Surviving Dispossession: Burmese Migrants in Thailand's Border Economic Zones

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The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

Department of Sociology

SURVIVING DISPOSSESSION: BURMESE MIGRANTS IN THAILAND'S BORDER
ECONOMIC ZONES

A dissertation

by
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

May 2015

Abstract

Title: Surviving Dispossession: Burmese Migrants in Thailand's Border Economic Zones

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Chair: Professor Stephen Pfohl

This dissertation explores the intersection of gender, violence, and dispossession among Burmese migrants living in precarious circumstances in Thailand, close to the border with Myanmar. In this space, particularly in the town of Mae Sot and surrounding areas, migrants are targets of multiple overlapping technologies of governance, including the Thai state, multinational garment export processing facilities, plantation-style agricultural firms, international humanitarian NGOs, and transnational social and political networks. Through a multi-modal qualitative approach relying on collaborative action research and key informant interviews, I consider how this complex web of discursive and relational power simultaneously renders migrants invisible subjects of global supply chains and yet hyper-visible targets of humanitarian assistance and intervention. Invisible because actors associated with state or market forces performatively enforce upon migrant bodies the violent notion that they are deportable, reiterating the boundaries of sovereignty at each encounter. And visible because as migrants struggle to make ends meet working long hours for illegally low wages, NGOs spotlight their social problems and offer solutions that promote individual biowelfare but not wider transformative change. Despite what appear to be opposing forces, both forms of power contribute to the production of gendered border subjects that are healthy workers; ethical and self-reliant yet docile.

Migrants interpret and negotiate these overlapping systems, exerting agency as they rely on their own social and political networks to establish mechanisms of order that are shaped by but not necessarily subordinate to the disciplinary regimes of factories and farms, the juridical frameworks of the state, or the biopolitical gaze of NGOs. This dissertation finds that within these mechanisms, gender becomes a key discursive metaphor both to make sense of the widespread violence of displacement and to maintain collective order. Migrants' own gendered performances of discipline are themselves a product of border precarity and forge pathways of limited agency through which migrants seek to navigate the everyday conditions of that precarity.

Throughout, this dissertation reflexively examines its own collaborative action research approach as well as humanitarian intervention on the border to identify ways that both are complicit in gendered border subjectivation. Gender in this analysis manifests itself as a set of discursive resources that NGO staff and migrants make use of as they seek to effect change—albeit in ways that tend to leave unchallenged the larger structural conditions of violence and neoliberal sovereignty that undergird and require the formation of a docile and disposable border population. Thus, in one sense, this dissertation is about how migrants survive in a violent context of dispossession, but it is also just as much about the generative qualities of violent life, the spaces in which agency challenges precarity, and the ways in which performatively reproduced gendered hierarchies are at the center of both precarity and resistance.

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Acknowledgements

I am incredibly grateful to the many individuals and institutions whose support made this dissertation possible. I extend my heartfelt thanks to the many activists and migrants living in Mae Sot and Phob Phra who participated in the interviews and group discussions on which this dissertation is based. I owe many thanks to the individuals in Mae Sot involved in the projects that became part of my dissertation work. I am deeply grateful to co-researchers Chan Chan, Daraporn Prakunwisit, Fah Parada, Min Min, Nan Hong Noon, Nor Da, Nu Nu, Nway Oo, Sandi Maung, Ye Win War, and Zin Mar Thet. In our time together we forged an environment of trust, reflection, purpose, and solidarity. I thank also the Burmese Women's Union, Burma Lawyer's Council, Mae Tao Clinic, MAP Foundation, Overseas Irrawaddy Association, Sana Yar Thi Phan Women's Center, Social Action for Women, the Tavoyan Women's Union, World Education, and the Yaung Chi Oo Worker's Association. I am thankful to Santi Dusitvorakan, Saw George, Hla Su, Charoensin Intaphad, Sara Kauffman, Khin Thu, Khu Khu, Liberty Thawda, Dominique Maidment, Suttinee Seechaikham, and Akkarat Wantanajai who provided assistance to the assessment on which much of this dissertation is based. Shane Scanlon and Nyunt Naing Thein helped with coordination at the International Rescue Committee to make this project possible. I owe profound thanks to Chotayaporn Higashi whose house we turned into an office, who assisted with research and translation, and who shared her knowledge about the history of the borderlands. I am thankful also to Klo Say Wah, Nu Nu, Shalom, and Saw George for their help with translation.

Dissertation research and writing was supported by a Dissertation Fellowship from the Boston College Graduate School of Arts and Sciences and a grant from the

Chapter 1—Introduction

1. The Intervention

Our truck drives past sites that have become familiar markers of Mae Sot's energetic center, this diverse town on the Thailand-Myanmar border: first the gate to the Buddhist monastery behind the main road where I see dogs asleep in the shade of the temple; then, amidst two-storey shops, a row of sagging wooden houses whose sloped roof-lines succumb to gravity; remnants of the old face of the town. Turning right, we pop out of an alley onto a hectic road in the Muslim quarter of downtown where the smells of sawdust from lumber yards stacked with milled teak mix with the sweetness of frying roti, motorbike and truck exhaust, and curries with rice noodles hawked from sidewalk stalls—scents devoid to us today as we sit in our air-conditioned truck insulated from the sounds, smells, and textures we pass. This way of seeing the town from behind the glass of the window makes me feel like a voyeur, turning the place and its people into objects for consumption and "enjoyment" (Benjamin 1998: 95). When we finally weave our way toward the edge of town, we emerge from the tightly packed and blocky concrete buildings of Mae Sot to roadside dirt lots zoned for construction, intermittent high-walled and windowless garment factories, open fields with goats eating grass and litter, and finally to our destination as we turn off the paved road onto a bumpy ridged track worn into existence by repeated use.

We arrive just outside the periphery of Mae Sot, pulling up in our Toyota Hilux bearing a USAID logo in front of the cluster of corrugated zinc and woven thatch houses where nearly 100 Burmese families live behind a set of oxen stables. This is the neighborhood known as Khok Kwai in Thai and Kyuwe Kyan in Burmese, which

translates in both languages to "buffalo enclosure." Despite being less than a five-minute drive from the heart of Mae Sot, Kyuwe Kyan could not be more outside the urban space, and hidden from the view of most residents. There is no road access, and, abutting rice fields, Kyuwe Kyan floods severely every rainy season; all houses are on stilts and the water rises from the ground to just below the floor. There are pieces of board serving as partial plank walkways, and residents who can afford them wear rubber boots to wade up to the main road. Dengue fever is a major problem here.

Rather than seeing this settlement as a contrast to the industrial border town of Mae Sot, it should be considered a product of the town's—and the country's—reliance on low wage and informal migrant labor. Mae Sot is illustrative of its place as a middle class town in Thailand, but it is riddled with informal settlements; houses made from found materials crowded into the lots of individual landowners or next to factories, usually behind walls or out of view from the main road. They are, in this sense, invisible slums maintained at low cost to supply the adjacent Thai households with domestic workers and factories with wage laborers. In this way, places like Kyuwe Kyan are both inside and outside the urban space of Mae Sot. They are "Third World" spaces constructed in a state attempting to achieve "First World" economic status (Arnold and Pickles 2011). There is something *ad hoc* in their informality, as if they sprung up spontaneously in otherwise empty locales. And yet, everything about these habitations is deliberate: they are often in enclosed spaces, their boundaries are the boundaries of the landlord or factory property, they are built or allowed to be built by landlords who cleared and leveled their land, and in many cases these settlements developed over time; Kyuwe Kyan, for example, has grown slowly over a twenty-year period.

Now, during the dry season, as we get out of the sterile environment of the truck, we are hit by all the senses against which we had been shielded: in the foreground is the cooked chemical smell of a slow-burning trash heap—two children are stoking the flames, sending up a pall of engulfing yellow smoke; behind them the heat muffles the sounds of the settlement, giving it an empty, faraway feeling.

Arriving in Kyuwe Kyan, we are stepping into "the field" where we will "mobilize the community" to take action on a village cleanup campaign migrants decided on during a "community health consultation" with the NGO the previous month. I am along for a ride as an observer with this NGO's health team, which aims to improve access to basic healthcare for dozens of migrant settlements like Kyuwe Kyan along the border; many on the outskirts of Mae Sot, near factories, behind warehouses, adjacent to fields, and others in rural areas in districts to the north and south. Working on my PhD research, I want to know more about this place, about how it and its inhabitants were both part of Mae Sot and also the signification of "other" space. Though our arrival lays bare my privilege and that of the NGO to conduct these visits and observations—to move about freely, to enter the settlement—I am interested in the ambivalence and discomfort of these moments or the lack thereof. We unload the supplies from the bed of the truck and carry everything to the side of one of Kyuwe Kyan's houses where a "community health volunteer" lives and where this NGO organizes its activities. Unsure of what to do, I watch as the staff and the volunteer put up a plastic banner with USAID's logo and the message "From the American People" in large print across the wall of the house. They open boxes and remove tins of cookies, twenty-liter trash bags, baskets, gloves, and face masks, which they array on a table we brought. Soon residents gather and a representative

from Mae Sot General Hospital begins an animated lecture in Thai about the importance of maintaining a clean neighborhood, which the community health volunteer translates into Burmese. There are about thirty people sitting or standing nearby, listening to this presentation; others peer through the open windows of their houses or continue with their household work, seemingly oblivious. Then residents and NGO staff take gloves, bags, and baskets and set off through the settlement collecting bits of garbage lining the pathways and stacked up under houses. The trash heap smolders in the near distance. After about an hour we load the filled bags and baskets onto our truck and drive off, stopping at the dump to unload the garbage and then we head back to the office. The community mobilization is finished for today.

Activities like the one described here raise a number of important questions that are at the center of this dissertation. For example, what do "community" and "mobilization" mean in this place that is, in so many ways, a site constructed out of dispossession, built to be a non-space? Settlements like Kyuwe Kyan and their residents are invisible in Mae Sot as a result of poverty, undocumented migrant status, informal sector livelihoods, and socially constructed gender, race, and religious identities. Wages for migrants are a fraction of the national minimum, the cost and effort of becoming registered—and thus, semi-legal—is prohibitive, and migrants work long hours on jobs considered dirty, dangerous, and degrading (Campbell 2013; Pearson and Kusakabe 2012a). Outside of the workplace, they face restricted movement, have a hard time accessing healthcare and the justice system, and are subject to deportation or abusive treatment by authorities if caught outside one's place of work (Pearson and Kusakabe

2013; Person *et al.* 2006). On top of this, they must contend with the widespread notion that such conditions are acceptable or appropriate for them.

However, for the same reasons that Kyuwe Kyan residents are invisible to many in Mae Sot, they are hyper-visible to NGOs working in this town as the targets of biopolitical intervention that aim to empower them, especially women, as healthy, safe, and responsible individuals. These apparent contradictions reflect, in fact, a point of intersection between the destruction wrought by flows of global capitalism, the legacy of colonial hierarchies, the practice of sovereignty, and the world of humanitarian affairs. As such, it is important to interrogate the relationship between the types of projects described here, implemented by some NGOs, and the relations of production on the border that have shaped the town into a variegated pattern of visible homes and invisible slums. This means looking at how all the enclosures, settlements, and labor camps that are home to thousands of Burmese migrants signify the multiplication of borders that produce and simultaneously erase difference, rearrange and fracture sovereignty, and impose hierarchies which place greater value on some lives than others, and that affix people to place and to labor in the most intimate ways.

This also means that it is crucial to ask how, amidst all of this, life in precarious spaces of dispossession goes on as subjectivities shift and migrants confront, interpret, and engage with these various imbricated sets of power relations. Illegality, the enforcement of unjust policies, exploitation, racialized and gendered discourse about migrants, disregard, restricted rights, and a slew of other practices and ideas all constitute a kind of violence that, when imposed on the migrant population's everyday lives, becomes a rendering force that reproduces status iteratively and performatively. The

differences of class, race, and gender that these encounters enforce are integral to defining the nature of dispossession and the relations of production. It is unequivocally the case that the special economic zone of Mae Sot is profitable because of the near-free laborers on whose backs it is built, a condition that exists by its rationalization as acceptable.[1] The gendered violence of constructing and maintaining an idea of a class of "disposable Third World women" to serve as flexible workers in outsourced care and domestic work, piece-rate sewing or weaving, and other forms of supply-chain production are instrumental aspects of labor's intensification, diversification, and heterogenization in a post-Fordist era (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013: 88; Wright 2006).

Moreover, flexible labor and the maintenance of precarious households are bound together with gendered definitions of work and the unequal burdens of social reproduction in a way that locates the contradictions of dispossession and capital accumulation in the home and family. While both men and women struggle in such contexts, on top of their role as flexible workers women often bear the extra burden of household maintenance and care imposed by patriarchal power structures (Hochschild and Machung 2012; Hochschild 1989; Kusakabe and Pearson 2010). At the same time, scholars find that these contexts often lead to crises of masculinity when it becomes impossible to live up to gendered standards related to the support of one's family, and when both men and women are subject to disempowering regimes of discipline in worksites and at the hands of authorities (Sinatti 2014; Walter *et al.* 2004). As the strain

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[1] As I note later in the dissertation, despite the prominence of the garment industry in Mae Sot, employers often complain of labor shortages as migrants often move from the border area to more central parts of Thailand where wages are higher and conditions are better. This has engendered severe efforts on the part of Thai security officials to prevent migrants from leaving the border area. This suggests that the garment sector's profitability hinges not only on low wages, but also on the willingness of local authorities to sometimes break the very laws they are mandated to uphold in order to restrict migrants' mobility.

of precarious labor confronts such structures, families often become the site of violence and conflict, which, in its own way, furthers certain notions of gender identity and disregards or subverts others (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Messner 1994; Kabachnik *et al*. 2013). It is in this way that dispossession relates to a process of identity materialization and de-materialization through the multiple overlapping layers of difference imposed on migrants (Butler and Athanasiou 2013).

This dissertation is concerned with these processes of subject-formation as it looks at how precarity is reproduced and how social actors negotiate the overlapping forces of dispossession, political exclusion, humanitarian intervention, and capital accumulation. Concerned with the productive power of gender and violence in such contexts, I ask in particular how migrants' discourse linked to displacement, violence, and the resolution of interpersonal conflict on the border leads to the production of gendered political subjectivities and particular social forms that do not always conform to dominant power structures. This is to focus outside the workplace, in migrant labor camps, informal settlements, and urban neighborhoods where migrants must navigate the myriad forms of violence outlined above, violence that is produced and reproduced in the assertion of dominant meanings of dispossession, exile, and flexible labor. It is also to look reflexively at how, as a researcher and as somebody affiliated with humanitarian NGOs, my work, and the work of my colleagues is implicated in all this. I struggle with my goal of acting in solidarity with participants and the reality of producing and reproducing certain gendered and racialized knowledges of research participants/service users and their social problems. I interrogate this contradiction to enrich and deepen this dissertation's analysis.

Basing my question on the idea of gender and dispossession as productive forces reflects a phenomenological and constructivist notion that people employ certain knowledges that have become available to them through their experiences or the inheritance of the collective experience of those by whom they are influenced (Scheutz 1953). Also key here is Butler's (1988) concept of performativity, which argues that identities and perceptions of reality are reproduced through the iterative repetition of discourse, practice, and affect. Implied in both ideas is the complexity of relations in which assemblages of domination and resistance are never fixed but are contingent and always in flux. Thus, in one sense, this dissertation is about how a sample of people who have been uprooted from their homes in Myanmar develop ways to survive the hostile conditions of the Thailand-Myanmar border that are outside but linked to the normative juridical and social-political structures of power. Yet it is also just as much about the generative qualities of violent and precarious life, the spaces in which agency challenges precarity, and the ways in which performatively reproduced gendered hierarchies are at the center of both precarity and resistance. This is to suggest that dispossession does not always necessarily lead to more dispossession, but can and does lead to something alternative, and possibly resistive in a way that offers a "future that is…not the invention of…empires, hegemonic or subaltern" (Mignolo and Tlostanova 2006: 209).

2. Borders, production, and gendered subjectivation

In addressing this set of questions, this dissertation makes contributions to the study of displacement and scholarship on the intersection and interconnectivity of capitalism and gendered subjectivities. This approach brings together work that tends to focus on structural and systemic forces linked to space and capital on the one hand, and

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the practice and discourse of individual interaction and knowledge construction, on the other. Helping to tie these elements together is this dissertation's methodology. Guided by the principles of Participatory Action Research, I reflexively put the social forces of the Thailand-Myanmar border into conversation with dynamics of knowledge construction that resonate between multiple situated representations of the local and global.

2.1 Governance and spaces of capital accumulation in a context of displacement

Henri Lefebvre's (1991) assertion that space and power relations are mutually constitutive provides an important link in this study between work on the uneven geographical development of capitalism (Harvey 2006; Smith 2008) and the production and reproduction of particular relational assemblages and technologies of governance in certain locales and not others. This relates to Aihwa Ong's (2000, 2006) concepts of graduated sovereignty and graduated citizenship; terms that describe shifts in the relationship between states, territory, governance, and subjects in ways that correspond to the global market dynamics of advanced capitalism. That is, as part of a neoliberal trend characterized by financialization and capital mobility, privatization, the imposition of economic rationality in everyday life, and the dwindling of the public sector, certain spaces and certain groups of people are exposed to regimes of discipline that reflect a grouping of state and supra-state market forces. As Ong (2006) points out, these regimes are gendered and racialized in that they assert ideas about ethnicity, femininity, and masculinity within the scope of production. In fact, notions about gender in terms of production are part of what determines the nature of reterritorialization and variegated categories of belonging. Spatialized power relations of capitalism and Foucault's (2008)

notion of biopolitics come together to form particular regimes of discipline to manage the care and productivity of workers and their families. While graduated sovereignty and biopolitics are symptoms of advanced capitalism that arise heterogeneously in many forms throughout the world—from the elite spaces of technological expertise to labor-intensive export processing zones—I focus in particular on the types of gendered governance found in sites rendered productive through acts of destruction and dispossession (Harvey 2003; Banerjee-Guha 2010). Such locales represent the sites for the production and distortion of social and political borders.

This dissertation builds off of and departs from this set of concepts in that I look at graduated sovereignties and citizenship as not only relating to arrangements between the state and the market, but as contingent with the personal and collective agency of migrants as well as the racialized conceptions linked to the idea of the nation. I show how, historically, the political, and geographical formation of the Thailand-Myanmar border area constitutes a space that is integral to the imaginary of both countries, but whose perennially peripheral status also renders it a zone of exception in many ways where the law is applied differently. I show how the contemporary practices on the border linked to governance and production stem from these spatial arrangements but also further shape this space as one of violence and precarity for Burmese migrant workers there. In addition to, and interconnected with, the force relations of production and state-making, my research also points to the importance of social, political, and religious networks for migrants that extend across official boundaries. In the borderlands, migrant workers are not only subjects of market-oriented discipline by state security officials or factory managers. The extent to which Mae Sot and surrounding areas are

spaces of exception and exclusion allows for a proliferation of multiple overlapping and fragmented forms of sovereignty. These correspond to networks of power rooted in local communities, migrants' semi-autonomous places of origin, and global circuits of discourse. Like the dynamics of production on the border, these non-market and non-state order-making systems advance their own gendered and racialized ideas that interact in their own ways with the demands of production and social reproduction. Thus, this dissertation argues that migrant agency and the kinds of social capital which derive from mobility are just as important to consider as the dynamics of market-oriented discipline when analyzing subjectivation in borderland special economic zones.

2.2 Discourses of dispossession and gendered subjectivities

This dissertation also builds on scholarship concerned with how social actors make meaning of conflict and violence, and what this says about the experiences of dispossession, migration, and precarity. I approach this line of inquiry both theoretically and methodologically. In terms of the latter, having collected and analyzed data through a collaborative action research project with Burmese migrant rights' activists in Mae Sot, I look at the overlapping mechanisms of knowledge production about gendered migrant identities in our assessment, the discourse of the activists involved, and my own assumptions. This method pushed me to both think with and about co-researchers and participants as well as about my own role in this study in an attempt to interrogate the role of scholarship on dispossession in migrants' efforts to survive and negotiate a precarious environment (e.g., Jacobsen and Landau 2003). What this means is multiple levels of analysis: co-researchers and I looked at and discussed data as we collected it; I facilitated an interpretive focus group discussion with co-researchers and other activists

on the border; and finally, I stepped outside of the collaborative process to apply my own constructivist analysis of both the data we collected together as well as the first two analytical layers in order to tease forth a sense of how our joint project generated discourse in its own right. By looking at multiple layers of meaning making, I suggest that it is possible to focus on the interstices between the individual and collective construction of knowledge.

Conceptually, this work aspires to Mignolo's (2000) notion of "critical border thinking" in its analysis of how migrants negotiate their experience with dispossession in ways that appropriate and redefine local and transnational marginalizing discourses. I locate this act of negotiation within migrants' narratives about displacement, order-making, violence (both structural and interpersonal), and the resolution of social conflict. Within discussions about such experiences and practices, I find the performative reproduction of gendered subjectivities and the use of particular gendered tropes to make sense of everyday life and the challenges of dispossession. This perspective builds on the writings of Judith Butler (1990) on the production of the gendered subject and her work with Athena Athanasiou (2013), which explores how precarity and dispossession are conditions reproduced iteratively through discourse and practice.

When I write subjectivities, I am referring to interactions between power and the self. This ascribes to a relational notion of power that infuses everyday life in a way that affixes the self and gives it definition as an individual with particular attributes vis-à-vis others, discourse, the state, and the market (Foucault 1982). Subjectivity is a fluid concept that engages with, constitutes, and is constituted by discursive constructs that appear to be static, such that one emerges as a woman or a man in ways that give

meaning to sex and femininity and masculinity; or one emerges as a migrant in ways that frame certain types of violent experiences as a natural part of what it means to be on the move. To Butler, who infuses psychoanalytics with a relational conception of power, subjectivation is a paradoxical and ambivalent process. The subject is iteratively produced from amidst a diverse field of possibilities in ways that are mediated by expectations rooted in social relations and discourse. This means that the characteristics that define individuals are not inherent, but arise through struggle and the assertion of certain qualities, truths, identities, and the subordination of others. Subjectivation, then, is just as much about foreclosure as it is about agency, and both occur in conflict simultaneously and performatively through repetitious acts of definition and self-definition (Butler 1997). Subordination is a form of power that presses onto a subject in the process of its forming, meaning that, as Butler (1997: 198) puts it, "The power imposed upon one is the power that animates one's emergence." To her, "there appears to be no escaping this ambivalence." To the extent that all individuals embody this conflict, the study of how issues like violence, migration, borders, and labor intersect with gender on the level of subjectivity is to engage in an analysis of how the particular power relations bound up in these processes and concepts push individuals and collectivities to consider themselves and struggle with diverse notions of how to live life (Anderson *et al.* 2009; Das 2008; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013; Ong and Peletz 1995). Importantly, Butler and Athanasiou look to these moments of ambivalence in the performative reproduction of the subject when it becomes possible to subvert and oppose the relations of domination in ways that do not privilege narrow interpretations of identity. In this context, these moments of diverting the discursive power of precarious production and biopolitical

governance constitute the kinds of semi-purposeful resistive subaltern acts described by de Certeau (1984) when he refers to "tactics."

While this dissertation builds on these ideas, it complicates them by asking how the production of alternative subjectivities on the border for Burmese migrants can lead to modes of social organization that are outside the dominant market-state regimes of discipline but that nevertheless constrain migrant identities in gendered ways. That is, even as some migrants in this context organize to oppose their precarity and to restore and rethread some of the social fabric torn through displacement, their discourse may reify in its own way gender and gendered ideas of migration and survival in exile. Similarly, I point to an ambivalent role for humanitarian intervention on the border, asking whether international and grassroots NGOs engage with local and transnational movements for political transformation; reproduce discourses of biopolitical self-regulation; challenge dominant notions of femininity, masculinity, and sexuality; or all of the above. I ask what ideas about migrants, gender, and culture underlie these interventions and how migrants interpret and make use of these notions in their self-conception and everyday struggles to make order and get by.

As this brief description shows, my work contributes to multiple fields within the discipline of sociology, including the study of capitalism, development, gender and sexuality, and inequality and mobility. It also brings new perspectives to scholarship on the performative dynamics of social space, processes that transform the abstractions of global space into a phenomenology of lived place. Indeed, bringing these fields of study into conversation with one another is one of the strengths of this work. Outside of sociology, this dissertation brings new perspectives to scholars exploring the experiences

of displacement and to those interested in how dispossession, the law, and transnational struggles for rights intersect to limit or enable subaltern social movements.

3. Locating the study of migration, supply chains, and gender production on the Thailand-Myanmar border

This dissertation focuses on the town of Mae Sot and the agricultural district to the south, Phob Phra, making comparisons between migrants' experiences in urban and rural settings. As the next chapter explains in more detail, the town of Mae Sot, in the district of the same name, lies about four kilometers from the Thailand-Myanmar boundary and is the largest city in Tak Province as well as on the border (see Map 1).

Map 1: Mae Sot and Phob Phra Districts, Tak Province

While much research has been done on migration and labor issues in Mae Sot (see for example, Arnold and Hewison 2006; Aung 2010; Campbell 2013; Pearson and Kusakabe 2012; Pollock and Aung 2010; Saltsman 2014), few studies mention Phob Phra, despite the fact that this district is an example of Thailand's industrialized agricultural sector, a source of highland products as well as cut flowers. Mae Sot's status as a zone plugged into regional and global production circuits makes it an attractive site for research on the dynamics of capital accumulation and flexible labor, but no studies have compared the extent to which the power relations and disciplinary regimes associated with the export processing industry there are unique to this zone of multinational investment and activity,

and what their relations are with nearby areas "outside" transnational production networks. Though the difference in experiences migrants have in rural and urban areas along the border does not constitute the main argument of the dissertation, the comparison helps to situate the findings in broader discussions about the political economy of borderlands.

To place this dissertation's focus into perspective, scholarship as well as policy tends to analytically divide the population of Burmese displaced in Thailand into two categories: refugees or displaced persons (primarily residents of nine camps along the Thai side of the border) and people on the move for primarily economic reasons who live in Thailand's rural and urban areas (Brees 2009; Grundy-Warr and Wong 2002; Saltsman 2014). The category of refugee typically corresponds to rural upland populations of southeastern Myanmar displaced by conflict as well as those fleeing state persecution, often from more urban areas (Sciortino and Punpuing 2009; Lang 2002). The category of economic migrant refers to those Burmese people who have moved to Thailand over the last thirty years in search of opportunity (Rabibhadana and Hayami 2013). Based on the lived experiences of all those leaving Myanmar, the distinction between refugee and migrant is essentially a construct in that economic reasons cannot be unlinked from the broader effects of militarism and war (Caouette and Pack 2002; Green *et al.* 2008). Nevertheless, the ideal type categories are important to enumerate here as they play a role in the discourse about migration on the border.[2]

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[2] Making comparisons between migrants and camp-based refugees has become increasingly prevalent in literature on forced migration, as scholars articulate the importance of urban spaces in terms of protection, economic opportunity, access to social networks, and new ways of articulating the relationship between forced migrants, the state, the host population, and the growing numbers of urban poor (Jacobsen 2006; Agier 2002; Malkki 1995).

This dissertation is also deliberate about centering the border as a place of study, albeit one that is not isolated, but linked in and connected to territories, populations, and relations of power at disparate points around the globe. Borders between visibility and invisibility, exclusion and inclusion, and disposability and valued life are to be found not only on the physical boundaries of states, but in every corner of their territories in the form of affect, discourse, and interaction (Agamben 1998; Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). Nevertheless, while the significance of some geographic boundaries is downplayed (states within the EU, for example), others reflect the gathering point of many of today's figurative borders. These constitute manifestations of states' policies and attitudes regarding the edges of their bounded and imagined communities (Anderson 1991). They are places of beginning and ending; where nations cease to be nations or are called into being (Thongchai 2003). As a result, the borderlands are where a plethora of border-related subjectivities and practices coalesce and confront one another. They are the territories to which states and private firms look to tuck "third world" production sites out of view; where refugee camps are built alongside "off-the-grid" labor camps and factories. They are the spaces in which multiple identities—racial, class, gender/sexuality, national, and ethnic—are made and contested (Balibar 2002). Because it is here that migrants' daily discrete crossings back and forth between countries destabilize notions of state boundaries as the parameters of "national/regional culture," these are also the loci where security forces gather to articulate and defend these ideas.

On top of all this, borderlands are significant because they are spaces that are at once liminal and generative of subjectivities that challenge dominant or normative notions of identity and belonging (Lamont and Melnár 2002; Téllez 2008). The

"creolization" or mestiza identities of borderlands suggests an assertion of identity from the cracks of state and imperial homogenization, an exertion of the double-consciousness that arises from subjectivation in the imbricated space between subjugated and dominant histories (Anzaldua 1987). The goal then is not to write about practices on the border but to "think from the borders themselves" to rewrite "geographic frontiers, imperial/colonial subjectivities and territorial epistemologies" (Mignolo and Tlostanova 2006: 214). Discourse and practice related to inclusion, exclusion, recognition, and dispossession on borders make visible broader practices related to how states, markets, individuals, and collectivities are engaged in an ongoing process of determining hierarchies of subjecthood. The sites where this research was conducted, introduced below, represent these sorts of locales where multiple borders meet, overlap, and confront one another. While the following chapters contain further details that convey some idea about migrants' experiences in these sites, I briefly mention some basic points here.

Map 2: Mae Sot research sites
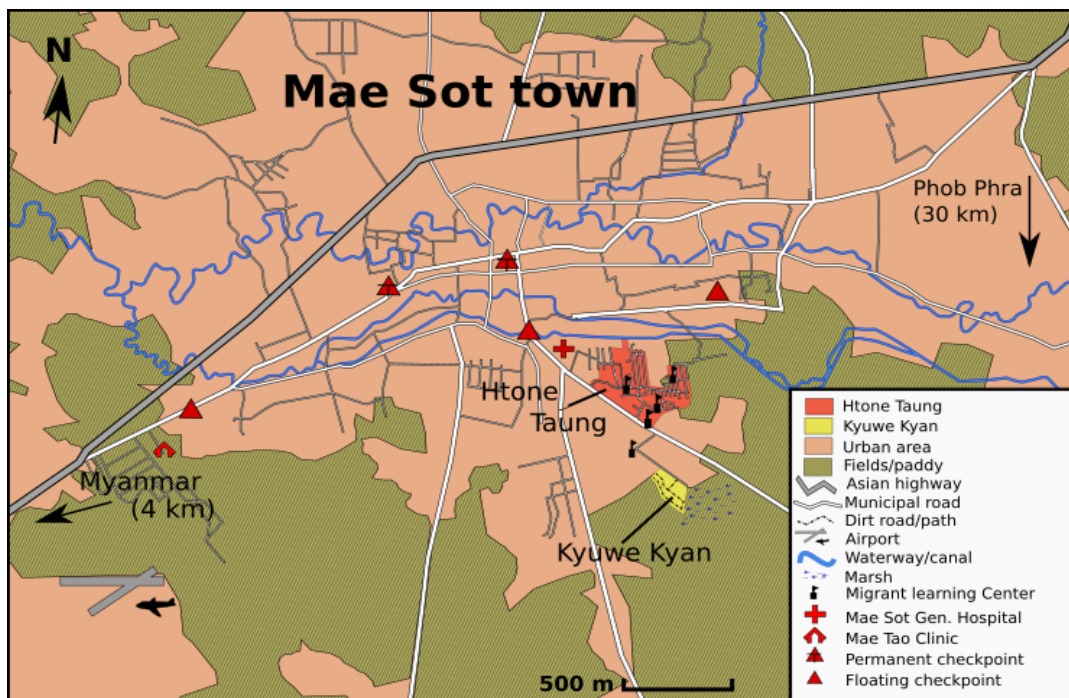
3.1 Htone Taung (Map 2)

Situated behind Mae Sot General Hospital, this dense urban neighborhood consists of several blocks, some of which are further divided into communities, like Ya Mar Kin, Medina, and Wat Luang, colloquial names that mostly refer to landmarks such as factories, temples, and mosques. There is a great diversity of housing in this section, including two-storey concrete structures and single-floor row-houses with small and long apartments divided into two or three rooms. There are also clusters of houses made from found materials, thatch, zinc and/or bamboo. The streets are narrow here and alternate from organized blocks to winding alleys. Despite being made up of many blocks and despite the fact that there are no walls or gates closing off the neighborhood, there are only three roads to get into or out of Htone Taung. In this sense, the place feels bounded with a distinct inside and outside. The back of the community abuts rice paddy and forms part of the outer edge of Mae Sot town. The fact that one can step out from the last alley

Photo 1: Houses in Htone Taung

of Htone Taung into fields is a reminder that this neighborhood is on the periphery, though the heart of the place feels urban, albeit separated from the downtown area by the hospital and the layout of roads.

NGOs in Mae Sot estimate that approximately 2,500-3,000 Burmese people live here, though one group asserts the figure is closer to 4,000. An unknown number of these migrants are without legal status in Thailand. The most populous site in this study, Htone Taung, is also the most diverse with many different ethnic and religious groups from Myanmar living there. In some areas, particularly the more upscale, the Burmese

population shares space with Thai residents. The smaller community within this neighborhood known as Medina is primarily Muslim and, as chapter five shows, with a mosque and an imam, is connected to the Muslim council of Mae Sot, a Thai organization. There are also several migrant learning centers and grassroots organizations, including Social Action for Women, one organization involved in this study. Together, these institutions give the neighborhood a feeling of vibrancy as an organized but varied set of spaces and peoples. That said, the many lines of difference here serve as a reminder that assigning the term "community" to Htone Taung is an arbitrary endeavor that is ignorant at best and risks subjugating certain voices. This is not one single group of people, but many crammed together. Keeping this in mind, I do not consider the place to be an analytical unit by itself. Rather I rely on findings from Htone Taung as part of an urban sample, together with Kyuwe Kyan.

3.2 Kyuwe Kyan (Map 2)

Kwye Kyan, already introduced at the start of this chapter, is a group of approximately eighty-six houses behind a buffalo stable situated on the southeastern edge of Mae Sot (the number of houses fluctuates slightly) (see Map 2 shown above). In front of the neighborhood are private homes and factories divided by streets and alleys that eventually lead to the heart of the city. One of these houses is a large two-storey villa belonging to a junior police officer. Its high-walled perimeter, which blocks both the officer's family from seeing Kwye Kyan and the

Photo 2: Police officer's home near Kyuwe Kyan

latter's residents from accessing the property, is symbolic of Mae Sot's relationship with this informal settlement.

Everything about this site defines it as peripheral in relation to the space and people of Mae Sot. Geographically, two sides of the settlement border wetlands, rice paddies, and cornfields, which extend to outlying villages and eventually the highway. In appearance, Kwye Kyan contrasts the concrete organized structures of Mae Sot with less permanent construction. Unlike Htone Taung, which is tapped into Mae Sot's power and water grid, Kyuwe Kyan has no running water and gets its electricity from a spliced wire hooked up to the landlord's house nearby. While Htone Taung reflects a more recognized segment of Mae Sot's Burmese population—with many working in factories—Kyuwe Kyan residents tend to work in those sectors which are invisible to most of the town; livelihood practices linked to waste picking and sorting. On an additional level, residents of Kyuwe Kyan, who are generally darker and poorer than other residents of Mae Sot, including the Burmese population, are subject to the place's racialized hierarchies that render them alien among a broader population of alien others.

Photo 3: Kyuwe Kyan in the background

All these factors render Kwye Kyan an undesirable place, a slum on the edge of town to be regarded suspiciously by those who are aware of it. Though the owner of the property on which Kyuwe Kyan sits is a middle class Thai man who raises and sells buffalo and has been renting out the space to these Burmese Muslim migrants for more than fifteen years, authorities look to the place and its estimated 400 mostly

undocumented residents as prone to crime and drug addiction. They are a minority within Mae Sot's minority, a factor that, as subsequent chapters show, manifests itself in particular types of discourses, interventions, and discipline.

3.3 Pyaung Gyi Win and Rim Nam (Map 3)

Not far from the Mae Sot-Phob Phra highway, close to the forty-two kilometer marker, one finds this collection of labor camps adjacent to one another. One site is a compound with high walls and dozens of migrant households set apart from the landlord's house. The place next to it consists of rows of thatch, corrugated zinc, and bamboo huts on land cut out of a cornfield, giving the impression of a temporary labor camp, one that exists today and can be erased tomorrow. Indeed, a fire swept through this part of the settlement in 2012, burning down an NGO's health post and several houses.

Photo 4: Pyaung Gyi Win (left) & Rim Nam (right)

These sites go by different names; different organizations refer to the whole area as KM42 (such as the International Rescue Committee, which only works in the compound) while others call the labor camp in the cornfields KM44 and refer to the compound as Pyaung Gyi Win. The latter literally means "baldie's land" in Burmese, an example of a widespread trend among workers to give nicknames to worksites like farms and factories. Part of the reason for the difference in names is that the owner of Pyaung Gyi Win lives in the village that corresponds to KM42 while the labor camp adjacent to the compound

has an owner that lives in KM44 village. Nearby these labor camps are Hmong and Meo households, ethnic minority groups in Thailand that moved into this particular area in the last thirty years from other highland parts of the country.

Though these settlements are close to the highway, they feel isolated because they

Map 3: Phop Phra research sites
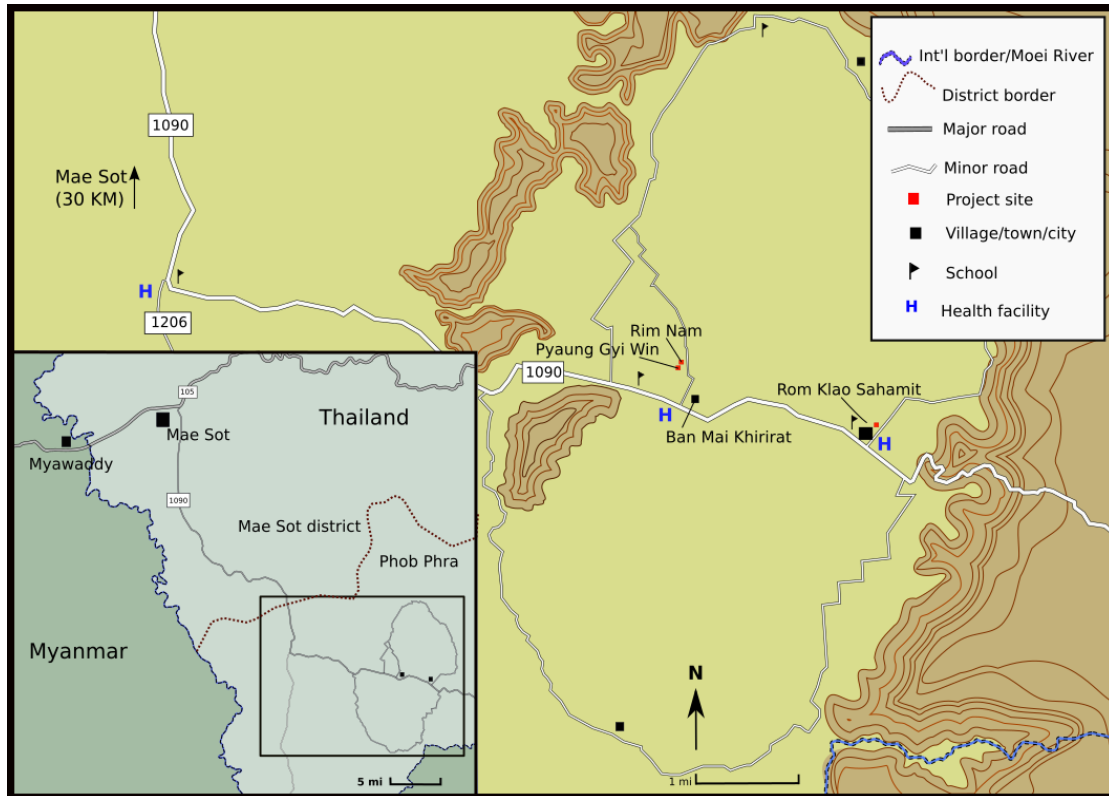
are on employers' properties and are not part of any town or village. That is, when a migrant needs to go to a market or some other facility, such as a school or health clinic, she or he must first traverse others' land and must then walk at least two or three kilometers on a dirt road to the highway. There is limited sanitation and no running water here. In the labor camp in the cornfields, there is limited electricity. Only a few houses have small wires that lead off from the farm through their roofs. In front of each house is a small wooden frame where residents can garden or hang their laundry. Despite the

temporary appearance, a Burmese community leader living in the KM44 labor camp

reports that he is familiar with migrants who have lived on or around that land for more

than twenty years, since the early to mid-1990s. Between the two sites of Pyaung Gyi

Win and KM44's labor camp, "Rim Nam," it is believed that there are approximately

1,000 Burmese migrant workers, though there is no precise number. The International

Rescue Committee counts only 272 in the Pyaung Gyi Win compound while a

community leader from the KM44 labor camp (Rim Nam) estimates that there are 1,000-

1,500 in his area as well as migrant housing on the other side of the road. There are

religious and ethnic differences in these sites, with many residents identifying as

Christian or Buddhist, though, as noted elsewhere, this study did not inquire about

participants' religious and ethnic identities in order to ensure a more comfortable

interview setting.

