2018.576.
- UN** (2018) *World Youth Report: Youth and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. New York: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.
- UNESCAP** (2013) *Population Trends in Asia and the Pacific*. New York: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.
- UNESCAP** (2018) *Population dynamics and inequality in Asia and the Pacific*. New York: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199560103.003.0007.
- UNESCO** (1995) *National Profiles in Technical and Vocational Education in Asia and the Pacific: Myanmar*. Bangkok: UNESCO for Asia and the Pacific.
- UNESCO** (2011) *The hidden crisis: armed conflict and education, EFA Global Monitoring Report*. Geneva: UNESCO. DOI: ISBN 978–92–3–104191–4.
- UNESCO** (2014) *Definition of Youth: UN General Assembly Resolutions*. Paris: United Nations.
- Ungar, M.** (2005) *Handbook for Working with Children and Youth: Pathways to Resilience Across Cultures and Contexts*. Edited by M. Ungar. London: SAGE Publications.
- UNICEF/MDRI** (2014) *Making Public Finance Work for Children in Myanmar: An Overview of Public Finance Trends 2011-12 to 2014-15*. Yangon: UNICEF.
- Unterhalter, E., Ladwig, J. and Jeffrey, C.** (2014) 'Decoding aspirations: social theory, the capability approach, and the multiple modalities of education', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 35(1), pp. 133–145. DOI: 10.1080/01425692.2013.856669.
- Uprichard, E.** (2008) 'Children as "being and becomings": Children, childhood and temporality', *Children and Society*, 22(4), pp. 303–313. DOI: 10.1111/j.1099-0860.2007.00110.x.
- Valentin, K.** (2014) 'Certificates for the Future: Geographical Mobility and Educational Trajectories among Nepalese Youth', in Dalsgård, A. L., Frederiksen, M. D., Højlund, S., et al. (eds) *Ethnographies of Youth and Temporality: Time Objectified*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, pp. 117–137. DOI: 10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004.
- Vigh, H.** (2006) *Navigating Terrains of War: Youth and Soldiering in Guinea-Bissau*. Oxford & New York: Berghahn Books.
- Vigh, H.** (2008) 'Crisis and chronicity: Anthropological perspectives on continuous conflict and decline', *Ethnos*, 73(1), pp. 5–24. DOI: 10.1080/00141840801927509.
- Vigh, H.** (2009a) 'Motion squared: A second look at the concept of social navigation', *Anthropological Theory*, 9(4), pp. 419–438.
- Vigh, H.** (2009b) 'Wayward migration: On imagined futures and technological voids', *Ethnos*, 74(1), pp. 91–109. DOI: 10.1080/00141840902751220.
- Vigh, H.** (2018) 'Displaced utopia: on marginalisation, migration and emplacement in Bissau', *Identities*, 25(2), pp. 192–209. DOI: 10.1080/1070289X.2017.1400274.
- Wa Lone** (2014) 'Behind the student protests', *Myanmar Times*, 24 November.
- Walther, A.** (2006) 'Regimes of youth transitions: Choice, flexibility and security in young people's experiences across different European contexts', *Young*, 14(2), pp. 119–139. DOI: 10.1177/1103308806062737.
- Walton, M. J.** (2012) *Politics in the Moral Universe: Burmese Buddhist Political Thought*. Unpublished PhD Thesis: University of Washington.
- Walton, M. J.** (2013) 'The "Wages of Burman-ness:" Ethnicity and Burman Privilege in Contemporary Myanmar', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 43(1), pp. 37–41.
- Walton, M. J.** (2016a) *Buddhism, Politics and Political Thought in Myanmar*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Walton, M. J.** (2016b) 'Monks in Politics, Monks in the World: Buddhist Activism in Contemporary Myanmar', *Social Research*, 82(2), pp. 507–530.
- Walton, M. J.** (2020) 'Myanmar's Political Transition and Its Effects on the Buddhist Religio-Political Landscape', in Chachavalpongpun, P., Prasse-Freeman, E., and Strefford, P. (eds) *Unraveling Myanmar's Transition: Progress, Retrenchment and Ambiguity Amidst Liberalization*. Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, pp. 209–232.

- Walton, M. J.** (2021) *Buddhism and the Political: Organisation and Participation in the Theravada Moral Universe*. London: C. Hurst & Co.
- Walton, M. J. and Hayward, S.** (2014) *Contesting Buddhist Narratives: Democratization, Nationalism and Communal Violence in Myanmar*. Policy Studies: 71. Honolulu: East-West Center.
- Walton, M. J. and Jerryson, M.** (2016) 'The authorization of religio-political discourse: monks and Buddhist activism in contemporary Myanmar and beyond', *Politics and Religion*, 9, pp. 794–814. DOI: 10.1017/S1755048316000559.
- Wannous, S.** (2019) *Sentence to Hope: A Sa'dallah Wannous Reader*. Edited by R. Myers and N. Saab. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Waters, J.** (2006) 'Emergent Geographies of International Education and Social Exclusion', *Antipode*, 38(5), pp. 1046–68.
- Waters, J.** (2012) 'Geographies of International Education: Mobilities and the Reproduction of Social (Dis)advantage', *Geography Compass*, 6(3), pp. 123–36.
- Waters, J. and Brooks, R.** (2011) *Student Mobilities, Migration and the Internationalization of Higher Education*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Weiss, B.** (2004) 'Contentious Future: Past and Present', in Weiss, B. (ed.) *Producing African Futures: Ritual and Reproduction in a Neoliberal Age*. Leiden: Brill, pp. 1–20.
- Welap, R.** (2010) *Burma Displaced*. UK: Syndicado.
- Welsh, B. and Kai-Ping Huang** (2016) *Myanmar's Political Aspirations & Perceptions: 2015 Asian Barometer Survey Report*. Taipei: Center for East Asia Democratic Studies, National Taiwan University.