3.4 Kilometer 48 (Romklao Sahamit) (Map 3)

Colloquially, residents refer to this village as KM48 or even just 48, which

translates to *See-Sib Bet* in Thai or *Leh Sey Shit* in Burmese. However, the official Thai

name of KM48, *Romklao Sahamit*, which translates to "under the protection of the king,"

communicates something of this place's involvement in the Thai government's efforts to

secure the borderlands in the late 20th century. I outline this history in the next chapter,

but it is worth noting here that the diverse population of this village stems from

Thailand's anti-communist counter-insurgency campaigns in the 1970s and 1980s. The

former head of the village, until his death, had been a militia commander with one of

Thailand's paramilitary groups. In this sense, KM48 represents the many layers of social

dislocation and violence that gives Phob Phra the topographical and demographic contours it has today.

KM48, as the name suggests, is forty-eight kilometers from Mae Sot. It is also only six kilometers from the border with Myanmar. However, there is no official border crossing here; the international boundary is the Moei River and is minimally enforced in Phob Phra. KM48 is a hub for all the agriculture along a fifteen-kilometer stretch of the highway. It is larger and has a more centralized character than most of the other villages along the road with actual blocks divided by fifteen different *soi*, or alleys, the smaller of which are dirt, and the larger of which are paved. The village extends behind a large wooden arch with the official Thai name written in gold-painted letters. Leading into the community from here, along the main stretch of road, there is a small market, a few restaurants, and rows of shops selling farm equipment. Farmers and workers from a number of villages on a back road off the highway come to KM48 regularly for gas or to make purchases. This includes people from Pyaung Gyi Win / Rim Nam which is only six kilometers away.

Divided as it is into blocks, KM48 does not have the same feel as Pyaung Gyi Win / Rim Nam just down the road. It is less isolated and more crowded with a number of different enclosures and a high diversity of ethnic groups and languages spoken here, part of the place's history. The majority of residents in KM48 are immigrants who have permanent status as ethnic minorities in Thailand. Migrants typically live with owners in their enclosures, sometimes working for those landlords as farmhands or domestic workers, or they just rent the space from these landlords and travel to nearby farms to do agricultural work. As a result of this layout, one cannot talk about a single community of

migrant workers. Migrants' situations vary greatly depending on their relationship with their landlord or employer, the size of their compound, the number of workers living together, and the housing conditions in enclosures.

Population estimates vary depending on the part of the village to which participants are referring, though NGOs and local government guess that there are around 1,500 to 2,000 Burmese people in the KM48 area. Other participants referred to the specific population of Burmese in the lane or alley on which they live. For example, participants identified seventy Burmese houses on lane four, in different properties, fifty houses on lane five, forty houses on lane six, and eleven houses on lane seven.

Between February 2013 and February 2014, co-researchers and I visited these sites in Phob Phra and Mae Sot numerous times. Though some researchers were quite familiar with residents in certain communities because of activities run by their NGOs, we were all constantly negotiating different levels of outsider and insider status, a topic I pick up in chapter three. Nevertheless, the data we collected for our assessment—and for this dissertation—was to design specific service and advocacy activities and, even as this dissertation is finished and I am no longer on the border, the activists that were involved in this study continue to maintain relationships and connections in the places where we conducted our research.

4. Questioning the boundaries of the "field"

Writing about migrant communities comes with enormous risks of essentializing and fetishizing both people and landscape in a way that reproduces hierarchies of difference. To write "from the borders" as Mignolo and Tslostanova (2006) direct is to engage in a form of methodological and analytical praxis; to move iteratively between

reflexive interrogation and dialogic analysis in a way that de-centers reifying conceptual frameworks (Cornwall and Molyneux 2006). Though this dissertation is not an ethnography, I was in many ways a participant observer. Always negotiating my place in an activist-scholar spectrum, I conducted the research for this study while affiliated with various organizations. To carry out the collaborative assessment that makes up a significant portion of this dissertation's data, I worked with six local NGOs (five of which are unregistered, and thus officially illegal in Thailand) and two international NGOs; one of the latter funded the project and provided logistical support. Earlier, I was a consultant with an international human rights NGO doing research on Thailand's refugee policy, and at another point I volunteered with a local unregistered Burmese community organization to help them secure funding for their projects. Not only did these experiences pull me in various directions according to the agendas of the groups with whom I worked, but they created opportunities to explore the ways that power and privilege intersected in various venues to reproduce dialectics between different forms of knowledge.

Though my language abilities (English and Thai but not Burmese), my nationality, and appearance (white, North American male), and many other aspects of my background—including class and professional/academic experience—render me an outsider in the communities of Mae Sot (Burmese, Thai, and others), this is also a town in which I have spent more than two years on and off during a period of more than half a decade. This means I have established friendly and professional relationships within multiple communities, including Burmese activists, Thai activists, Thai NGO staff, Thai academics, and foreign aid workers. It also means that I was attempting to work in

solidarity with migrant rights groups (in the way that I could without Burmese language abilities). These factors, together with the collaborative nature of the study did not, of course, make me an insider, but instead revealed the extent to which even supposed "insiders" were "outsiders," a comment on the many lines of division piercing this town and its population. In addition, my work there meant that I was somebody embedded in local power relations, albeit with a critical perspective. I do not write this as evidence of "access" to participant communities. Rather, if anything, I am implicated in the very processes that I analyze and critique in this dissertation. The discourse I examine in the following chapters includes that which I myself helped produce and circulate, only sometimes wittingly. This is what I mean by participant observer. However, instead of seeing this as a limitation, I read in my position the inevitable partiality that any study brings. And I have used this reflexivity to broaden my scholarly lens to include in the analysis my work, the work of my colleagues, and the transnational and institutional knowledges we both represent and with which we grapple. As well, being a participant observer means that the questions guiding this dissertation come not only from the dozens of hours of taped interviews, but also from hundreds of informal conversations, shared moments of solidarity, and observations made over an extended period.

5. Dissertation outline

To address this dissertation's questions and weave together the various conceptual threads discussed above, each chapter deals with a different aspect of how practice and discourse in this context link to the process of subjectivation. I move in the next chapter towards a discussion of space, its construction, and its capacity to generate particular social relations. Chapter two focuses on the development of the border space through the

discussion of three significant historical epochs: prior to the colonial era, the period of modernity and colonial rule, and the late twentieth century's transition to globalized neoliberal capitalism. Each of these moments contributed to the construction of racialized and gendered notions of geographic difference that today designates the borderlands as marginal, wild, and lawless; and its "non-Thai" inhabitants as outsiders. The role of the borderlands as a place of exile, refuge, social dislocation, and smuggling/trafficking stems from this discursive and material construction and also fuels the iterative reproduction of power structures that influence the lives of migrants living and working there.

Thus, rather than outlining a detailed history of the region, the chapter is more concerned with looking at the production and reproduction of discourse that labels the border as a space that is simultaneously outside the imagined community of Thailand and in need of control. During the years prior to colonialism, the production of difference adhered to geographic and topographic distinctions between lowland polities and highland peoples. This was a categorization that hardened into binaries during the colonial era when the British (in what was then Burma) and the monarchy and principalities of Siam asserted ideas of nation founded on territory and racial difference. Simultaneously, the border at this time was constructed as a frontier space rich with resources to be claimed and exploited by imperial or state powers. This duality—physical territory to be controlled and a peripheral, alien, population within national boundaries— not only defined the nation and national identity but instilled in people and places the makings of borders between inclusion and exclusion. Subsequent eras in both Myanmar and Thailand involving insurgency and counter insurgency, smuggling, displacement (of

people into and within Thailand), social dislocation, and development all reproduced this

contradictory relationship in their own way, and often in subtly gendered terms. This

includes the Cold War and anti-colonial struggles in Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos,

which sent initial waves of refugees into Thailand in the 1970s and 1980s. More recently,

market and government reforms as well as economic crisis further transformed the border

area, capitalizing on the history of marginality, alienation, and gendered narratives of

management, profitability, and resource extraction. Moving through history in this way, I

show that the violence of the border, migrants' responses, and the gendered political

subjectivities which emerge in this space are related to not only the more recent dynamics

of advanced capitalism, but also to the role of the borderlands in the national imaginaries

of Thailand and Myanmar.

In chapter three, I outline and interrogate the dissertation's methodology by

looking at the issue of representation and voice in the research process and tying this into

a broader conversation about conceiving of gender violence and community in contexts

of displacement. I start by presenting a conceptual framework of power, knowledge, and

Participatory Action Research that forms the foundation of this dissertation's methods.

This includes looking at the difference between experiential local and expert institutional

knowledges, and the types of power relations that lead to their circulation, reproduction,

or supression (Smith 1990). An important concept for this dissertation that I introduce

here is the Foucauldian notion that identities and knowledges are embedded in power

relations to the extent that some ideas are privileged as normal and valid, emerging as

dominant, whereas others are considered biased, emotional, invalid, and are thus regarded

as inferior. I emphasize, though, the haunting nature of those submerged knowledges or

voices; they take on what Gordon (2008) calls a "ghostly nature," exerting an influence from a place of invisibility.

I also provide a detailed description of the specific methods relied on in this study, which include a collaborative action research project employing qualitative data collection strategies and a multi-layered analysis, as mentioned above. The design of the methods strove to privilege ideas that arose from a forum of knowledge production in which Burmese migrant rights activists and I engaged with one another's interpretations of gender violence and humanitarian intervention on the border. However, I point out that within this research approach there emerged important lines of difference and hierarchy worth examining for what they say about the interplay between local/experiential and expert knowledges and how this affects the lives of those migrant workers our collaborative action research project aimed to support.

Chapter four takes these subtle discursive expressions of power and places them on a continuum with some of the more material constraints placed on migrants' lives that one finds on the border. I rely on concepts of structural violence and precarity, which help frame the uncertainty, insecurity, discrimination, and exploitative conditions of migrants' lives on the Thailand-Myanmar border. I show that these less visible forms of violence are part of what makes the migrant population flexible and deportable in the eyes of many, and also forms an important context for any analysis of more conspicuous forms of violence among individuals and collectivities.

Having laid out these ideas, I look at the development of migrant policy in Thailand and the ways that this supports the establishment of a population of registered but illegal migrant workers (and a larger group of migrants who are altogether

undocumented); a set of laws and policies built to protect a notion of Thai-ness, attract foreign direct investment, and keep Thailand competitive in an economic era of mobile capital. Beyond these institutional mechanisms, though, I show that what places the greatest constraints on the migrant population is the symbolic and invisible violence of these policies. By this I mean the ideas about worth and humanity conveyed by a lack of rights, and the ways that the meaning of these policies enters into the interactions among migrants, authorities, employers, and other actors. These interactions inscribe the violence of precarious status onto the bodies of migrants in gendered ways and erect barriers that narrow the set of choices they have for determining how to survive and make ends meet. It is in this way that the precarity of the border plays a role in migrants' gendered subjectivation. As Farmer (2004) reminds us, the most nefarious side of this structural violence is its power of erasure, to naturalize and render the subordinate status of illegal others seemingly inevitable.

In chapter five, I begin to consider some of the ways that migrants on the Thailand-Myanmar border respond to the subaltern status imposed on them through a variety of mechanisms that support a parallel set of social structures. I note that these informal institutions are built on migrant social and political networks that extend across boundaries, multiplying the borders of migrants' lives, and offering subjectivities that are linked to the dominant power relations of state and market, but not bound by these dynamics. I look in particular at the informal systems migrants encounter and on which they rely to make order, keep peace, and resolve interpersonal conflicts, especially those related to intimate partner violence. In a place where both state and market practices are, in many ways, built on certain notions of gender, looking at intimate partner conflicts and

their resolution reveals important areas to see both how borderland precarity produces gender and how gender as a concept is embedded in migrants' tactics for negotiating that precarity.

I devote the first half of the chapter to an analysis of the networks and informal systems used to solve disputes in both rural and urban parts of the border. I consider the ways these networks are rooted in the border's history, as noted in chapter two, but how they also interact with the demands of flexible labor routines, and navigate the constraints imposed via the systems and institutions of enforced deportability. I also look at how these technologies of governance, together with the living and working conditions migrants face, result in certain forms of self-regulation and discipline in ways that reflect a neoliberal withdrawal of the state. However, while it is the case that this is coupled with an augmented role for private firms in the management of workers' lives, this chapter suggests that sources of ordering are more diverse, stemming from multiple locations, including those developed out of migrants' own social and political networks that are informed by but not yoked to the relations of production.

In the second part of the chapter, I look to the discursive and gendered overtones of these alternative modes of governance. By analyzing the narratives of mediators and leaders who come from migrant communities, I consider the importance of gendered ethical and religious tropes. These authorities rely on such discourse to make order, but at the same time, their language serves to make meaning of the experience of displacement and to provide some indication as to how they think migrants need to act in order to survive such difficult conditions. These moral threads tie people together in a context where power relations seem intent on tearing them apart, but at the same time, they have

important implications for how they reproduce certain gendered hierarchies.

Continuing the thread of looking at gender as communicative and productive, chapter six focuses on participants' and co-researcher's narratives related to violence (especially gender violence) and its resolution. I locate this analysis within the literature on the mutually constitutive roles of gender and capital, a body of work that regards gender as performative and productive of social and power relations in global supply chains (see for example, Salzinger 2003; Wright 2006). This chapter's approach, however, is to look at social relations outside the workplace as reflective of migrants' struggle with precarious conditions and their reliance on complex networks for social support. By looking at discourse around gender violence in the community and home as well as the resolution of such conflicts, I am centering this chapter on the pressures migrants encounter at the intersection of the demands for social reproduction, the insecurity of work in this setting, and the ways these affect notions of masculinity and femininity.

Within participants' narratives, I find that gender is both produced as well as productive. That is, participants' discourse reinforces certain identities at the same time that those ideas serve as metonyms that help make sense of the challenges of dispossession. Central to migrants' narratives was the theme of violence, and in this chapter, I explore the ways that the communicativity of this violence is part of an iterative discursive and affective process that has a disciplinary role in migrants' lives in ways that buttress the demands of production networks, but that claim ownership over individual choice. Some migrants also rely on gendered explanations to reconcile with the violence around them. In the final part of the chapter, I focus in particular on the role of migrants'

narrative and collective memories about gender and sexual violence in Myanmar.

Participants' experiences with stories of gender and sexual aggression before they left for

Thailand were formative in their thinking about social problems in the present on the

border and the best way to deal with them. In this sense, the spatio-temporal shifts caused

by displacement stretch migrants' conception of life in the host country and ways of

negotiating precarity to include memories and encounters from both their place of origin

and host country. I underscore that in these processes of navigating the constraints of life

in Thailand, the trend of relying on conservative notions of home and culture may prove

useful in fostering a certain solidarity, but at the same time it reifies a narrow view of

gender identities that exclude the lived reality of many men and women. Perhaps most

subtle here is the interplay between this way of coping with dispossession and the

reproduction of the precarious conditions of labor. In this sense, gender as trope becomes

a mechanism for the displacement of the injustices migrants face from the relations of

capital to their own bodies and families.

However, migrants must also contend with the gendered narratives of

humanitarian interventions that seek to protect their biowelfare. In chapter seven, I turn

toward the question of how discourses within these interventions linked to women's

rights circulate in migrant communities, and what this means for the possibility of

political change. Situating the global movements related to gender justice and the

practices of the humanitarian industry within the context of capital accumulation, I reveal

the tendencies for such forms of intervention to reproduce the neoliberal emphasis on

individualized biowelfare, self-care, and self-regulation—all forms of Foucault's

biopower (2008) and what Merton (1957) might refer to as "latent functions." Key in

global discourses about women's rights are racialized overtones about "Third World Women" that invoke neocolonial hierarchies. I consider these issues by analyzing local activists' "theories of change"; that is, their notions about what is needed to achieve a level of gender justice for Burmese women on the border and elsewhere, including Myanmar. My particular interest is in interpreting that which is not said explicitly in these theories, which rather linearly move from oppression to liberation.

With an approach of interpreting between the lines, one of the goals in this chapter is to trace what Avery Gordon (2008) calls the "seething" presence of race and gender differences as a resonating force between discourse framed as global and sites considered "local." I question whether these discursive threads constitute sources of stigma for the targets of aid, the migrant participants in this study, in a way that demonstrates colonialism's transnational linkages of race, class, and gender inscribed in individual minds and bodies. In addition to considering how activists relate to and interpret these global discourses as they formulate platforms for change, this chapter also puts local activists' ideas into conversation with the perceptions of migrants in the four sites where data were collected. This enables an analysis of how ideas move among the global arenas of language, the local interlocutors—or "vernacularizers" as Merry (2006) puts it—and the migrants whose lives these interventions aim to improve. In the last part of the chapter, to comment on the variance between discourse and practice, I contrast the activities of womens' rights and humanitarian/service NGOs on the border with the informal tactics on which migrants rely as they maintain peace and strive for a form of gender justice on their own.

In the concluding chapter, I bring together the various arguments raised

throughout the dissertation to discuss implications on three levels. First, and most importantly, I write what the findings discussed here might suggest for the lives of the study's participants, both co-researchers and migrants in the four sites. I ask what gendered subjectivities on the border have to say about people's future, their choices, and the possibilities for broader transformation in the conditions of displacement and the relations of production. Second, I consider what this study's findings reveal about state practices in Myanmar and Thailand at a time of great change. I highlight what the politics of the border could mean for Myanmar as it struggles with questions of political reform and opens its markets to the demands of global capitalism. The focus in this dissertation on subjectivation brings nuance to a discussion about how women's rights campaigns on the border relate to those in Myanmar. I also look at what border politics mean for Thailand as a society and for the region of Southeast Asia as 2015 marks the formal start of a regional economic body: the ASEAN Economic Community, a concept that hinges on the perpetuation of flexible labor. Finally, I consider the implications of my findings for further research on borders and in contexts of dispossession. As well, I show that while findings reaffirm the importance of thinking *with* and not only *about* participants in such settings, it is just as important to analyze the nuanced challenges of engaging in such work. With such a reflexive approach, I deepen understanding of how the practice of research is part of the nuanced dialectic over knowledge and identity for those navigating displacement.

Chapter 2—Boundary as Other: the construction of the Thailand-Myanmar borderlands in historical perspective

1. Introduction

Lying in a broad river valley between two ridges, the densely populated and smoky border city of Mae Sot resembles an urban island surrounded on all sides by fields and separated from lowland Thailand and Myanmar by the Tenasserim Hills and the Shan Highlands. This juxtaposition of forest against town is one of the border area's many contrasts. The place is at once bucolic and industrial as it is simultaneously remote and plugged in to global production networks. It is also as much Burmese as it is Thai; the border is both a site of refuge for Burmese migrants fleeing their country and a space defined by the exploitation and lack of rights those migrants face. These contrasts relate in many ways to how the border zone fits within the contemporary dynamic of capitalism. Spaces considered peripheral in the "Global South" are frequently reterritorialized and developed as labor-intensive low-wage sites of production in global supply chains. However, in the case of Mae Sot, such contrasts are only a current iteration of two recurring contradictions that have played out for centuries on the Thailand-Myanmar border. First: the tension between a statist belief that the borderlands are in need of inclusion in order to be better controlled and the imperative to exclude them on some level so that they will remain peripheral. And second: contrasting with state desires for control is the reality of the semi-autonomous social systems of the people living there.

As scholars have suggested, the contradiction between the desire to control and the perceived need to exclude is foundational to the discursive construction of a border between Thailand and Myanmar; in terms of both the rationale for the boundary and the

meaning ascribed to the line dividing the two states (Pinkaew 2003a; Toyota 2007; Thongchai 1994). And yet, in the space carved out between inclusion and exclusion, one finds a persistent autonomy among those inhabiting the Thailand-Myanmar frontier. Following from this, I ask in this chapter what role repetitive acts of discursive construction play in the social forms and power relations that one finds on the border today and that are central to the focus of this dissertation. With this question, I use this chapter to ground this dissertation's arguments in a phenomenological and constructivist interpretation of space, especially border spaces. Though gender is not this chapter's main focus, I show how the structural violence, the modes of social organization, the gendered discourses and practices, and the emergent political subjectivities of migrants analyzed in subsequent chapters are related not only to the flows of capitalism but also to the very meaning and maintenance of the Thailand-Myanmar border. As such, I suggest that the social dynamics examined in this dissertation cannot be unyoked from broader considerations of national and regional identities.

I begin this chapter with an explication of my theoretical position vis-à-vis space and borders. The notion that a discursive contradiction repeated iteratively in different forms can have a defining role in constructing and reaffirming a state boundary, which is itself not fixed but consists of multiple fragmented lines of differentiation, is founded on certain assumptions that require a bit of explanation. In this next section, I briefly bring together political, economic and post-structural notions of socially constructed spaces with postcolonial interpretations of borders and their emergence at a particular intersection between modernity and the rise of empires and nation-states. This includes the idea that discourse can constitute space and influence its physical appearance, which

in turn can lead to certain social relations and power arrangements (see for example, Lefebvre 1991). I consider also the relevance of Thongchai's (1994) concept of geo-body, i.e., the linking of territory and national consciousness to an analysis of how power, identity, and conflict overlap in peripheral spaces. A third important angle builds on the work of scholars who point to borders as sites of transformation in the reconfiguration of sovereignty, territory, and gendered subjectivities which is endemic in contemporary advanced capitalism (Mezzadra and Nielson 2013; Ong 2006). Together these various ideas form the basis for my approach to the Thailand-Myanmar border zone.

In the third, fourth, and fifth sections of this chapter, I look historically at the long-standing tension involved in the dominant discourse about the Thai-Myanmar frontier as a space that must be both incorporated into and repelled from the space of the state. I show that this discourse was evident during the pre-colonial period and fully emerged as a component of British colonialism in Burma and the Siamese project of defining and claiming power over its territory. I highlight how in the post-colonial Cold War period, this discursive contradiction continued to dominate perceptions of the border and the various peoples living in highland areas, and led to military conflict and campaigns to reshape the borderlands. The sixth part of the chapter looks at the post-Cold War era of economic liberalization in which the border has served as a locus for capital investment and as a hub for low-wage production. Throughout the chapter, I consider what this discursive tension has meant for the people inhabiting the Thailand-Myanmar borderscape who find themselves pushed and pulled by contradictory power relations, including in ways that have gendered implications, and who, nevertheless, reveal cracks in dominant discourse through their everyday lived experiences.

2. Borders as constructed and constructing

The arguments of this dissertation are based on the assertion that the border zone in which Burmese migrants are living and working is, in certain ways, a socially constructed space that plays an active role in shaping the social and power relations there. It is a collection of locales in which unique forms of social organization and political subjectivities are produced as a result of multiple overlapping forms of power and struggle. From this perspective, borders are heterogeneous spaces where "several functions of demarcation and territorialization—between distinct social exchanges or flows, between distinct rights, and so forth—are always fulfilled simultaneously" (Balibar 2002: 79). They divide between belonging and not belonging, exception and norm, and legality and illegality (Rajaram and Gruny-Warr 2007).[1]

I point to three key perspectives that are relevant to this discussion: the view of space as simultaneously absolute/material and relational/representational, the significance of national and colonial discourses for the designation and construction of border/peripheral space, and the linkages which place border spaces in global supply chains. The second and third perspectives stem from the first.

2.1 Borders as material, borders as relational

Borders must be thought of both in terms of their physicality—that is, as

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[1] This is not to say that I consider borders as impermeable lines, an assertion that much scholarship and any observation of practices at borders has shown to be false. This is a point that has been so well established across social science disciplines that I do not take it up in this dissertation. Rather I start from the position that state borders are spatial constructs that span lines dividing nations as well as sites for state expressions of sovereignty. It is easier in some cases and more difficult in others for people and goods to cross boundaries; certainly some borders are built up specifically to prevent uncontrolled crossing (such as the wall dividing the US and Mexico in some parts of the border or the wall Israel has erected in the West Bank),while other border spaces show no marking whatsoever that there is a division between one place and another. However, instead of approaching such practices within a dualistic lens (permeable/impermeable), my concern in this dissertation lies with the way borders are conceived, perceived, and lived as Lefebvre (1991) puts it.

boundary lines on maps, as rivers, mountain ranges, and immigration checkpoints (to name a few examples)—and as places that are constructs of discourse which locate power and meaning at these sites of entry and exit, inclusion and exclusion. The objects and spaces that physically make up borders reflect what Harvey (1973) calls "absolute space" and what Lefebvre (1991) refers to as "material space," which is "mapped (*balisé*), modified, transformed by the networks, circuits, and flows that are established within it— roads, canals, railroads, commercial and financial circuits, motorways and air routes, etc." (Lefebvre 2003: 84).[2] Such spatiality is essential for border thinking because it relates to the physical structuring of borders and the material manifestation of perceptions of those borders.[3] It does not only refer to state-controlled spaces or locales which lie on the geographical boundary line. Rather, material border spaces are components that signify borders for all those who encounter them (Lafazani 2013; Mountz 2010). Thus, absolute border spaces might include a river that an individual needs to cross in order to enter a new country, a safe house, a checkpoint, the backroom of a police station where officers exact bribes or negotiate migrants' rights, the gate of a camp which communicates to a refugee that she or he has arrived in a space of exceptional legality, or a welfare office in an urban center where caseworkers exercise discretion upon migrants in a way that reminds them that they do not belong. As well, border spaces are those

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[2] Another translation of *balisé* is "marked."

[3] Harvey (2006) is careful not to equate his tripartite framework for theorizing space with that of Lefebvre. Thus, while I write of absolute and material space as similar here, it is important to also recognize the nuanced difference. To Harvey, absolute space means not only the physical objects of geography (such as walls, roads, and bridges), but also geographical representations, such as maps. For Lefebvre, the concept of material space includes virtual manifestations of experienced space such as the circulation of capital and commodities. Harvey also draws similarities between his notion of relative space and relational space on the one hand and Lefebvre's concepts of "representations of space" and "spaces of representation" on the other, but points out that these are better thought of as different axes on a matrix as opposed to translations of the same ideas (2006: 134-135).

where economic arrangements manifest themselves in material terms that suggest periphery, as a political economic concept: labor camps that are "off the grid," squatter settlements housing non-citizens or citizens deemed unworthy of basic rights to housing and sanitation, or a home set up with sewing machines operating informally as a factory that pays migrants a quarter of the minimum wage.

These examples suggest that the materiality of borders intersects with a more relational or representational view of space in that different absolute spaces have different meanings for various actors. As Balibar (2002) notes, this renders borders polysemic; individuals perceive, articulate, and experience border spaces through emotions, lived encounters, and images. Such relations give meaning to borders and reaffirm their existence. Space, writes Lefebvre (1991: 342), is thus both abstract and concrete:

> Abstract inasmuch as it has no existence save by virtue of the exchangeability of all its component parts, and concrete inasmuch as it is socially real and as such localized. This is a space, therefore, that is *homogenous yet at the same time broken up into fragments.*

Space "enters social relations at *all* levels," including the physical, semiotic, abstract, interactive, and affective (Gottdiener 1993: 131). Borders as abstract space are constructed as they are interpreted and enacted. They are internalized as invisible borders at the same time a variety of actors performatively inscribe them, at times violently, upon migrant bodies (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2007). Discourse about difference and belonging construct borders and render material spaces into border spaces that are capable of exclusion or affixing statuses of legibility/illegibility and visibility/ invisibility to different groups of people (Tangseefa 2007). Space, borders, and hierarchies are all aspects of knowledge construction and the assertion of certain discourses over others.

However, as Foucault (1977) would suggest, within the span of relational forces

that constitutes space, one must conceive of every iterative reproduction of dominant

discourses as an opportunity for divergence, resistance, and conflict. To concentrate on

"border struggles," then, is to focus on the space (both relational and material) between

seemingly binary notions of "inside" and "outside" or "inclusion" and "exclusion" which

are never stable and are always conflicted (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013). It is to follow

Mohanty (2003: 2) who calls for analysis of "the fault lines, conflicts, differences, fear,

and containment that borders represent." Thus, just as discourse may relationally define a

space in gendered terms, studying the interstices may reveal moments where social actors

resist such constructs or offer their own interpretations of how gender and space interact.

Viewing space as both material and relational is key to this dissertation's

argument in the sense that I view the Thailand-Myanmar border zone as a series of

tangible places constructed and constantly reproduced as a result of multiple discourses

and power relations. The relational and the material converge here in that while tangible

locales on the border are built physically (e.g., out of bricks and mortar), certain

perceptions of the frontier zone and the people living there are just as much part of these

locales' construction. My analysis of migrants' social relations stems from the view that

particular discourses infuse the material forms which constitute this border with specific

knowledges and exert an influence on migrants who internalize, are shaped by, and

struggle with these bordered hierarchies. In some cases, this cyclical relationship between

space, discourse, action, and conflict can lead to alternative spaces and knowledges that

migrants develop and that are central to their survival and wellbeing in that context of

displacement.[4] In order to situate this dialectical notion of space, I turn now to another

angle for theorizing borders that conceives of them as constructed via the discourses of

modernity and colonialism and as intimately connected to conceptions of national and

ethnic identities.

2.2 Borders as interstices in the national imagination

With this constructivist view of space, it is important to highlight here the way

that borders link to the discourses of nationhood, national communities, and national

identity.[5] Borders not only play a central role in the imagining of national spaces as an

outline of territory. They are implicated in the very construction and reproduction of the

concept of a national space, or what Thongchai (1994) termed a geo-body. This refers to

a spatialized national consciousness in which the map, as "new geographical knowledge,

was the force [for] conceiving, projecting, and creating the new entity" of the nation

(Thongchai 1994: 129). The connection between borders and the geo-body relates to the

development of state boundaries as we know them today during the period of nation and

empire-building beginning in the 19th century.[6] The idea of the nation as a discrete

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[4] These alternative spaces and knowledges, to the extent they push back on the dominant power relations which exert pressure on migrants to fit within categories of subjects that are exploitable, can be conceived of as a form of resistance. However, I stop short of referring to these types of processes and shifts as such in favor of other terms like struggle and conflict. This is because I hesitate to frame as resistance those actions which merely strike subjects as survival or "getting by," that is, which subjects do not consciously frame as resistance. To label migrants' tactics which transform or appropriate dominant or exploitative relations and knowledges for their own uses and purposes but which they do not consider resistant would be, I think, to impose categories onto these migrants and deny them their agency to conceive of resistance in their own terms.

[5] While scholarship in the last two decades has debated the continued relevance of the nation-state as an analytical category, I am concerned here less with the state's integrity (or lack thereof) and more with the uses of an idea of the nation as a tool for articulating identity-based hierarchies.

[6] While the colonial period in Latin America began significantly earlier than this, I refer here specifically to the era of empire and nation building associated with the age of modernity when countries like Germany and Italy established themselves as nations and France as the Third Republic. This was the formative age of colonialism in Africa and Asia. Though the British colonized India starting in the 17th century, it was only

community of citizens and the colony as divided by distinct racial groups developed together with the principle of fixed boundaries separating one nation/colony space from another (Anderson 1991). Indeed, in his seminal work on nationalism, Benedict Anderson (1991) points to the census and the map as two mechanisms which worked in tandem as a sort of "demographic triangulation" to render known the peoples and places of a nation-space.

I highlight this conceptual link of maps, concrete borders, and identity because of the role it played and continues to play in creating ethnicity, ethnic and racial hierarchies, and—more broadly—a determination of inclusion and exclusion on a national scale. Boundaries, as the point of differentiation between inside and outside, facilitate the visualization of a national community in contrast to those external to that space. This spatial-conceptual demarcation turns "territory into tradition" and the "people into one," writes Bhabha (1990: 300).

Nowhere is this more evident than on borders, where the erasure and construction of ethnicity and group identity is active and ongoing (Balibar 2002). These are thus sites of constant struggle for the establishment of what Anderson (1991) famously calls "imagined communities" and Kapferer (1988: 97) refers to as the fetishization of culture, that is, the supersession of discourses of homogeneity over difference within the national community. The taxonomy of different peoples within a national space has been part of the establishment of the geo-body, and this process was essential for the construction of certain hierarchies and dichotomies between cultures-as-races, distinguishing primitive from civilized and rendering a "them" legible and knowable in order to more clearly

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during the age of nation building in the 19th century that control of the sub-continent by the East India Company ceded to the British government.

define an "us." As Stoler (2002) writes, discourses of gender and sexuality were also intimately connected to conceptions of race in the service of constructing the social boundaries of colonialism. The same is true for post-colonial nationalisms in which behaviors and sexual practices considered masculine, feminine, and hetero-normative have been part of the conditions of racial membership, which divided up national spaces (Harriden 2012; Ong 1995a; Suriya and Pattana 2014).[7] As Thongchai (2000: 41) explains, the hierarchical domain of colonies and nations in Asia adhered to a sort of "ethno-geography," with distinct peoples mapped out as part of various landscapes. On these maps, border areas were peripheral both geographically and culturally since they were inhabited by groups identified as ethnic minorities, the "outsiders" to be compared to the nation's community in racial as well as gendered terms. Ludden (2011) notes that such divisions, rooted in the processes of empire, continued to intersect post-colonial nation-states as useful hierarchies separating elites from subalterns. In this sense, it remains that border spaces relationally embody a notion of exclusion or exception in a way that helps define the included, i.e., the norm (see for example, Agamben 2005).

Referring to the link between mapping, territory, and culture, Homi Bhabha (1990: 295) writes, "The recurrent metaphor of landscape as the inscape of national identity emphasizes the quality of light, the question of social visibility, the power of the eye to naturalize the rhetoric of national affiliation and its forms of collective expression." This excerpt raises important points about the visual and conceptual shaping

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[7] Ong (1995b) cautions that nationalism not only be thought of as a masculine endeavor that suppresses women's agency, even if this is often the case, because this view glosses over the unique ways in which the relationship among gender, space, and social institutions shifts during nationalist and post-colonial struggles as women articulate belonging and political autonomy in their own terms, even, at times in seemingly "traditional" or conservative ways.

of national spaces and peoples and the solidification of these into always already

constituted frameworks through their repetitious discursive presentation. That is, colonial

social-spatial conceptions were often represented as fixed and permanent in a way that

reaffirmed the European ontology of modernity, which placed the world and its peoples

onto racialized and evolutionary hierarchical scales (see for example, Edwards 2007).

Through ethno-geography, the "inscape" of national identity becomes naturalized by the

recurrent discourse of identity building.[8] These efforts rendered a diversity of peoples

into more organized categories and groups and affixed these categories to the natural

development of the place.

The establishment of borders as a product of national/colonial negotiations did

not, however, neatly adhere to the spaces of the groups living along what became a

boundary line. As the materialization of a relational space conceived in capitals, they cut

across and divided groups of people who, in many case, considered themselves more of a

distinct and separate unit less affiliated with far away capitals (Horstmann 2014;

McKinnon and Michaud 2000; Scott 2009). Thus, the drawing of borders and the

affirmation of nation-state territory also signified a need to exert more complete control

of those on the edge who were "outsiders" but within the national geo-body (Scott 1998;

Thongchai 2000a). It is here, along the borders within the tension between relational and

material space that the primary contradiction I mentioned at the start of this chapter plays

out: the need to incorporate and manage peripheral spaces and peoples lies in tension

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[8] For example, as part of this process and in an effort to justify colonial endeavors, it was not uncommon in the 19th century for British and French scholarship to historicize their spatial claims in Asia and elsewhere (Anderson 1991; Edwards 2007). Anderson (1991: 174-175) writes of "historical maps" used as a sort of "political-biographical narrative" to demonstrate the "antiquity of specific, tightly bounded territorial units" that coincided with colonial borders.

with the place of these "others" as peripheral in the national imagination.

Borders, therefore, can be conceived of as sites for the performance of the expression of a "national culture" and people in contrast to the narratives, identities, and histories of "others" in the borderscape. And yet, at the same time, it is in the border space where one finds an alternative reality of subaltern lived experiences that contradict popular notions of peoples and places. This is true not only for contemporary geographic boundaries, but also for myriad invisible borders that cut across states and which constitute vestiges of colonial racial and ethnic hierarchies that are reproduced on the national scale (Ludden 2011). It is with this in mind that I quote Tsing's (1994: 279) definition of margins as a way of explaining the relations of border spaces:

> Margins [are] conceptual sites from which to explore the imaginative quality and the specificity of local/global cultural formation. Margins here are not geographical, descriptive locations. . . . Instead, I use the term to indicate an analytic placement that makes evident both the constraining, oppressive quality of cultural exclusion, and the creative potential of rearticulating, enlivening, and rearranging the very social categories that peripherize a group's existence.

As Thongchai (2003) writes, "A history of the margins of a nation is, therefore, a history of the locations—geographically, temporally, culturally—where it stops being a nation, or being this or that nation" (p. 12). It is by focusing at the interstices between insider and outsider, inclusion and exclusion, normative and exceptional, that we can see alternative histories and identities that were and are actively submerged as part of the project of building and maintaining the nation and its hierarchies (Mignolo 2000; Thongchai 2003). Placing the focus along state boundaries in Southeast Asia, one can see that space is actually fractured into multiple sovereignties which are constantly contested through the everyday lived experience of the people there (Soe Lin Aung 2014; Horstmann 2002; Ludden 2011; Rajah 1990). Thus, studying social practices in these

locales affords an analysis of how nation-states reproduce hierarchies and how various subaltern actors contest these lines of division.

2.3 Borders as plugged in and peripheral

Keeping in mind the tensions and hierarchies that pull at border spaces, I turn now to the increasing role of these peripheral sites in global production networks. The place of border zones in contemporary capitalism as gendered sites is a global phenomenon that stems from the most basic tenets of the relationship between capitalism and space; that is, the way that the "geographical configuration of the landscape contribute[s] to the survival of capitalism" (Smith 2008: 4). What Smith refers to here is the spatial relations of uneven geographical development which builds on the Marxian concepts of how space shifts as a result of several of capitalism's fundamental principles, including capital accumulation, market exchange and competition, physical infrastructure development to enable production and consumption, and the production of scale. There is a socio-ecological component as well in the sense that social relations and the perception and relationship between humans and nature are bound up in the uneven geographical development of space (Smith 2008; Harvey 2006). Economically, the concept pertains to the duality of capitalism's constant need for growth and expansion, converting assets into capital, and the tendency for capital to centralize. This duality, writes Smith, is one of the fundamental contradictions within the capitalist system in that an increasing number of spaces are brought into the fold of a capitalist mode of production at the same time capital is concentrated in fewer locations.

Fueling this expansion is the pressure to avoid crises of over-accumulation, which results in the dumping of surpluses, devaluation, and the reinvestment of capital in new

locales or existing sites of production through acts of dispossession (Harvey 2006).

Accumulation by dispossession, as David Harvey terms this practice, is one of the key

forms of spatial reconfiguration resulting from the exigencies of capitalism (see also

Banerjee-Guha 2010). Harvey (2003: 145-146) lists some of the ongoing forms of

dispossession:

> Displacement of peasant populations and the formation of a landless proletariat as
> accelerated in countries such as Mexico and India in the last three decades, many
> formerly common property resources, such as water, have been privatized (often
> at World Bank insistence) and brought within the capitalist logic of accumulation,
> alternative forms of production and consumption have been suppressed.
> Nationalized industries have been privatized. Family farming has been taken over
> by agribusiness.

In this, Harvey describes three significant effects capital accumulation has on space.

First, as populations leave their homes and move elsewhere, there is an emptying of

locales where people used to live and a building-up of homes and infrastructure wherever

they go, whether it is to an urban area in the form of suburbs or slums, or to camps for

migrants and/or refugees. Second, public spaces become private through the

commodification of certain natural resources that were formally public or unregulated.

Third, a geographical landscape consisting of small farming properties increasingly shifts

to a landscape of industrial agriculture, manufacturing, or development.

The devaluation of surpluses and subsequent reinvestment gives capital a certain

mobility that, on the ground, can wreak havoc as sites of production are de-industrialized

and other locales that can enhance competitive value (because of lower transportation

costs, more advanced technological capacity, or the possibility of lower wages) enter the

supply chain in their stead. It is possible for such changes in production networks, what

Harvey (2006) terms a "spatial fix," to manifest themselves on grand scales in the form of

regional developments that transgress state boundaries to connect centers of capital in diverse locales via lines of transport and low-cost zones of production along these routes. When this happens, the building up of the infrastructure for such projects bypasses certain places (including many that used to be significant sites of production) and reconfigures others.

In recent decades, as part of the neoliberal turn in politics and the global economy, reterritorialization and the establishment of special zones of production have become a dominant manifestation for capital accumulation through certain kinds of regional and global developments (Arnold 2012). This practice is another form of accumulation by dispossession in that it reflects the repurposing of active economic spaces into new arrangements, often through the displacement of the institutions and individuals that were previously functional in that locale (Banerjee-Guha 2008). These zones are often established in sites where capital can draw on an ample supply of labor. While special economic zones differ in terms of the labor-power on which they rely (technological SEZs versus garment manufacturing SEZs, for example), it is common for zones to be populated by migrants traveling internally from rural to urban areas or migrants moving from low-wage or less secure countries. For this reason SEZs are often located outside major urban areas or along borders. A number of scholars have shown that SEZs on borders (often called cross-border economic zones, or CBEZ) are able to be competitive in part because of their distance and isolation from economic centers, their lack of regulation, and their exploitative treatment of workers (Arnold 2012; Campbell 2013; Arnold and Pickles 2011).

The establishment of special economic zones (and their various incarnations)

reflects changes in the relationships among state governments, market forces, and territory, including in gendered terms (Arnold 2010; Ong 2006). Such zones are what Banerjee-Guha (2008) calls "economic enclaves," that is, spaces with different governance and regulation structures where investment and infrastructure accumulate in ways that are effectively isolated from the economic landscape outside of these spaces because the zones are more tapped in to global supply chains than domestic markets. In her seminal piece, Aihwa Ong (2000) uses the term "graduated sovereignty" to describe the state's role in setting territories aside for development as exceptional spaces that will link strategically with global supply and production chains. In certain arenas, such as in Malaysia and Singapore, states designate these special economic zones as locales in which production firms assume some of the responsibilities of governing, such as surveillance, regulation, and control, that "set the terms and are constitutive of a domain of social existence" (Ong 2000: 56; see also Foucault 1991 and Sparke *et al.* 2004).

These spatial shifts influence the links among states, territory, and gender vis-a-vis global capital. In an age of hypermasculine capitalism characterized by mobility, high risk, competition, and aggression (both of the social actors who make capital move, and the discourse around flows of capital), the dominance of global financial investment firms based in the "Global North" over governments of the "South," resulting in an occupation and accumulation of "virgin territory," evokes a hierarchial relationship among territories, institutions, and social actors that adheres to economic tropes with gendered overtones (De Goede 2004; Griffin 2012; Ling 2004). Such a dynamic is part of how global economic forces and state redistributive policies play a major role in the production of space and the social relations and modes of organization within that space.

Large-scale spatial practices which give rise to special economic zones, including those on borders, are not only gendered, but influence gendered subjectivities in various ways, including how women and men relate to one another, think of themselves, navigate moral and civic structures, and participate (and are expected to participate) in local and global economies as well as in the social fabric and care structures of communities (Mills 2003; Tsing 2005). This is part of the way that global capital has transformed gendered spaces, insinuating itself into households and the practices of social reproduction, rendering both into forms of surplus labor (Bryan *et al*. 2009; Nagar *et al*. 2002; Pollard 2012).

However, within the spatial relations of social reproduction, as "capital produces landscapes in its quest for survival…workers seek to produce space in particular ways as part of a strategy to secure their own social and biological reproduction on a daily and/or generational basis" (Heynen *et al*. 2011: 241). Practically speaking, this refers to all the ways that workers formally and informally build up infrastructure to support their survival, including accommodation, healthcare, family space, childcare, and educational facilities/services. It also pertains to the re-appropriation of space for worker recreation, mobilization, and solidarity building as well as transportation networks and systems to enhance the connectivity of individuals and families across long distances. Crucially, these sites are never solely produced by and for the perpetuation of capital. While the landscapes workers construct sometimes support the goals of capitalism, sometimes they constitute or support resistance (Boyer 2006; Kurtz 2003). That these unanticipated consequences in the reproduction of labor-power are openings for struggle, change, and the assertion of alternative spaces and space-relations is a key theme in this dissertation.

The three concepts of space highlighted in these pages—space as material/relational; space and the imagining of nations, empires, and culture; and space and capital—are, of course, deeply interrelated. The legacies and continued prominence of various hierarchies manifest themselves in the economic practices that reconfigure spatial relations. Spaces considered peripheral are more easily subsumed into new sites for production. Special zones for production relying on different regimes of regulation, governance, gender relations, and wage scales are likely to profit from employing those who might already be considered as "others" who do not have the full entitlements of citizens. Along borders, discourses about the nation and national identity seem to become all the more important the more spaces are designated as sites in global supply chains. Concerns over national security and the perception of change to the national consciousness fixate public attention onto borders in terms of their permeability and the threat of the people living in these peripheral areas.

All of these intersections in spatial consciousness and spatial relations are relevant for the development of the Thailand-Myanmar borderlands. While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to convey a full account of this area's history, I share several snapshots from three centuries in order to convey the intersecting and contingent spatial processes that render the borderlands a place where migrants find themselves simultaneously incorporated into economic practices and the national imagination and forcefully kept on the margins. I show also how the border's particular historical development represents an agglomeration of time-space moments in which various histories, discourses, and relations of power are in a state of constant struggle.

3. From forests to towns and periphery to the center

Prior to the colonial era, the hierarchies and boundaries that currently divide the territory and people of Southeast Asia did not exist as such. That said, the topography of the region, which divides mainland Southeast Asia into broad lowlands and the highlands of a vast massif, did facilitate the construction of particular categories of difference, which had a lasting effect. The political, economic, and social relationships between the people living in the highlands and those in the lowlands of Southeast Asia fostered notions among the latter of a frontier space that delineated between concepts of center and periphery. As this suggests, the production of social and political differences and the production of a concept of a frontier between civilizations were interconnected, giving rise to binary analytical categories in which the spatial and the social were linked. I focus in this section on the association between the material and relational concepts of frontier, lowland, and highland in this region. I look at the construction of these binary categories and their contrast to the actual patterns of settlement and social structures in this region prior to colonialism. I show that while the work of social-spatial differentiation before the colonial period lacked the rigidity of subsequent eras, it nevertheless laid a foundation for more recent conceptions of hierarchy and space which embody the contradictions on which this chapter focuses.[9]

Before the current 1,300-mile boundary divided the territories of Thailand and Myanmar,

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[9] It is important to note here that known histories of the region are unfortunately imbalanced in the sense that there is far more material to work with from the perspective of lowland polities who kept written records and wrote their own historical accounts. As Renard (2003: 3) writes about the Karen, one of the dominant agglomerations of highland peoples in western Thailand/southeastern Myanmar, "With neither a written record nor a continuous tradition of oral history, historians seeking to record the past of such 'Karen' peoples…have little on which to rely." Keeping this in mind, I regard the descriptions of highland groups as perceptions as opposed to facts.

the mountains of the Dawna Range, Shan Highlands, and the Tenasserim Hills running longitudinally formed a natural barrier between the lowland Irrawaddy River basin of Myanmar and the Chao Phraya River basin of Thailand (see Map 4 below; Gupta 2005). Summarizing Leach, James Scott (1998: 185) explains that pre-modern Burma could be

Map 4: Thailand-Myanmar borderlands

thought of in terms of "horizontal slices through the topography" in which different peoples and social systems existed at different altitudes based on the ecology, the terrain, and isolation from lowland centers of power. The highlands were home to a variety of peoples with multiple different languages and customs who, by and large, considered themselves autonomous from each other as well as from lowland civilizations. Anthropologist Charles Keyes (1979) explains that highland and lowland groups "lived in symbiotic relationship," with the former "having wet-rice cultivation as its economic base" and the latter "having upland swidden cultivation as its main system of production" (pp. 29-30). Scott (2009: 106) describes reciprocal economic relationships dating back at

least as far as the ninth century, with upland groups procuring and trading commodities considered luxury items for lowland polities, including "rare and/or aromatic wood…medicinals…and latexes…from forest trees as well as rare hornbill feathers, edible birds' nests, honey, beeswax, tea, tobacco, opium, and pepper." "Hill people" also depended on lowland traders for staples like "salt, dried fish, and ironware" and later "ceramics, pottery…porcelain, manufactured cloth, thread and needles, wire, steel implements and weapons, blankets, matches, and kerosene" to name a few items (Scott 2009: 107).

Despite the presentation of highland versus lowland peoples as distinct, the populations of these two altitudinal categories "have no intrinsic permanence," as Leach (1960: 62) put it. First, while the Southeast Asian massif does constitute a large landmass, it is also the case that mountains and valleys are interspersed, especially in foothills or high altitude plateaus. Once outside the broad flatlands of the central river basin—and once down from the core of the massif—mountains bisect hundreds of smaller alluvial rice plains, leading to a checkered pattern of social, political, and economic practice. Second, it was not uncommon for inhabitants of highland areas to relocate to lower locales or to cities, engaging in wet-rice farming and integrating into the social systems of the valleys. Inversely, Scott (2009) describes the upland spaces of Southeast Asia as sites of refuge for people seeking to leave the influence of lowland states/polities for a variety of reasons. As a result, both highlands and lowlands developed as utterly heterogeneous (Thongchai 2000).

But while the peoples of the highlands and lowlands were somewhat flexible in their settlement patterns, these two categories referred to different political systems with

the latter developing as more centralized polities and the former as semi-autonomous

communities. Keyes (1979: 29-30) refers to a difference between "quasi-feudal polities"

in the lowland areas and upland peoples "having no stable political organization that

brought together more than a few villages." However, anything but stable, the lowland

kingdoms of Burma (including Ava, Toungoo, and Shan kingdoms) and of Siam

(including Lanna and Ayutthya) were, as Thongchai writes, "arch-rivals since the

sixteenth century" (1994: 62) and in a more or less constant state of warfare.

As a result, as power and control frequently shifted in the lowlands, the highlands

emerged as a frontier to these polities, a kind of buffer zone. In that power and

sovereignty in this region were determined less by mapped and bounded territories and

more by tributary semi-feudal networks of allegiance, there was no clear edge to these

fractured lowland states. Indeed, Anderson (1972) uses the word "potency" to describe

masculine power in Java as a drawing or consumption of powerful people and objects

towards one's center increasing one's power and thereby decreasing others'. Kingdoms

of Lanna, Ayutthya, the Shan, the Burmese, and even the Chinese in Yunnan competed

for the affiliation of highland towns, who, in turn, often hedged their bets by paying

tribute to multiple kingdoms simultaneously (Thongchai 1994). Highlands were strategic

in that armies and traders relied on key mountain passes to move from one lowland state

to another (interestingly, one of the key military and trade routes between Burma and

Siam passed close to Mae Sot).[10] In addition, towns in the frontier space were drawn into

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[10] Today, highway 105, which runs from the city of Tak west through Mae Sot to the border and then north, goes through the Mae Lamao pass. This pass, along with multiple other routes across the mountains, was instrumental in both trade and military campaigns at least since the 14th century when Tak was the westernmost corner of the Sukhothai principality (Pitch 2007). Pitch (2007: 376) notes that Tak (and subsequently Mae Lamao and *a priori* the area where Mae Sot is today) was "part of the trade route from

the conflict, "to cultivate food for the troops while they were at the same time the targets of destruction from the other to prevent them from supplying the enemy" (Thongchai 1994: 62). Siam's chronicles and the oral traditions of highland groups describe perennial attacks back and forth, "the prizes of which were prisoners-of-war" who were assimilated into the victors' towns (Renard 2000: 66).

The frontier/buffer role of the highlands during the centuries leading up to the colonial era defines this region as an in-between space, important strategically and economically, but neither fully Burmese nor Thai. This perception of the highlands as external resonates with the development of a cosmographic interpretation of space in Siam (Thongchai 1994). Bangkok conceived of itself as center and of all those spaces at the edge of its control as periphery. While the shifting pattern of allegiances mentioned above suggests that there was no clear or permanent boundary between center and periphery, these two categories nevertheless emerged as distinct from one another in a conceptual and social-spatial sense. Indeed, in Siam, a dominant system for classification consisted of dividing people into an inclusive "Tai" and an "other," "*kha*," which corresponded roughly to the spatial categories of *muang* (town) and *pa* (forest) (Turton 2000). First, in terms of the pair of spatial references, *muang* and *pa*, it is important to note the variety of interpretations attached to each. *Muang* refers not only to town; it has also been used to refer to a settled community, a city, or a country. It is, as Thongchai (1994: 49) writes, "an occupied area under the exercise of the governing power but

Sukhothai westward to Burma, both Pegu and Martaban and the religious (Buddhist) route to Sri Lanka.". Situated at the confluence of two rivers, Tak also connected the lowland Bangkok-based kingdom to the powerful Lanna kingdom in the north (at the heart of which is where Chiang Mai lies today). During the great Burma-Thailand wars of the 16th and 17th centuries, it was through the Mae Lamao pass that the Burmese army entered Thailand to launch devastating attacks.

without specification of size, degree or kind of power, or administrative structure."

While this definition of *muang* connotes a sense of space inside the kingdom, *pa*, on the

other hand, can suggest the opposite. It means not only forest, but wild and/or savage and

suggests a space external to the *muang* (Turton 2000).

Second, Tai largely refers to the category of lowland populations, "a reference to

a level of civilization and participation as a full member of a kingdom" while

"*kha*…refers to those who were on the outside of this" (Renard 2000: 66). But *kha* means

more than "outsiders" or "non-Tai;" according to Turton, it refers to "a generic social

status of servant, slave, etc." (2000: 6). Renard (2003: 1-2) refers to *kha* as those

considered "forest-dwelling" peoples "living beyond the pale of the Tai." Elsewhere,

Renard (2000) explains that Siam used the term *kha* to classify a broad range of groups

into a few different ethnicities, including the Karen, Kachin, and Khamu—all names that

Pinkaew (2003a) says are derogatory because of the meaning of *kha* and different from

the names these groups gave to themselves, which usually translate to "human beings."

Turton (2000) reminds readers, however, that the terms *kha*, *pa*, Tai, and *muang* should

not be used as analogous binaries (such as *kha* : Tai as *pa* : *muang*) because this glosses

over their complexity and various changes in meaning over time.

Importantly, no scholar regards *kha* and Tai as entirely dichotomous. Rather, they

are categories that relate to the ever-changing ethno-geography of Siam's kingdom of

tributary towns and principalities. Moreover, *kha* should not be thought of as entirely

external to Siamese civilization. Siamese perceived some *kha* as closer to the *muang* than

other, wilder *kha* who remained in more isolated forests/mountainous areas (*pa*). And, as

Tapp (2000) explains, center (*muang*) and periphery (*pa*) together make up the state in

the sense that the center desires the population and the resources of the

highlands/mountain/forest/periphery. A common northern Thai (Yuan) saying was "*kep

phak sai sa, kep kha sai muang,*" which means "gather vegetables (and/to) put into

basket(s), gather *kha* (and/to) put into *muang*" (Turton 2000: 16).[11] While Turton

explains that a common way to interpret this over the centuries was in terms of warfare

between towns and the forcible relocation of populations from one to the other, the

meaning of the saying has, no doubt, developed to connote something of the relationship

between the perceived notions of center and periphery. It is suggestive of an

understanding of the periphery as an untamed region with autonomous "others" that the

state needs to bring into the fold of their influence.

Despite the interconnection and even flexibility between Tai, *kha*, *pa*, and *muang*

in a social-spatial sense, Keyes reminds us to consider such distinctions as technologies

of power exercised by lowland kingdoms to impose analytical categories of identity onto

diverse groups (Keyes 2002: 100). In this sense, even before the colonial era's notorious

racial and ethnic hierarchization of Southeast Asia and its peoples, socio-spatial

distinctions differentiated the mountainous area between Thailand and Myanmar and its

inhabitants in ways that portrayed them simultaneously as peripheral and inferior, and yet

subsumed. In the next section, I look at how this system of classifying spaces and peoples

developed into more rigid hierarchies as a product of colonialism and the movement of

Siam and Burma from tributary kingdoms to bounded territories with

administrative/bureaucratic systems of rule.

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[11] Grabowsky (2001) notes that this saying has been translated in multiple ways, including "Put vegetables into baskets, put people into towns," a version that does not connote ethnic difference and domination. Nevertheless, through archival research he asserts that the phrase was in reference to the relationship between outsiders (*kha*) and centers of power and the control of manpower.

4. Producing a boundary, imagining the Thai geo-body

While the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries represented an era of conflict, fragmentation, and the classification of center and periphery in Siam and Burma, it was in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that colonialism precipitated the demarcation of a clear boundary and fixed categories of ethnicity. In this section, I highlight the resonating technologies of power that led to the reconfiguration of the frontier landscape and the articulation of racial/ethnic hierarchy in spatial terms. I show that these processes were directly related to the construction of what Thongchai (1994) refers to as the geo-body; that is, a spatial-social conception of national identity.

The Burmese colonial period (1824-1948) resulted in the establishment of clear boundary lines marking the territory of Siam for two significant reasons. First, the unique natural environment of the mountainous areas on the peripheries between the Thai and Burmese states drew international attention to seemingly endless hills of teak and other hardwood. Second, with the British occupying Burma and Malaya to Siam's south, and the French in Indochina to the north and east, the West effectively imposed their conception of boundaries and territory onto Siam, a process of state and colony-making that scholars argue promulgated gendered metaphors of masculine European states dominating hyper-feminine Asian territories (see for example, Sinha 1995). While Siam was never colonized by a Western power, the British and French each claimed large chunks of territory to secure natural resources; the British incorporating the Shan highlands into their empire, and the French asserting control over what is now Laos

(Renard 2000; Saratsawadi 1996).[12] The British were eager from the beginning of their reign in Burma to demarcate the exact border between Burma and Siam, and from the inception of talks, the question was always an economic one. While both Siam and Burma had relied for centuries on timber, neither logged on an industrial scale, and as a result the dense jungle of the frontier maintained a reputation as "untamed" or "wild"—*pa*, as mentioned in the previous section. In order to transform the space from jungle to colonial property in the form of an organized, domesticated forest that could service the empire's timber industry, the British argued that it was necessary to settle on a border. Thongchai notes that disputes between the British and Siam over claims to parts of the forest were what eventually "brought about the first formal Siam-British India treaty signed in January 1874 at Calcutta to mark the boundary between Lanna and Tenasserim Province" (1994: 73). The two powers continued to demarcate the rest of the border over subsequent decades.

And in terms of constructing bounded political spaces, with two imperial powers bearing down on it, grabbing hundreds of thousands of square miles of land, Siam was forced to revise its pre-colonial understanding of state space and frontiers. Earlier spatial conceptions of Siam adhered less to mapped territory and more to a combination of

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[12] Siam was able to avoid colonization in part by acting as a buffer between the French and British empires, but also by negotiating the loss of vast tracts of land. This was the case not only regarding the Shan Highlands, and Laos, but also much of the land that is currently Cambodia today, over which Siam had been claiming suzerainty for some years. In addition, Siam was able to avoid colonialism because it effectively yoked its economy to the colonial exploits of surrounding empires, especially the British. The Bowring Treaty of 1855, signed under military threat by the British, liberalized Thailand's economy up to British exploitation. The treaty gave British extraterritorial status in Siam, preferential treatment when it came to exports, and proscribed many of the duties and tariffs on goods. Ultimately, the British came to control much of Thailand's rice trade (Raquiza 2012). Pasuk and Baker (2008) use the term "colonial" to describe Thailand's economy during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries while Glassman (2010: 66) refers to Thailand during this time as "an ensemble of institutions that serves to facilitate accumulation by the most internationalized investors, regardless of their 'nationality'.".

sacred topographies and quasi-feudal tributary networks connecting to centers of power

in Bangkok and Chiang Mai (Thongchai 1994). While there had been certain landmarks

that served to divide Siam from its neighbors, such as rivers and mountain passes, the

British demanded a far more detailed and rigid articulation of space. The persistence of

the British to establish a clear boundary between Burma and Siam took decades in the

second half of the nineteenth century, but finally in the 1870s and 1880s led to the

drawing of a series of lines along rivers and mountains, a process that was more or less

complete by the 1890s.

At the same time that Siam worked to demarcate its national boundary, the

government also enacted a series of political changes to reconceptualize its national space

in light of imperial advances. This was also in response to Bangkok's desire to

consolidate its management over territory and people (as opposed to the diffuse system of

allegiances to local lords and tributes from lords to the monarchy). Many of these

changes took place during the reign of King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910), the monarch

credited with "modernizing" the country. First and foremost, this involved centralization

on multiple levels and the replacement of the quasi-feudal tributary system with the

division of the territory into mapped units and the advent of a nation-wide tax system to

generate revenue (Vandergeest and Peluso 1995). These changes, which coincided with

the establishment of a Ministry of Interior, replaced the ubiquitous and predominant

muang with the "region (*monthon*), province (*changwat*), district (*amphoe*), subdistrict

(*tambon*), and village (*moo ban*)" (Bunnag 1977; Pitch 2007).[13] And, importantly, Siam

began using the term *prathet* (nation) to define itself (Thongchai 1994). This spatial-

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[13] The spatial administrative unit for the region (*monthon*) was eliminated in 1932, leaving the province as the primary unit for dividing territory in Siam/Thailand.

administrative system made it theoretically possible for the first time for every subject-citizen of this nation to be accounted for and registered down to the household level. Bangkok also established Ministries of Finance, Agriculture, Education, Public Works, Defense and others during this period. In 1896, the government created the Royal Forest Department to manage the teak trade flowing out and through Siam's territory (Renard 2000). This department was involved in a series of laws that declared as government property all uninhabited land in Siam (Vandergeest and Peluso 1995). In 1910, the Modern Land Act nationalized Siam's forests, signaling the importance of the logging industry as a source of revenue for the country (Pitch 2007). A Royal Survey Department, founded in 1885, worked together with a newly centralized army to document the spaces and boundaries of Siam's newly arranged national territory (Vandergeest and Peluso 1995).[14]

The effect of these reforms was a new way of exerting control over the conception of national territory by rendering people and spaces known, legible, and counted. In practice, this process manifested itself through two technologies of power: the physical exertion of control over all parts of Siam with an emphasis on border spaces through the building up of infrastructure, and the production and circulation of discourse about the various subjects living within Siam's national territory.

In terms of the first mechanism, at the end of the nineteenth century, Siam recruited thousands to join military and police forces. By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, more than 8,000 police were based in 345 stations throughout the country (Vandergeest and Peluso 1995: 400). In addition, Mae Sot and surrounding areas

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[14] The Royal Survey Department was subsequent to the Anglo-Siamese Border Commission which was initiated in 1866 after much pressure from the British to delineate the Thai-Myanmar boundary.

along the western frontier developed as more permanent border fixtures during the

colonial period, transitioning from ad hoc trade-route establishments imposed upon local

pre-existing communities to symbols of the Thai state; part of the government's strategy

to manage and populate the lands near the boundary line. One commander:

> Ordered local authorities to set up new villages right along the borders with a
> number of guardhouses, fortifications, and households in each place…He called
> for a meeting of local chiefs along the frontiers. There they signed a declaration of
> loyalty to the king of Siam and took an oath of allegiance (Thongchai 1994: 72-
> 73).

In border areas, it was particularly important for Siam to remind its subjects who had not

considered themselves particularly attached to the Thai state of their affiliation. Suddenly

people who had belonged to no nation or to multiple nations now technically belonged to

only one and were officially prohibited from maintaining the kind of flexibility in

movement that had defined much of their social organization. "The prohibition," writes

Thongchai (1994: 78):

> Caused confusion among the local people, who were used to traveling across the
> boundary without permission in the case of friendly borders. Local people were
> accustomed to visiting their relatives on both sides of the border; some even
> migrated from one side to the other from time to time. This has been true for all
> borders from the Pakchan River to northernmost Lanna.

Greater interest in developing the border area in response to British colonialism and

advancements in the frontier space motivated Siam to appoint representatives of highland

kha communities, such as the Karen, as heads of towns and principalities. The Thai state

placated such groups, eager for them to remain in Siam and for their allegiance to reflect

the boundary lines drawn on official maps (Jorgensen 1979; Pinkaew 2003a).

This enabled Siam to both consolidate power in border spaces and to capitalize on

the lucrative teak trade in this area. The conflation of state power, resource extraction,

and profit resulted in particular assemblages of state power and infrastructural developments along the border. For example, in one historical account of the area where Mae Sot lies today, the newly appointed governor of the area only made an appearance "during the dry season to oversee the logging activities which only took place during that time of year" (Pitch 2007: 391). And as Mae Sot emerged as a border post along a well-trodden trade route between Burma and Siam (halfway between Yangon and Bangkok), it grew as an international hub, albeit one tucked remotely in the mountainous jungle of the frontier. From an early twentieth century account, Chinese caravans passed through en route from Yunnan to Burma; Indian lenders managed currency exchange (the British-Indian rupee was the dominant currency in the town); the dominant population was Burman and Shan (not Thai); and the head of the police department was, according to records, Danish (Lajonquiere 2001).

The second key technology for exerting social and political control over the nation of Siam during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries lies in the efforts made by the government to "know" and classify the diverse groups of people living within Thai territory. Pinkaew (2003a) points out that this effort was also a part of a broader project to construct "the new Thai national identity." She continues, "As *pa* (forest), the non-Tai entity, has been gradually incorporated into a new spatial organization…the uncivilized *khon pa* (wild people), the non-Thai ethnic category, has become a salient object of interrogation" (p. 26-27). As part of this project, then, one finds a proliferation of Thai ethnographies at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, creating and shaping ethnicity through the process of making people legible, a process that was echoed in neighboring colonial territories as well

(Edwards 2007; Thongchai 2000a). Underlying this ethno-geographic project was, according to scholars, Thai interest in defining themselves as superior to other ethnic groups and thus civilized (*siwilai*) alongside the other modern nations exerting their imperial authority in the region (Thongchai 2000b).

The work of classifying what Thongchai (2000a: 41) refers to as the "others within," the *chao pa/khon pa* (forest/wild people)—which later developed into the contemporary term still in use *chao khao* (translated as hill tribe)—ascribed to European constructions of racial/ethnic hierarchies, the colonial discourse of civilized and primitive peoples, and spatial conceptions of center and periphery (see also Renard 2006). Another category was the *chao bannok* (country-side people), which referred to the melting pot of peoples living in lowland rural areas under the sovereignty of the Thai state. This suggests that the early ethnographic discourse, produced for both government documentation purposes as well as public consumption, affixed linear notions of racial/ethnic and social hierarchies to a geographic grid in which one gets more civilized the closer one gets to Bangkok. Thongchai (2000a: 46) provides one example of an 1886 ethnographic publication, "On the varieties of the forest people in the north," which listed multiple ethnic groups including the Karen, Hmong, Lahu, Khamu, among others, according to their place on a spectrum from primitive to civilized. While the language of the text is blatantly racist, these early Thai ethnographies placed the many groups in a category of *khon daem* (original people) to reflect evolutionarily on the living origins of the Thai nation. In this sense, the peoples inhabiting the borderlands are both included within the Thai national consciousness and, at the same time, kept at a distance as they serve as contrast to highlight the modernity of Siam, and Bangkok in particular. Over

time, these lines of difference only hardened as the construction of Thai national identity articulated in racial and cultural terms produced growing nationalism in the early decades of the twentieth century (Renard 2006).[15]

As this section shows, the development of the Thai nation—referred to as Siam until 1941—during the age of modernity and imperialism involved multiple constructions that reconfigured the border space in significant ways. Prior to the colonial era, the mountains between Burma and Siam had been the permeable and dynamic peripheral space outside but still tangentially incorporated into multiple polities. The region's inhabitants as well were classified as outsiders though not in modernity's inflexible racialized way; they moved in and out of social-spatial categories. Officially, the colonial period ended the relative autonomy of those living on the edges of the state. At the same time the state built up the border as a site to emphasize Thai sovereignty, official and public discourse placed highland populations within the interest of national security and on an evolutionary scale to help define Thai identity.

Nevertheless, while the historical developments covered thus far in this section highlight the spatial-social construction of the border and its people from the perspective of the Thai state, the lived reality of border populations suggests an alternative set of histories. Scott (2009: 217) writes that the themes of "equality, autonomy, and mobility" arise repeatedly in the "positional self-understanding of hill peoples" whose material lives in the highlands were structured around maintaining freedom and independence.

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[15] Laws like the 1913 Thai Nationality Act aimed to eradicate heterogeneity, particularly in terms of the many thousands of Chinese migrants who had moved to Siam in the early part of that century (Pinkaew 2003b). Renard (2006) describes the strong link between this Thai sense of nationalism and European notions of race and hierarchy, possibly a result of the impression late 19th and early 20th century Europe made on Thai royalty.

Citing as an example the shifting settlements of Karen groups in the Thailand-Myanmar

border space, which frustrated state efforts to manage these populations, Scott

emphasizes the extent to which "the utter plasticity of social structure among the more

democratic, stateless, hill peoples can hardly be exaggerated." This, he writes, was a

"polymorphism…suited to the purpose of evading incorporation in state structures. Such

hill societies rarely challenge the state itself, but neither do they allow the state an easy

point of entry or leverage" (Scott 2009: 219). This suggests that despite a building up of

the border and the state's assumption of control, people and communities remained quite

autonomous and still managed to move back and forth across what was still mostly an

unmarked boundary. What Scott does not mention here is that aside from efforts to evade

state efforts to control and manage, since before the twentieth century some of the

highland populations had also begun their own nationalist movements for self-

determination, which developed into full-fledged separatist governments, as the next

section discusses (Christie 2000).

     Thus, the work of nation building in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries

solidified the contradictory position of the border and its people. The space and its people

as *pa* and *khon pa*/*chao pa*/*chao khao* served as a social and geographic marker to

indicate the center and its identity. In this sense the periphery was simultaneously

incorporated into the national consciousness and yet excluded. And yet, at the same time,

this discourse belies the lived experience of the borderlands, where populations could

capitalize on the designation of the frontier as isolated and remote to assert their

autonomy in terms of their material life and social organization. As I move to the next

section, I show how the tension between inclusion and exclusion and control and

autonomy continued its iterative repetition during the Cold War period in which the border and territory on both the Burmese and Thai sides emerged as contested, highly securitized sites of social dislocation and relocation.

5. Border as a site of refuge, border as a site of dispossession

Keeping one's focus on the border zone between Thailand and Myanmar during the second half of the twentieth century, one finds a space that continues to be both of great importance to the two states as well as a site of struggle, exclusion, and autonomy. During this period, both Thailand and Myanmar (still Burma until 1989) increasingly regarded the border through the lens of national security, expending great effort and resources to pacify the space. On the Burmese side, this involved decades of active warfare as the government sought to crush rebellion waged by Karen and other ethnic groups struggling militarily for independence and autonomy. In Thailand, highland groups faced further exclusion and prejudice as a result of nationalism. By the middle of the twentieth century, the government perceived the autonomy of the highlands— particularly along border areas—as threatening. This sentiment grew in the post-World War Two era as Thailand dealt with political change and upheaval, in part related to the broader geopolitical shifts taking place in the region. These factors reconfigured the gendered nature of the border from the feminized space of imperial conquest to one of conservation threatened by masculine warfare, development, and eventually global capital.

I divide this section into three parts, the first focusing on armed conflict in Burma and the mass displacement of Karen and other ethnic groups along the border. In the second part, I look at how Thailand's campaign against a communist insurgency in the

highlands/border areas reshaped the borderscape in Mae Sot and Phob Phra. In the third

sub-section, I consider the particular role that Mae Sot played during this tumultuous

time; its historic place along trade routes positioning the town to become a hub for a

black market smuggling, refuge, and resistance. I attempt to approach these topics with

the specific perspective of the border and its physical and discursive construction during

this era.

5.1 Myanmar, civil war, and displacement

With approximately forty percent of the country constituting highland spaces with

populations that had maintained a state of semi-autonomy under British colonialism,

Burma was born as a nation in 1948 with only partial control over its territory (Smith

1991). Though this is somewhat of an oversimplification, the struggles that took place in

the borderlands during the subsequent sixty years can be characterized as conflict

between the government's effort to claim sovereignty over these mountainous territories

and the nationalist movements for independence and/or autonomy of more than a dozen

ethnic groups.[16] The state of Burma has been in constant civil war since months after the

country's independence from England when ethno-nationalist groups took up arms for

self-determination and a powerful communist movement erupted in revolt. A succession

of failed negotiations over the status of highland quasi-states in the new nation, on top of

racial and historical political tensions from the colonial era between the majority Burman

and dozens of minority groups, sparked insurgencies that spread throughout the entire

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[16] The highlands of Myanmar did become the battleground for multiple struggles that were separate from,
but interconnected with, the campaigns for self-determination of ethnic groups. This includes the conflict
waged by the Communist Party of Burma and student activists turned militants after the 1988 suppression
of student activist movements in Rangoon/Yangon.

country. In addition, the new government of independent Burma was unable to pacify the Communist Party of Burma or its more militant "Red Flag" faction, both of which had emerged before the Second World War as a widespread nationalist movement (Charney 2009). However, rather than a single unified revolt, ethno-nationalist groups and the communists waged their own struggles, forging certain alliances with some groups and fighting others (South 2008).

As conflict dragged on for decades, the government of Burma (which changed from a civilian government to military and nominally socialist dictatorship in 1962 as a result of a coup)[17] and its military, known as the *Tatmadaw*, deployed a "scorched earth" strategy to suppress and control contested territory.[18] This emerged as a total war against the highlands, the armies operating there, and their civilian populations who the government regarded as supporting the rebellion. Starting in the mid-1960s and continuing for the next fifty years, *Tatmadaw* waged what it referred to as the Four Cuts campaign (*Phyet Ley Phyet*) to combat the insurgencies by severing the latter's support structure.[19] That is:

> To cut food supply to the insurgents; to cut protection money from villagers to the insurgents; to cut contacts (intelligence) between people and the insurgents; and to make the people "cut off the insurgents' head" (meaning, involving the people in fighting, particularly the encirclement of insurgents) (Maung Aung Myo 2009: 26).

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[17] In 1962, General Ne Win staged a coup, overthrowing Burma's civilian government, imposing martial law (which would last for the next twelve years) and initiating the "Burmese Way to Socialism," his program to consolidate total control over the country's resources, territory, and economy. This coup ushered in an era of military dominance in Burma that has continued in different iterations through the present time.

[18] One of the first targets of this campaign in the 1950s was actually a non-highland space, the Irrawaddy Delta, where Karen insurgents had gained control at the outset of the conflict.

[19] Smith (1991: 259) points out that this was not a particularly innovative strategy, but rather was adapted from British counter-insurgency work in Malaysia and the subsequent "strategic hamlet" program of the United States in Vietnam (see also Thompson 1966).

The tactic, which has become notorious for extreme human rights abuses, effectively reconfigured the Burmese social-spatial conception of the border area. The *Tatmadaw* color-coded the country into white, brown, and black areas. White areas were those totally under their control; brown represented disputed territory, where government forces and insurgents each held territory or where territory regularly changed hands; and black referred to areas completely under the authority of insurgents. The Four Cuts campaign aimed to expand the white area by both winning the "hearts and minds" of the people and by relocating highland communities to "strategic villages" away from areas the *Tatmadaw* designated as combat zones and toward military bases or areas more firmly under the latter's control. Smith (1991: 259) writes:

> Any villager who remained, they were warned, would be treated as an insurgent and ran the risk of being shot on sight. After the first visit, troops returned periodically to confiscate food, destroy crops and paddy and, villagers often alleged, shoot anyone suspected of supporting the insurgents. It was, they claim, a calculated policy of terror to force them to move.

In this sense, the Burmese state's strategy was to not only gain control of territory and people, but to eliminate whole populations they saw as threatening either through direct attacks or by causing their displacement (Lang 2002). Through brutal tactics, the military moved whole villages, often from hills where they had farmed for generations, into the plains or valleys where the Burmese government could more easily control them.[20]

The Border Consortium (2012) claims that since 1996, when it started counting,

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[20] The *Tatmadaw* laid landmines in the middle of emptied villages and in surrounding rice paddies; murdered hundreds of villagers who were reluctant to leave or who returned from relocation villages to harvest their crops; tortured villagers under the guise of interrogating them; and raped and pressed villagers into forced labor as part of its eradication campaign (International Human Rights Clinic at Harvard Law School 2014; Karen Women Organization 2007; Karen Human Rights Group 2009).

the Burmese government has destroyed approximately 3,700 villages. Humanitarian organizations and ethno-nationalist groups working in southeastern Myanmar and on the western border of Thailand documented more than 500,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) (the number includes those displaced since 1996 when they began to collect data). The Border Consortium, formerly the Thai-Burma Border Consortium, divided this number into three main categories of IDPs: those in hiding in "militarily contested areas, which are generally located in remote and mountainous forests and fields" (TBBC 2007: 26); those forced into government "relocation sites;" and those displaced in "ethnic ceasefire areas," the latter a broader category for multiple forms of displacement, including IDP camps (p. 29). Figure 1 displays figures for internal displacement in southeastern Myanmar in 2007 and in 2012.

Figure 1: Displacement in southeast Myanmar 2003-2012
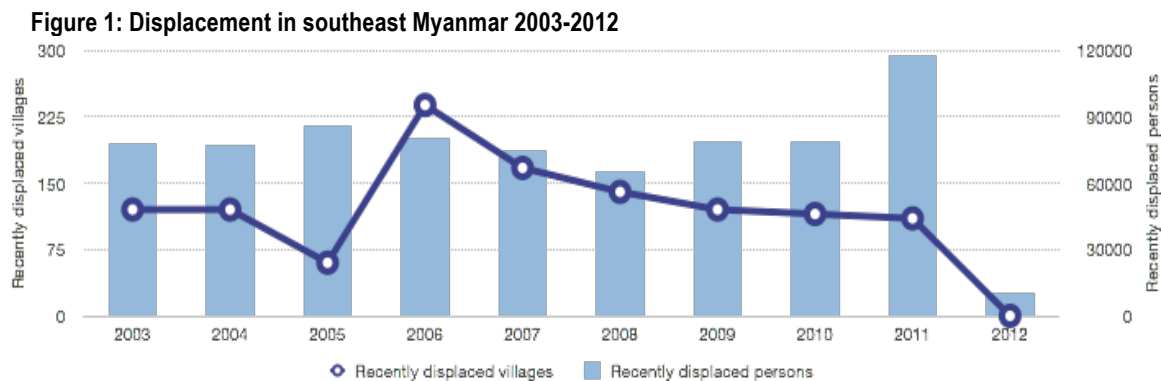
From The Border Consortium

In addition to violence and displacement, civil war has proliferated the many articulations of nationalism and fragmented sovereignties that have multiplied and shifted over time and in relation to local, regional, and global politics. Movements for self-determination among ethno-nationalist groups have developed over the years into militarized political, social, and economic structures. In southeastern Myanmar, armed groups like the Karen National Union, the Karenni National People's Party, and the New Mon State Party have

built up complex political and social systems, which include departments for relief and development, health, and education, all of which depend heavily on support from international donors as part of a humanitarian intervention (Jolliffe 2014; South 2011).

Beyond these more prominent groups, there are a growing number of breakaway factions that exert control over people and territory and that sometimes fight alongside the Burmese government. For those living under insurgent control or in mixed-control areas, life is extremely complicated as people are "under the authority of multiple 'states' or 'state-like' authorities that extract from citizens, both mediate and cause conflict, and provide some services for residents and commercial interests" (Callahan 2007: xiii). Ashley South (2008: 36) refers to the rise of multiple splinter insurgent groups and the social structures which result as a system of "neopatrimonialism" where "authority [is] concentrated in the hands of strongmen (or warlords)." Jolliffe (2014) characterizes this as a patron-client system of loyalty, power, hierarchy, and legitimation.

Amidst the diversity of different authorities, the economic landscape of the Burmese borderlands has developed during this time as a web of interconnected networks engaged in the production and trafficking of drugs as well as struggles over the control of natural resources, especially logging and mining concessions (Lintner 1999). With the *Tatmadaw* and their various proxy forces also heavily involved in these practices, power and legitimation in the Burmese highlands is increasingly based on access to and control over modes of black market production and transport. During the 1990s, economic exploits increasingly defined the terms of the civil war with growing numbers of Thai and Chinese investments in hydropower and resource extraction projects in conflict areas (South 2011). In more recent years as the Burmese government has signed ceasefires with

a number of ethnic armed organizations, the once illicit networks for logging and mining remain intact and are rebranded as liberalization as they attract the interest of multi-million dollar foreign direct investment from firms no longer restricted by sanctions (Fujimatsu and Moodie 2015). The end to sanctions against Myanmar (gradually between 2012 and 2014), which succeeded political change and ceasefires, allowed for what was illegal trafficking to continue unabated, but as an increasingly legitimate practice. In this sense, even as conflict and militarization are ongoing and even as this continues to define the nature of economic practice in the Burmese borderlands, changes in the social-spatial arrangements of the frontier render the space and its inhabitants at once marginal and central, resistant, and subjugated.[21]

5.2 Development, displacement, and relocation in Thailand

On the other side of the border, the Thai state also increasingly approached its borderlands from a national security perspective.[22] Embracing a nationalistic notion of state boundaries which conflated territory and ethnic/racial identity, Thais saw those they identified as non-Tai peoples of the highlands as not only peripheral and less civilized but progressively as alien and non-citizen.[23] Like Myanmar, though not on the same scale, in Thailand the tension between the autonomous lives of highland groups and the government's desire to manage them resulted in open conflict and forceful attempts at

[21] South (2008) notes, "On a number of occasions, KNLA units were deployed to 'protect' areas of forest from government-oriented and rogue logging companies, in order that these trees could be logged by companies allied with powerful Karen commanders and their families" (pg. 74). In a footnote, South provides an example of one unit who laid landmines to protect a logging tract, resulting in the death and injury of local villagers (cf. 24, p. 237).

[22] Though not discussed in depth here, this included the eastern border with Cambodia in the 1980s where a highly visible population of 300,000 refugees fleeing the Khmer Rouge and Vietnamese occupation had gathered in a series of camps.

[23] This was the case even with the Thai Nationality Act of 1913. This was because all those within Thai territory had access to citizenship though it was considered in terms of lineage from Thai parents.

relocation and containment. During the post-World War Two era, the threat posed by

ethnic minority "others" became part of Thailand's larger geopolitical Cold War struggle

against what the government perceived to be an international communist movement

within its borders. The government, concerned that communist China was secretly

funding Hmong and rural Thai peasants, viewed highland peoples as either for or against

the communist threat, an assessment that included views on which groups were most

willing to integrate in Thai society.[24] As I show in this sub-section, acts of resistance and

government counter-insurgency tactics—both through military force and development-

focused interventions—contributed to shaping the borderscape as it exists today.

The government's security perspective toward its "peripheral" spaces in the

highlands as well as the arid northeast (*Isan*) derived in part from the growing

polarization of these regions from Bangkok during the first half of the twentieth century.