- Welsh, E.** (2002) 'Dealing with Data: Using NVivo in the Qualitative Data Analysis Process', *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 3(2), pp. 1–8.
- Weng, L.** (2016) 'Religion Minister Seeks to Mollify Christians and Buddhists in Karen', *The Irrawaddy*, 10 May.
- Werbner, P.** (2006) 'Understanding Vernacular Cosmopolitanism', *Anthropology News*, 47(5), pp. 7–11. DOI: 10.1525/an.2006.47.5.7.
- White, R. J. and Green, A. E.** (2015) 'The importance of socio-spatial influences in shaping young people's employment aspirations: case study evidence from three British cities', *Work, Employment and Society*, 29(2), pp. 295–313. DOI: 10.1177/0950017014561334.
- Whyte, S. R.** (2009) 'Epilogue', in Haram, L. and Yamba, C. B. (eds) *Dealing with Uncertainty in Contemporary African Lives*. Stockholm: The Nordic Africa Institute, pp. 213–216.
- Wide Horizons** (2020) *The Concept, Wide Horizons Organisation Development Program*. Available at: <https://widehorizonsmaesot.wixsite.com/widehorizons/about-wh> (Accessed: 12 September 2020).
- Wilkinson, S.** (1998) 'Focus groups in feminist research', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 21(1), pp. 111–125. DOI: 10.1016/s0277-5395(97)00080-0.
- Wilkinson, S.** (1999) 'Focus Groups: A Feminist Method', *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 23, pp. 221–244.
- Willis, P. E.** (1978) *Learning to Labour: how working class kids get working class jobs*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Willis, P. E.** (1981) 'Cultural production is different from cultural reproduction is different from social reproduction is different from reproduction', *Interchange*, 12(2–3), pp. 48–67. DOI: 10.1007/BF01192107.
- Willis, P. E.** (1983) 'Cultural production and theories of reproduction', in Barton, L. and Walker, S. (eds) *Race, Class and Education*. London: Croom Helm, pp. 107–138.
- Wilson, K.** (1992) 'Thinking about the Ethics of Fieldwork', in Devereux, S. and Hoddinott, J. (eds) *Fieldwork in Developing Countries*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, pp. 179–199.
- Wimmer, A.** (1998) 'Zurich's Miami: Transethnic relations of a transnational community', *Neuchâtel: University of Neuchâtel – Swiss Forum for Migration Studies*, pp. 1–17.
- Womack, W.** (2016) 'Zwekabin: Exile, return, pilgrimage, and narratives of sacred place in Karen State', in *12th International Burma Studies Conference (October 2016)*, pp. 1–8.
- Womack, W. B.** (2005) *Literate Networks and the Production of Sgaw and Pwo Writing in Burma, c.1830-1930*. Unpublished PhD Thesis: School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London.

- Woodman, D. and Wyn, J.** (2015a) 'Continuity & Change', in Woodman, D. and Wyn, J. (eds) *Youth and Generation: Rethinking Change and Inequality in the Lives of Young People*. London: SAGE Publications, pp. 1–16.
- Woodman, D. and Wyn, J.** (2015b) 'Global Change & Inequality', in Woodman, D. and Wyn, J. (eds) *Youth and Generation: Rethinking Change and Inequality in the Lives of Young People*. London: SAGE Publications, pp. 17–35.
- Woodman, D. and Wyn, J.** (2015c) *Youth and Generation: Rethinking Change and Inequality in the Lives of Young People*. Edited by D. Woodman and J. Wyn. London: SAGE Publications.
- World Bank** (2018) *Myanmar's Future Jobs: Embracing Modernity*. Washington D.C.: World Bank Group.
- World Bank** (2019) *World Development Report 2019: The changing nature of work*, *World Development Report*. Washington D.C.: International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank. DOI: 10.1007/s11159-019-09762-9.
- Worth, N.** (2009) 'Understanding youth transition as "Becoming": Identity, time and futurity', *Geoforum*, 40(6), pp. 1050–1060. DOI: 10.1016/j.geoforum.2009.07.007.
- Wyn, J.** (2009) *Youth Health and Welfare: The Cultural Politics of Education and Wellbeing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wyn, J.** (2014) 'Conceptualizing Transitions to Adulthood', *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 143, pp. 5–16. DOI: 10.1002/ace.
- Wyn, J. and Andres, L.** (2011) 'Navigating complex lives: A longitudinal, comparative perspective on young people's trajectories', *Early Intervention in Psychiatry*, 5(SUPPL. 1), pp. 17–21. DOI: 10.1111/j.1751-7893.2010.00235.x.
- YUDE** (2018) *Yangon University of Distance Education*. Available at: <http://www.yude.edu.mm/public/> (Accessed: 2 September 2019).
- Zar Ni** (1998) *Knowledge, Control and Power: The Politics of Education Under Burma's Military Dictatorship (1962-88)*. Unpublished PhD Thesis: University of Wisconsin-Madison.
- Zaw, J.** (2018) 'Karen peace hopes on road to nowhere', *UCA News*, 11 June.
- Zipin, L., Sellar, S., Brennan, M., et al.** (2015) 'Educating for Futures in Marginalized Regions: A sociological framework for rethinking and researching aspirations', *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 47(3), pp. 227–246. DOI: 10.1080/00131857.2013.839376.
- Zobrist, B. and McCormick, P.** (2013) *A Preliminary Assessment of Decentralization in Education: Experiences in Mon State and Yangon Region (Subnational Governance in Myanmar Discussion Paper Series)*. Yangon: The Asia Foundation.
- Zon Pann Pwint** (2019) 'Making Youth Voices Count', *Myanmar Times*, 12 August.