A dominant narrative emerged in Thailand that *chao khao* (literally hill tribes) were

unwilling to assimilate and integrate (Pinkaew 2003a). In addition, the twentieth century

saw an in-migration of newer groups of people such as the Hmong, Burmese Karen,

Akha, and Kuomintang Chinese (anti-Maoist followers of Chiang Kai-shek) from China

and Burma to Thailand's north and western frontier. This coincided with a drastic rise in

opium cultivation in the highlands, most heavily in the far north "Golden Triangle"

region bordering Burma and Laos (Culas 2000; Lintner 1999). Lumping groups

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[24] While scholarship at the time sometimes considered the conflict in Thailand as yet another Cold War proxy conflict between the US and its capitalist allies and China, the reality is that insurgency in Thailand was more local. Moreover, the suspicion of Hmong villagers as especially linked to China reflects a racialized assumption of a threatening "other" based on the Hmong's origins in China. Thailand viewed other groups, particularly the Karen National Union, the Shan United Army, and the Kuomintang, as allied with their struggle against insurgency and communism and, with the help of the CIA provided substantial funds in their efforts to fight communist insurgents in Burma and Thailand. To enlist Thailand in its regional campaigns for influence, the US gave Thailand approximately US $650 million between 1950 and 1975, for primarily counter-insurgency activities, including those for development (Kislenko 2004).

autochthonous to the highlands with these newer migrants, the Thai state viewed most

upland populations as illegal, their perceived lack of assimilation as a sign of disloyalty;

their perceived involvement in swidden agriculture and opium cultivation as unlawful

(Pinkaew 2003a; Renard 2000). As Pinkaew (2003a: 32) writes, "migratory behaviour,

opium growing, and shifting cultivation were marked as the three most dangerous threats

posed by 'hill tribes'—all needing to be urgently controlled and suppressed in order to

maintain the security of the entire nation."

These concerns about highland populations converged with Bangkok's anxiety

that growing numbers of rural peasants in many parts of the country, including the south

and northeast, were joining the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) out of discontent

with the government (Bowie 1997).[25] Though highland-dwelling groups were not

particularly affiliated with the communist movement at first, their status as dangerous

outsiders made it easy for the government and the public to see them as part of the armed

insurgency, particularly the Hmong, who historically were the most isolated and

independent of the highland communities (Tapp 1989).

Importantly, however, the Thai government made exceptions for those highland

communities who joined them in the fight against communists. This included the forces

of the Karen National Union who often crossed into Thailand and were ardently anti-

communist (Lintner 1999). This was also the case with Kuomintang Chinese soldiers and

Shan militants whose expansive opium production and trade networks the government

agreed to ignore because they battled communists in Thailand and in Burma (Cooper

1979; Lintner 1999). This reflects an important contradiction in the development of the

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[25] Though starting in the "peripheral" areas of Thailand and based there, by the 1970s the Thai government classified a majority of its provinces as "infiltrated" with the insurgency.

borderlands during this Cold War period of heightened security. During this time, the Karen, Shan, and Kuomintang armed groups thrived in an autonomy that confounded Thailand's official perception of the border as space in need of regulation and control. They crossed back and forth over the boundary, launching attacks from Thailand into Burma, and they earned immense profits from the management and taxation of a multi-billion dollar black market in timber, gems, opium, and everyday goods passing through their territory. This was just the sort of behavior the Thais had expressed as anathema, a rationale for critiques of and attacks against other highland communities the government perceived to be linked to communists. From this perspective it becomes possible to see how official consideration of the border and attitudes toward highland peoples were, at this time, related to the influence of broader geopolitical concerns.

The Thai government's view of upland autonomy through the lens of anti-communist struggle helps explain their militarized response to certain ethnic minority expressions of autonomy in the border region in the 1960s and 70s. For example, even though various highland communities had violently protested perceived government intrusions in the past, the Thai labeled the "Red Meo revolt" (Meo being another term for Hmong) what started as a series of land quarrels in Chiang Rai and Nan Provinces between Hmong residents and local Thai authorities in late 1967 (Cooper 1979; Renard 2000). Fearing that Hmong unrest was an act inspired by the communists, the Thai army responded to small-scale attacks with artillery and airstrikes, destroying villages and displacing many hundreds (Marks 1994). Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, the Thai government waged war on their own highlands in an attempt to stamp out rebellion at the same time their repressive tactics motivated increasing numbers of peasants, students,

and ethnic minority groups to join the insurgency.[26] Journalists covering the conflict in the mid-1970s analogized what they saw to what was taking place in Vietnam: napalm dropped indiscriminately in forest areas and "wanton killing and damage inflicted on the rural people in the remote areas where the heaviest fighting takes place" (Economic & Political Weekly 1976: 1,823).[27] Also documented was the relocation of whole villages from highlands to the lowlands; in some cases, people ended up in government-built "new villages" because they fled fighting, while in other cases, the Thai security forces had razed their homes and brought them down to the lowlands where they could not aid rebels (Abrams 1970; Thomson 1968). Hearn (1974) suggests that about 100 villages were destroyed during the late 1960s and early 1970s when the government's counter-insurgency tactics most severely targeted highland-dwelling Hmong people. Tapp (1989) asserts that while Hmong communities were not particularly affiliated with the communist insurgency prior to these events, such government reprisals drove them to join the CPT. Pinkaew (1996) echoes this perspective, noting that Karen living in western Thailand joined the CPT only after seemingly random attacks on their villages by the Thai military in the 1960s and 1970s.

Simultaneous to the tactic of military might, the Thai government also engaged in a substantial campaign to "develop" highland areas and extend the "border of Thainess," as Thongchai (1994) puts it. This was part of what has been referred to as a CPM (Civil-

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[26] Also fueling rebellion was the police and paramilitary crackdown on student protesters at Thammasat University on October 6, 1976 and the subsequent coup and takeover by the military. Though the military asserted the need for them to be in power to combat the widespread communist insurgency, their takeover appeared only to galvanize widespread support for the uprising.

[27] It is important to note that these tactics were not entirely disconnected from the conflicts taking place in nearby countries. Not only did the US fund Thailand's counter-insurgency efforts, but Thailand was involved (alongside the US) in funding anti-Soviet factions among the Cambodian refugees who fought against the Vietnamese who were, at the time, occupying Cambodia.

Police-Military) approach, which was heavily sponsored by the United States (Marks 2007). Government programs served the dual purpose of gaining the support of highland communities and increasing the government's access to such areas in order to better suppress insurgents and diminish the opium trade. This included the establishment of a number of paramilitary forces, such as the Border Patrol Police, the Volunteer Defense Corps, the Village Scouts, and the Rangers, all of whom had different roles ranging from armed patrol missions, to development projects, to the mobilization of the rural population under the banner of nationalism (Ball and Mathieson 2007; Bowie 1997; Lobe and Morell 1978). A Hill Tribe Division of the Public Welfare Department of the Ministry of Interior began work in the late 1950s and early 1960s to engage in "resettlement and development" of ethnic minorities, a policy that continued into the 1980s (McNabb 1983). The US Agency for International Development (USAID) poured tens of millions of dollars into "Accelerated Rural Development" programs which sought to improve the production capacity of rural communities, build roads connecting rural to urban areas, better extend government authority into the village level, "promote the growth of democracy," and provide vocational training (Vichit 1966).

Thus, parallel to and intersecting with the state of active warfare in the highlands were government efforts with substantial international financial support to build schools, roads, bridges, health centers, and government buildings; spread the education of the Thai language, school curriculum, and love of the monarchy; fund cash crop alternatives to the production of opium; and train and support village-level counter-insurgency efforts (Bowie 1997; Keyes 1995; Tapp 1989). However, scholars argue that these were "of secondary importance," in that "Many of the development projects, such as the

construction of rural roads built in security-sensitive areas were primarily intended to serve the needs of the police and military in combating the insurgents" (Thomas 1986: 20). Either way, a significant result was to diminish the relative isolation of highland communities in multiple ways.

A third component to the government's reterritorialization of the borderlands involved its forest and land policy during this time, which, together with "resettlement and development" and a military presence, reconfigured the system of landholding in this territory and furthered a discourse of ethnic minorities as unlawfully living in spaces that needed to be regulated. Under the Reservation and Protection of Forests Act of 1938, which prohibited grazing animals or clearing land in reserved spaces, in the 1950s and 1960s, the Thai government began designating large swaths of territory as protected areas, even when sections of these areas were in use or inhabited (Vandergeest and Peluso 1995). Through this process, over forty percent of Thailand was considered "protected" by 1985 (ibid). Other initiatives took place in the second half of the twentieth century to mark certain areas as national parks and protected watersheds. At the same time, in the 1950s, the government instituted reforms to the landholding system such that property owners had to register their land (within 180 days) or it would be considered uninhabited and thus the state's (Vandergeest and Peluso 1995).[28] The policy was based on fixed property lines, which did not support the shifting-agriculture of many highland communities.

While many of those who did not register their land were those in more remote areas living off of swidden farming, because of lax enforcement, many living in upland

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[28] The policy of declaring unregistered land unoccupied extended from 1954 until 1971 when it was abolished in recognition of the many thousands of settlers who had moved into protected areas unlawfully.

areas, including protected territory, continued their livelihoods without change. Nevertheless, two consequences of these laws and policies were to consider certain people and their livelihoods illegal and the issuance of a series of plans to remove the millions of people living in reserves, watersheds, and national parks. Tapp (1989) and Walker and Farrelly (2008) describe limited and isolated incidents of displacement and relocation of ethnic minorities from protected areas from the mid-1970s through the 1980s, totaling 5-6,000 people who ended up in lowland settlements. More than the act of forced relocation though, forest and land policies during this time contributed to the alienation and exclusion of highland peoples.

During and after the insurgency in northern and western Thailand, the military and the government used internationally funded development projects to encourage the population of forested territory in border areas by lowland farmers to expand alternative cash-crop production (Hirsch 2009; Vandergeest and Peluso 1995). The government encouraged such groups to settle in the highlands as a security measure; new roads and other infrastructure in previously semi-autonomous areas established new villages loyal to the government and disrupted the support networks of insurgents and other communities who had been living more or less independently. Hirsch (2009: 125) describes this as a kind of "frontier-taming" and a continuation of the "state's civilizing mission" of its territory's outer reaches, but notes that the settling of the highlands also had to do with "global market demand for commercial rice and other crops." Settlers and investors often followed directly in the footsteps of the logging industry which cleared vast swaths of public territory, enabling the establishment of high value agribusiness on the border, such as sugar, pineapples, cut flowers, and even prawn farms (Hirsch 1992).

Border development, then, had less to do with protecting forested land or empowering

and incorporating local communities, and more to do with reconfiguring space to be more

economically useful.

While most of the government initiatives during the Cold War did not result in the

forced displacement of large numbers of highland peoples or other rural landholders, they

changed the relationship between the conception of forest space, national territory, and

what type of people and practices were entitled to property. On the one hand,

development, land, and forest programs furthered the late nineteenth/early twentieth

century goals of constructing the Thai geo-body and a unified concept of a "Thai nation"

by pushing language and identity into areas in the name of national security (Baker and

Pasuk 2005). On the other hand, discourse, policies, and practice during this period

drastically changed the economic topography of the border. Hirsch (2009) aptly describes

the growth of cash-crop industrial agriculture in border areas as a process of

accumulation by dispossession. Instead of semi-autonomous villages practicing

swidden/shifting agriculture in a small-scale, cyclical fashion, the newer settlements used

this land to create labor intensive contract farming, often on an industrial scale, a shift

that created significant demand for seasonal, low-wage migrant labor. Groups like the

Hmong that had farmed cyclically, became more sedentary in the 1980s and 1990s, and

wealthy Thai investors bought up land that had been lying fallow to start industrial farms,

drastically increasing land prices (Hirsch 1992).

In this sense, the Cold War era constituted another iteration in Thailand's struggle

to control and manage its frontiers; not only western and northern as highlighted in this

section, but eastern as well where 300,000 Cambodian refugees lived in camps. While, by

the end of this period, Thailand had succeeded in gaining control over its borders in ways that it had not been able to during previous eras, the state had also both further excluded its highland communities and laid the groundwork to transform the space into a site of labor-intensive production (Cambodian refugees had also mostly repatriated or been resettled). As Anna Tsing (2005: 28) writes, these interconnected contradictions were a common theme throughout the region during this period, where due to:

> Cold War militarization of the Third World and the growing power of corporate transnationalism,…resource frontiers grew up where entrepreneurs and armies were able to disengage nature from local ecologies and livelihoods, "freeing up" natural resources that bureaucrats and generals could offer as corporate raw material.

And yet, underlying all these Thai government efforts to "tame" the frontier is the reality that a number of groups, such as Burmese Karen and Shan separatist movements, who took up the anti-communist struggle, exerted their own, heavily organized, cross-border sovereignty in ways that directly contradicted the notion of the Thai geo-body.

5.3 Mae Sot and Phob Phra as a site of refuge, reterritorialization, and black market trade

While previous eras marked Mae Sot on the map as a stop between Rangoon, Bangkok, and Chiang Mai, the political and economic-spatial changes during the Cold War era reconfigured Mae Sot and the surrounding border districts of Tak province from a remote border trade post into a site of refuge, exile, resistance, conflict, and industrialization. Many of the events described above—including insurgency and counter-insurgency, development and the expansion of "Thai-ness," and deforestation and new settlements—took place near Mae Sot as well, and are directly related to the establishment of the sites where research was conducted for this study and to the social practices discussed in subsequent chapters.

In terms of conflict, development, and social dislocation on the Thai side of the border, the mountainous districts of Tak province were sites of intense struggle. Umphang emerged as a communist stronghold in the 1970s because the area was heavily forested, remote, and largely controlled by the Karen and not by the state government, making it an ideal place for dissidents and students-turned-insurgents to hide (Pinkaew 2003; Pitch 2007). To suppress rebellious Karen and Hmong villages in this area, the government initiated infrastructure and social relocation projects aimed at pacifying the people. This included the construction of a road in 1973, and the establishment of several towns and settlements with schools and police stations over the following years, including the two Phob Phra sites where research was conducted for this dissertation. The road, the only one from Mae Sot to Umphang, is an extraordinarily winding 125-mile route through the Dawna Mountains, next to the border with Myanmar, that passed through dozens of highland villages considered insurrectionary when it was built (see Rt. 1090 on Map 3, chapter 1). The road was built one stone at a time in the face of frequent attacks from insurgents. Using one ethnic minority group to pacify or displace others, the Thai army requested support from the anti-communist Karen National Liberation Army (the armed branch of the KNU), who controlled the territory on the Myanmar side of the border, to help guard the road-builders and to patrol the surrounding hills (Pitch 2007; [field notes, February 15, 2014]). The army also sent in a paramilitary group known as *krathing daeng* (red gaurs) made up of highland migrants from Burma (including Akha, Lahu, Lisu, and Yao peoples) and Kuomintang soldiers from China to guard the civilian road crews (Schmid and Jongman 2005).

To express gratitude for the frontline fighting of the Karen and the *krathing*

daeng, King Bumiphol of Thailand granted them the right to settle in the area close to the

48 kilometer marker and, according to one veteran still living in the area, "cultivate all

the land we could see" [field notes, 20 February 2014]. Today, there are a number of

Karen villages in this part of Phob Phra who remain closely affiliated with the KNU

across the border.[29] For the *krathing daeng*, the area they settled became an official

village in 1977 and the Thai government named this nationalist, anti-communist

settlement *Romklao Sahamit*, which translates to "Under the protection of the King;" a

pocket of loyal subjects implanted on the land that used to belong to rebellious Hmong

opium farmers.[30] A government school with the same name was also established along

with other village-level institutions, such as pro-government village chiefs. Additional

Romklao Sahamit villages and schools were established along the border, including one

about fifty kilometers further south on the same road.[31]

    With the construction of the road, the establishment of outpost towns, and the

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[29] The presence of Karen villages that claim loyalty to the KNU in this area corresponds to my discussion of Karen-based networks of power in chapter five.

[30] The use of the monarchy in the naming of this village is significant and reflects the military and the government's use of the king to construct a sense of unity in a fractured country. The king of Thailand has, himself, played a major role in this project. Though the country is a constitutional monarchy with a strong parliamentary system and everyday executive power lies in the hands of a prime minister, the king and the military maintain an extremely close relationship such that the agendas of the military and the monarch are often conflated.

[31] Entering the latter village from the highway, one passes under a large wooden gate with the name carved in a style mimicking Chinese letters, homage to the Kuomintang soldiers who helped establish the place. In this village, Chinese script can be found on the doorframes of many houses, but today the descendents of Kuomintang fighters say they are ethnic Haw instead of Chinese because this enabled them to register for Thai ethnic minority IDs. According to older residents, the first village chief was the Kuomintang commander who declared that the village was only for those ethnic groups who had fought together against the communists; no Hmong or Thai people were allowed to settle there; residents affirm that this was the case until he passed away. Residents say that over the years the Thai government reneged on their promise of land to the anti-communist veterans and began relocating other groups to neighboring areas as part of a subsequent era of social landscaping called *Ruam Thai Pattana* (develop Thailand together). To clear a national park south of Umphang district in the 1980s, the Thai government moved thousands of Hmong to the hills near *Romklao Sahamit*; only a string of villages along the highway in Phob Phra are now not Hmong dominated [field notes, 20 February 2014].

ongoing control of certain areas by the KNU, Phob Phra developed as a site for both

Karen resistance and intensive resource extraction. Once trees were cleared, capital-

intensive agribusiness moved into this fertile highland territory. Now, all along the two-

lane highway, one finds massive plantations with thousands of acres of roses, corn,

cabbage, palm sugar, and other crops. These are interspersed with smaller Hmong and

Karen farming communities.

Photo 5: Gate to Romklao Sahamit village (KM48). The gate was made to look Chinese because of the many former Kuomintang soldiers involved in the militia that fought for the Thai government against the communist insurgency during the construction of the road to Umphang.

Not only Phob Phra, but Mae Sot and districts to the north were also KNU

strongholds during this time. As noted in the section above, the Thai government gave

them tacit permission to operate autonomously on this part of the border in exchange for

their fight against communism. As the Burmese army gained more territory in the

southeast of Burma pushing the Karen further east and over the border, Mae Sot

increasingly became a hub for KNU activity where one could find the homes of

government-in-exile officials and generals (Lang 2002; South 2008). Mae Sot also

attracted many thousands fleeing the Burmese governments' crackdown against students

and democracy activists in 1988 and 1989 and during the post-1990 election repression

(Fink 2009). They too relied on Mae Sot as a safe corridor beyond the range of the *Tatmadaw* from which they could engage in advocacy and regroup, many joining the armed struggles of different ethno-nationalist insurgents, and others staying to start Mae Sot's budding unregistered civil society industry. By the end of the twentieth century, Mae Sot was a prime headquarters for forces opposed to the Myanmar government, and central in their narrative of resistance.

Related to this is the presence of refugee camps along the border in five different provinces. Ashley South argues that the refugee camps which opened in the mid-1980s along the Thai side of the border swelled in the 1990s with former soldiers, families of combatants, and the civilian branches of the exiled Karen, Mon, and Karenni political bodies (2008; 2011). As of October 2014, there were 74,000 registered refugees living in the camps, though as a result of a long-stalled registration process, the unregistered number in the camps brings the total over 110,000 (TBC 2014). Over 90,000 Burmese refugees have left the camps to resettle in third countries since 2005 (UNHCR 2014). The largest refugee camp, Mae La, which hosts more than 40,000 people, is just thirty-five miles north of Mae Sot and another camp, Umpiem Mae which holds 15,000 refugees, is only fifty-five miles to the south in Phob Phra district. Additional camps extend to the south and north of Mae Sot, and the town is the primary junction for residents' movement between camps and urban spaces (Mae Sot, Bangkok, and elsewhere) and from one camp to another. There are also thousands of Shan refugees in Thailand, most of whom work as migrants or who attempt to blend in with the Thai population. The influx of displaced Burmese in the mid-1980s and 1990s came just as Thailand and the international

community were resolving the decade-long Cambodian refugee crisis.[32] Fatigued from the latter, the Burmese on the border initially received little attention, which Bowles (1998) argues facilitated self-sufficiency and autonomy among the displaced Burmese who moved back and forth across the border depending on conditions in Myanmar.

In addition to their pervasive social and political networks extending across the border, until the end of the twentieth century, the KNU also controlled an incredibly lucrative black market trade that passed through Mae Sot for goods to get into Burma/Myanmar (Horstmann 2011). As part of Burma's "socialist" program—initiated in 1962 after the military coup—the government shut down nearly all of its official border trade. Mae Sot and the Burmese town of Myawaddy (four km away, see Map 5) across the border emerged as the primary gateway for a variety of illicit essential goods into socialist Burma (Pitch 2007; Mya Maung 1991).

Map 5: Myawaddy, Mae Sot & border crossings

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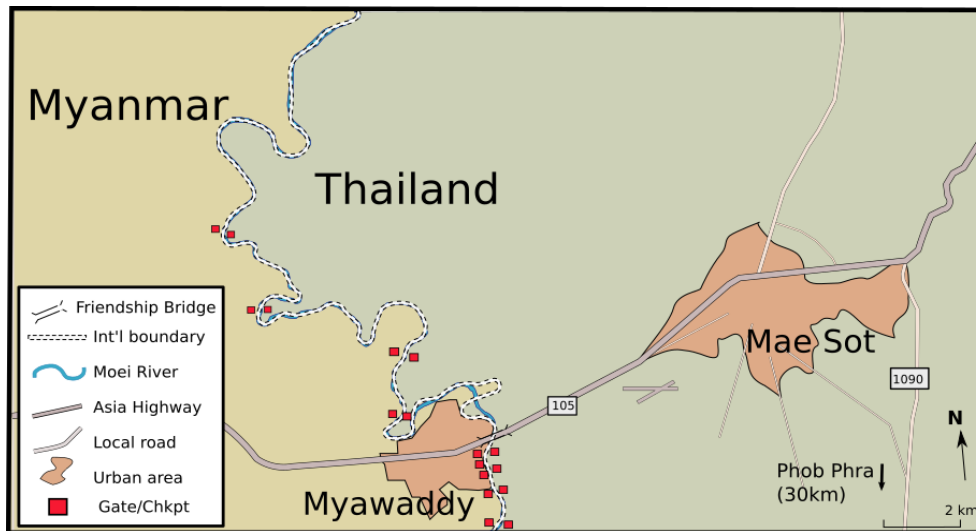
[32] The attention the Cambodian crisis received from the international community contrasted heavily with the Burmese influx. While the former received significant international support immediately and fit in the broader Cold War narrative of refugees from Soviet-backed Vietnamese aggression, Thailand sought to deal quietly with the growing population of Burmese refugees along the border (Robinson 1998). This is likely another reason the western border was a space of autonomy and factionalization in the way it was.

Mya Maung (1991) asserts that during these years of economic failure and insularity in Burma/Myanmar, it was the black market that sustained much of the population. There was no more vibrant trade route for the black market than that between Myanmar and Thailand, and in particular:

> the largest trade points were border market centers in Mae Sot, Phob Phra, Mae Ramat, and Tha Song Yang district…The most active illegal border trade between Burma and Thailand was conducted along the Thai river of Moei involving more than fifty different Thai market centers or custom outposts…There were five different outposts in the township of Mae Sot alone…The Thai exports from Mae Sot were mostly basic necessities needed by a Burmese family (Mya Maung 1991: 210).

For example, one report from the late 1980s observed nearly three-dozen trucks heading from Thailand through Mae Sot into Myanmar daily through just one crossing, with an estimated average value of 200,000 baht [~ US$8,000] per truck (Khin Maung Nyunt 1988: 98). Going the opposite direction, from Myanmar into Thailand along the same routes were precious and semi-precious stones and hardwood (Mya Maung 1991; Felbab-Brown 2013). See Table 1 for a list of commonly traded items in the early 1980s.

Table 1: 1980s Burma-Thailand trade

Burma → Thailand	Thailand → Burma
Fish, food, other	Auto parts and bicycles
Opium and drugs	Pastes/sauces/food products
Gems	Textiles
Timber/wood	Chemicals/plastics
Livestock	Pharmaceutical
Minerals	Electric appliances

Adapted from Takamuri and Mouri 1984, p. 134

In addition, scholars, NGOs, and UN agencies have identified Mae Sot and the trade routes as hubs for human trafficking, as well as trafficking in arms, counterfeit and

contraband goods, and drugs (Chouvy 2013; Feingold 2013; Capie 2013; Lintner 2013).

For many years in the 1960s and 1970s, a large informal border market existed in the

open near Mae Sot where Burmese forces could not easily access it, a testament to the

lack of control either Myanmar or Thailand could exert on the town or the trade. The

scale of the black market trade in the 1960s and 1970s prompted the migration to Mae

Sot of traders and smugglers.

Despite officially being on Thai soil, the social fabric and economic terrain of

Mae Sot and Phob Phra constitutes a microcosm of the many contradictions intersecting

in the Thai-Myanmar border space. With major geopolitical transitions taking place in the

late 1980s and early 1990s—the end of the Cold War, Burmese "socialism," and

Thailand's communist insurgency—the border gradually ceased to be a site of political

struggle and emerged as a space illuminated by regional governments as a symbol of

Southeast Asia's new economic cooperation.[33] This signified the shift Thailand's then-

Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan called for in turning "battlefields into market

places" in the late 1980s (Battersby 1999). As the next section demonstrates, this change,

which emphasized the economic power of the Thailand-Myanmar borderlands as a

distinct region within Southeast Asia, was entirely contingent on the influx of more than

two million migrants from Myanmar, fleeing both the broader effects of civil war and

economic destitution.

6. Crisis and the movement of capital: Mae Sot as a special economic zone

With the borderlands constituted and reconstituted as a peripheral space of

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[33] As Thailand grew significantly closer to the government of Myanmar, these geopolitical changes also
signaled the termination of the partnership between Thai security forces and the KNU who had lost much
of their control over the Burmese side of the border (Smith 2007).

"otherness" and as a result of the physical, political, and demographic changes wrought on this landscape, the Thailand-Myanmar frontier has come to reflect an ideal locale for a particular form of capital accumulation that advances gendered and racialized assumptions about the people there. As I show in this section, in order to remain competitive amidst the broader regional and global turn toward neoliberal market reforms, Thailand capitalized on the unique social, economic, and political dynamic of the border space to establish a special economic zone around Mae Sot. The modes of production and gendered social organization one finds in this zone today derive in many ways from the discursive contradictions that define Mae Sot and the Thailand-Myanmar borderlands as a space set apart. They also reflect the spatial relations of uneven geographic development.

Since the early 1990s, the tension between the border's designation as external and semi-autonomous and the desire for the Thai state to incorporate, regulate, and make this space useful has manifested itself in Mae Sot's growth as a hub for capital and migration. In terms of capital, Pitch (2007: 417) notes that "it was the armed ethnic war [in Myanmar] that has structured the economy of the area," in the sense that the KNU and later the breakaway faction Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) controlled most of the lucrative Thailand-Myanmar trade along Thailand's western border via a series of informal crossing points. Mae Sot's reputation as the port for an immense black market trade between Myanmar and Thailand drew in brokers from throughout Thailand in the 1980s and multi-national capital investment in the 1990s when relations between the two countries improved (Pitch 2007). By the mid 2000s, goods passing through Mae Sot represented fourteen percent of Myanmar's *official* border trade, which accounted, in

2007, for about thirteen percent of all of Myanmar's imports and exports (Kudo 2013).[34]

As of 2007, official statistics showed that US $360 million of trade passed through Mae

Sot annually (imports and exports), while unofficial estimates are closer to $1.5 billion

(Silp 2007).[35] During the 1990s, improved relations between Thailand and Myanmar also

led to a series of new economic initiatives centered around this vibrant cross-border trade,

including Thai investments in Burmese contract farming and logging initiatives,

hydropower, and mining—only some of which was legal (see for example, Felbab-Brown

2013).[36] A major source of investment was also a budding garment industry in Mae Sot,

tailored according to gendered assumptions to capitalize on the thousands of Burmese

women entering Thailand through this town. Firms relocated to the border in order to

undercut organized Thai labor in the country's central provinces as well (Maneepong

2006; Piya 2007).

Along with the thousands of mostly Karen and Shan refugees displaced from

southeastern Myanmar since the 1980s, and the urban activists fleeing persecution in

Yangon, Thailand has become a destination for some two to three million Burmese men

and women uprooted as a result of fifty years of disastrous economic practices under two

different dictatorships (Martin 2007; Matthews 2006). Burmese households throughout

Myanmar have struggled against double-digit inflation, unreliable market prices, regional

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[34] In the late 1990s, the primary imports from Burma to Thailand were wood and gems and as one of the more developed border towns, much of this traffic—which is semi-legal or completely illegal—passed through Mae Sot (Maneepong and Wu 2004).

[35] Kudo (2013: 190) compared Burmese and Thai statistics from FY 2006 and found significant discrepancies regarding the value of imports and exports between Mae Sot and Myawaddy. According to Myanmar there were US $61 million in exports to Mae Sot and US $95.1 million in imports from that port. However, according to Thailand, the former was only US $34.2 million and the latter was US $289 million. The enormous discrepancy may be indicative of the double flow of legal and illegal goods and a lack of agreement between the two countries about which goods show up in official records and which do not.

[36] This coincided with the formal renewal of official border trade between Myawaddy in Myanmar and Mae Sot in Thailand in 1998 (see Lintner 2013).

economic downturns, and arbitrary taxation on the local level (MAP 2010; Myat Thein 2004; Fink 2001).[37] During the years of "socialism" (1962-1989), they had to rely on overpriced commodities since these entered the Burmese consumer market illegally through limited channels. They also had to deal with a paucity of education and healthcare infrastructure (James 2005; Jolliffe 2014). For all of these reasons, and also because of lax immigration enforcement in Thailand (see chapter four), increasing numbers of Burmese migrated to Thailand. Already a hub for black market goods, migrants found it easy to cross the unregulated border at any one of more than a dozen piers and gates to the north and south of Mae Sot where boats move back and forth across the Moei River with great regularity (see Map 5 above and Photo 6 below).

Photo 6: (Left to right) one of many ferries taking migrants across the Moei River; goods moving from Myanmar to Thailand; a "market" of cars for import to Myanmar

Up until the late 1990s, Mae Sot's growth as a garment production site and target for investment was relatively slow, given the isolation of the border, the proximity of conflict on the other side of the border, and the lack of infrastructure supporting industry. Having opened a Mae Sot branch in 1996 to take advantage of rising numbers of migrants, the Federation of Thai Industries started with thirty firms and only increased at a rate of five per year for the first three years (Arnold 2007; FTI 2013). Glassman (2010)

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[37] Arbitrary taxation refers to a form of extortion at the hands of military and government actors, and some insurgent groups as well. This takes place during temporary or permanent occupation of villages by military/armed groups or when patrols pass through, as well as at checkpoints along roads.

notes that during this time, the border area received only minimal foreign direct investment.

However, the 1997-98 Southeast Asian economic crisis effected a complete reconfiguration of the relationship between industry, labor, and capital in Thailand in a way that transformed this localized zone of border trade set in a predominantly agricultural region into an industrial site connected to far away centers of capital (Maneepong 2006). Harvey (2010) refers to the economic and political changes that much of Southeast Asia underwent as a result of this crisis as accumulation by dispossession linked to the movement of capital on a global level.[38] Ling (2004: 115) describes a gendered tone to this crisis and the aftermath, as the institutions of global capital sought to "(re)feminize Asia by discrediting the region's claim to a muscular, alternative capitalism" while (re)masculinizing "the role of Western capital in the region by buying out Asian capital at bankrupt prices." This period witnessed the evisceration of organized labor, a shift toward foreign control over Southeast Asian economies, and a transition to export-oriented economies built on the backs of flexible labor in ways that reflected capital's gendered hierarchies.

6.1 Economic crisis and the relocation of capital to the borderlands

Kicking off two years of harsh economic recession that spread throughout Southeast Asia and beyond as far as Brazil and Russia, the Thai baht collapsed in July of 1997 in the face of massive debt and financial speculation. These trends were a reflection

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[38] Harvey describes the 1997-98 crisis as a safety valve for capital-rich economies trying to avoid their own crisis of over-accumulation in the sense that it was a largely manipulated event, which led to the rapid devaluation of assets and the subsequent creation of immense opportunity for capital in North America and especially East Asia to buy these assets up at a lower cost and with fewer regulations. Harvey points to Argentina's 2001 crisis as another such example.

of the previous decade's drastic economic and political reforms in Thailand. In the 1980s, the Thai government followed the World Bank's advice to liberalize its external trade and deregulate foreign investment, which helped transform the economy into one built on export-oriented manufacturing (Pasuk and Baker 2008). The following decade saw a flood of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into Thailand's retail and manufacturing sectors, such as telecommunications and the automobile industry. From 1987 to 1997, Thailand experienced an economic boom with an influx of investment into industry as East Asian countries relocated their manufacturing overseas to Thai factories. Investment in property, real estate, retail, and telecoms also soared (Pasuk and Baker 2007). The biggest portion of this investment came from East Asia, particularly Japan, but also Taiwanese and Hong Kong-based firms.[39] Bello (1997) points out that in Thailand during this period, fifty percent of all investment came from property-related loans and between thirty and fifty percent of annual growth of the GDP came from property development. By the 1990s, firms in the US and Europe also entered the speculation market by investing in Thai loans and property. In addition, domestic firms began borrowing from international lenders with lower interest rates than Thai banks, and to an extreme degree as they sought to keep up with the pace of growth. During the decade of economic success, the private sector's debt "ballooned from 8 billion baht in 1988 to 74 billion in 1996" (Pasuk and Baker 2008: 7).

As soon as the Thai baht was unyoked from the US dollar in July 1997, the bubble popped and the value of the baht decreased by half over the following five

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[39] Piya (2007: 132) writes: "Between 1985 and 1990, about US $15 billion of Japanese direct investment poured into Southeast Asia, and by 1996 about US $48 billion in Japanese FDI was concentrated in the countries of Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines."

months. But because so much of the debt in Thailand was foreign-held, the devaluation of

the baht meant that firms in Thailand had to pay out double for fixed interest debt

payments to foreign institutions (Wade and Veneroso 1998). Lenders clambered to

collect their loans as borrowers defaulted on their debt; the Thai economy recoiled and

effectively shuttered with GDP decreasing by eleven percent (Natenapha 2008). Instead

of remedying the situation, the IMF greatly exacerbated the crisis with a support package

that included deflation, further shrinking consumer spending (Pasuk and Baker 2008;

Wade and Veneroso 1998).[40] Many Thai finance companies closed, and banks stopped

operating. As a result of the crisis, by the end of 1997, there were an estimated two

million people out of work. Millions of Thais had migrated from rural to urban areas in

the 1980s and 1990s, many to participate in the burgeoning manufacturing industries. As

part of the gendered aspect of this crisis, hundreds of thousands of Thai women who had

left agricultural villages in the north and northeast of the country to join the workforces

of the garment and textile industries lost their jobs (Mills 1999; Piya 2007).[41] In the few

years after the crisis hit Thailand, nearly 350,000 industrial workers (including 150,000

women) lost their jobs as hundreds of factories shut their doors (Piya 2007: 134).

     The crisis and the recovery moved Thailand from an economy built on domestic

capital to one where it was minimal compared to the percent owned by multinational

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[40] The IMF provided a package to Thailand meant to help deal with crises related to excessive government borrowing, not the accumulation of private debt. Their insistence on further liberalization and deregulation appears to have been built on the notion that reshaping the Thai economy to more closely resemble Western economies would help Thailand recover.

[41] There were certainly many men who lost their jobs as well in that the crisis hit multiple industries. However, more flexible, low-wage manufacturing industries, which have a disproportionately female workforce, were quicker to close doors and relocate elsewhere. It is often the case in financial crises that flexible industries de-materialize and re-materialize. It is also the case that women are usually the first to be laid off in such crises, with the assumption that men are the real income-earners in their households (Pollard 2012; Pollock and Soe Lin Aung 2010).

firms. Natenapha (2008: 23) writes, "in the 10 years following the crisis, the average

annual inflow of FDI was almost three times higher than in the boom decade in dollar

terms, almost five times higher in baht terms, and over double as a proportion of GDP."

Japan emerged as the primary investor and the industry sector received the bulk of this

investment (see Table 2). Natenapha (2008) estimates that 25% of Thai capital was either

liquidated or subordinated to foreign investment acquiring stakes in those firms.

Table 2: Foreign direct investment by sector and country (1970-2006) (Nathenapa 2008: 24)

	1970-1986	1987-1996	1997-2006
FDI yearly average			
US$ billion	0.2	1.7	5.1
Baht billion	3.5	43.7	202.3
% of GDP	0.0	1.6	3.6
Shares by country			
Japan	29.5	28.9	37.6
US	30.9	14.3	12.1
EU	15.5	9.4	18.7
ASEAN	6.1	10.2	14.5
Hong Kong	10.3	15.5	6.2
Taiwan	0.6	6.9	2.5
Shares by sector			
Industry	32.3	37.3	51.6
Trade	19.7	17.9	15.3
Services	7.3	3.8	7.3
Finance	5.2	6.6	4.7
Real Estate	2.8	23.0	5.6
Construction	15.2	8.3	0.8
Other	17.6	3.1	14.7

In the increasingly masculinized Thai economy, marked by increased

liberalization and less regulation, multinational capital, which had quickly become

dominant, was increasingly mobile in search of low-cost production strategies that could

circumvent new labor protection standards and Thai labor unions; the "virgin territory"

Ling (2004) writes about (see also Klein 2007). Through the creative destruction that left

many hundreds of domestic firms closed or converted into majority foreign companies,

there was an opportunity to assert a new model for production that reflects what Arnold

and Pickles (2011) refer to as "dual-space economies." In certain high-value sectors, such

as the auto industry and electronics, foreign companies predicted that over the long term

it would be profitable to continue manufacturing in Thailand. In many cases, including

the auto industry, ownership converted to foreign-majority, FDI increased, and

production increasingly targeted the export market in light of low domestic consumption

(Nathenapha 2008). This high-value production represented Thailand's "First World"

economy. For labor-intensive sectors like garment production, the crisis coincided with a

broader global decrease in profit rates. Thus, investors in Thailand and elsewhere sought

to drastically reduce the cost of this industry through a number of initiatives that

effectively relegated garment production to "Third World" spaces. As elsewhere, in

Thailand this meant the break-up of larger firms with assembly-line systems into a

network of sub-contractors filling orders at a piece-rate for multinational companies. This

further linked the garment industry in Thailand to the new global economy, while

lowering the cost of production significantly.

But while some states who had had thriving garment sectors outsourced

production to other countries with lower wages, fewer rights for workers, and less

regulation, firms in Thailand looked to its borders where the wages and working

conditions enabled competition with markets in China and Bangladesh. Instead of

instilling companies with policies of fiscal responsibility, Walden Bello (1998: 48) and colleagues observed, "Thailand's manufacturers took the easy way out: relying on ever cheaper labor,…reducing the size of factories to contain production costs and inhibit unionizing, and farming out more and more production to temporary workers, contract workers, and migrant workers." This reflects a global pattern of rendering migrants into flexible labor, a pattern that often intersects with various forms of displacement, economic crisis, gendered assumptions, and neoliberal spatial fixes (Castles and Miller 2009; Bacon 2008; De Genova 2005; Massey 1999; Castells 1975).

This was a new era for the Thai garment industry which, in order to remain competitive, relocated itself to the site of cheaper production costs, less regulation, less accountability, and lower wages: Mae Sot. Based on the history described above, the Thai-Myanmar border, particularly Mae Sot, was an ideal host for a less formal garment industry based on subcontractors. As I have shown, Mae Sot emerged as a particular space with characteristics that made it attractive to multinational investors looking to locate capital in a setting with little to no regulation. Dennis Arnold (2010) stresses that local business leaders, and town, district, and provincial authorities, heavily lobbied investors and the central Thai government to make Mae Sot a special economic zone. As a space where stakeholders have thrived on largely illegal trade in timber, gems, and all the other black market goods moving between Myanmar and Thailand, this was the perfect environment to build an unregulated labor-intensive sector. In addition, Thailand's outlying provinces, like Tak, have lower minimum wages than central provinces, such as those around Bangkok that used to host the many hundreds of garment factories that have since been disassembled and moved to the margins of the state (Piya

2007). Finally, the large surplus of women migrants spoke to the gendered ideas that women can earn less, work at a contract or piece-rate, including from home, and are easier to manage and fire (Wright 2006). It was not necessary, Mae Sot's business leaders and local authorities argued, for firms in Thailand to outsource production to neighboring countries with cheaper costs because they could offer a site for "Third World" production without crossing borders, built on the backs of mostly women migrants from Myanmar.

With investors receiving exemptions from paying taxes on imports, businesses, machinery, raw materials, and equipment, regional capital eagerly clustered in places like Mae Sot (Silp 2007; Maneepong 2006). The Federation of Thai Industries, which started in Mae Sot in 1996 with thirty members, now has 144 (FTI 2013). The number of firms investing in Mae Sot jumped in 2000 when it became easier to hire migrant workers legally (Interview, Federation of Thai Industries, 6 February 2014). As of 2013 in Mae Sot there are 365 registered factories with 49,101 workers, the vast majority of whom are migrants from Myanmar (FTI 2013). See Table 3 to compare Mae Sot district with the other districts of Tak Province (see also Map 1 in chapter 1).

Table 3 Registered factories in Tak Province

No.	District	# Factories	Capital (millions of baht)	Male	Female	Total
1	Muang Tak	146	5,044.3	1,874	432	2,306
2	Baan Tak	32	343.9	539	159	698
3	Sam Ngao	18	3,680.9	487	254	741
4	Mae Ramat	23	173.2	246	269	515
5	Tha Song Yang	18	33.9	238	80	318
6	Mae Sot	365	6,013	13,774	35,327	49,101
7	Phob Phra	26	125.7	259	47	306
8	Umphang	10	37.6	36	4	40
9	Wang Jao	39	876.4	351	157	508
Total		677	16,329.2	17,804	36,729	54,533

Federation of Thai Industries 2013

Mae Sot's registered factories represent more than six billion baht of annual capital (US $186 million) (Federation of Thai Industries 2013).

As a result of such growth and the town's strategic location, today Mae Sot features in new regional spatial bodies that re-imagine the geography of mainland Southeast Asia in economic terms and that recast the role of women and men in global production circuits. That is, Mae Sot is now one of a set of focal points on the maps of regional governmental bodies, investors, and multinational financial institutions, particularly the Asian Development Bank and the Association of Southeast

Photo 7: Former PM Yingluk Shinawatra on a billboard showing Mae Sot as the keystone of the ASEAN Economic Community

Asian Nations (ASEAN) (see Photo 7). These maps convey the notion that Mae Sot plays a significant role in broader regional development as it represents Thailand's westernmost point on what is known as the East-West Economic Corridor, part of a development plan for the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) (see Map 6), sponsored by the Asian Development Bank (Glassman 2010).[42] The East-West Economic Corridor and the Greater Mekong Subregion are both constructs of the Asian Development Bank and ASEAN geared towards enhancing economic activities among mainland Southeast Asian

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[42] Recent changes in Myanmar that have led to the lifting of international sanctions and an influx of foreign investment inspired fear among some Thai employers that they would lose their migrant labor force. Since 2012, the Japanese have begun investing in large-scale infrastructural development projects on the Burmese side of the border—what will become production zones with even lower costs—in order to take advantage of a decrease in Thailand's capacity to ensure cheap labor.

countries, strengthening south-south linkages and enabling greater global competitiveness

(Glassman 2010, Asian Development Bank 2009). Incorporating China's Yunnan

Province, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam, the GMS is quickly

expanding its capacity for regional trade via transport routes that cut across borders and

connect trade zones in these various countries (Asian Development Bank 2011). The

East-West Economic Corridor represents the first and only route connecting the Indian

Ocean (the coast of Myanmar) and the South China Sea (the coast of Vietnam) and is part

of ASEAN's and regional financial institutions' (like Asian Development Bank) efforts

to better plug the GMS into circuits of global trade (Arnold and Pickles 2011; ADB

2009). As Map 6 illustrates, Mae Sot lies squarely on the Asia Highway and represents

the gateway to Thailand and territories east. As such, the town is expected to continue to

grow dramatically in the next decades as the flow of multinational investment is

channeled through this town.
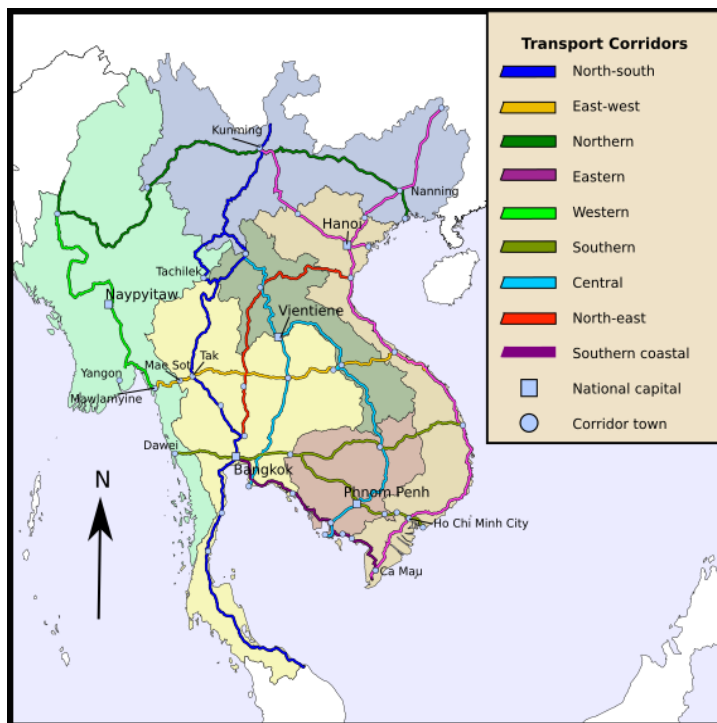
Map 6: Greater Mekong Subregion transportation corridors (adapted from ADB)

Despite Mae Sot's apparent prominence in this reconfiguration of Southeast Asia's geography, the town's position on this map is rather fragile. This is because the maintenance of the border's status as a competitive zone of exception relies entirely on the restriction of migrants' rights and status; that is, on their continued flexibility as a workforce (De Genova 2005). In Thailand, there are five significant mechanisms employed to reproduce migrant precarity and thus the status of the border as outside the state's normative legal and political frameworks. I briefly outline them here.

First, the predominant tool used by the Thai government, which I explore in greater detail in chapter four, is the country's immigration system, which places migrants permanently in what Pitch (2007) calls a "registered illegal immigrant worker" category. Various registration schemes since 1992 have led to partial registration of migrants from Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia, ensuring a vulnerable status for documented migrant workers with limited rights as well as a significant population that has remained undocumented. There are currently 1.6 million migrants from neighboring countries registered in Thailand, but there are believed to be at least the same number living and working without legal status (Penchan 2014). The numbers corresponding to workers mentioned in Table 3 above actually belie the reality of how many migrant workers are in Mae Sot, which includes what is a much larger undocumented population (Saltsman 2011).[43] With migrants in a constant state of "deportability," it has been more possible for employers to get away with exploitative practices.

Second, in Mae Sot, much of the employment is informal and distanced from the

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[43] In the profiling study done for the International Rescue Committee and the Feinstein International Center, results found that 60% of migrants in Mae Sot were undocumented (Saltsman 2011: 24). This resonates with Campbell's observations (2013) and the work of Pearson and Kusakabe (2012) whose estimate is closer to 50%.

brand name companies for whom the garments are produced. Like the numbers of registered migrants mentioned in Table 3 and referred to above, the Federation of Thai Industries' statistics for the number of firms operating in Mae Sot do not account for the many unregistered factories. These are usually "home factories" with no more than fifty workers, and sometimes as few as three or four set up around sewing machines in the house of an "owner."[44] There is no known number of home factories in Mae Sot, but it is believed that there are upwards of fifty of them (Arnold 2010). These unregistered facilities help ensure a level of flexibility for garment production in Mae Sot. Not only are they built on a subcontract system like the larger registered factories, but they are essentially invisible, can pay little and violate worker's rights in other ways, and can shut down and reopen whenever necessary.

Third, employers in Mae Sot's garment industry maintain a largely female workforce. That nearly 72% of the registered workers in Mae Sot (and 80% of registered garment workers in Tak) are women is no accident (FTI 2013; see also Saltsman 2011). As in a number of contexts, Thai labor-intensive industries have long depended on women to fill the factory floors, a reflection of what Salzinger (2003: 157) calls the "transnational trope of productive femininity" (see also Mills 1999; Piya 2007). This trope lies behind what makes women's labor attractive to factory owners and investors. Mills (1999) argues that many employers make assumptions about women, believing they will only work for limited periods of time (until they quit to marry and raise families) and

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[44] These can also be somewhat formal operations that are located far away from main roads or urban areas. This was the case with one factory that I visited during research in February 2014. The unregistered factory I visited employed approximately fifty Burmese migrants living in one village in Phob Phra district to produce plastic figurines. The space was clearly constructed as a factory (as opposed to a private home operating as a factory). Yet, far from the eyes of anybody who might crack down, conditions in this workplace were substandard and some of the workers were under eighteen years old.

that they are therefore less likely to protest low wages and harsh working conditions. Though a wide body of scholarship shows this to be far from the reality, this trope fuels recruitment trends and hiring practices in manufacturing industries attempting to cut production costs (Pearson and Kusakabe 2012). In Thailand, when the crisis engendered a flight of capital to the borders for the garment industry, the feminized workforce also shifted nationalities, populated increasingly by Burmese as opposed to Thai women.

A fourth tool consists of the policies and practices of local authorities in Mae Sot and along the border. As I have noted elsewhere (Saltsman 2014), interactions between migrants and representatives of the Thai state are instances for the performative reproduction of migrant illegality and deportability. Migrants are reminded of their flexible status. In addition, provincial governors, district authorities, employers, and local FTI branches have worked together to establish rules to limit migrant freedoms in an ad hoc fashion. For example, in late 2006, five provincial governors issued provincial decrees that prohibited migrants from public gatherings and from owning mobile phones, motorbikes, or cars (Human Rights Watch 2010). In 2012, in response to complaints from employers about migrants leaving Mae Sot, the police began turning migrants back at checkpoints on the way out of town, even those migrants with registration (Lawi Weng 2012; see also chapter four for further details). In 2014, the governor of Surat Thani province imposed a curfew on migrant workers (Supapong 2014).

Finally, there is in Thailand a prominent discourse that reproduces public enmity and disdain for Burmese migrants based on particular narratives of regional history. Politicians have used Burma-Siam conflicts that took place more than two hundred years ago to justify restrictions on the freedoms of migrants (Arnold and Pickles 2011). Thai

television programming portrays Burmese as "bad neighbors and socially inferior" (Zaw Aung 2012); and government actors have insisted that migrants give DNA samples for the establishment of a national database of foreigners to prevent "foreign murderers lurking in the country" (The Nation 2013). "One consequence," of these portrayals, according to Arnold and Pickles (2011: 17), "has been the easy justification of intolerable conditions for migrants, and especially for those working in low-skilled, low-wage labor-intensive industries." While it is not clear that such discourse is successful in generating a wave of hatred or condescension towards Burmese among the broader Thai public, there is no doubt that this kind of racialization is linked to rationales for the exploitative treatment migrants face.

All of these mechanisms demonstrate a widespread effort to buttress the notion of the borderlands as a space set apart from the rest of Thailand. During the era of economic liberalization, which, in this context, began in the early 1990s, the Thailand-Myanmar borderlands increasingly attracted multi-national capital because of the perceived exceptional status of this space. And yet, to the extent that the flow of undocumented migrants and the promise of cheap labor motivated investment and supported an image of the border as a special zone, employers and authorities have, ever since, faced the challenge of reproducing the terms of exclusion in Mae Sot and surrounding districts. They are, in a sense, captive to the narratives that have been discursively constructed throughout history, but which do not often reflect the lived experiences of the people inhabiting the borderland.

7. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how the highlands between Thailand and Myanmar

emerged as a multi-dimensional border. At once a boundary between two states and a conceptual tool to articulate the differentiation between the incorporated national community and the excluded space of the "other," the construction of the Thailand-Myanmar border is a process that is still ongoing.

While prior to colonialism the highlands between the lowland polities of Burma and Siam were imagined as peripheral peoples and spaces in comparison to the center, the colonial era was significant in that during these years, colonial and nationalist powers affixed such categories in racial/ethnic terms at the same time they concretized national boundaries. The concept of this national border as a site of difference was significant in the postcolonial period as well in that both Burmese and Thai government authorities located threats to their sovereignty at the borders and simultaneously profited off of the illicit practices taking place there, including opium production and rampant deforestation. And, as I have shown in the last section of the chapter, the rise of a special economic zone on the border in Mae Sot is contingent on the notion of the border as a site of difference set apart from the regulatory frameworks of the rest of the country.

Nevertheless, intersecting with each of these iterations of border construction are the lived experiences of the people inhabiting this frontier space, the diverse local histories that center this marginal space. This includes both their various organized efforts to remain autonomous from the control of the state as well as their everyday encounters which do not adhere to the hierarchies, definitions, or categories dominant power relations have applied to them over the years. The contrast between popular discourse and lived experience is part of what constitutes the borderland; a space of contradictions where concepts of nation, ethnicity, belonging, and identity are

performatively negotiated on an everyday basis. As such, the social dynamics I analyze in this dissertation are a product of the multitude of conflicting relations of power. The specific nature of governance and sovereignty in their fractured and variegated forms in this borderland speak to the various constructions of the border as separate and untamed.

These relations are not only discursive, but take on a material form as well in the shape of changes to the natural topography of the highlands. Labor camps, informal activist offices, checkpoints, expansive plantations, factories, highways, and deforested hills are all the product of the particular discourses that have made this territory a space of labor-intensive production, refuge, resistance, and transit. The material forms of this border interact with the discursive and relational, giving rise to and shaping each other.

This dissertation positions its analysis at a particular juncture in space and time where the material and the relational borders appear to be tearing apart from one another even as they contribute to each other's reproduction. In the age of advanced capitalism, the political and economic value of the border is increasingly becoming centered on the bodies of migrant workers and their labor-power. No longer a point strategic to national security, and quickly depleted of its natural resources, the profitability of the border lies in the export potential of the garment and agriculture industries as well as in the role Mae Sot will play in future regional trade and transit. The mechanisms mentioned in the previous section for ensuring migrant flexibility are not specifically yoked to the physical territory of the Thailand-Myanmar border, though the latter has been central in the creation of each of these strategies, as the chapter has shown. Indeed, the differentiation between statuses linking to wages, rights, and entitlements, which derives from the historic categories of center/periphery and all their social meaning, can now be applied

anywhere migrants find themselves in Thailand. That is, migrants, and their interactions

with local authorities and employers, embody the border, and as such reproduce it and

have the power to change its contours and nature. I focus on this "multiplication of

borders" because within the performative embodiment of historical violence and

exclusion are opportunities to assert local histories and alternative subjectivities.

Finally, throughout the chapter, I have noted the shifting role and presence of

gender. This includes the use of metaphors for considering how the border fits into

broader, regional, constructions; from colonial representations of Europe and Asia to the

more contemporary relationship between economies, global capital, and states. In

addition, I referenced the assumptions that adhere to men and women and result in the

materialization of unequal relationships within the border space. Weaving the gendered

construction of space through the more general analysis in this chapter helps set the stage

for the practices and discourses that this dissertation looks at in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 3—Representation and the "local": Knowledge construction and the power of discourse in a collaborative action research project

1. The trailer of knowledge construction

There are thirteen of us crammed into the portable trailer, around two long and narrow folding tables that give us just enough room to sit, but not enough room to move about. It is March, approaching the hottest time of the year in Mae Sot; outside the pavement is baking, but we are insulated, kept unnaturally cool by the humming air-conditioner perched above us from the top of the wall. Bathed in florescent lights that reflect dully off the matte gray plastic walls are the signs of our prolonged discussion: scattered papers; flip-charts with tables and notes in Thai, English, and Burmese marked on them; and lap-tops connected to a tangle of chargers that all seem to flow from one overburdened multi-plug.

In the cramped comfort of the trailer, the conversation centers on the ongoing evaluation of our interview questions, a daily occurrence. Ye Winn War notes that in one-on-one interviews when she gets to questions that ask about problems women face in the community, domestic violence never comes up. "To the people in the communities" she says, "violence will always be something that happens outside the home, on the road or at the edge of the community. It's not what's going on in people's homes or in the families." Others nod their heads in agreement; there is a widespread feeling among co-researchers, many of whom have done health, education, and women's protection work in those settlements for years, that during interviews respondents must be downplaying the prevalence of domestic violence. As the ensuing discussion moves toward ideas to address this dilemma, to get a clearer picture of what violence against women looks like in migrant worker settlements, I realize that the group is debating more than a

methodological approach; they are exchanging interpretations of what gender-based violence means in the communities where they are doing research. Further, they are also voicing their own different notions of the concept with subtle articulations of power and influence. As a technical term rooted in academic, social movement, and international human rights discourse, the term and its deployment in dialogue among this team of researchers has become reflective of the multiple discursive refractions held in tension in that space, and representative of status and difference—both among the group and between us and the migrant worker participants who are part of the assessment, but have no voice of their own in this discussion.

This narrow room was our forum for dialogue, questioning, and planning related to "collaborative" data collection in four settlements—two in Mae Sot and two in Phob Phra. It is an eight by twenty foot mobile office trailer installed next to a large villa where two international NGOs are based, one of which was funding this assessment of gender-based violence on the Thai-Myanmar border. For nearly four months, the group of co-researchers and I met every day; first to adapt interview questions and finalize plans for sampling, recruitment, and data collection, and then, once we had started the research, to debrief about the day's interviews and focus groups, discuss any logistical or security issues, further adjust the interview guide, and reflect on the work we were doing. At the same time, as representatives of Burmese migrant communities, I considered co-researchers as participants because, as I made it clear to the group, I was not only studying violence in migrant communities, but also the ways that research projects are implicated in generating important discourse. During our daily meetings, I observed and took notes as we discussed the process of our project. The trailer was, in this sense, our

research laboratory where we fine-tuned our instruments, conducted analysis, and made interpretations on multiple levels.

As such, the crowded trailer was the space in which we constructed knowledge about research, the nature of migrant worker settlements where data collection took place, and about gender and gender-based violence for Burmese displaced in Thailand. The co-researchers themselves were a mix of Burmese and Thai staff of international NGOs and more local Burmese organizations, which many refer to as community-based organizations (CBOs).[1] I was the head of the project, a white male outsider from the "Global North"[2] and representative of the international NGO mentioned above. Representing different backgrounds, communities, and organizations, and coming to the table with vastly different resources and amounts of privilege, our laboratory was also the site of implicit power struggles; concepts of community, organizing, social change, gender, and gendered violence shifted constantly but quietly under the unstable terrain of our imbalanced dialogue. We not only gathered data about discourse, we generated it in our own right, and the use of that information by the various organizations involved and by me in this dissertation constitutes an exertion of power; that is, the power to amplify or submerge certain knowledges (Lykes 2010). All this was situated within the logic of

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[1] As in any context, the extent to which Burmese organizations in Mae Sot are actually based in communities with work agendas that advance community interests varies from organization to organization. While some groups more closely resemble social service or civilian wings of political parties or non-state armed groups, others are run by migrant workers for the benefit of migrant workers. However, international NGOs, UN agencies, and Burmese organizations themselves refer to this diverse group as CBOs. This issue will be discussed at length elsewhere, but at the risk of contributing to such homogenization, I will refer to these groups as CBOs as well.

[2] I use the phrase "Global North" here instead of other terms like "First World" or "Western" to imply the element of privilege that it suggests (as opposed to racial difference or geopolitical distinctions). See Mohanty (2003: 226-227) for a detailed perspective on the various meanings implied by this analytical language.

the international humanitarian NGO funding us; an added layer of knowledge

frameworks, power, and priorities which guided our project.

In this chapter, I show that it is by looking carefully at representation and at

whose voice counts and whose does not that one can understand how collaborative action

research can aid or constrain community efforts to survive. Such work has real

consequences for the lives of people struggling to negotiate displacement. Contexts of

migration and displacement are spaces for the production and contestation of racialized

and gendered identities, and NGOs are enmeshed in these dynamics (Markowitz and Tice

2002; Mohanty 2003). As such they play a role in affirming and constructing certain

concepts and identities in ways that constitute constraints and opportunities for migrant

agency. The programs of NGOs on the border constitute interventions that affect

migrants in many ways, from the opening and maintenance of schools and health

programs to influencing the flow and content of information to migrant settlements—

including regarding notions of gender and inequality—to the promotion (explicitly or

unwittingly) of certain individuals to positions of authority over others. Staff from these

groups act as organizers in labor camps, factories, and informal settlements who hope to

achieve particular agendas relating to health, women's protection, education, child

protection, and labor rights, among other goals. Through their organizing work, they

interpellate, performatively reproduce, and collectively construct certain notions. This

research project is just one reflection of the construction of discourse about violence and

gendered social problems that lies at the heart of the logic of aid interventions (i.e.,

international humanitarian and development work). In addition, because this context is

one not only of displacement but also of flexible capital accumulation, it impossible to

disengage the impact of aid discourse from the logics of labor extraction and production. While this chapter does not aim to point out all of the ways that development, humanitarianism, and capitalism are imbricated, I am careful to place my analysis within a consideration of this context. Chapter seven will pick up this issue, looking at how the interventions of women's rights groups, supply chain production, border politics, and the performative production of gendered identities are interconnected.

Here, I both analyze and interrogate the research process reflexively in this chapter, an approach that will highlight important methodological concerns with research in liminal power-laden spaces of marginality and locate the project in broader questions about discourse and agency. In the next section of this chapter, I look at the relationship between power and knowledge construction in contexts of research on displacement, asking who has the authority to represent migrant voices and define and analyze their social problems. I then introduce the collaborative action research project as a method built to allow for multiple voices and levels of participation in a project that had the goals of social change, solidarity-building, and a dissertation. In the fourth part, I show that despite such efforts, there remained—as there always does—important lines of difference between our research team and the groups of migrants who participated in the project. By looking reflexively at my own assumptions and at the background of the co-researchers and other community representatives, I offer an analysis of the source of these differences and their implications for the production and privileging of particular forms of knowledge over others. Finally, in the fifth part, I provide some accounts from the research process to illustrate moments of knowledge construction and how the collaborative process resulted in certain ideas of needed interventions in the four sites where research took

place. Thus, the first part of this chapter deals with theory and the methods of the study while the second relies on certain findings to critique the process. I close the chapter with some reflections on the research method and how researchers might improve upon it in the future.

2. Power and knowledge construction in a context of research and dispossession

Stories of displacement and the migration it triggers are often marked by encounters with power and authority and by the expression of agency in the face of what is often extreme subjugation. The more visible forms of power in this context are manifested in migrants' interactions with employers, managers, Burmese settlement leaders (*yakwet lugyi*), representatives of the Thai state such as village heads (*puyai baan*), police and other security officials or staff at government facilities and institutions, including hospitals, rural health centers, the labor protection office, or the court. For migrants who are unauthorized, a trip down the street involves the threat of extortion or violence, the possibility of arrest and deportation, and requires a certain amount of tact to remain invisible to representatives of the state (e.g., Coutin 2003). In many ways these dangers are gendered, as women face a particular threat of physical and sexual violence on the border, from these authorities as well as at home (Pearson and Kusakabe 2012). Such repressive, physical forms of power are likely predominant in migrants' lives as they dictate the everyday life struggle to earn wages and stay safe and healthy. I discuss the prevalence of such violence in chapter four.

Nevertheless, this corporeal power is imbricated with the relational power of discourse and knowledge as both resonate against each other to constrain or facilitate agency and structure the experience of migration. In a sense, this dissertation is centered

on that overlap and that resonance between the physicality of violence and migrants' responses on the one hand and the discourse around such practices, which in turn lead to exchanges that affect the lived realities of Burmese migrants. Given that power is intimately tied to knowledge in the sense that the control over knowledge production and dissemination for the purpose of influencing perceptions of reality is a manifestation of the exercise of power (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2008: 174), I am concerned with how this collaborative action research project plugs in to the circuits of power extant on the border.

Dorothy Smith (1990a) distinguishes between two forms of knowledge that are in constant struggle. First, the knowledge of the local and the particular is knowledge generated through experience. (The notion of "local" here is not taken to necessarily be a spatial reference, but rather in regards to a level of discourse and language rooted in lived experience, not abstracted.) Second, the objectified knowledge of the "extra-local" is that which has been abstracted from lived experience to be useful on an institutional and administrative level. As such, objectified knowledge—considered official, textual, and academic—subjugates the knowledge of the local and experienced as irrelevant, chaotic, or even dangerous. To Smith (1990b: 15), the governing processes of society construct a knowledge for the purpose of management and control in which "issues are formulated because they are administratively relevant, not because they are significant first in the experience of those who live them." Such processes "eliminate the presence of subjects as agents" (ibid.: 31) as they maintain the dominance of the ontological perspective of those considered representatives of power. Such a position of authority is socially constructed and maintained on a discursive level and can be understood in terms of

whose voice counts and whose does not (Smith 1987: 30). Smith offers this framework as a tool for analyzing the power relations involved wherein certain forms of knowledge become dominant over others. Dominant knowledges are reproduced through legislation, state power, organizational policy, or discourse while on a deeper level, the adoption of particular knowledges into the social fabric influences the way individuals see and govern themselves (Foucault 1972).

The duality of local and extra-local knowledge means that for every dominant or normative idea of which interpretations of a concept are true, and for every notion of what it means to fit within a particular category of identity, there are alternative assessments of behavior and identity that are submerged into a silence that haunts repressive technologies with murky utterances of discordance (Gordon 2008). Such theories speak to the invisibility and "ghostly nature" of Burmese migrant narratives in any of the discursive forces influencing their lives, including the discourse of Thai immigration and border security policy, the Burmese government, Thai society, humanitarian intervention, much academic research, and employer networks, all of which are undergirded by the dynamics of flexible accumulation in a system of globalized capitalism.

This corresponds to broader trends affecting social movements including feminist movements, e.g., global women's movements, that struggle with donor pressures to depoliticize activist agendas and to professionalize, substituting transformative goals for more service-oriented roles that step in where governmental programs have been reduced as part of neoliberal cuts to social welfare sectors (Armstrong 2004; Markowitz and Tice 2002; Townsend and Townsend 2004). As Armstrong (2004: 41-42) notes, "Efficiency

slides into efficacy, when the politics of an NGO is measured in these easily quantifiable ways." The efforts of international and local NGOs to meet donor requirements may introduce new social hierarchies into global movements as discourse increasingly prioritizes professional over grassroots (Baillie Smith and Jenkins 2011; Markowitz and Tice 2002). Moreover, Hemmit (2011) warns that issues and knowledge relevant to donor interests—which are those particularly situated within "Global North" or "Western" perspectives toward women's rights and gender-based violence—are privileged while more local conceptions are subverted (see also White and Perelman 2011). These kinds of power dynamics are manifested in the daily interactions and decisions of movement activists and NGO workers who must make meaning out of a multitude of concepts that relate to their work; including more international or global approaches, and interpretations of the local or traditional, all of which are mediated by dominant discourses that highlight certain knowledge systems over others (Merry 2006; White and Perelman 2011; Wies and Haldane 2011). Looking closely at these power dynamics, paying attention to voice and representation is something more often done in name than in action. Such terms often remain invisible in questions of policy and development, despite their deployment as tropes to convey elements of participation and empowerment (Cornwall and Edwards 2014). As Cornwall and Edwards argue, the language of participation has dominated development work for the last two and a half decades, but tends to leave out a reckoning with the relations of power that assert particular ways of knowing and subvert others.

Despite the exertion of such discursive power relations upon the lives of migrants, we can see here that working from that same discursive position, it is possible to engage

in work that surfaces migrant voices for the purpose of challenging an economic, political, and social order that constructs them as voiceless. This involves striving to work on the level of experiential knowledge to understand what in the everyday lives of migrants constitutes strategies for negotiating displacement. As Nyamu-Musembi (2002: 145) writes, "a genuine engagement with practice at the local level is powerful in dislodging both the abolitionist imagination of the local as the repository of unchanging patriarchal values and the defensive relativist portrayal of official norms as bounded, immutable, and well settled."

However, this requires us to define the "local." Positionality and the multiple layers of privilege and inequality confront efforts to locate oneself on the level of experiential knowledge. Our research laboratory sat in juxtaposition to the "field," that is, the "communities;" everyday the team would leave the climate-controlled safety of the NGO compound for the unpredictable migrant worker settlements. In so doing, we defined ourselves as outsiders. However, many of the co-researchers themselves were from migrant worker settlements; some of them had grown up in such places and many now lived in predominately Burmese neighborhoods in Mae Sot.[3] Their proximity to the spaces where we collected data contrasts with the distance of our trailer of knowledge construction to the lives of our respondents. This insider-outsider dynamic enabled our group to "know" the people we researched while, at the same time, exerting our power of analysis over them. The fact that there were also some in the team, particularly those identifying as Thai, who lived in more middle-class or elite parts of Mae Sot served as an

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[3] It is important to note here that the Burmese neighborhoods in which co-researchers live are all in Mae Sot and not Phob Phra, creating a greater sense of familiarity to the two settlements where we collected data in Mae Sot and a greater sense of distance to the sites in Phob Phra.

important marker of difference within the group not only in terms of social class, ethnicity, and citizenship status, but also of what kind of expertise could be claimed; that is, expert knowledge over migrant lives as opposed to expert knowledge over research methods. Therefore local is a hard concept to pin down geographically. I find that it is more contingent on time as well as space and relations as well as position.

The distances noted here—between the hub of our research endeavor and the migrant worker respondents, among the co-researchers, and, importantly, between the co-researchers and me—are all sites for the articulation of power relations that are necessary to interrogate in order to build an understanding of how discourse about migrant workers and their modes of social organization, particularly related to gender and gendered violence, exerts an ordering influence upon migrant spaces and is, at the same time, contested in a variety of ways by Burmese migrant workers struggling to survive. As this chapter shows, in some cases this power manifests itself solely on the level of discourse, that is, via the circulation and reproduction of knowledge about the lives and experiences of Burmese migrants which disseminate certain notions of identity; while in other cases, migrants experience concrete and tangible effects of such discourse in terms of humanitarian interventions that categorize, educate, delimit, and mobilize displaced Burmese for various agendas that relate to some mix of donor concerns, findings from data collected, and moral and ethical representations of Burmese culture forged in the process of liminality and dispossession. Raising voice and representation to the surface and interrogating them in this research context helps to uncover the multitude of divisions and inequalities that are themselves generative of social forms and systems affecting migrant lives. Through this method, I hope to tease forth the nature of the border between

privileged and subjugated knowledges in the fluid space of migrant worker settlements.

3. Study design: collaborative research for action

This section reviews the methods selected for this study to show how efforts were made to engage with a multitude of voices through several distinct levels of participation. With the aim of designing a project to listen to narratives that are often overlooked, the methods chosen for this dissertation were inspired by the principles of Participatory Action Research. As Lykes and Hershberg (2012: 332) write, PAR is an approach:

> …wherein collaborations or partnerships are formed between those directly affected by an issue or problem that becomes the focus of the project…and others with technical skills and formal knowledge that complement indigenous knowledge systems and expertise to facilitate knowledge construction, education, collaborative learning, and transformative action.

In its approach, PAR is fundamentally a dynamic locus between the collective and individual development of knowledge forms that propose a practical alternative to marginalizing discourses. Gaventa and Cornwall (2008: 179) write, "'Truths' become products of a process in which people come together to share experiences through a dynamic process of action, reflection and collective investigation." Smith (1997: 184) contributes to this notion describing a PAR project as one where a "group embarks on a transforming path, making decisions, and taking on activities that are grounded in members' experiences." Using PAR-inspired methods presents opportunities to highlight alternative, marginalized interpretations of reality, surfacing what Foucault and Gordon consider repressed knowledges, recognizing that these repressed knowledges are in and of themselves constructions that are contested and partial. Such collaboration is often the best—or even the only—way to understand not only how people in disadvantaged positions struggle for their rights, but also how various communities conceive of rights

and rights practice (Perelman and White 2011). Lykes and Crosby (2014: 146) reflect that the decision to rely on:

> …praxis at the interface of feminist, community-based, and participatory action research stems from the fundamental epistemological and methodological challenges that arise in undertaking research in contexts that continue to be overshadowed by ever-present histories of colonization and imperial intervention, which include the hegemonic power of Northern academics.

While I stop short of labeling the methods used in this dissertation as PAR, the design of this study was informed by a similar awareness of how research is often embedded in the reproduction of marginality. I relied on a PAR framework to build a design that privileged the diverse sets of knowledge and expertise of Burmese activists in Mae Sot and to put the latter into conversation with my own technical skills related to carrying out research. The focus of my analysis as well, which engages my various subjectivities as I work with the multiplicity of voices, ideas, and participation of Burmese migrants, is founded on reflexive praxis and what Avishai and colleagues (2013: 396) call "institutional reflexivity." While the former refers to more of a process of reflection and action based on an awareness of my individual positioning vis-à-vis the research context, the latter relates to the interrogation of the institutional methodological and theoretical frameworks that "both constrain and enable interpretations of the social world." As noted above, the collaborative research methods described in this section served multiple purposes; the primary and immediate function was to enable NGOs and CBOs working on the border to plan coordinated actions to address the consequences and causes of gendered violence in Burmese migrant settlements. As a result, the project was infused with the agendas and theoretical positioning of these organizations and their donors. Among the other more discursive impacts this had on the project, the emphasis

on an applied goal as opposed to my own academic purposes introduced a level of rushed

pragmatism to the study that both limited a reflexive focus on process during the course

of the project and legitimized the work in the eyes of co-researchers committed to the

betterment of Burmese migrants in Thailand.

3.1 Overview of Research Design

This study is based on a qualitative multi-modal research design that brings

together an extended case method and PAR principles. As Figure 2 below shows, I

Figure 2: Embedded research design
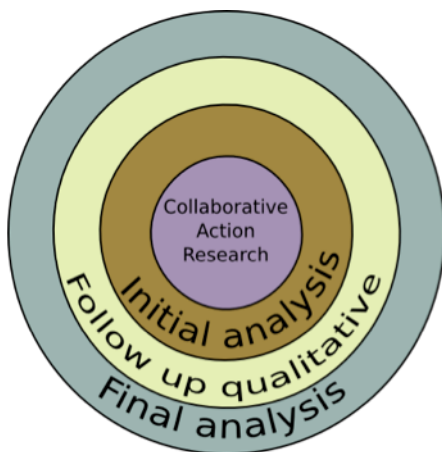
embed a collaborative assessment in which I took part within a broader constructivist qualitative study, and I employ different analytical tools to explore different layers of meaning-making. Principles of PAR undergird the whole design, even those pieces that were not collaborative (the outer two rings in the figure below), in the

sense that I approach the study reflexively with a focus on knowledge construction, in the

interest of partnership and transformative action, and that I measure validity as much as

possible in terms of authenticity (Lincoln and Guba 2000: 180-181). As the inset circles

in Figure 2 suggest, there was also an inside-outside dynamic to the design of the study,

which corresponded to the different phases or layers of the project. At the core is a

collaborative action research project, followed by an initial thematic analysis, which co-

researchers and I conducted. Moving toward the outer two rings or circles, I stepped

outside of the collaborative process to critically examine it and supplement its results

with additional interviews. I then applied my own discursive and narrative analysis to the

findings of the initial collaborative assessment, process of collaboration itself, and the

additional qualitative data I collected.

The study relied on a series of data collection tools, including semi-structured

interviews, key informant interviews, and interpretive focus group discussions carried out

in an iterative and collaborative way. Figure 3 illustrates how these various methods

interacted. This subsection is followed by a more detailed discussion of the dissertation's

methods.

Figure 3: Organization of methods
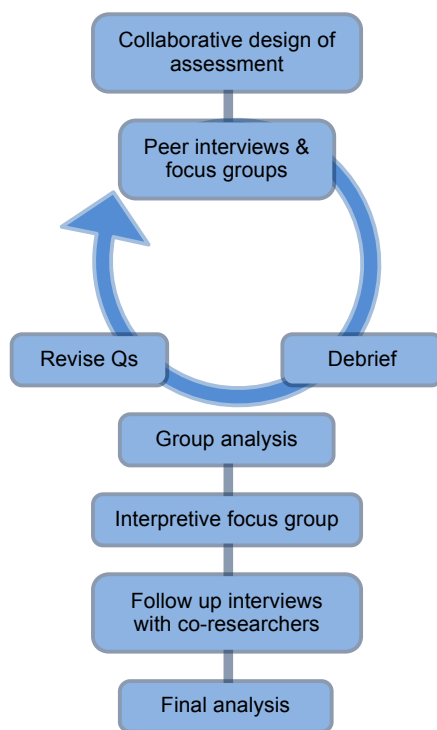
An advisory group made up of fifteen representatives from seven organizations, including four unregistered Burmese CBOs, one Thai NGO, and two international NGOs formed to put together a study that would inform the work these organizations do on protecting women and children from violence. Many organizations represented had previously worked together in the mid-2000s to write up a coordinated response plan to rape. I solicited the participation of these

groups and others that had emerged in the last ten years as important voices for migrant

women's rights. The advisory group and I developed the primary research questions for

the assessment, decided where to conduct it, which methods to use, and what the sample

sizes should be in each site. They decided on two communities in Mae Sot and two in

Phob Phra with the goal of conducting in-depth interviews with women and community

Figure 4: Data collection, sample sites, & participant groups

leaders and focus group discussions with women, men, and community workers, separately (see Figure 4, left). The group chose to structure focus group discussions around community mapping exercises for some groups and the discussion of

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            ┌─────────────────────┐
            │   4 Communities     │
            │   Mae Sot: 2        │
            │   Phob phra: 2      │
            └─────────────────────┘
             ┌──────────────┴──────────────┐
   ┌──────────────────────┐    ┌──────────────────────┐
   │ Focus-group discussion│    │  In-depth interviews  │
   │   6 groups/community  │    │   10-15 ppl/community │
   │   (25-30 ppl/community)│   └──────────────────────┘
   └──────────────────────┘
   ┌────────┬─────────┬─────────┬────────┐
┌────────┐ ┌────────┐ ┌──────┐ ┌────────┐
│Community│ │ Women* │ │ Men  │ │Community│
│leadership│└────────┘ └──────┘ │ workers │
│ (M/W)  │                      │  (M/W)  │
└────────┘                      └────────┘
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*This category includes teenagers who participated in focus groups

particular case studies with others. With these basic elements of the design in place, the

advisory group transitioned into a team of co-researchers. Some members from the

former joined the latter.[4] In other instances, their organizations chose to send somebody

else as a representative or chose not to participate in the data collection phase.[5] I provided

training on research methods and ethics to the group, and they also engaged in

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[4] Half of the advisory group members later took on the role of co-researchers. For those organizations whose representatives did not become co-researchers, some sent other staff to join. Two organizations represented in the advisory group chose not to participate in data collection and sent no one as co-researchers.

[5] Organizations that decided not to participate in the data collection phase typically did so because the locations where the advisory group had decided to conduct the research were not familiar to them or their staff. For example, one health organization that was in the advisory group played an instrumental role in designing the study based on their decades of experience providing healthcare to women who had experienced violence, but they do not go out into migrant areas to provide care and therefore felt it was not the best use of their staff's time to participate in data collection (in this particular case, it is worth noting that the son of the health organization's director did participate as a co-researcher).

discussions on issues related to gender-based violence. Together we made plans for the recruitment of participants via a chain-referral, or "snowball" method, and moved from the main research questions developed by the advisory group to more detailed interview and focus group discussion guides.

The co-researchers collected data in a semi-iterative fashion. We met every day before they went to conduct interviews and focus group discussions to "debrief" from the day before, a chance to discuss both logistical issues and the research process. While we did not engage in cycles of analysis and data collection, the group worked to refine the method based on reflections on how research participants were responding. After multiple visits to each site, the group had conducted 74 interviews and focus group discussions with a total of 154 people. We hired two transcribers and translators to produce English-language transcripts. The two transcribers were asked to review each other's work in an effort to triangulate and minimize translation error. Co-researchers and I conducted an initial analysis of the data and then held a meeting with the remaining members of the advisory group for a discussion of the results, analysis, and possible actions that could emerge for the organizations involved.

In the following months, I conducted key informant interviews with the directors of three out of four Burmese CBOs involved in the assessment and with nearly every co-researcher to gain their interpretation of the assessment and understand their background in more detail.[6] At the time of writing, the members of the advisory group are involved in different stages of action, some together with the other members, and some on their own.

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[6] As noted earlier there were seven groups total who participated in the advisory group. I was not able to interview the heads of the Thai or international NGOs. In addition the advisory group representative from

It is important to interrogate the power relations implicit in the process of working together to develop the research design. Each step along the way consisted of decisions made through the exchange of different perspectives. We did not have a method to evaluate or ensure consensus, but we tried to make space for everybody who wanted to speak to do so. It is inevitable that some participants in the advisory group refrained from speaking at various moments. For me, I entered the process with the desire to have a participatory method that adequately collected information in a way that achieves "validity as authenticity." I tried to remain open but involved though I recognize that my support of certain ideas over others introduced a less democratic aspect to the process.

3.2 Sample design

This dissertation makes use of multiple overlapping samples. The largest sample for this study was purposively developed from among the population of Burmese migrant workers living in Mae Sot and Phob Phra. But I also consider the co-researchers with whom I worked a sample as I took extensive field notes of our group discussions, conducted in-depth interviews with most of them, and rely on such information to address the primary questions behind the dissertation.[7] In addition, I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with people in leadership roles from nine different Burmese CBOs working in Mae Sot and Phob Phra, representing three of the member organizations from the advisory group (see Table 4 below for a complete list of participating organizations). This sampling strategy enables me to critically engage with both migrant narratives and

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one of the Burmese organizations had moved away from Mae Sot in the middle of the assessment. These interviews were all recorded and then transcribed.

[7] I always recorded key informant interviews. I also recorded the interpretive focus group. Regular group discussions, however, were documented solely in my field notes.

the research process that accessed such narratives. In this section, I devote particular attention to the largest sample.

Given that I cannot hope to write about *a* "migrant community" in Mae Sot without glossing over numerous differences that divide up the migrant population into numerous and quite distinct groups, I pay particular attention to the differences of the four locations where we collected data and interrogate the notion of community as it is used by civil society, both local CBOs and international NGOs. In some ways, this study relied on the notion that through collaborative work, it would be possible to make some headway in understanding important differences within and between communities. However, it would be essentialist to presume that my co-researchers would be able to articulate Mae Sot's many different communities devoid of the kinds of power relations or politics that would cause some differences to be privileged while submerging others. As Fine and her colleagues write (2000: 110), it is important to realize that "profound fractures, and variation, cut through lives within…communities," reminding us that even when being considerate about differences from one community to another, it is important not to forget about differences and power dynamics within communities as well. Thus, I made sure to ask questions about community when I interviewed co-researchers in order to understand how our research might have confronted or perpetuated marginalizing discourse about community dynamics.

The advisory group chose the four sites of data collection via a systematic analysis that took into consideration questions of access, acceptance and interest by residents of the site, familiarity, existing resources in place, and concrete plans for involvement in those sites in the future. The advisory group chose to look at Phob Phra as

a possible district to conduct the assessment because their previous work there highlighted numerous social problems facing the Burmese population working in the agricultural sector, including threats to their safety, labor issues, violence, poverty, and a lack of freedom of movement, which precludes access to healthcare and justice. In deciding where in this vast hilly landscape filled with remote labor camps to focus this assessment, the above-mentioned criteria proved useful in identifying five locations. The advisory group then narrowed it to two with a vote. In terms of Mae Sot, all of the organizations represented in the advisory group worked and had strong relationships in the majority of the town's Burmese neighborhoods or settlements. Thus, in addition to the selection criteria, the group considered where previous research had been done and where they could identify the most "need" for assistance.[8]

As Figure 3.3 above shows, we chose a sample that would account for gender and that would provide a variety of different perspectives. In each site, the advisory group elected to recruit a sample of residents divided by gender and age; "community workers," a category that includes anybody considered by the residents there to be a service provider, accepting a broad meaning of "service" that included para-professional or non-professional health workers (such as "community health volunteers"), teachers, organizers—effectively those migrant workers who provide some assistance and who are part of a network that links them to the work of NGOs and CBOs; Thai community workers, which included teachers at official schools and border health workers from the Thai government district health offices adjacent to migrant settlements; Burmese

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[8] Mae Sot's Burmese communities are well-studied, particularly by research with a public health focus, making the risk of "over-saturation" high.Our goal was not to find an "unstudied" population; rather we aimed to balance information already generated elsewhere and to engage with migrant workers with greater solidarity of purpose than the dominant researcher-subject relationship offers.

community leaders—anybody who the Burmese migrants there consider to be in a

leadership or decision-making role (this included religious leaders, staff from CBOs

living in that neighborhood who wield authority, or "section leaders" appointed by

landlords or CBOs to help manage the migrant population there); and local Thai leaders,

such as village heads (*phuyai baan*) or their deputies, local administrative authorities, or

members of security forces who live in the area and have influence (including police or

border patrol, for example). While this does not build a representative sample, it enabled

us to access the sensitive local knowledge related to violence and safety that might not

emerge so easily in larger quantitative studies and from a variety of perspectives.

Sampling was done purposively, as this study's respondents were recruited via

what is known as a "snowball," "chain-referral," or "respondent-driven" sampling

method, which involves relying on participants to help introduce us to and recommend

subsequent participants, ideally helping to break the ice with potential new respondents in

terms of familiarity and trust (see for example, Heckenthorn 2002). It was necessary to

have a purposive snowball sample strategy rather than a simple or stratified random

sample for three main reasons. First, I was working with a group living on the margins of

society. It is not always possible to locate individuals with addresses, phone numbers, or

other markers of identity and location and to randomly knock on doors may inspire a

level of suspicion difficult to dispel within the duration of the interview. Second, in part

because of the marginal status of Burmese migrants in Southeast Asia, it is necessary to

build relationships with research participants to the extent possible and to move from one

trusted contact to another in putting together a sample of individuals willing to speak in-

depth. Third, I have tried alternative sampling methods for qualitative research in Mae

Sot with the migrant worker population and found that missing even the slight familiarity that comes with the snowball method made for problematic and uncomfortable interview experiences. While I recognize the many drawbacks associated with relying on snowball sampling (some particularly associated with doing research with forced migrant populations), as noted in Jacobsen and Landau's (2003) important piece on methodology, ethics, and research on forced migrant populations, as an exploratory study this project does not claim to capture a representative picture of migrants on the Thai-Myanmar border.

With all this in mind, the sampling of residents started with the links between advisory group members and co-researchers and the Burmese "community workers" in their networks. The latter were crucial entry points into the settlements, though cannot be considered as objective or neutral actors capable—or interested in—generating a representative sample. However, because they are in many cases a kind of first-responder when violence takes place near them, they were aware of who might be the most willing and interested to discuss the issues facing their community. This reflected the goal of being as representative as possible within the more paramount aim of accessing a set of narratives expressing a partial glimpse of local knowledge.

Between focus group discussions and in-depth interviews, we hoped to build a sample of 35-45 people in each community. Respondents ranged in age from 16 to 64, and 67% percent were women. The vast majority of the migrant sample who self-identified did so as ethnically Burman. We did not inquire about ethnicity or religion. In terms of the latter, co-researchers and I felt that with ongoing religious tensions between Buddhists and Muslims in Myanmar, inquiring about religious identity might cause

discomfort, though the topic was not taboo and participants felt free to bring it up often.

Co-researchers also felt that they did not want to give interviews a formal feeling by

requesting bio-data such as ethnicity.[9] They preferred to let the topic arise naturally in the

flow of in-depth interviews. The FIC study found that among migrant participants, 49%

identified Burman, 21% as Karen, 18% as "Muslim", and 12% as Shan, Pa-O, Mon,

Rakhine, Chin, Bangladeshi, Chinese, and Indian (Saltsman 2011).[10] The ethnic

population of Phob Phra is more heavily Karen, especially in the border area, though

labor camps are more diverse. Though we did not ask participants about their legal status

(for the same reasons), a majority of those who self-identified did so as undocumented in

Thailand. See Table 4 for a detailed demographic breakdown of participants.

Table 4: Participant demographics

Community	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Htone Taung	14	31	45
Kyuwe Kyan	11	30	41
Pyaung Gyi Win/Rim Nam	13	22	35
KM 48	13	20	33
Total	51	103	154

[9] This does not presume that the category of ethnicity would have been particularly contentious, especially given the diversity of the co-researcher team (see below). However, like elsewhere ethnicity in Myanmar is a heavily politicized term that is, in many ways, a political and social construct that privileges certain differences and ignores others. During the FIC study, it became clear that participants interpreted "ethnicity" as "nationality," given the contextual link in Myanmar's current social environment as well as the historical construction of ethnic difference (see for example, Walton 2008).

[10] Though Muslim refers to a religion and not an ethnic group, Muslim respondents self identified as ethnically distinct in this way in the FIC study, a reflection of the fact that that this group finds itself primarily categorized in Myanmar by their religion. There are in fact multiple ethnic groups in Myanmar who are all or majority Muslim (such as Rohingya) or who have a significant Muslim minority, including part of the Chinese-Burmese population. It is possible that some of the participants in the FIC study who identified as Bangladeshi might, in fact, be Rohingya but were not comfortable to identify as such.

Community	Age				Total
	Under 18	18-40	41-60	61 and up	
Htone Taung	3	26	14	2	45
Kyuwe Kyan	4	24	12	1	41
Pyaung Gyi Win/Rim Nam	3	21	10	1	35
KM48	-	21	12	-	33
Total	10	92	48	4	154

3.3 Data collection and analysis methods

In order to address the research questions guiding this dissertation, I employed multi-modal data collection and multi-layered analysis strategies. The different methods illuminate different versions of experience and perception and different approaches for different samples. In some cases, the co-researchers and I utilized the same method in different ways, depending on the sample. Together they enable a sort of methodological triangulation. Data for this study are in the form of qualitative in-depth semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions and an interpretive focus group discussion.

In terms of focus group discussions, we were relying on a method that is, to some extent, overused by researchers and NGOs on the migrant population. As such, we risked reproducing certain power dynamics and expectations that are familiar to individuals in the migrant community who may have participated in focus group discussions in the past. To address this issue, we structured discussion around specific topics or activities, namely community mapping exercises and case study narratives. Second, we structured the focus group with participants as an action-oriented discussion to build a sense of commitment and so that the process did not seem useless. Third, I followed the advice of

Wilkinson (1999) who recommends researchers recruit participants who know each other to enhance the chances of a more natural discussion and allow for and encourage a shift in the control of discussion away from the moderator who is more minimally involved (this goes against traditional literature on the focus group method, but fits a constructivist and phenomenological approach). In our assessment, co-researchers facilitated group discussions with Burmese men, community workers, women, and youth. Each group had four to five people participating, though this varied as some members of the group arrived late or left early, and as small children were frequently present (especially in the women's focus group). These discussions typically lasted one to two hours.

I relied on two types of in-depth semi-structured interviews for this research: "peer interviews" conducted in Burmese, Karen, and Thai and interviews with key informants and co-researchers in English, Thai, and Burmese. By "peer interviews" I refer to a method commonly used in collaborative or participatory research, particularly with "hard to reach populations and communities" (Warr et al. 2011: 338). The method involves asking members of a community to conduct interviews with other members of that community, which scholars have argued helps to create a positive dialogic environment for the discussion of sensitive topics (Benoit et al. 2005). In principle, this is what co-researchers attempted to do. In-depth interviews lasted between 35 minutes and 1.5 hours and covered a range of topics, differing according to the category of participant. During interviews with the largest sample for this method, Burmese women, co-researchers asked about work, basic household information, differences between men's and women's roles—both in terms of work and within the household, safety and well-being in the neighborhood or labor camp, about challenges women face in particular,

what sorts of violence women experience (if any), responses to this violence (both individual and collective), women's self-protection tactics, and existing and needed services in that place. Questions about violence were asked quite generally and co-researchers made sure to inform participants that they were not inquiring about their personal experiences. This was because, as a group we agreed that we did not want to lose the assessment goals to the exigencies of case management. Nevertheless, we prepared ourselves to deal with participants' disclosures of abuse. We focused our questions on their well-being; their encounters with employers and the Thai state; their strategies for solving social conflicts, particularly related to gendered violence; their participation in social welfare programs with grassroots organizations; and their reliance on and participation in social and familial networks. Interviews with Thai community leaders concentrated on their perspective on policies toward migrants and their role in resolving interpersonal conflicts in migrant households.

Interested in engaging with experiential knowledge, I promoted this method as a way to collect data within a social space of familiarity and trust. Having done in-depth interviews with a similar population myself in Mae Sot in the past, it is clear that participants' experiences and ideas flow more readily with those staff from local groups or organizations they appear to know and trust. However, the extent to which co-researchers are "members" of the community varied from site to site and warrants further discussion (see the subsequent section below). Htone Taung, for example, is where one co-researcher lives and works, whereas no co-researcher lives in Phob Phra and they only conduct work-based visits there. It is likely this difference in familiarity created some difference in the interview results, though both were equally rich. As I note in subsequent

sections, the term "peer interview" and the assumptions behind its use raise numerous

important questions about how and from what position co-researchers relate to migrant

worker participants. Were co-researchers actually insiders or were they outsiders or some

combination? Was trust and familiarity—or proximity—sufficient to consider co-

researchers "peers"? Does the use of the term "peer" subordinate important divisions or

inequalities between co-researchers and participants? And besides what scholarship says

is gained by reliance on such a method, is there a violence done to local knowledges at

other stages of the research process, such as analysis and interpretation?

The in-depth interviews I conducted myself also raised questions about insider-

outsider relationships. I am certainly an outsider in many ways, nevertheless most of the

key informant interviews were with people I knew, some quite well. Having spent more

than two and a half years in Mae Sot and having worked on the border on and off since

2008, I knew the directors and staff from most of the Burmese CBOs there, having been

together at meetings, trainings, meals, "community events" such as May Day or local

weekly markets, holidays, weddings, and funerals. In some cases, I had planned activities

with them or helped them write proposals. My interviews with these individuals had a

tone of professional familiarity and a level of solidarity. My interviews with these

representatives of organizations lasted between one and four hours; I interviewed three of

these participants twice because their busy work schedules required us to keep each

meeting relatively short. Questions for representatives of grassroots organizations

focused on the philosophical/ideological mission and vision guiding their work; how

migrants access basic services; their role in and perspectives on the resolution of

interpersonal conflicts among migrants; their engagement (or lack thereof) with global

discourses such as those from women's rights and feminist movements; and their perspectives on social order and gender.

With the co-researchers I was able to interview, I perceived a dyadic relationship. We shared a sense of camaraderie that came from our work together on the assessment, though with these participants, I struggled to negotiate my previous role as the head of the project, which proved easier in some cases than others. These interviews lasted between one and 2.5 hours. During our conversations, I asked co-researchers about their personal histories, experiences working on gender-based violence on the Thai-Myanmar border, their perception of and feedback about the collaborative assessment, and the actions currently being carried out by their organizations that developed out of the research project.

Language constituted another important barrier. Issues of translation and representation were present in all methods used. In terms of my interviews, when the language was English or Thai I did not face dilemmas of altering language or meaning (e.g., Alarcón 1994) as I can speak Thai well enough to conduct an interview, though I sometimes needed the aid of an interpreter. I do not speak Burmese and therefore I required an interpreter for those interviews with Burmese-speaking participants. One co-researcher and one key informant considered both Burmese and Thai to be native languages, one key informant is Thai, nine key informants spoke Burmese during the interview, one spoke English, two co-researchers preferred to do the interview in Burmese to speak as naturally as possible, and four preferred to speak in English. I took several measures to negotiate bias from translation: I recorded interviews and hired multiple transcribers to create Burmese and English language transcripts and review each

other's work to triangulate meanings and interpretations between the two languages; I took my own notes during interviews as well and reviewed these together with translated transcripts. For the collaborative interviews conducted in Burmese, Karen, and Thai, I also relied on multiple individuals to triangulate transcription. In addition, co-researchers traded roles, acting as note-takers and as interviewers with migrant participants; for every audio file and transcript from one of these peer interviews or focus group discussions there is also a set of notes in Burmese or Thai that I had translated into English. I consider these shifts and mutations imposed on the spoken words of participants through translation and interpretation an extension of the reification of spoken words as they move from the participant into the interpretive space of the researcher. Like any researcher, I claim the privilege of interpretation, but I do so with the recognition that my interpretation is just another layer upon the interpretation of others.

Thus, while I had transgressed some of the distances between my North American university setting and the context of Mae Sot through my work over the years on the Thai-Myanmar border, I fully recognize both that it is not possible to shed my privilege and outsider status and that I also built on this privilege and "foreign expert" role to accomplish my research in ways that constructed new lines of division and new chasms separating me from the work of Thai and Burmese activists. Aware that the privilege I carried with me to the Thai-Myanmar border stems from my socioeconomic position in the "Global North", and my whiteness, gender, sexuality, and education, it was never my ambition to discard something that is so utterly ineradicable. Rather, my aim has been to be mindful of such power and to interrogate its place in my work and in the social relations that constituted my research environment.

3.3.1 Data analysis strategies

Data analysis was multi-layered in order to account for the multiple levels of this study. As Figure 2 at the start of section 3.1 shows, co-researchers and I employed one level of analysis upon completing peer interviews and focus group discussions. Once complete, we compiled our findings and presented them to the advisory group in an interpretive focus group discussion. I then conducted an additional level of analysis on the results of the interpretive focus group discussion, the data collected during the collaborative project, and results from my own key informant interviews. I outline these layers briefly below.

1) Co-researcher analysis: First, daily debrief sessions during data collection served as regular opportunities to evaluate the research process, interpret initial findings, and reflect on the work, enabling me to observe and document the circulation of discourse and the co-construction of knowledge. Co-researchers also employed a deductive line-by-line coding system to findings in order to identify forms of gender-based violence prevalent in the four sites; local efforts to respond to this violence; and needs for external services. Co-researchers then divided coded results into these analytical categories for discussion and project planning.

2) Interpretive focus group: In addition to employing focus group discussions as a method of data collection, I also relied on them as a tool to facilitate analysis in this study (Dodson et al. 2007; Dodson et al. 2006). The research team and I organized an interpretive focus group at the end of the assessment (see Figure 3 above) with the additional members of the advisory group. We presented our findings and initial analysis as prompts for discussion and I documented with a voice recorder the conversation that

followed as the participants shared reflections and interpretations of the data and dialogued on possible actions that could come from the results. This interpretive focus group lasted a half-day and resulted in a list of plausible activities the network of CBOs and NGOs might carry out. Missing in this method was an additional discussion with the migrant workers who had participated in the assessment as respondents. While it was our goal to share findings with participants, elicit their feedback, and factor this into the analysis, co-researchers and I found that we had already demanded too much of the little free time participants had to offer, an observation made through follow-up discussions with individual participants. Rather than set up such a meeting, we planned to incorporate presentation and discussion of the results in smaller meetings more focused on community-based actions, some of which have taken place since I left.

3) Constructivist analysis: Stepping outside of the collaborative action research project, I applied additional layers of analysis to the data. I conducted inductive line-by-line coding in the spirit of Charmaz's (2005) constructivist grounded theory, identifying emerging themes and concepts. The themes that were most salient form the basis for the subsequent sections of this chapter and chapters four through six in this dissertation. Concerned with the way participants framed a variety of topics that my coding surfaced, I applied a discursive analysis to this data in the sense that I searched for meaning in participants' discourse to identify their performative reproduction of and struggle over meanings, knowledge, and the practice of subjectivity (Foucault 1972). When participants' responses took the form of narrative, I broke from grounded theory and kept their accounts intact to apply what Riessman calls "thematic narrative analysis" (2008: 53), a tool that looks at participants' stories as units of meaning from which it is possible to

build comparison across cases and themes. I use these narratives throughout the dissertation.

3.4 Collaborating with organizations: concerns for ethics and validity in a context of marginality

Deciding which method to employ for this dissertation, I was deeply aware that from an ethical perspective, it would be highly problematic to "extract information" from individuals struggling from a marginalized position (Speed 2008; Turton 1996) without engaging with these groups to help shift the relations of power and social structures that help maintain their disenfranchised position. However, as a social scientist, I know that my methods must be grounded in more than moral considerations, such as validity. And when I write "validity" here, I mean the proximity of theoretical assertions to the lived experience of those about whom the theoretical assertions are postulated, a definition broadly derived from Lincoln and Guba's (2000: 180-181) constructivist "validity as authenticity." As Hale (2008: 12) writes, "activist research methods have a built-in test of validity that is much more demanding and stringent than conventional alternatives: Is it comprehensible to, and does it work for, a specific group of people who helped to formulate the research goals to begin with?" Greenwood (2008: 331) adds:

> Action research, unlike conventional social science, to use John Dewey's term, issues "warrants for action" where the interested and at-risk parties gain sufficient confidence in the validity of their research results to risk harm to themselves by putting them into action. In my view, this is a "real" significance test.

Thus, by developing this study's research questions through reflective dialogue with community activists during my preliminary work in Thailand, by merging my expertise and interests with local knowledges and goals to refine methods and to initially interpret results, I strived to put together a study that is exploratory and partial, as any study is, but

also valid in terms of the experiences and perceptions of activist co-researchers (Perelman and White 2011). Echoing Hale (2008) in his edited volume on activist-scholarship, this collaborative effort does not necessarily signify a complete rejection and disposal of post-positivist methods or interpretive claims; rather I recognize that in the world of collaboration for action on the level of community and policy, it is often important to frame assertions from the data in post-positivist terms or categories imposed from external orders (see also Speed 2008).

Those who collaborated in this study brought multiple different perspectives to the table, with varying knowledges and experiences that contrasted well with one another and with my own background. As Table 5 shows, among the organizations who worked together for this study were two health organizations (one solely focused on women's health), a labor rights group registered as a Thai NGO, an international education NGO, an international NGO broadly focused on humanitarian assistance for refugees and IDPs, and two Burmese groups focused on women's protection. Four of these groups provide some sort of shelter and safety to survivors of abuse, two coordinate legal assistance through the Thai court system, and one acts a source of curriculum and funding for a network of dozens of "migrant learning centers" along the border.

Table 5: Organization profiles

Organization	Established	Focus/Type	Involvement in project
Burma Lawyer's Council	1994	Legal assistance /advocacy	Key informant
Burmese Women's Union	1995	Womense rights/service & advocacy	Key informant
International Rescue Committee	1998*	Service	Donor, advisory group, co-researchers
KMR Karen Youth Organization	~1980s**	Mediation/Youth Organi	Key informant
Mae Tao Clinic	1989	Health/service	Advisory group
MAP Foundation	1996	Labor rights/legal assistance/activist	Advisory group
Overseas Irrawaddy Association	2004	Gen. welfare/service	Key informant
Peoplefo Volunteer Association	2008	Gen. welfare/ protection	Key informant
Sana Yar Thi Pan Women's Center	2004	WomenYa health/service	Advisory group, co-researcher
Social Action for Women	2000	Womenl rights & women's health/service	Advisory group, co-researcher
Tavoy Women's Union	1995	Women W rights & women's health/service	Advisory group, co-researcher
World Education	1998*	Education/service	Advisory group
Yaung Chi Oo Worker Assn	1999	Labor rights/activist	Co-researcher

*Date corresponds to the first year the organization became involved on the Thai-Myanmar border. Organizations may have been operating elsewhere in Thailand prior to this year.
**Respondents had a hard time pinning down the year the KMR-KYO was established. This may be because there was no formal opening of an organization, but rather a growing presence of a network.

Almost all of them have long-term networks in migrant worker settlements and

neighborhoods including through "community contacts" they refer to as "community

health volunteers," "peer educators," or "community organizers;" or through "mobile

health visits," labor organizing activities, vocational training programs, or "women talk"

activities. One of the health organizations involved is the primary health care provider for

hundreds of thousands of migrants on the border who do not have access or choose not to

go to Mae Sot General Hospital. This unregistered organization is the oldest on the border; they have provided medical assistance to refugees, migrant workers, and IDPs on the Burmese side of the border since the late-1980s.

As Table 5 shows, participating organizations differed from one another not only in terms of focus but also by what I call type of organization here. I categorize the different participating groups according to whether they primarily carry out their objectives via advocacy, service provision, activism (or mobilization), or "protection;" the latter a reference to the variety of tasks those groups carry out as power brokers and intermediaries between the state and the migrant population. The categorization is not meant to suggest groups' rigid adherence to one focus or one way of working. In reality, each organization employs a variety of tactics; advocacy groups deliver services and service groups may engage in advocacy or "protection," for example. Table 5 represents an assessment of groups' primary focus and strategy. As the rest of the chapter shows— and as I discuss further in chapter seven—organizations' strategies are significant in that they are often indicative of their broader objectives, including the provision of life-saving services or a commitment to action that is transformative on the level of social and political structures and systems.

The representatives from the seven participating organizations were also reflective of Mae Sot's diverse constituencies across social classes, genders, labor sectors, ethnicities, and nationalities. Missing, however, were representatives from Mae Sot's substantial Muslim communities, itself an ethnically and socially diverse population. As I note throughout the dissertation, this proved to be an important gap. Moreover, there is always room to include more voices in the process; each member of

the advisory group and the co-researcher team brought her or his own ideas and opinions, which sometimes echoed the perspective of that person's organization, and which always reflected an amalgam of partial and situated lived and learned experiences.

As this section has shown, the design of the research project had different layers of participation built into it with the purpose of bringing forth and giving attention to a variety of voices. Paying attention to co-researcher's perspectives about the migrant populations in the four sites where we did research deepens the analysis of conditions in those locales. At the same time, it also enables a critical look at the project based on co-researcher's reflections and attitudes. In the next section, I show that despite the design of this project, there were numerous unanticipated additional layers of difference and power that emerge in the analysis and that had an influence on the direction and result of the research.

4. Power, voice, and representation on the border

Having discussed the relationship between knowledge and power in the research of displacement and the specific methodological steps employed to take such a dynamic into consideration, I turn now to a critique of the methods. I do so by looking at two aspects of the findings, which turn the gaze back onto the research process. The first focuses in particular on representation, looking at the narratives of co-researchers who explain their transformation into activists and social workers. In that section, I present my own set of assumptions that affected the research process as well. I show how these reflect different power-laden positions that likely influenced our awareness of and attention to certain voices while leaving us unaware of or inattentive to others. The second aspect involves a look at the different interpretations of violence by co-

researchers. As noted at the start of the chapter, the ongoing reflections and analysis of our research team surfaced the realization of important differences in understandings of violence, particularly as related to gender. At these instances where difference is articulated, I locate sites for the production and circulation of knowledges that ultimately had an important impact on the trajectory of our project.

4.1 Representation and the production of insider-outsider relationships

As noted above, this dissertation relies in part on a PAR-infused epistemology that privileges the narratives of those Burmese migrants who—as representatives of NGOs (including local groups)—participated in a dialogic data collection process among other migrants in Mae Sot and Phob Phra. However, rather than taking for granted the link between co-researchers and migrant worker participants, in this sub-section I ask who gets to be a representative of migrant narratives, whose voice counts in this process, and what discourses and notions haunt us from the shadows beyond the scope of the programmatic analysis that came out of the assessment we conducted in the four migrant settlements. I present three of the co-researchers' narratives they shared during in-depth interviews with me as exemplars of migrants working with NGOs. I highlight the factors that motivated co-researchers to become involved as activists or providers of essential social services to their fellow migrant workers. In terms of their demographic backgrounds, the team of co-researchers reflects in many ways Mae Sot's diversity, though they are not representative of it. They range in age from twenty-one to fifty-three years old: three are in their twenties, six in their thirties, one in her forties, and one in her fifties. Two are men while the rest are women. Ethnically, two co-researchers identified as Burman, four as Karen (two as from Myanmar and two from the Thai side of the border), one as Tavoyan, one as Shan, one as Karenni, and two as multi-ethnic (Shan-

Karen and Burman-Karen). Linguistically, seven members of the team were bi- or multi-lingual between Thai, English, Karen, and Burmese while three speak only Burmese. Co-researchers brought a range of professional experiences to the project. All but one was working with an NGO at the time of the assessment (the same organizations mentioned in the previous section above), describing different roles from "capacity building" for women's shelter staff, to health workers, to directors. While most co-researchers are working in the NGO sector, they all recalled varied formative experiences, including those that brought them to their current work. Such experiences are important in their own right for the way they ground—or do not ground—co-researchers' knowledge in the local knowledge of migrant participants. Their stories reveal lines of connection and diversion with the greater population of Burmese migrants; none come from privileged backgrounds but all three of these individuals now find themselves in positions of power relative to the communities in which they work. They describe such transformations as they also explain how they arrived at their particular social platform. Finally, I also pay attention to what their narratives say about the production of insider/outsider status in their relationship to the broader migrant population.

***

Zin Mar Thet

      Zin Mar Thet's story describes her decision to come to Mae Sot as a young woman looking for the opportunity to make a living wage. Zin Mar Thet is thirty-two. She is one of the co-researchers who speaks Burmese but not English so I communicated with her through an interpreter, Sweet:

ADAM: Where are you from in Burma?

SWEET: Which village are you from?

ZIN MAR: I am from Pegu[11] district, Kawa township.

ADAM: Would you mind telling me what is the main reason you left your village?

ZIN MAR: It was about economic problems. There are five siblings, including me. Then my mom and dad so there are seven people in our family. My eldest brother went to school with support of my aunt. The rest, my parents supported us to go to school. We did not have rice fields. In the village those who have rice field still have money. Even if you don't have a rice field but if you have a business that can get income everyday, it is okay. So in the village people who are doing fine are those who have either rice fields or a shop.

SWEET: Did you have to support the rest of your siblings to go to school?

ZIN MAR: No, I didn't have to. I mean my eldest brother was supported by my aunt. Then the four of us including myself were supported by our parents. My parents do not have any regular income. My father is day labour worker so for the day he is called he got income but the day he is not called he doesn't have income. Only when there is job he will get income if there is not job he doesn't get any. Then my mother is selling lottery. She sells the three-digit lottery tickets. Then in my village, if there is a fair, our family makes home made snack and sells them in the fair. When we have to overcome our life in that way, as we grow older and school grade is higher, expenditure becomes more. When we are in high school grade eight, grade nine, the expenses become very high so we cannot afford it. Next thing is in the school, although you tried your best, if you cannot bribe the teachers some people can fail the exam. My eldest brother failed in that way. My brother got very disappointed and doesn't want to continue to study any further. He stopped studying.

My health was not good so I quit school, as I could not take the exam. To repeat the class, I was getting one year older so I didn't want to join those who are younger than me. I felt shy so I did not continue to go to school. Then another thing was in my village, after you quit school you have to solve economic problems. I could find a job in my village but not the kind of job you can use to upgrade your living standard. The job available was growing paddy, picking beans. I still did it, but labor cost per day is only 300 kyats Burmese money [US $0.31]. Sometimes 250 kyats [US $0.26]. If you work very hard you can make 300. Under that situation, I could not support my family. It was not even enough for myself by making 300 kyats per day. That is the reason why I am here.

As soon as I arrived in Mae Sot in 1999, I worked in a factory. First I worked in Champion's factory. After Champion, Ban Song Kweh. Then Mae Pa. Mae Pa

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[11] Zin Mar Thet refers here to "Pegu," which is the older name of a district now referred to as Bago within Bago division. Bago district is about fifty miles northeast of Yangon.

then Ban Nuer located behind Tesco Lotus right close to LLC office [Labor Law Clinic]. It was my last factory. In that factory we did a demonstration. The factory got a problem. So after we demonstrated in that factory, Yaung Chi Oo helped us to solve our problem. While in the process of solving the problem, in 2005 with support of Yaung Chi Oo I was able to attend the trainings of BLC [Burma Lawyer's Council] as a representative of Yaung Chi Oo. After I attended BLC trainings, BLC had a plan to choose their volunteer. I was selected as a BLC volunteer there. Then they checked and observed my attitude for one week then after one week I became staff. So when I started with BLC, my role was office assistant and from office work to legal aid.

Zin Mar Thet's experience growing up in a family struggling to survive in rural lower Myanmar bears similarities to the challenge faced by millions of Burmese, including many of the hundreds of thousands who left Myanmar to find work in Thailand. Zin Mar Thet grew up in a Myanmar (still Burma at the time) afflicted with crippling economic disaster after thirty years of dictatorship and mismanagement by Ne Win's "Burmese Way to Socialism;" an era marked by almost complete dependence by the public on black markets and government financial decisions that eradicated people's savings overnight.[12] She describes her situation as particularly difficult because her family was poor relative to those others in her village who themselves did not have much; her family was landless and dependent on irregular day wages or sales of lottery tickets. Zin Mar Thet suggests that it was not the difficulty of daily life that persuaded her to leave her town, though, but the way her family's poverty affected her chance to complete her education. Her explanation of why she did not complete school appears multifaceted. She mentions that she was not in good health and could not take the exam, which set her back a year; that her family could not afford the expenses of school for all five children,

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[12] For example in 1963, Ne Win decreed that fifty and 100 kyat notes were no longer legal tender. In 1987, he acted on the advice of an astrologer and eliminated many of the larger kyat notes. Both acts resulted in the sudden loss of savings for much of the public (see Matthews 2006).

especially as they got older; and that the corruption endemic in the school system meant that one could only obtain the best grades by bribing the teachers.

After dropping out of school, and faced with the prospect of earning less than fifty cents per day working as a farm hand on others' rice fields, Zin Mar Thet decided to join the ranks of the industrial workforce growing in Mae Sot where she could earn more than ten times as much (though still far below Thailand's minimum wage). Her experience in Mae Sot as a factory worker resonates with the stories told by many migrants. In Mae Sot, garment factories open and close with some regularity as mobile capital deploys, shifts, and redeploys rapidly; it is not uncommon for factories in Mae Sot to shut their doors overnight ,leaving workers surprised the next day and without their wages from the previous month(s) (Arnold 2007). When workers face problems at one factory, such as closure or a failure to pay wages (or a host of other issues), they often find a job at another factory that is expanding its workforce. For six years, Zin Mar Thet worked the line at garment and knitting factories; each of the factories she mentions are large producers—concrete structures with slats for windows and high ceilings and fans for ventilation; adjacent are dormitories and workers remain within a high-walled compound except for their monthly or weekly day off (depending on the factory). At least two of the factories where she worked—Champions and Ban Nuer—were sites of large-scale worker protests and strikes (Campbell 2013).

For Zin Mar Thet, the exploitation she faced at the Ban Nuer garment factory precipitated her transition from an assembly-line worker to staff at a local CBO. It was her involvement in the protest there that connected her to the Yaung Chi Oo Worker's Association, a proxy for a garment workers' union on the border, and the legal aid group,

Burma Lawyer's Council, both of which work together to organize workers and train them on topics such as labor rights and human rights. She had shown herself to be particularly capable and perhaps her interests aligned with the work of these organizations; among all the workers on strike, she was the one who became a volunteer, then an office assistant, and finally a legal officer. She remained with BLC for nearly ten years, until the organization closed its office due to a lack of funding and she moved to work with Yaung Chi Oo in 2013 where she works as legal staff and helps to manage a safe house for workers who have faced workplace abuse.

In her account, one finds an experience of poverty in Myanmar and a struggle to make ends meet in Mae Sot. Her transformation from a factory worker to a staff member at a local worker's rights association relates to her own efforts to protest unfair labor practices. The Yaung Chi Oo worker's association probably saw her as somebody who was willing to stand up and advocate for change. In the subsequent years, Zin Mar Thet received substantial training on human rights, labor law, and gender based violence. These experiences no doubt both enhanced Zin Mar Thet's ability to advocate for migrant rights on the border, but perhaps on some level they also created some distance between her and the knowledge level of her former colleagues who did not have the chance to attend such trainings.

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Min Min

The second segment tells Min Min's story. He is thirty-nine years old, lives and works in the Htone Taung neighborhood as one of the heads of a CBO there. Like Zin Mar Thet, Min Min and I communicated through the interpretation of Sweet:

MIN MIN: In the beginning I was just a regular migrant person. As a migrant worker I worked on the building construction, welding. I lived in the section where I could see many children left behind when parents went to work in the morning at 7:30 am. They got back at 6:00 pm in the evening. This was their regular life. The problem was the children. In the area I lived there were 32 households with about 260 people. There were 40 children in total. Children means from 3, 4 years old up to 12 years old. Around those ages. In the morning when working people went to work, only those children and a few very old people left behind. So what happened there was I heard those children's ways of talking. The words I had never heard. Terms that were too rude. They cursed each other with the words I had never heard in my life. I saw that. Another thing was when people were away for work, those children were stealing things from people's houses. Another thing was they were playing and swimming in the pond and some drowned. No adults were watching so the children playing in water died. Another thing was drugs. At that time, police paid attention to adults who were dealing drugs so these children were used to bring drugs by paying them small amounts of money. Another thing was that children were asked to become beggars. When I saw those many problems, I thought these children are Burman. One day they will become adults. Then they will go back to their country. If these kinds of children from different areas go back, there will be many bad people. Their current life is not good. It will not contribute to the dignity of the nation. Their future is not good. This is not good for our country either. If we look at adults there, they went to work in the morning and got back in the evening. When they came home in the evening, men were drinking and at night they gambled. Then they fought each other, you know. Their way of living was min meh zayike [living without having any king] like people who live without any chief. Then what came to my mind was that I must do something about this.

I discussed with the adults. In the discussion, we were looking at their future; the future of the children, and the goal of their lives. At that time they did not know anything. They only thought about their day-to-day survival. Then I asked if it was a good idea to do some education for the children. They said it would be good. I arrived here in 1997 and since 1999, I have been a teacher. Together we began to prepare a teaching place and it started from there. Me and one of my friends—the two of us were founders and started by teaching 12 children. We worked for our own income and we also taught the children. We took turns. When he taught, I went out to work. With the income we made we bought the teaching materials needed. As for our daily food, the 30 households took responsibility to feed us. Our own income was used for teaching.

ADAM: Before you came to Mae Sot, where you were living?

MIN MIN: Before I came to Mae Sot I lived in Yangon. My older brothers were university students. In 1988, they were involved in the uprising. They asked me to send messages here and there about their appointments. My brothers had to go to the

jungle. Then I never heard about them again. I thought maybe I could find them here so I came.

ADAM: Did you find your brothers?

MIN MIN: Not yet. I think they died already.

Like so many on the border, Min Min's history is deeply colored by the persecution of political activists that the Burmese government carried out on a large scale in the aftermath of the 1988 student protests. Just beyond the border, Mae Sot was indeed a locale to which those escaping the Burmese government could hide, and during the years of war and violence, there remained a chasm between the then-capital Yangon and the outside world with little information getting in or out (Fink 2009). Also like many on the border, Min Min sought work as a manual laborer; Burmese men in Mae Sot often find work in construction or agriculture while women are more likely to work in the feminized garment factories there or as domestic workers (IOM 2011). For Min Min, however, his time as a construction worker was short-lived.

As he recounts his experience responding to the dilemmas in his community, which, as he shares, reached extreme levels of child mortality, crime, and drug-trafficking, Min Min stresses the grassroots nature of his transformation from migrant worker to service provider. This is a key component of Min Min's story. It implies his status as a self-made organizer, as somebody who could see rationally while the others were, according to him, mired in ignorance ("at that time they did not know anything"). He saw immense social need, organized the neighboring households, developed a plan to provide the neighborhood's children with education and childcare, and sacrificed his own well-being by donating his now part-time earnings to the school and living off his neighbors. The logical and fluid flow of his narrative belies what was surely a grueling

experience of hardship. At the root of his efforts appear to be the desire to bring order to this group of Burmese people living in chaos "without a chief," though Min Min does not claim a sense of leadership over those in his community. Contributing some sense of order, via an informal school and a system of reciprocity and exchange (daycare for food), Min Min appeared to believe that his fellow migrant workers could live in dignity, and, importantly, be better subjects of a future state in which they would reside as respectful citizens.

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Nor Da

In this third narrative, Nor Da explains her years of displacement, moving from Burma to Thailand and then from camp to camp. Leaving her home in the early 1980s and now in her early fifties, Nor Da was essentially mobile for twenty years. Yet these years reflect the period in her life when she developed her career skills and emerged as a survivor of repeated abuse, committed to helping women who face gender-based violence. This interview was conducted in English, a second language for Nor Da.

NOR DA: Mostly I grew up in Burma, yeah. Hpa'an. Karen state, yeah.

ADAM: So, I want to ask you a little bit, like uh, in your background. How old were you when you left Hpa'an to go to--did you leave Hpa-an to go to the camp in 1986 like that?

NOR DA: R: Ah...19...81, I came with all our family because of the situation in Burma. My father was working in construction, the leader of a construction team and they had a very very low salary. My mother was a teacher and they had to pay to support the family and not enough, they borrowed the money and after the debt increased and they couldn't pay it so they—we moved all our family to Mae Thawar village and we stayed there and after Mae Thawar—fighting, the Burmese coming and fighting with the KNU [Karen National Union], and after we moved to Wa Lay, Wa Lay and then after my family went to stay there, and

then Mor Kur and then I moved with my husband and my children to Bor Nok camp. So he was the secretary in Bor Nok camp.

After the—when the MSF [Medecins Sans Frontieres] started working, they had the KNU nurses, they could not speak English and so she asked me many times, please come and help me translate. I was very shy to speak but besides me there was no one. They were going inside Karen state to help, so I saw that it was really needed to work in our community so I—the basic thing, I started to work on the basic things, like nurse to do the dressing or pharmacy, and after that I started to do like uh consultation.

So I married and then after...in the beginning, I didn't have any problem because we were under our parents so even if he wanted to do something, he could not because we were under the control of our parents and like, uh, not, we don't have any problem for the family. I selected the man who can manage the kitchen! [laughs]. Yeah, so I found like that and I can get my husband, my husband can cook very well before he was the-how do you say? Very clever and polite, no drinking. No smoking. Not speaking a lot. So uh it is good and also my mother, my mother, how do you say...engaged and selected for me also. And we stayed—when we—after our family, we separated, we stayed in Bor Nok camp, before Bor Nok burned, burned—the DKBA burned the Bor Nok camp naw, before it burned there was like a little conflict in my family. Like he [the husband] was the leader in the camp, and he started to drink, also he cannot—he didn't come in the night, like sometimes he came back at midnight, sometimes in the early morning. Even when I was pregnant. So sometimes I took some pill of the promethyzin or the chloraphinaramine [ADAM: Sorry?] Tablets to sleep, sometimes..uh..[not during] pregnancy, sometimes I drank the regency also—drink—and I slept. [ADAM: Regency?] Yes, a whole bottle! Like, uh...I wanted to commit suicide. I was thinking...because our mind, mostly for Karen and Burmese, naw, we love one, only one—I was thinking just one, about religion and also ethnicity, something like this. After Bor Nok burned and I moved to—1995, we started to move to the Mae La camp, so in the Mae La camp, I was the head in the...uh...midwife in Mae La camp for SMRU [health clinic]. In the beginning in Mae La camp, naw, he drank more and more. After coming home, like uh domestic violence came and shocked the children and talking a lot, but he didn't beat naw, he never used the weapon or something, because of, he said his mother said "don't beat or use the weapon to your family" so always, he kept this in his mind. But! Talking, like emotional violence, was very, very painful for me. Yes! Sometimes, he is very, how do you say, he's shouting and talking and sometimes I can be patient but very painful in my head but I didn't say anything. But sometimes the domestic violence and like uh, emotional violence and also the sex violence. He was a very strong man for the sex. Sometimes, we don't know before, we don't know. Most of the women, normally if you can, if you ask, they cannot answer, they don't dare answer, but sometimes I share my experience and then after they speak out also. I was thinking, I am the one who gets the money we need to support the family. You don't know, you don't know—you didn't give me

money, and I cannot support the family like that. So during five years I needed to be patient for this problem so after that I could not stay for longer than that.

Nor Da's experiences, as told here, reflect the interlocking and cyclical nature of abuse and displacement that is prevalent in the border space and among Burmese migrants. The debt her family faced was, and continues to be, extremely common in southeastern Myanmar, particularly in those areas affected by conflict; a combination of the heavy taxes imposed on the population by the Burmese military and other armed groups and spiraling inflation (South 2008). Moving to an area under the KNU's control near the border provided initial reprieve, but during the 1980s this became increasingly volatile and Nor Da and her family were caught in the fighting between the *Tatmadaw* (Burmese military) and the Karen National Liberation Army. Like many thousands of Karen displaced from their villages, Nor Da fled to the border area across from Phob Phra district, where she and her family could quickly escape to Thailand if the situation became dangerous. Impermanent make-shift settlements dotted both sides of the border, housing these forced migrants in informal camps that were under the authority of the KNU; for more than a decade, families moved back and forth across the border, uprooted every dry season when the *Tatmadaw* launched an offensive against the KNLA.

This cyclical displacement led Nor Da to marry and move to Bor Nok camp, where she found herself thrown into health care, learning the skills of midwifery that would become a cornerstone of her professional life. She feels that her time in the camp crystallized her awareness of a responsibility to help her "community" of displaced Karen people and so she joined the international NGO Medecins Sans Frontieres (Doctors without Borders), eventually becoming a head mid-wife, effectively in charge of delivery for that health facility in the camp.

The camp was also where she began to experience verbal and then sexual abuse at the hands of her husband, a powerful man in a patriarchal and militarized system of governance. Her husband's drinking and abuse worsened after the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) attacked and burned Bor Nok camp, pushing them to another camp, Mae La—displacement layered upon and resonating with cycles of domestic violence. Nor Da's story of abuse as she tells it here explicitly conveys her desperation; how close she was to killing herself as she took sleeping pills and consumed large quantities of alcohol. Implicit is her courage to continue surviving and working as a midwife despite the horror she faced at home, and then to face the stigma and divorce her husband in a highly religious Christian society that tacitly prohibited such practice.

During my interview with Nor Da, I did not ask her about her experience with violence, but she chose to share this with me. In fact, it was not the first time that I heard her describe this part of her life; the previous year she had stood up in front of a workshop on domestic violence and told her story. When Nor Da says, "Most of the women, normally if you can, if you ask, they cannot answer, they don't dare answer, but sometimes I share my experience and then after they speak out also," she is suggesting an informal role that has developed together with her midwifery. She uses narrative-telling as a tactic to inspire strength in other women who have experienced abuse and then she works to find those that express the need for resources to help them seek medical attention, safety, shelter, justice, or any other solution. Though such interventions are not part of her everyday work duties as a health worker and trainer, Nor Da has explained that she fulfills this role informally: "Even I gave the training, after it doesn't stop there. They always communicate with me, if they have the problem they call me in the night

time," suggesting that through her formal training and activities, she expands her network and makes herself available to provide assistance.

In this way, Nor Da reveals that she arrived at her social change agenda through both her years of health work and her particular strategies to turn abuse into a way to care for others. She identifies herself as a different kind of organizer than Min Min. While Min Min describes the development of his organizer identity as arising explicitly out of a need for order and protection, Nor Da became a midwife through work with an international NGO, but then built on that connection and the network it fostered, combining her knowledge of care and her own traumatic experiences as a tool to informally counsel organize response services for victims of violence. However, for Nor Da, her organizing work must be on the side because, while there are a number of women's protection organizations in Mae Sot, her role within the organizations for which she works does not encompass such work, and moreover those organizations do not, according to Nor Da, recognize her autodidact skills as valid. She gained these skills during waves of displacement and her own efforts to make meaning out of the violence inflicted on her and to act upon that meaning. Her experiences caring for others constitutes a form of local knowledge that took constraints upon agency and wrought them into opportunities for social and personal healing.

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Nor Da, Min Min, and Zin Mar Thet narrate three accounts of displacement and violence: stories linked to political persecution, years of conflict, economic destitution and dictatorship, domestic and sexual violence, and workplace exploitation. And all three convey different avenues for making transitions from previous roles to that of activist,

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organizer, and/or service provider. Other co-researchers supplement these three stories

with memories of growing up on both sides of the border, the experience of being raised

by a health CBO as the son of its director, and going through the Thai school system

negotiating both Karen and Thai identities, to name a few.

Co-researchers for this project were at once representative of the broader migrant

population on the border and simultaneously different as their service-provider

backgrounds thrust a border between them and the rest to the extent they are influenced

and guided by NGO or social movement discourse and training. This is a distance that

enables co-researchers to maintain an analytical eye, but at the same time may lead to

agendas not fully rooted in needs and interests of the diverse migrant populations in and

around Mae Sot. Thus, the placement of these individuals as those who represent the

voice of migrant workers must engender some reflection. As intermediaries (Merry

2006), they are migrants themselves, and yet they have stepped out from the space of

daily struggle in which they once found themselves and in which the majority of Burmese

on the border still live and work, and into the space of programmatic analysis, budgeting,

the allocation of limited resources, and the logics of organizational thinking. This

bestows a kind of insider-outsider status upon co-researchers, a challenging place for

them to be situated.

4.1.1 Insider/outsider tensions at the level of authorship and project coordination

With my own assumptions and agenda, I, of course, also affected the

insider/outsider nature of the project. I mention three relevant attributes here. First, I

primarily engaged in this project in terms of my professional identity as somebody

working from a perspective grounded in principles of human rights but working in a

development context. Influenced by years of human rights monitoring, I recognized in myself a tendency to focus on violations of rights on which to base advocacy. At the same time, as the head of a project funded by a large NGO, I had to be mindful of deadlines, deal with pressure to speed up the work, and work within the program framework of an NGO which was primarily concerned with keeping a balanced budget and achieving pre-determined indicators that they agreed to with their donor, USAID. In that role, I honed my skills in finding ways to articulate the details of the project in the language of reports to development practitioners.

A second point to note here is that I also brought to the project certain expectations for a participatory process based on my study of PAR methods and epistemology. In some ways this contrasted with the aspects of my background and requirements of the project mentioned above. In this space of project design, the academic prodded the professional, not only in terms of my own internal struggle, but on a group level. I found myself pushing the advisory group and co-researchers to engage in dialogue; sometimes I was on my own in this effort while others, pressed by time and busy schedules, were ready to forgo discussion and consensus in exchange for speed. My focus on transformative work and the co-construction of knowledge was sometimes at odds with not only the NGO funding the project, but also with co-researchers and the advisory group who were more interested in how the project could improve women's safety in a more immediate sense, short-term goals and action over the longer term and process. Upon reflection, this raises important questions about trying to focus on the co-construction of knowledge in a context of chronic liminality, especially one most service

providers and donors label a prolonged emergency. I further explore this question at the end of the chapter.

Third, as noted above, I brought my multiple layers of privilege to the project as well as my intentions. This included my dependency on the English language (as Thai was only marginally used in group discussions). While I made constant and accurate translation a priority (as noted in section 3.3 above), and while the emphasis of the project was on producing materials in Burmese for Burmese people, I am also sure that my privilege and the power of the organization funding the project took on a linguistic form. On one level, this manifested itself in terms of use of time. Meetings were longer when I was there and when the discussion was translated, even if simultaneously. On another level, in the space created by gaps in understanding, co-researchers and I were left to develop our own assumptions about what the other was saying; assumptions that likely reinforced what we wanted or expected to hear. And finally, in terms of the concepts central to the project, including violence, gender-based violence, and gender, among the multiple meanings that each has, I believe there was an unspoken influence toward English-language terms and meanings (as I demonstrate in section five below). This was likely a result of my role as head of the project, though in addition, there are definitions for such terms rooted in the language of the UN and international NGOs. Both my privilege and the co-researchers' years of working with NGOs pushed us toward a singular interpretation of concepts whose meaning varies quite widely from place to place, language to language, and culture to culture.

My expectations and assumptions mixed with those of the co-researchers and advisory group members to create a project that represented an amalgam of our various

priorities and ideas. In this sense, we co-constructed a research project and knowledge

about the subjects of our research. And it was in the process of this effort that we built up

lines of additional difference between participants and us designers of the study. These

constitute the kinds of social hierarchies that one often finds in research among

participants experiencing hardship or disadvantage. By recognizing these and including

them in the discussion, I can show how this study is partial and situated, even as it is

important. And in its partiality, I find ways in which we not only gathered information

but generated it and circulated it as well.

4.2 Representation and hidden logics on the level of participants

While the previous section posed questions of representation and discursive

performance on the level of the research team, including me, it is also important to

consider this in terms of those community workers and leaders interviewed as

representatives of their communities (i.e., not co-researchers; see Figure 3.3 above for

participant categories). As noted above, in each of the four sites, the research team

identified key participants who play a leadership role among migrants there or who work

as some sort of service provider, usually on an informal level. Even as co-researchers

considered themselves qualified to speak on behalf of various migrant communities, most

tended to look toward this group of participants for a more accurate sense of residents'

lived experiences. One co-researcher, for example, recognized her position as both a

representative "working with people very closely on the grass-roots level" and

simultaneously distant, aware of her need to listen to her organization's community

representative in Kyuwe Kyan: "Sometimes I have to take her ideas because she lives

with the community, she stays there, sleeps there, eats there so she knows about the

situation more." At such moments, co-researchers made explicit the ambiguity of their

position vis-à-vis settlements of migrant populations.

Yet even relying on these representatives to gain more of an insider's perspective

constrains the type of knowledge that entered the analytical space of our research project,

privileging certain perspectives while subverting others. For example, in the focus group

discussions with informal service providers (also referred to in this dissertation as

"community workers") in the Htone Taung location, participants identified themselves

thusly:

> R1: My name is U Wa Sin. I am the health representative of IRC, Mae Sot
> General Hospital and IOM but I am the leader of that community.
> R2: I am Ma Thein from Sanayar Thi Pan Center and IOM as well. I earn 1,500
> baht [US $46] per month. My responsibility is sending patients to Mae Sot
> hospital. If there are some difficulties, I have to inform my organization.
> R3: I am a teacher of the education program for SAW. I teach the children in this
> community and villages.
> R4: I am Yar Pao Min from SAW. As a part of the SAW, I am a health trainer.
> R5: My name is Win Win Mar- Gender Based Violence Coordinator.
> (MM&CC-HT-CW-(18.3.13)01)

All those considered community workers from Htone Taung for this assessment—and

one leader—are representatives of NGOs, several of which were involved in this research

project. This is perhaps not surprising in the Htone Taung neighborhood since this is the

locale where many civil society staff live. Some of the participants in this focus group are

individuals who have committed their lives to providing crucial services to migrant

workers around them, sometimes as volunteers who find time after or during work or

with the support of a wage from a larger NGO (except one participant, who is a full-time

staff person with a CBO). As U Wa Sin explains, "My responsibilities are cleaning the

community, to help and to bring the patients with TB [tuberculosis], malaria, diarrhea or

pregnant women—or whoever calls us—to Mae Sot hospital or Mae Tao Clinic." With

all these responsibilities, U Wa Sin plays many roles; he is the representative of two international NGOs, Mae Sot's government hospital, and one of the leaders of Htone Taung's Burmese population, an informal position chosen by the local Thai *kam nan*, or sub-district head. Thus, we inadvertently ensured that the perspective of community workers would in some way be tempered by their awareness of NGO interests and priorities. The missions of these NGOs are primarily oriented toward social service in a non-confrontational way. They provide life-saving services without questioning the broader inequalities that reproduce migrant precarity (see for example, Ong 2006). This means other logics relating to more radical forms of social change might have less strong of a voice in this study.

In the two Phob Phra sites, KM48 and Pyaung Gyi Win/Rim Nam, representatives included Burmese community leaders. These are individuals whom local employers or landlords select to maintain an ordered work force or set of tenants. "Leaders" in Phob Phra were thus those considered best at speaking for and controlling the worker population, as I discuss in greater detail in chapter five. Comparing representatives for Htone Taung and Phob Phra, it is important to note important differences between the sources of power on which these actors are able to draw. While those in the former can rely on the institutional resources of NGOs and government actors, Phob Phra representatives have the support of bosses and landowners who, in the isolation of those agricultural areas, wield a kind of absolute control.

Narratives from Htone Taung, then, should be considered for the logic of NGOs that undergirds the presentation of social problems and local strategies for dealing with gendered violence, a discursive and power-laden link between migrant communities and

NGO and Thai governmental citizenship regimes. In Phob Phra, on the other hand, the logic of production dominates the unspoken discursive space between the words of these representatives. It is crucial to ask how these knowledge frameworks differ and converge and I attempt to consider this throughout the dissertation. While the immediate priorities of the capitalist logic of production seem highly variant from that of NGOs providing key services to unauthorized migrants, in some sense the service-oriented paradigm that prevailed over other ways of knowing in our study—such as a more transformational or confrontational approach—shares with the needs of capital an ordered and well-governed or self-governing population of workers or service-users. That is, these two dominant sources of discursive power present on the border and in our research group both prioritize a kind of non-confrontational mode of social organization over a more contentious dynamic. This relates to what Aihwa Ong (2006: 212) refers to as "biowelfare," which constitutes "an ethical claim that skirts the issue of political rights by focusing on the sheer survival of foreign female workers." Thus by looking at who speaks for the migrant population—including in this study—I look at representation as a series of concepts, experiences, and relations that inform individual perception and influence the co-construction of certain realities which are imposed on those who are spoken for but whose voice is not recognized. With this perspective, I attempt to engage throughout this dissertation in what Martín-Baró (1998) referred to as "de-ideologizing" (desideologización), that is, examining the power structures behind the construction of certain knowledges (see also Lindorfer 2009).

5. When violence isn't violent: Interpreting social problems and dialectical knowledge construction

The underlying discursive power of who gets to represent and speak for a population is directly linked to the construction of knowledge in our group about the social problems affecting the four research locations. While this is significant in its own right for the way it can affix certain notions of identity to individuals and groups, these knowledges also lead to concrete and tangible realities in the research locations in the form of organizational interventions or changes in practice by leaders and community workers. In this section, I reflect on two ways that our group produced or perpetuated certain knowledges which, in the end, resulted in tangible impacts on Mae Sot and Phob Phra's migrant populations. The first relates to an interpretation of the term violence and the second highlights analytical maneuvers to draw comparisons and make programming decisions.

In conducting thematic analysis of the data, a pattern emerged in interviews conducted by multiple different co-researchers. They asked participants about violence in their communities and participants often answered that this was a non-existent social problem. The following excerpt serves as an example.

> I: How about violence between husband and wife?
> R: Between husband and wife, it does not commonly happen. They only fight verbally. There is no such violence in this section between women and men.
> I: Then in this section, is there any bodily harm occurred between couples?
> R: No.
> I: How about psychological violence?
> R: No.
> I: When husband and wife fight, what are they doing?
> R: If husband and wife fight, they shout and scold each other.
> I: They shout and scold each other. Then?
> R: Then "you are what?" "I am what?" "You take a stick, I take a knife."
> I: Do they beat each other?
> R: Beat, they beat.

I: They beat, they shout.
R: If the women are beaten by men, they shout, they cry. (HT F2Fw-7)

Aside from the number of interesting observations one can make about this excerpt, I focus here on the interview style and the evolution of a "no" answer to a question about violence to a "yes" answer. At first when the interviewer asks about violence, the participant explains that it is something that "does not commonly happen" as "there is no such violence" but a moment later when the interviewer asks if partners "beat each other" the answer is yes. What changed in the interview for the participant to make her decide to discuss the nature of physical and verbal violence between couples in Htone Taung? Did the interviewer's repeated questioning wear down the participant? Or is violence somehow not the same as physical beating?

Consistently in almost every interview when this type of interaction took place, interviewers used the Burmese word "*ajanpet mhu*," which is a literal translation of violence. One finds this term in Burmese language media headlines describing riots and military conflict or attacks. It is also a term commonly used in NGO trainings on women's rights, human rights, and gender-based violence, but less in everyday life.[13] It was only when interviewers used the term "*yaigt*," which translates to "beat" in the infinitive, that it was possible to achieve understanding. Thus, it is not that participants do not consider what goes on in their neighborhood to be violence. Rather, there appears to be a language barrier between the professional Burmese that interviewers were using and the Burmese that participants could understand. This may also be a conceptual barrier as well to the extent that "*ajanpet mhu*" as violence is an abstract term while "*yaigt*" as beating is concrete.

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[13] Personal correspondence with Chotayaporn Higashi (15 August 2014).

In such moments during interviews, which clearly demonstrate the types of subtle

social hierarchies and lines of difference that separate interviewers and participants, I

identify sites for the construction of particular knowledges about the migrant population.

This is because I worked with co-researchers to divide the data up into administratively

useful categories to aid our efforts in designing programs appropriate for migrant

workers. This produced numbers for "how many people are talking about, for example,

physical violence or emotional violence…from each community" (IFGD, CC). Such

considerations ultimately factored into discussions during the interpretive focus group

about which sites were in need of which kinds of interventions. Some co-researchers

interpreted interactions like the one quoted above as a sign of participants' acceptance of

violence: "According to their answers, they are used to these problems. They don't report

it as a family problem" (IFGD, MM). The assumption that intimate partner violence is

part of the banality of everyday suffering affixes violence to the people and the

communities in which they live in a way that speaks less to participants' lived reality and

more to the research team's expectations and interpretations.

Another site for the construction and circulation of knowledge was when the

interpretation of our research findings intersected with the tendency to essentialize

participants along cultural and religious lines, a form of othering. This was particularly

the case when some co-researchers formulated analyses in reference to the Kyuwe Kyan

neighborhood. Buddhist and Christian Burmese co-researchers pointed to the all-Muslim

site as illustrative of gendered violence as an aspect of that neighborhood's residents'

culture. At one moment during the interpretive focus group discussion, a co-researcher

reflected on the prevalence of gendered-violence in Kyuwe Kyan and identified

"attitude" as an issue in this site where "if a wife is forced to have sex, it does not mean it is a rape case, but if a wife makes a mistake, it is acceptable for the husband to beat her" (IFGD, NO). Following up on this, another co-researcher added, "They have the belief like that in some communities." Co-researchers did not make comments like this about other locations, though during a one-on-one interview with me, one co-researcher explained that in Phob Phra sites, "the Burmese…are very…they didn't go to school when they were young so they don't have any idea…how to deal with their life" (CC). These are clearly co-researchers' ways of making sense of the fear and violence migrant workers revealed to them. Nevertheless, these moments are also productive of knowledge about migrants as our team divided participants into analytical categories as if culture, ethnicity, and religion were static traits.

The decision-making process—both in the deliberate sense of what takes place in debriefing sessions and the interpretive focus group discussion in our trailer meeting room and in a more nuanced subconscious mediation of power-laden discourses—directly relates to the range of ideas considered reasonable and appropriate as ways to engage with the migrant population to decrease rates of gender-based violence, both in the domestic sphere and public abuses that are the product of a more generalized violence affecting Burmese people. The interpretive focus group discussion, which, as noted above, was structured as a forum for analysis, interpretation, and action-planning, generated much debate and discussion about what each of the co-researchers' organizations might do with the assessment's findings. The meeting surfaced different individual and group agendas and interpretations of the data. Eventually, the advisory

group and co-researchers came up with a condensed list of potential projects their

organizations could implement in the four sites. I include an abbreviated version here:

1. Information center on Thai law/legal services
2. Drug awareness training
3. Integrating videos and cartoons into outreach because of illiteracy
4. GBV trainings to men and women (separately)
5. Shelter for women and children
6. Awareness raising for men
7. A new organization that can "take action effectively" or a network of Burmese, Thai, and "NGOs" to collaborate
8. Women's associations in communities/women's exchange/women talk
9. Resource library in each community
10. Radio or film production for outreach
11. Domestic violence awareness training for health workers and teachers
12. Basic first responder trainings
13. Better referral network
14. Integrate GBV knowledge into school curriculum
15. Involve religious actors in awareness raising

These suggestions cover a wide variety of activities that attempt to deal with the social

problems as co-researchers and members of the advisory group interpreted them.

Interpreting violence as a symptom of attitude or lack of education, for example, inspired

awareness-raising activities. Agreement on the need for greater coordination among those

organizing responses to violence coalesced into activity ideas relating to referrals and the

training of "first-responders." The list of possible actions here also communicates an

absence of a more transformative approach that would confront the structural violence

that resonates so clearly in the narratives of Burmese migrants on the border, including

co-researchers themselves. More dominant are activities that educate communities

towards a more peaceful existence and strengthen services for victims. As noted above,

this adheres to a more passive NGO focus on biowelfare, which, despite co-researchers'

personal encounters with exploitation and violence, proved to be the dominant discourse.

Thus, in this sense it is possible to see the link between individual and collective forms of

knowledge, the construction of social hierarchies, and the process of using a variety of

logics to determine social service programs for a subject population that ultimately have

an ordering effect without confronting the systemic or structural inequalities that frame

the setting for the interpersonal violence these groups are committed to stopping.

6. Reflections: methodological reflections and alternative narratives

By making visible questions of representation and voice in this way, I center my

focus on the ways in which the research space of our collaborative project was itself an

important site for the production, selection, and performance of knowledge, albeit in

subtle ways. Unpacking terms like representation and voice helps gauge the circulation of

power and the production of discourse vis-à-vis migrant worker lives. Even though, as

noted above, some co-researchers live in or are from the same neighborhoods they

analyzed in the study, the task of analysis and a variety of individual encounters with

efforts to professionalize their work over the years engendered the deployment of certain

discursive maneuvers that wedge space between these individuals and the subjects of the

research. In the end, one might argue that there is no one individual empowered to speak

on behalf of another subject. In fact, it is for this reason that the collaborative research

endeavor relied primarily on individuals identifying as members of a broader migrant

community. The assumption of voice is an assumption of representation, but at the same

time overlooks the many divisions between research participants and those recruited to

play the role of researcher. To the extent to which one's position vis-à-vis research

participants is an assumption, representation threatens to deny a subject her or his agency

because such an act imposes one's own subjectivity onto another's.

Validity as authenticity, a phrase mentioned earlier in this chapter, implies that researchers recognize and respect participants' and/or co-researchers' agency and knowledge; it implies a level of trust that participants invest in the research process, a sentiment that is reinforced only by researchers' efforts to ground their analysis in the knowledge system or framework of participants, to actively co-construct knowledge. Ensuring and maintaining "just enough trust" (Lykes and Moane 2009) in the research context countervails the forces of power that might push for the privileging of alternative, administrative, market-centered, knowledge systems over the local. This dissertation's methods are premised on multiple levels of trust: among co-researchers, between co-researchers and me, and between migrant worker participants and our team as we conducted interviews and focus group discussions with them. Given the topic of the assessment, the study was premised on an assumption that migrant worker participants and co-researchers' relationships were founded on a strong bond of trust that would enable candid discussion about social problems in their community, albeit not in their households.

This was perhaps a simplistic and problematic presumption rooted, despite my best efforts, in a homogenizing perception of the border. First, there were certain levels of difference that we did not take into consideration during the design phase of this project. Co-researchers and I maintain different notions of culture and its relationship to violence and gendered social relations. Additionally, the tying of religion to culture and behavior in our discussions and analysis suggests that we did not build sufficient trust or did not navigate well the lines of social difference between our group and Muslim participants, who are a majority in the Kyuwe Kyan neighborhood. These participants appear as more

essentialized than other participants with patterns of violence linked inextricably to cultural beliefs. This constitutes an important gap and limit in this dissertation's approach that could have been better addressed through constructive dialogue in our team to confront questions of difference, power, and representation as they relate to certain subsets of our sample.

Second, the insider-outsider dynamic of our group and the powerful structures of support and funding for our project meant that the discourse of our collective discussions trended toward a system of knowledge rooted in organizational frames for planning and analysis, at times more so than the local knowledge of the communities where we conducted research. Thus on one level, I attempt to maintain a constructivist epistemology as I approach my analysis of the collaborative research project, but on another level, our collective analysis of violence against women and strategies to respond to or diminish such violence adhered to more of a post-positivist framework that sought to discover certain "truths" about the migrant worker population. As I have shown in this chapter, such a tendency is incredibly significant for what it reflects. It reveals the power of certain logics on the border, a type of relational force that imposes discursive and practical order on the lives of migrant workers. If pursued further, it might also provide some clarity to evaluative questions looking at the effectiveness of development work and how there might be a kind of insularity, or circular feedback loop, to strategizing about programming and interventions.

Reflecting back on the critiques outlined here for the epistemologies and methods relied on in this dissertation and the ways in which they can relate to the construction of and perpetuation of knowledges that have an ordering effect on certain populations, there

are certain questions that should be asked. These are both reflexive and they can serve as starting points for ethical and methodological considerations of other collaborative action research projects in contexts of displacement. I take as a guide the writing of Fine and colleagues (2000) who call for researchers to give attention to the ways their analyses relate to participants' voices, wishes, interpretations, agendas, and welfare.

    1) How do we own all *the knowledges we construct and circulate?*

This first question relates to all contexts in which a PAR methodology guides research methods. I could not reconcile in this project what to do with analyses that essentialize or unfairly homogenize or divide up groups of people. Beyond addressing such issues in dialogue, how should such concepts and discourses fit within the final analysis and interpretation of data? As is clear in this dissertation, I have chosen to interrogate such moments, but I know that these findings are likely not to be welcome to co-researchers and the advisory group who did not commit time and effort in order to be critiqued. Perhaps in this sense, I am writing against the interests of the people with whom I collaborated. To ensure that all the findings that make it into this dissertation are those I can share with the research team, perhaps I do not need to cut out the critiques that I include here, but rather find a way to pose thought-provoking questions to the team that puts together in discussion the needs of migrants and the impact our organizational knowledge frameworks and institutional assumptions about those migrants can have. This relates to how I share my findings with participants, co-researchers, and advisory group members. Building off of Avishai et al. (2013), findings that run contrary to participating organizations' assumptions are cause for reflexivity about one's institutional assumptions, and I pick up that idea in chapter seven, looking at the various and

sometimes contradictory notions of women's empowerment that influenced the implementation of this study.

2) Is a PAR methodology suited to "humanitarian goals"?

Subsequent work should pose this question at the outset of a project. I don't think there is one right answer. As noted above, the co-construction of knowledge in the service of transformative social and political change are central tenets of a PAR epistemology. When the goal the project's architects articulate is more closely related to biowelfare, it may become difficult to keep in focus the aims of a deeper shift (see for example, Lindorfer 2009). The immediate needs associated with a response to violence, such as shelters, referral networks, and a variety of other solutions, can sometimes dominate over questions about inequalities (gender, ethnic, and social) and discrimination that are systemic and institutionalized. And this is best since questions about biowelfare arise because of the urgency of the situation. As one advisory group member put it, "they are struggling for their lives so they cannot give time" (IFGD, ES). It was my own goal and the goal of some co-researchers and advisory group members to try to keep the immediate concerns for safety and the broader structural forces linked in our discussions and in the formulation of tangible actions and strategies. This proved difficult in practice both because of donor pressure and because of the differing goals of other members of the team.

3) What does transformation mean in contexts of displacement?

There are two interrelated components to this question. First, this research was conducted in a space that was highly liminal. Participants' time in Thailand varied from only a few months to a couple decades; participants' time in specific settlements also varied,

especially in Phob Phra as migrants reported moving regularly between different farms and plantation in the area. With so many people transitioning in and out, is there time in this context for collaboration on longer-term goals? But the transience of the space also raises questions about what is to be transformed. Do we focus on transformation of oppressive migration trajectories, helping to foster stronger networks, addressing the root causes that place migrants in the situation of having to rely on predatory brokers? On xenophobia and racial as well as ethnic discrimination? Or on the abuse of power by local officials? It was hard to find agreement among this project's participants and in the end we settled on pragmatism, that is, immediate, lower-cost, concrete, and shorter-term goals. Second, in such contexts, how do we measure representation and voice? That is, are there communities to represent? Such spaces are not only marked by a fragmentation of sovereignties with local authorities and NGOs stepping in to perform the work of order and welfare. They are marked by social fragmentation as well; settlements consist of individuals and families who have been uprooted at different times from different places and who have come together to work. When thinking about representation and voice, then, we need to ask not only what lines of difference and inequality divide communities, but also whether we are doing harm by imposing a sense of community onto people.

Such research projects can always strive to be more vigilant about these issues. Even though it is common for collaborative methods working from a PAR epistemology to involve multiple layers of participants, some of which are more involved than others in the co-construction of knowledge, maybe in this context of urgency and transience, participatory action would be more transformative and more grounded in the lived

realities of migrants if there was no boundary between participants and co-researchers. That is, if *all* participants were co-researchers and we maintained a smaller sample size.

In addition to questions about methods and epistemology, this chapter provides one angle for thinking about knowledge construction and the articulation and interpellation of particular ideas and concepts that have an impact on the lives of migrants who are on the receiving end of NGO projects. This can be considered a form of ordering that influences migrant lives. In the next chapters, I will look more at the influence of other ordering mechanisms linked to precarity and structural violence, moving from the more discursive to an analysis of people, relations, and places in terms of power and the development of social organization.

Chapter4—A Proliferation of virtual boundaries: Violence and precarity in the production of migrant spaces

"The crackdown started on Thursday in the wake of the Thai coup. Some 1,000 Myanmar workers in Tak's nine districts, including Mae Sot, were under detention. Myanmar migrants living in major cities like Bangkok and Chiang Mai have been keeping low profile for fear of being rounded up by the authorities. 'Some have been in hiding near forests and farms. In cities, they stay in locked apartments without making noise,' said Moe Gyo, chairperson of the Joint Action Committee for Burma Affairs."
—Eleven Myanmar, 14 June 2014

1. Introduction

In mid-June 2014, the Thai army and local authorities deported several thousand Burmese and Cambodian migrant workers from both central and border provinces, triggering a mass exodus of almost 250,000 people in the following days (Bangkok Post 2014; Finch 2014). This took place in the second month of Thailand's National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) government, led by the military after a May 22 coup d'état.[1] The raids followed the NCPO's directive to create a new military-led committee to develop new policies on "foreign labor," a top priority after enforcing an end to the political turmoil that had rocked the country for so many months prior to the coup. This crackdown clearly targeted undocumented migrants in an effort to "clean up society," and defend the nation's security, with references to illegal weapons, drugs, and migrants (Asian Correspondent, June 17, 2014). Factory owners employing hundreds of

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[1] The May 22, 2014 coup d'état in Thailand was the culmination of months of political tension between the Pheu Thai party that held power in the government at that time; their allies, the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD); and the People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC). But beyond this specific event, the coup was only the most recent iteration of more than a decade of unrest and political conflict between multiple factions that divided along social class, center-periphery, pro/anti monarchy, and geographic lines. Additional incidents in the last decade include a coup in 2006, which ousted then-prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra and the government's suppression of mass protests in 2010 with military force, resulting in more than 90 deaths. For a detailed account of Thailand's political conflict over the last 20 years, see the special issue of Current Anthropology online, "The Wheel of Crisis in Thailand," (2014) edited by Ben Tausig, Claudio Sopranzetti, Felicity Aulino, and Eli Elinoff. [Accessed on September 26, 2014 at http://www.culanth.org/fieldsights/582-the-wheel-of-crisis-in-thailand].

undocumented migrants closed their doors out of fear that they would be punished. Landlords renting out space for migrant housing, including individual homes and entire labor camps announced they would no longer make their land available for those without legal status (The Nation, June 12, 2014).

While these events may have signaled the new military government's earnest commitment to solve two decades of contradictory migrant labor policies and revolving door enforcement, the excerpt above reminds us that "cleansing" is never clean. Raids detain individuals, remove them from their homes, separate them from their families, and tear apart social networks that have developed over years of people living and working together (Mendoza and Olivos 2009). Much scholarship has devoted attention to the machinery of deportation, its relevance to states' articulation of sovereignty, and the ways it affects the lives of migrants (De Genova 2010; Coutin 2007; Brabeck et al. 2011; De Genova and Peutz 2010).

In the case of Thailand, the government's goal, according to weekly nation-wide addresses made by the country's military leader, General Prayuth Chan-Ocha, is not to rid the country of migrant labor, a point he has vigorously stressed as factories emptied and hundreds of thousands left in an effort to get out of the country on their own terms. Rather it is to "restrict people from coming into the inner parts of the country;" effectively to enforce what has been the practice for many years of concentrating migrant work in special economic zones along borders (Asian Correspondent, June 17, 2014). Indeed, for decades Thailand has worked to create a "dual economy" with labor-intensive industries drawing on migrant populations clustered in zones where employers pay as low as 1/4 the national minimum wage (Arnold and Pickles 2011). As noted in earlier

chapters, this kind of graduated sovereignty (Ong 2000) is a product of the border's relationship with the state and global supply chains; a messy history of conflicting interests, displacement, primitive accumulation, and the movement of capital. But as the excerpt at the start of this chapter shows, the work of zoning migrants into border spaces can be just as violent as deportations. In fact, the latter is often a tool in the service of the former. Such moments stand out, but they are not exceptional. Rather they are individual events in the commonplace violence inscribed upon migrant bodies. In the time since the coup, the military government has coupled roundups of undocumented migrants with directives to enable smoother migrant registration and the creation of new day-passes for seasonal agricultural workers in border areas, though in practice little has changed, as the government repeats the familiar pattern of deadlines for registration backed by the threat of deportation (Bangkok Post 2014; Penchan 2014; Nyan Lynn Aung).

In my dissertation, I interrogate the productive violence of this zoning work. Coming from a phenomenological perspective to ask how migrants survive and negotiate such conditions, it is crucial to consider migrant subjectivities, technologies of governance, and violent spaces as mutually constitutive. That means looking at how the everyday acts of violence involved in enforcing Thailand's migration policies play a key role in Burmese migrants' development of tactics to get by. When I write "everyday acts of violence" here, I mean both harmful physical behavior and a more invisible set of forces that renders migrants' hardship and suffering seemingly inevitable and justified. As McGuffey writes, "'when things fall apart' we learn a lot about structure and agency by observing the ways social actors attempt to put things back together again" (2008: 216). To consider how all this violence effects certain survival strategies among migrants,

I devote this chapter to understanding how violence manifests itself on the Thai-Myanmar border, how migrants embody this violence, and how violent conditions lead to certain constraints on migrant lives and certain ways of regarding oneself and one's surrounding world.

These issues speak also to the ways in which the reproduction of labor flexibility consists of everyday practices of domination that construct a particular kind of precarious alterity as well as a social space marked by violence. This is to place emphasis on the implications everyday practice bears for broader social and power relationships (de Certeau 1984) and on the productive nature of such relations (Foucault 1980). I write this with the recognition that practice, as a performative and repetitive set of actions, exists within a complex system in which power and resistance are relational and interconnected; both pass through "apparatuses and institutions, without being exactly localized in them" (Foucault 1990: 96). Thus, while I focus on precarity and violence in this chapter, it is with the knowledge that these are not dynamics contained within the local context of the border, but which are enacted there. Futhermore, it is my argument that their iterative nature can lead to new social forms or formations of power that can have a resistive, or at least an altering, quality to them, leaving open the potential for the breaking or changing of seemingly fixed structures of domination (Deleuze 1994; Žižek 2004). Along similar lines, as I refer to social space and violent space above, I do not mean to infer that space and violence are inherently joined, but that as a "relational assemblage," violent acts can produce space, which can in turn affect the social relations of the people inhabiting that space (Massey 2005; Springer 2011). Violence, as Springer (2011: 91) explains, is never a "cultural" phenomenon just as violence never sits fixedly in place. Rather "seemingly

local expressions of violence are…always imbricated within wider socio-spatial and political economic patterns." Thus, it becomes possible to see connections and understand contingent relationships between violence within migrant communities perceived as beyond the law, the broader violence of government practices of zoning or territorialization, and the dynamics of global capitalism. Considering the resonance between social space, practice/relations, and discourse, Lefebvre (1991: 26, author's emphasis) explains that "*(social) space is a (social) product*" and "serves as a tool of thought and of action; that in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power."

It is from this perspective that I approach the issue of violence and migrants' survival in this chapter. I begin with a look at the relationship between precarity, invisible violence, and interpersonal violence, particularly as perpetrated against women. Interpersonal violence refers to a range of different types of behaviors that take place on an individual scale, such as personal confrontations and attacks by one person on another (Collins 2008). Invisible violence and precarity are two concepts that have developed in proximity to one another but have not been substantially put into dialogue. When I write invisible violence here, I am referring to Philippe Bourgois's (2009) triad of structural violence, symbolic violence, and normalized violence (each of which is outlined below), which enables us to look at what Paul Farmer calls "the social machinery of oppression" (2004: 307), the social, economic, and institutional dimensions of violence and suffering (Benson 2008). Precarity also refers to the multileveled violence that produces insecurity, illness, and poverty, but places an emphasis on process or "precaritization" as Butler and Athanasiou put it (2013). I consider these concepts together in order to build a sense of

how law and institutional policy, history, and global forces interact with the experiences

of individuals who find themselves squeezed into untenable circumstances and who

encounter multiple forms of violence. This suggests a perspective that regards precarity

not merely as an external set of forces imposed on migrants, but a space of performative

practice and interpretation. I attempt to frame the chapter in this way in the

acknowledgement that my efforts to study violence and suffering and the tactics to

mitigate those dynamics risks constituting an essentialism of migrants as categorically

victims (Mohanty 2003). While this chapter is overwhelmingly focused on violence

waged against migrants, I caution the reader not to consider this a portrayal of passive

subjects. Subsequent chapters (5-7) are more devoted to the multiple ways migrants

formulate responses to the harsh conditions of the border.

I then look at specific mechanisms used in Thailand that have constructed a

flexible migrant labor force, including legal, social, and economic developments. I place

emphasis on the extent to which the current situation in which migrants find themselves

is not a product of a united effort, but rather an amalgam of disparate interests and

broader processes. The historical developments that I presented in chapter two have led to

a particular relationship between the border and the state, and in this chapter I show the

way that in recent years this relationship correlates with the enactment of certain policies

and practices that do violence to the population of migrants living on the Thai-Myanmar

border. This constitutes a production of space, which corresponds to particular social

relations, including those linked to production and the reproduction of the social relations

of production (Lefebvre 1991). I organize this as a comparison between the four sites

where we conducted research to draw inferences about the rural and urban experiences

for migrants. Within this comparison, I sometimes include a gendered analysis, though this chapter is not centered on the topic of gender in the way some others are.

I show also in this part that the precarious spaces of practice or performance are capable of producing, reproducing, or challenging structures that make life "bare," to use Agamben's term (1998). In so doing, I remind the reader to keep in mind Mignolo's notion of "border thinking" to identify mechanisms for the production of knowledge and subjectivities that make use of but may lie outside of normative/dominant epistemologies linked to class, gender, and race in striving for decolonized identities and collectivities (2000). In this sense, the precarious social space I am examining is simultaneously a contested space of both fear and survival, but also a potentially resistive and/or transformative space of reciprocal power, as subsequent chapters show.

2. "Invisible violence" and "precaritization"

There is no shortage of terms to analyze and interpret the type of violence behind the social and power relations that reproduce poverty and everyday individual suffering. Bourdieu and colleagues (1999) refer to "social suffering" to study the lived experience of oppressive social structures (see also Frost and Hogget 2008). Bourdieu (2001) also developed the notion of "symbolic violence," the naturalization and internalization of unequal and oppressive relations; violence that is misrecognized as inevitable status quo (see also Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004: 19) propose "everyday violence," "normalized violence," and "peace-time violence" as useful ways to frame the multitude of conditions that create suffering under poverty or marginalization because it allows for the conceptualization of violence as a continuum "comprised of a multitude of 'small wars and invisible genocides'…conducted

in…normative social spaces" (see also Bourgois 2009). With the proposition of a continuum, Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois insist that the violence of war, such as rape or mass-slaughter, be linked and associated with the violence of peacetime as utterly human activities on a broad scale, often state-sanctioned and institutionalized.

"Structural violence" refers to the violence of multiple contingent and overlapping forms of domination placed within institutional and political economic conceptual frameworks (Benson et al. 2008; see also Galtung 1969). Farmer (2004: 308) makes an important contribution to this notion as he emphasizes erasure. He considers dominant accounts of how and why the people of Haiti have witnessed and continue to experience poverty, interpersonal violence, and illness on a broad scale and concludes that "the architects of structural violence" are perhaps most pernicious in their ability to erase, distort, and desocialize history, which reproduces a cultural explanation for suffering and subverts the linking of contemporary suffering in Haiti to the legacy of colonialism, geopolitical marginalization, and economic exploitation. The insistence on placing contemporary violence and suffering within its appropriate historical place is a constant reminder to consider the ways one's analysis of the local and contemporary is situated and contingent to understand not only why the violence or suffering in question is happening, but also why and how a particular discourse is most prevalent and dominant in justifying or explaining that violence both in public and academic circles.

Applying a spatial lens to the concept of structural violence, Rodgers and O'Neill (2012) developed the term "infrastructural violence" to explain the ways in which poverty, racial prejudice, gender inequality, and other forms of oppression are manifested and reproduced through the material world of spatial arrangements that deny certain

segments of the population access to clean water, healthcare, or healthy food. This analysis both grounds the individual's everyday experience of suffering in the spatial and follows a Lefebvrian tendency to make space an active agent in the production of social relations (Lefebvre 1991; see also Mbembé 2004). A focus on infrastructural violence means looking at the placement and meanings of buildings, facilities, fences, walls, monuments, sanitation systems, and other spatial arrangements in the reproduction of marginality or precarity. While Rodgers, O'Neill, and the contributors to their special issue on infrastructural violence tend to emphasize the urban setting for this concept, it is entirely possible to think about ways in which the material arrangement of space in rural areas reproduces the products of structural violence. Indeed, Benson (2008) writes about the brutal power of the labor camp for Latin American migrants working on tobacco plantations in North Carolina.

Analytically linking interpersonal violence with the symbolic and the structural, Bourgois (2009) brings together multiple theories on violence in offering one term "invisible violence" to account for structural, symbolic, and normalized violence (see also Dominguez and Menjívar 2014). This emphasizes situating individuated perceptions of or encounters with violence and survival within a broader analysis of the "order of things" that is often not considered part of that violence (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). It is to center the analysis where "multiple, layered forms of violence coalesce, setting the conditions within which individuals hurt one another and social relations are distorted" (Dominguez and Menjívar 2014: 185; see also Bourgois 2003). This approach is in contrast to—though not in rejection of—more individual-centered frameworks that look for explanations of violence in personal histories, psychological profiles, or the use of

drugs and alcohol, among other factors (Klostermann and Fals-Steward 2006; Martin *et al.* 2002). And it is an explicit move away from research suggesting a "culture" of interpersonal violence, though I do consider how culture can act as a mediating force, shaping violence, though not giving rise to it (Lee and Ousey 2011; Waldmann 2007).

The notion of precarity helps to target the analysis of the invisible violence Burmese migrants experience with its particular focus on the relations and networks of global supply chains. The concept refers to the social condition of insecurity and the process of integrating that insecurity into all facets of life whereby a population must come to terms with a new reality as one defined and governed by uncertainty and marginality.While some scholars, especially in the French school, have tended to use precarity (or *précarité* in French) in reference to changes affecting a society in its totality—as in a precarious society (Barbier 2002; Offredi 1988)—I use the term in my dissertation more for the way it reflects differentiation at the same time it annihilates diversity, that is, the production of heterogeneity via the interpellation among particular groups and not others that they are expendable and yet inextricably yoked to supply chains (Neilson and Rossiter 2005; Tsianos and Papadoupoulos 2006).[2]

Scholars have often referred to precarity as a symptom of life in post-industrial, post-Fordist societies, emphasizing conditions in the 21st century "Global North" (Butler 2004, Furedi 2002; Neilson and Rossiter 2005). However, Neilson and Rossiter (2008: 54) assert that by looking at capitalism from a "wide historical and geographic scope," one finds that "it is precarity that is the norm and not Fordist economic organization."

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[2] It should be noted that Pierre Bourdieu is credited with coining the term "*précarité* (1963), and he used the term to describe the difference between temporary and permanent workers in Algeria, reflecting the term's origins in the study of the relationship between economic conditions and social life.

Instead of seeing as different concepts the insecurity engendered by large-scale events singular in time and space, such as 9/11 (Butler 2004), and the "microspaces" of "contingent work conditions," Ettlinger (2007) argues that precarity transcends time and space boundaries, linking the individual laborer working at a piece-rate on the Thai-Myanmar border, for example, and the part-time no-benefits service worker in the US with enormous credit card debt.

In this sense, precarity refers to those experiencing Harvey's "accumulation by dispossession," that is, those at whose expense capital is consolidated in increasingly small corners of the globe. As Mezzadra and Neilson (2013: 90) put it: "As capital is driven to deliver higher productivity and profitability, labor not only assumes increased degrees of risk but is also subject to demands for increased productivity, more flexible hours, and the payment of lower real wages." This is the production of a flexible or expendable labor class, and precaritization is the process of acclimatizing a population to those conditions, to understanding that their "proper place is non-being" as Butler and Athanasiou write (2013:19). They explicate further:

> …the logic of dispossession is interminably mapped onto our bodies, onto particular bodies-in-place, through normative matrices but also through situated practices of raciality, gender, sexuality, intimacy, able-bodiedness, economy, and citizenship. It produces dispossessed subjectivities, rendering them subhuman or hauntingly all-too-human, binding them within calculable self-same identities, and putting them in their proper place—the only special condition of being that they can possibly occupy, namely one of perennial occupation as non-being and non-having (ibid).

This excerpt raises a number of key points. First, that using a conceptual framework based on precarity enables one to draw important qualitative connections between quite disparate encounters with violence. While structural, symbolic, and normalized violence convey the interaction of experience with social structure, Butler and Athanasiou's use of

precarity emphasizes the performativity involved in constituting or deconstituting subjectivities, a process that is constant, repetitive, and ongoing and embedded in text, discourse, and interaction. Seen in this iterative and relational way, the violence of precarity is always active and transformative; each exchange with oppressive social structures or abusive individuals is simultaneously constituting and deconstituting relations of power and relationships between individuals or groups and dominant social structures or layers of discourse. As Butler and Athanasiou explain it, the performative production of precarity can similarly be found in the way women who have been raped are performatively deconstituted as subjects of the law when their narrative is deemed to have no value and in the way a worker dies from a treatable infection because of unwritten rules that restrict movement and prevent certain groups of people from traveling to nearby health clinics.

Second, precarity provides a frame for analyzing a group's conditions and differentiation not only as disposable, but also, importantly, as a site for subjectivation. In that precarity performatively sears and inscribes insecurity onto precarious bodies, it also leads to the production of particular political subjectivities, shaping lives that in turn shape the supply or service chains that have, in part, imposed that insecurity onto them. Arguing that post-developmental spatial arrangements that accommodate global supply chains have led to a multiplication of labor and borders, Mezzadra and Neilson (2013: 251; see also Sidaway 2007) suggest that this heterogenization "entails the production of diverse subject positions and boundaries that crisscross the composition of living labor and insert themselves within shifting assemblages of knowledge and power." That is, a multiplication of labor engenders a multiplication of subjectivities. For scholars of

citizenship, this relates to the proliferation of statuses and the reshaping of the terms of inclusion and exclusion (Bosniak 2006; Honig 2001; Isin 2002). Sassen (2006) describes the ways that unauthorized migrants, through their status and their negotiation of exclusion and inclusion are active participants in redefining the boundaries of belonging. The notion of precarity reminds us that political subjectivation is not only a matter of institutional or corporate mutations of citizenship and sovereignty (Ong 2006). Rather it implies that the condition of precarity itself is constitutive of subjectivities that experience the violence of insecurity and exclusion and that must negotiate that treacherous terrain. Thus, the material manifestations of structural violence and other invisible violences are in feedback loops with the conditions of precarity.

Finally, scholars in the precarity movement have identified this social condition as one that bears potential for the formation of transnational networks and political mobilization against dominant power relations (Gibson-Graham 1996; Hardt and Negri 2004; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013). Butler and Athanasiou question how it might be possible in the repetitive discursive and gestural acts that reproduce the unequal power relations of precarity and dispossession for new forms of collectivity or mobilization to emerge that do not embrace liberal concepts of ownership as a political goal, but that have a decolonizing effect instead. While Neilson and Rossiter (2008) point out that precarity as a rallying cry for social movements in Europe has been on the decline, even as the academic concept gains traction in Anglophone scholarship, it is possible to look to the social movements against austerity that swept through Greece and Spain in 2012-2013 or the various Occupy movements as examples of collective action constituted by otherwise disparate groups of individuals unified by a shared sense of precarity (Schram

2013). This is not to say that precarity necessarily leads to collective action for social change, but that the performative process of constituting and deconstituting precarious subjectivities has a generative quality to it.

This notion of "generativity" is key to my dissertation. And in this chapter I focus on the link between various forms of invisible violence and precarity in order to shed light on the performative construction of political subjectivities. It is in my exploration of violence that I hope to begin to tease forth a sense of subjectivity, agency, and forms of social organization. At this point, one might ask whether all this is to imply an argument that structural violence gives rise to interpersonal violence. Therefore, before moving on, it is important to clarify my interpretation of how interpersonal violence, structural/invisible violence, and precarity are intertwined. This is contentious territory, recalling Randall Collins's (2008: 24-25) polemical statement, "Macro-cultural approaches to violence become vacuous when they reach the concept of 'symbolic violence.' This helps us not at all to explain real violence, but muddies the analytical task…'Symbolic violence' is mere theoretical word play." While I do reject Collins' narrow definition of violence because he uses his empirical work to claim a totality of knowledge on violence—which, in effect, excludes other forms of knowledge about violence that do not fit within his framework, I cannot dispute his claim that empirical evidence does not show a causal link between the violence of social structures and the specific motivations for an individual to become physically violent. But, in my analysis this is irrelevant because I am not concerned with making causal links. Instead, I point to precarity and structural violence as forces that shape individuals' assessments of constraints and opportunities as well as their ontological perspectives. This, in turn, may

influence how people react when violence is done to them and how they make sense of and discuss that violence. This is where I see the important connection between the structural and the interpersonal.

3. Constructing a flexible labor force in Thailand

To inquire about the construction of precarious migrant bodies on the Thailand-Myanmar border is to look into the heterogeneity of boundaries that define those migrants as flexible, disposable, and deportable. It is to look beyond the geographic borders between states and question the ways that inequalities—maintained and reproduced socially and institutionally—divide people, including or excluding them within the space of rights or entitlements of a society. Participants in this study linked the challenges of their everyday lives to their possession or lack of legal status in Thailand. In many cases, they present the migrant experience as a binary: those who have legal status and those who do not. However, upon closer examination, migrant discourse around legal status goes way beyond the contents or language of the law. Their words and descriptions pertain to so much more than that for which the law provides. Legal status, rather, is a metonym for the boundary between exposure to violence as bare life (Agamben 1998) and some relative sense of security; that is, between the wide range of violent experiences migrants encounter on a daily basis on the job, in dangerous living conditions, or at the hands of abusive or corrupt government officials on the one hand, and earning a living wage, feeling confident to travel outside one's house, or call the police in an attempt to access the judicial system, on the other. Legal status for undocumented Burmese migrants does not always constitute a fix. Indeed, many have shown that even those migrant workers who are registered to work in Thailand still find

themselves in exploitative employment circumstances and are susceptible to the predations of brokers, bosses, authorities, or aggressive others (Human Rights Watch 2010). Moreover, there are other lines of difference based on gender, race, and religion that cut across this space, erecting additional boundaries among the broader population of migrants, subjecting some to greater or other forms of violence than others. Nevertheless, the symbolic value of legal status reflects some level of power in the hands of those the law and production systems place into an identity of powerlessness and vulnerability.

The metonymic power of legal status may be a product of the pervasive yet abstract quality of law that becomes concrete through interpretation and interaction (Ewick and Silbey 1998; Merry 1992). As I have argued elsewhere in the context of Burmese migrants in Thailand, the many exchanges migrants have with employers, other migrants, local authorities, and many others certainly give meaning to the law and its categories in a performative and iterative fashion (Saltsman 2014). But in addition, as this section shows, the laws and policies governing migration in Thailand developed in such a way as to create what Agamben (2005) refers to as a "zone of exception," where migrants are under the law namely in the way that they are beyond the law, stuck in a space of illegality, and thus deportability (De Genova 2002; 2005). This is not to say that Thai law does not apply to migrant workers—it certainly does—but rather that its construction lends itself to migrant liminality and illegality, and leaves the interpretation of the law— and by extension in practice the decision whether or not to follow the law—in the hands of those with power over migrants, such as employers or local authorities. This is what Pitch Pongsawat (2007) refers to as a border partial citizenship regime, and he includes in this category a number of groups—both migrants and highland communities—to which

the Thai government has granted residency permits limited to space and time.[3] It is in this way that legal status, and access to that status, in Thailand, as in many other states, can be interpreted as one aspect of structural violence waged upon migrant bodies, rendering them precarious. This reflects a pattern of institutionalized precarity, an arrangement of the state and economic forces that complements flexible modes of production (Harvey 1989) and exploitative employment practices.

3.1 Legal loopholes for a flexible migrant population

There are two pillars to the set of laws governing migrant workers: the B.E. 2522 Immigration Act (1979) and the B.E. 2551 Alien Employment Act (2008 and earlier versions).[4] As I show in this section, both lay the foundation for migrant precarity in Thailand in that they construct a narrow channel for legal migration, heavily penalize unauthorized migration, and place such migrants' ability to stay in Thailand within a space of high-level government discretion.

In addition to forming the architecture for Thailand's immigration governance structure—calling for the establishment of a multi-disciplinary committee representing labor, business, foreign affairs, and national security interests—the Immigration Act outlines in broad terms who is and is not allowed to enter Thailand, penalties for illegal

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[3] Each group received cards of different colors indicating their status. For example, the Thai government granted former Koumintang soldiers from Batallion 93 a white card; Chinese families of Koumintang soldiers who arrived in Thailand between 1950 and 1961 received yellow cards; Tai Lue communities, some of which who inhabited Thailand's northern provinces since before the modern era, received orange cards as long as they were born in Thailand and live in three northernmost provinces; and Burmese displaced in Thailand prior to 1976 and living in western or northern parts of the country received pink cards. Each of these groups are the subject of different cabinet resolutions starting in the 1970s and continuing through today. In many, but not all cases, members of the second generation to receive the card are eligible for full nationality/citizenship (see Pongsawat 2007: 170-176).

[4] The Immigration Act B.E. 2522 was the Thai kingdom's third immigration law, the first being passed in 1950 and the second in 1954. The Alien Employment Act B.E. 2551 replaced the law under the same name from 1978 and a subsequent version in 2001.

entry, and the procedures for deportation. Among some of the provisions of Section 12 of the Immigration Act regarding which types of "aliens" are excluded from entering Thailand are sub-sections one and two, which declare as illegal all those entering without passports, other travel documents, or the appropriate visas, or those who come to Thailand without the means to support themselves. This accounts for the vast majority of migrants from neighboring countries who cross the border without authorization. Punishment for an unauthorized presence in Thailand can be up to two years imprisonment and a 20,000 baht fine (~US $600). Those aiding or harboring unauthorized migrants face even more jail time and steeper fines.

While the Immigration Act does not detail a process of regularization—that is, if one enters illegally, one remains unlawfully present until arrest and deportation—Section 17 is an important loophole that forms the basis of the vast majority of migrants' status in that it grants "in certain special cases" and only with Cabinet approval the Minister of Foreign Affairs to "permit any alien or any group of aliens to stay in the Kingdom under certain conditions." This provision creates an avenue toward regularizing one's stay in Thailand even after arriving illegally, albeit one that remains permanently on a discretionary level and that must be determined at the highest levels of the government. Toyota (2007) considers use of this law as a tactic to distinguish different legal rights for different members of Thai society, based on whether they are part of highland (periphery) or the lowland of the country.[5] It is from this section that the Thai government has

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[5] Toyota (2007) notes that there are more than 370,000 members of highland communities who are effectively denied citizenship rights by being considered illegal migrants, even though most inhabited Thai territory before the delineation of contemporary boundaries. Through Section 17, the Government of Thailand has allowed for a variety of ad hoc statuses that correspond to the spatial location of the populations, deny them full citizen rights, and restrict their movement and participation in the national

created certain exceptions over the years, allowing for an encamped population of 150,000 "temporarily displaced persons" from Myanmar and migrant workers from neighboring countries who crossed the borders without authorization. This means that there is no law in Thailand specifically regarding asylum. Though the government has developed policies over the last several decades to govern the granting of temporary shelter to those fleeing active military conflict or the consequences of civil war, they have used these policies in an ad hoc way to manage the flow of asylum seekers, a method that has left many thousands of would-be refugees in a place of illegality.[6] Additionally, those protected under Section 17 of the Immigration Act do not receive a visa and they remain in violation of the law for their unauthorized presence.

The biggest use of Section 17 is the B.E. 2551 Alien Employment Act, which contains provisions for the regularization of unauthorized migrant workers and the importation of workers from neighboring countries. In terms of the latter, the Thai government signed memoranda of understanding with its neighboring countries Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos to set up a system for recruiting labor from these countries to address labor shortages in Thailand, a desired form of migration in that it is a completely regulated process. Employers apply to the Thai Ministry of Labor, pay registration fees, and the neighboring country sends the requested numbers of workers to

community. Toyota notes this as a legal aspect to the discursive exclusion of the highland spaces throughout Thailand's recent history.

[6] Thailand is not a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention and has chosen to develop policies for asylum seekers on a case-by-case basis as decided by the Cabinet. The criteria determined to accept Burmese seeking refuge emerged from Cabinet-level decisions and has been applied to those Burmese forced migrants who reside within one of the nine "temporary shelters" managed by the Ministry of Interior on the provincial level. However, in order to fall under the Section 17 exception to the Immigration Act, Burmese asylum seekers must have their status determined by a Provincial Admission Board (PAB), and the PAB has largely ceased such registration in an effort to halt the influx of refugees. This means that all Burmese people entering the camps but without an official review of their status are in violation of Thailand's immigration law and are therefore subject to arrest and deportation.

be employed for a fixed period of time. Since the signing of the MOUs and since this labor recruitment program has started, this form of migration has constituted a minority compared to those who enter Thailand illegally and then seek to regularize their status.

The B.E. 2551 Alien Employment Act also outlines this process. While migrant workers who enter Thailand without authorization remain in violation of Thai law and are still subject to deportation, paragraph 2 of Section 13 states that as long as they apply for a work permit, they will be permitted "to stay in the Kingdom temporarily pending repatriation." This was the case in the earlier iterations of the law as well from 1978 and 2001. One of the new features of the 2008 law is the extent to which it criminalizes migrants who do not get a work permit. Those caught working in Thailand without such a permit can be jailed for five years and fined up to 100,000 baht (~US $3,100). Authorities can conduct raids to look for undocumented migrants without any warrants, and migrant workers are required to contribute to a fund from which authorities will cover the cost of deportations.[7] Anybody caught employing undocumented migrants is susceptible to a high fine and the law provides for a reward for those who inform on undocumented migrant work to the relevant authorities.[8] In this sense the law has two functions: regularize the undocumented and punish those who are not regularized. This puts the onus onto migrant workers and employers to avoid harsh punishment by getting registered. This means that a migrant's status vis-à-vis the law is completely contingent on the registration process itself, which is significant in its own right because the law places the power to determine legality in the hands of a bureaucratic process that, as

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[7] This fund was finally set up early in 2014 and employers are required to deduct 1,000 baht (~US $30) from their workers' wages for this purpose.
[8] See Alien Employment Act, Section 27 and Section 54.

noted above, is discretionary and ad hoc. This is not to say that undocumented migrants have zero protections in Thailand. In theory, the Thai Constitution, Criminal and Civil Codes, the B.E. 2551 Anti-Human Trafficking Act, the B.E. 2546 Child Protection Act, the B.E. 2541 Labor Protection Act of 1998, and its 2008 amendments guarantee certain rights for migrants and workplace protections for all workers, regardless of their legal status, including eight-hour workdays, the right to fair wages, equal treatment between men and women, humane working conditions, complaints mechanisms, protections for children, and fair access to the legal system.[9] However, the experiences of migrants reflects that there are immense challenges to access to these rights if one is undocumented as authorities often act on migrants' status as "illegal" before considering other laws and the rights they grant (Human Rights Watch 2010; Saltsman 2011).

3.2 The dilemmas of bureaucracy and a precarious labor class

The discretionary nature of Thailand's immigration policy has made it possible to regulate the flow of low-skilled migrant labor from neighboring countries as somewhat of a revolving door. A series of Cabinet Resolutions in the 1990s and early 2000s admitted migrants with temporary work permits. Each resolution declared the length of time migrant workers were permitted to stay, where in Thailand they could work, and in which labor sectors they would be permitted to work. For example, the 1996 Cabinet Resolution provided for a two-year work permit for work in forty-three provinces in the following sectors: "agriculture, construction, sea fishing, land freight, sea freight, mining, production and domestic services" (Archavanitkul 2010). Migrants working in the fishing

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[9] See Labor Protection Act B.E. 2551, Sections 8, 9, 12, 19 and Labor Protection Act B.E. 2541, Sections 44-49, 51-52, 123, 125. See also Muntarbhorn 2005: 14-15.

industry are subject to different timeframes (IOM 2013). When the permits expired, it was common for authorities to conduct raids and deport many hundreds or thousands of migrants who failed to renew, and eventually the Cabinet would pass an amnesty, allowing for a new round of registration and work permits (Hall 2011; Archavanitkul and Vajanasara 2008). The B.E. 2518 Labor Relations Act of 1975, which precludes non-Thais from forming their own unions, further bolsters migrant flexibility. Though registered migrants can join Thai labor unions, Deyo (2012) notes that the labor movement in Thailand is on the decline with only four percent of the country's workforce unionized.

A look at the pattern of deportations and amnesties over the last two decades reflects the Thai government's tension between economic demand for low-skilled and low-wage labor and the predominance of a nationalistic and national security-focused perspective toward migration (Arnold and Hewison 2005). Large-scale deportations have tended to take place during times of economic or political crisis in Thailand with more than 300,000 Burmese workers deported in the wake of the 1997-1998 financial crisis, many thousands after the 2008 recession, and just recently unknown numbers after the May 2014 military coup (Pearson and Kusakabe 2013; Weng 2009; Bangkok Post 2014). These have been largely political and symbolic actions from a migration policy perspective in that authorities drop migrants at the border and migrants typically return immediately or within a short period of time, though the consequences these deportations have on migrants' lives are sometimes great (Saltsman 2014).

Within this legal structure, the process of obtaining a work permit layers on obstacles to migrant regularization through formal channels. Challenges relate to the cost

of the process, travel required to go through the regularization process, the role of the employer, the steps involved, and the semi-formalized role of broker agencies. Starting in 2006, based on regional agreements with neighboring countries, Thailand began to require that all migrants holding work permits undergo a process of "Nationality Verification" and those without valid ID documents received a temporary passport that they would need to use to renew their work permit.[10] Initially, migrants had to cross back into their country to verify their nationality, but after the first year of Burmese nationality verification revealed that few Burmese migrants went through the process (citing financial difficulties and security concerns traveling through Thailand or returning to Myanmar) (Hall 2011), Thailand and Myanmar began a process of setting up increasing numbers of "NV" centers along the borders and eventually throughout the country. Thus, for the last few years, the nationality verification of current work permit holders and the registration of new migrants has occurred simultaneously, the idea being to regularize all migrants in Thailand. The reality, however, is that new migrants have continued to come to Thailand, existing migrants and their employers were letting work permits expire, and not everybody was undergoing nationality verification. The government issued Cabinet Resolution after Cabinet Resolution between 2010 and 2014 extending the deadline for nationality verification in the hope of reaching everybody. When they let the deadline finally pass in December 2013, there were still many undocumented migrants without temporary or permanent passports. Since the military takeover in May 2014, there are signs that regularization will continue in some new form. Going through the nationality verification process and receiving the temporary passports entitles migrants to a longer

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[10] This process started in 2006 with Cambodia and Laos and in 2009 with Myanmar.

work visa before being required to return home for a period of time, access to worker's

compensation, and greater freedom of movement (Hall 2011). There are, however,

certain groups that are not eligible for this process. The government of Myanmar refuses

to recognize as Burmese certain ethnic groups, precluding them from nationality

verification, and thus registration in Thailand. This is the case with most residents of the

Kyuwe Kyan site as residents are Rohingya or members of unrecognized Burmese

Muslim communities.

In terms of the registration process for a work permit, employers and migrants

face strict timeframes. As of mid-2013 registration was to take place between August and

December of that year with the months during that period divided up into different

phases, including:

1) Employers submitting "a letter of demand" for labor, noting a list of migrant names (20 August – 20 September)
2) Submitting an application for a registration form at the provincial employment office and passport photographs at the local registrar office (16 September – 16 October)
3) Health examination (including blood test and chest x-ray) once the registration form has been received (16 September – 30 October)
4) Application for work permit, again once the initial registration form is received (16 September – 14 November)
5) Receipt of work permit (migrants technically required to pick up the work permit in person)

Each step along the way incurs particular costs. In total the official cost for this process is

close to 4,000 baht (~US $120), a cost employers often deduct from their staff's wages

(Hall 2011). Important to note here is the extent to which migrants are completely

dependent on their employers for the registration process. Employers must apply on

behalf of migrants. Once migrants are registered, their work permits attach them to their

employers and the provinces where they are employed (though possession of a temporary

passport technically means migrants can travel anywhere in Thailand). This means migrants who went through this regularization process are only legally permitted to stay in Thailand as long as they are working for the employer noted in their work permit. Migrants can only change jobs and get new work permits if:

- The employer dies
- Termination or dissolution of employment
- Employer commits abuse
- Employer does not comply with labor laws
- Consent of the employer for change the job

Nowhere mentioned is the possibility that migrants choose of their own free will to leave but do not get the consent of their employer, face abusive treatment but do not know how to file a complaint, or decide to quit in search of a better job but find themselves temporarily unemployed. There are many circumstances that workers might face that push them to leave or give up their positions but that are not included in this short list. Or they might be left alone to figure out the registration process because they have employers who are reluctant to invest the money. It is also not uncommon for police to stop migrant workers on the way to fulfill some part of the registration process; in most cases—especially before the proliferation of locations to undergo nationality verification and work permit application—migrants have had to travel long distances, sometimes across provincial boundaries. In all those situations, migrants find themselves at risk of arrest and deportation. As Campbell (2014: 4) writes, even after nationality verification was complete:

> Those [migrants] who sought to work in central Thailand still depended on human smuggling in order to get from the border to their workplace. Only after starting work at their place of employment could they apply for legal documentation.

In response to these laws and policies that leave migrants in a precarious situation, it has become increasingly common to rely on broker agencies to facilitate regularization. Crucially, this allows migrants to circumvent the power the policy places in the hands of employers because many brokers offer the service of lining up a migrant with an unknown employer—either somebody the migrant will go to work for in the future or just a name and a face to go on the application, which enables the migrant to hold a work permit but have some greater freedom to choose her or his place of work. While Thailand and Myanmar agreed that the overall process of nationality verification and worker registration should not exceed a cost of 5,000 baht (a decrease from initial prices of 9,000 baht in 2009), since the process began formal and informal broker offices have opened up all over Thailand in areas with high concentrations of migrant workers, promising the services of a one-stop-shop for all regularization needs. According to the Ministry of Labor, there are more than 120 such agencies, though it is estimated that Mae Sot alone has nearly half that amount, many of which operate informally (author's personal correspondence). Some agencies charge as much as 20,000 baht (~US $600) for a temporary passport and a work permit, four times the maximum official cost. However, they can afford to maintain such exorbitant rates because so many migrants are afraid to travel and risk encounters with police and because of the language barrier they face, especially those who have only been in Thailand for a short time. In addition, many migrants in the border areas might be willing to pay such high fees in the anticipation of being able to travel to the center of Thailand where wages are, on average, higher. Thus, in an effort to regularize (at least temporarily), migrants often find themselves relying on illegal methods, bending or sneaking around the rules of the system, and putting

themselves at risk of losing the money they had saved up to buy their passport and work permit, getting mired in debt, or facing arrest and abuse (Campbell 2014).

3.3 Ad hoc migrant registration, migrant rights, and the construction of virtual borders

Central to the Thai state's institutionalization of a flexible migrant worker force is the geographical dimension, whereby the government, in an effort to lower the cost of its labor-intensive industries, has used the discretionary and ad hoc nature of migration policy to codify border areas and other designated export processing zones as migrant-labor corridors. As chapter two indicates, there is also a national security aspect to this policy landscape. The government has sought to limit migration to the periphery of Thailand, a move that both reifies the inside/outside binary and affirms internal boundaries within Thai territory. In the 1990s, during the earlier years of registration, Cabinet Resolutions sought to build up a low-wage labor-intensive sector on Thailand's borders by restricting migrants to unskilled labor in border provinces. The first Cabinet Resolution in March 1992 specified that unauthorized Burmese migrants may be granted temporary permission to remain and work in Thailand for one year only in four border provinces for their employer at that time; by 1995 the Cabinet had widened the list to nine (Pongsawat 2007).[11] A 1996 Cabinet Resolution expanded the list of approved provinces to forty-three and included migrants from Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos. This was designed as an amnesty whereby employers had to bring their "illegal" workers to the immigration office and "bail" them out and get them registered. As chapter two explained, it was the 1997-1998 economic crisis in Thailand that led to a spatial shift in the conception of borders and border-based employment.

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[11] These were Chiang Rai, Kanchanaburi, Ranong, and Tak.

With the liberalization of the Thai economy in the wake of the crisis, industry pressed the government to fill jobs that Thai workers had previously held prior to the widespread unemployment engendered by the crisis. Two Cabinet Resolutions in 1998 allowed for another amnesty of unauthorized migrant workers, but this time granted them permission to work in fifty-four provinces which included areas along the borders, coastal provinces with a large fishery industry, and other provinces where employers were looking for low-wage workers in the agricultural sector (particularly on rubber, sugar and palm oil plantations) (Pongsawat 2007). Under Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's pro-business government, the 2001 Cabinet Resolution lifted all geographic and employment sector restrictions, allowing migrants to register as workers throughout Thailand. The areas with the highest number of registrations were in Tak (border province), Samut Sakhorn (fisheries), and Bangkok (service and industry). These new policies designated new spaces as border spaces, with social, economic, and political rights constituting a dividing line.

These migration policies in Thailand have created somewhat of a paradox, which in turn, has brought about additional policies that seek to enforce migrant precarity. While the spatial arrangements noted above signify Thailand's place within regional economic networks that transgress national borders to link sites as nodes on a supply chain (Glassman 2010), nationality verification and temporary passports have empowered migrants to get around the territorial confinement of work permits. Thus, as the garment and agricultural industries hope to draw capital from foreign investors based on the promise of low-cost production in certain key zones along the border, many thousands of migrants who received their temporary passports have protested harsh working conditions

and below-minimum wage pay by moving to more central parts of the country where they can work in fisheries and earn higher salaries (Soe Lin Aung 2014). This has created somewhat of a crisis for industry along the border, with many factories reporting labor shortages, and in some cases for the Thai government as well which has increasingly emphasized such border zones as integral to its role within the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC).

As a fix, in June 2012, the Tak provincial government issued an order to prevent migrants from leaving the province, even those with valid passports, unless they had a work permit linking them to an employer in a different province. This new policy directly contradicted the nation-wide laws that granted those with valid passports and visas the right to travel freely anywhere in the country. Nevertheless, as the provincial governor at the time explained, "there has to be a balance between the white and the black. If I am too white, it will upset the black, but if I am too black it will not be good either," explaining the need to respect the national government's needs, but not at the expense of the needs of local business.[12] Police at checkpoints outside of Mae Sot have enforced this new rule by turning back thousands of migrants or accepting bribes to let them pass. This means that against national law but in line with local decree, migrants who cross into Thailand at Mae Sot and apply there for temporary passports must stay and find work in Mae Sot or surrounding districts. To enter Mae Sot and continue into more central parts of Thailand to apply there for regularization means moving through smuggling networks and risking any number of abuses (Gjerdingen 2009). As Campbell (2014) writes, this is exactly what many migrants are doing.

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[12] Field notes, Amphoe Muang, Tak province, November 4, 2012.

This brings us back to the beginning of the chapter and the details of the June 2014 raids on migrants throughout Thailand. The new military government's desire to "reset" migration policy by once again affixing it to territorial borders reflects both a national security perspective and a desire to achieve the AEC's roadmap to regional integration, a plan built on border economic zones that are only viable as long as it is possible to keep migrant workers in those spaces working long hours for low wages. But in practice, such shifts can wreak havoc on people's lives. For example, in the aftermath of recent arrests and deportations, families hid in fields and forests and hesitated to attempt to travel to Mae Sot's Burmese community health center, Mae Tao Clinic, for fear of being stopped by the police (Karen News 2014). The current government's effort, as well as the past twenty-five years of policy development, has led to a partial status for migrants (to refer again to Pongsawat's concept). The "status of partiality," Pongsawat (2007: 143) writes, "was intentionally created by the state as an effective means of entitlement, control and exploitation." Through the development of policies that place migrants within a space of legal flexibility, it has been possible to subject them to the ebbs and flows of the economy and the various pressures of the Thai state. Even when registered, they do not entirely inhabit the space of legality or illegality in Thailand. They are in a space of discretion, which in a sense is both within the law and beyond it (Saltsman 2014). Moreover, the policies themselves act as a filter because of the challenge migrants face in acting fully in accordance with the law. The financial cost is high, as is the risk to one's security just for traveling to obtain registration. In addition, the bureaucratic process is complex and constantly changing with new Cabinet Resolutions every year or two years. And all of this is in a language newly arrived

migrants typically do not speak. The nature of this ad hoc system excludes an unknown number of migrants who lack the chance or decide not to undergo regularization. Instead, many find it safer, easier, and cheaper to sacrifice the benefits gained by regularization and to remain "illegal," and all that this entails.

While it is crucial to understand the way institutional regimes constitute migrants as precarious, this legal and policy framework is only a piece of the story. In my dissertation, I am concerned with the law as a set of discourses and relations that impact migrant lives on the Thailand-Myanmar border. Policies are present in migrants' lives, but they do not govern them outright. Rather, migrants interact with those charged with carrying out these policies, they make decisions that take notions of these policies into consideration, and they are influenced by employers and landlords reacting (or not) to new resolutions and registration schemes. Migrants generate discourse and conceive of themselves vis-à-vis Thailand's migration laws and policies. Workers, employers, landlords, and various authority figures are all engaged in performatively articulating the meaning of the law and, in particular, the meaning of migrant identities. Thailand's institutional framework is present in instilling a sense of precarity in migrants, and their status in front of the law plays into the strategies and tactics migrants rely upon as they develop and reproduce modes of social organization.

As this dissertation makes clear, migrants feel the weight of and respond to these policies and enforcement practices in ways that are gendered. As scholarship shows, men and women migrants have vastly different experiences as a result of local and global conceptions of gender identities, displacement, and production systems (Indra 1999; Mills 2003). Thus, though this chapter does not focus especially on gender, I do highlight

certain moments when the structural violence of displacement and export processing in border spaces manifests itself in different ways for men and women and when men and women experience different sorts of constraints or opportunities in this space. In chapters six and seven, I center my analysis particularly on the gendered nature of how migrants respond to these constraints, especially the interpersonal violence that is bound up in this context of precarity.

4. Everyday violence and the experience of precarity in rural and urban parts of the Thailand-Myanmar border

Having considered the legal construction of a flexible migrant labor class in Thailand, I now look into some of the ways that precarity and structural violence manifest themselves on the Thailand-Myanmar border in migrants' lived experiences. I do so in order to address the question of how such broader forces shape or limit migrants' choices, their sense of place in Thailand, and their opportunities (or lack thereof) to structure their lives. In this section, I compare conditions in the Mae Sot and Phob Phra sites where we conducted research. This enables me to differentiate, when possible, between urban and rural settings as well as between violence in space designated as an export-processing zone for the garment industry and an agricultural sector less tied to networks of global supply. I structure my comparison according to indicators related to migrants' safety and access to healthcare, education, and livelihoods. These are categories that emerged inductively through my thematic analysis of qualitative data collected through peer interviews and other semi-structured interviews with key informants. Quantitative data I collected in 2011 for a multi-country profiling study run by the Feinstein International Center cover these categories along with others as the basis

for a measure of vulnerability, though only for the urban area of Mae Sot. A factor

analysis grouped a series of variables, including those mentioned above, into a

vulnerability index with categories of "employment security," "household

security/physical safety," "community security/access to justice," and "assets and

housing" (Saltsman 2011). When relevant, I rely on the statistics from that study to form

a baseline of information about migrants in Mae Sot, though in this dissertation I do not

make conclusions about migrant vulnerability as that is not the focus of this work.

4.1 Livelihoods

As noted earlier, migrants engage in a variety of different livelihoods on the

border, including garment production and knitting (primarily in Mae Sot), construction,

domestic work, agriculture, waste picking, recycling, and hospitality work among others.

Qualitative research suggests that wages differ widely, depending on one's type of work,

tenure at the work place, and legal status (Saltsman 2011). As well, Thai labor law and

policies regarding social welfare preclude certain protections and entitlements for

laborers in agriculture, domestic work, and the fishing industry (MMN 2012; ILO

2013).[13] While the minimum wage throughout Thailand is now 300 baht (~US $9.50) per

day, it has been possible for garment and agricultural firms on the border to employ

migrants for less than a quarter of the minimum wage (75 baht/~US $2.35) and require

them to work long hours without risking significant repercussions due to migrant

precarity (Campbell 2013; Pearson and Kusakabe 2012). Data gathered in 2011 for the

FIC study show that in Mae Sot almost half of undocumented migrants made between 30

and 162 baht per day (162 baht per day was the previous minimum wage in Tak province

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[13] In 2012, the Thai government passed Ministerial Regulation No. 14 to grant greater labor protections for domestic workers regarding rest days, minimum age requirements, and payment.

before the application of a nationwide wage, see Htwe 2011), while 31 percent of those with documents earned in that category and 20 percent earned above that. Data from this study's peer interviews shows that 64 percent of participants who mentioned their wages (n=35) reported making between 75 and 150 baht per day.

On top of being grossly underpaid, employers also often deduct from wages to cover the cost of accommodation, food, and a "protection" fee paid to keep the police away (Arnold and Pickles 2011; Human Rights Watch 2010). In addition, many migrants report that their employment is not regular or secure. The FIC study shows that nearly one quarter of all migrants in Mae Sot worked in insecure low-end jobs or low-end self-employment (day labor, porter, waste-picker). Twelve percent of undocumented migrants reported part-time wage-labor work, compared to 11 percent of those with documents. Only ten percent of all migrants reported full-time wage labor work, while 14 percent of undocumented migrants were unemployed as opposed to four percent of those with documents (Saltsman 2011). As research in Mae Sot shows, it is common for factories to halt work for days at a time, or even to shutter their doors completely and move elsewhere, particularly in response to workers' successful collective action (Arnold 2007). Arnold (2007) argues that such behavior is characteristic of the type of transnational mobile capital invested in Mae Sot and interested in flexible labor and production. Over the years there have been numerous cases in which Burmese garment or knitting factory workers organized collective action, filed complaints with the Labor Protection Department, and won, only to find their employer close down or flee before paying the compensation they owe (Campbell 2013).

With most research focused on Mae Sot's garment industry, there is a paucity of

research on informal work in Mae Sot and the agricultural sector outside of Mae Sot, such as in Phob Phra district. This makes it impossible to produce an even baseline against which to consider the data gathered for this dissertation. Nevertheless, as I compare the signs and products of precarity in the rural and urban settings below, I note that there are some differences in terms of how each sector experiences uncertainty and everyday violence. In making this comparison, I disaggregate my analysis of livelihood experiences by gender, as research suggests that in both agriculture and manufacturing work, women migrants receive less pay in Thailand than their male counterparts; are more likely to be verbally harassed by senior workers or supervisors; and must worry about the possibility of workplace sexual assault in Mae Sot's factories (Jampaklay et al. 2009; Leiter et al. 2006; Sciortino and Punpuing 2009).

Urban context

In the Kok Kwai/Kyuwe Kyan and Htone Taung sites, participants engage in a wide range of livelihood activities. Table 6 below shows the list of occupations mentioned during interviews and focus group discussions.

Table 6: Livelihood activities in urban sites

Htone Taung	Kyuwe Kyan
Domestic work/house maids	Collecting & reselling used metals
Driving *sam lor*	Day labor in construction
Factory work (garment or knitting, formal sector)	Domestic work
Home-based garment sewing or fabric work (garment or knitting, informal sector)	Driving *sam lor*
Masonry/construction (skilled, long-term work w/ regular hours; different wages for registered/unregistered workers)	Picking and selling water lilies, watercress
Rolling cigarettes	Seasonal agricultural work
Service (general)	Vendors/small shop owner
Supplemental income through farm-work	Waste pickers/Collecting and selling plastic & glass to recyclers
Vendors/small shop owner	
Waste pickers/Collecting and selling plastic & garbage	

Both Htone Taung and Kyuwe Kyan are areas with a diverse range of peoples and livelihoods. So much focus in the literature on factory work overlooks the trend of informal or self-employed work in which migrants are engaged in Mae Sot. Participants' livelihoods between the two locations overlap almost completely, though no residents from Kyuwe Kyan worked in a factory and more participants there engaged in collection and waste picking than Htone Taung residents. Several participants from Htone Taung work in the garment industry, either as laborers on the factory floor or working from home to cut cloth or sew garments at a piece rate. Most income for those participants in Kyuwe Kyan is self-earned in work related to collection of recyclable materials. The more one can collect, the more one makes. The work of collecting, cleaning, and reselling

plastic, metal, or glass contrasts with the garment factory jobs most Burmese migrants are known for in Mae Sot in that it is not part of the primary production sector, but represents the informal labor which undergirds the town's formal systems. Multiple families in both sites strategize when possible, sending different members to seek different forms of employment as a way to find greater security. At times this also means separations across greater distances with children working in Bangkok and parents in Mae Sot or vice versa. Decisions in terms of who goes to work where and in what sector represent some of the important survival strategies migrants employ to secure livelihoods and general well-being. Brees (2009: 117-133) found that Burmese migrants inside and outside refugee camps make decisions based on structural constraints and opportunities and individual members' capacities in order to maximize family income, secure protection, and to gain useful skills. Pearson and Kusakabe (2012) stress that livelihood decisions are also intimately connected to families' care strategies, with women bearing the burden of childcare responsibilities.

As there is a diversity of livelihoods in these neighborhoods, wages also vary. Construction workers' wages depend on experience and tenure. In Kyuwe Kyan, participants in construction mentioned making a similar wage as waste pickers (100-150 baht per day), but in Htone Taung, the range is much greater, with participants citing daily wages up to 250 and 400 baht and as low as 70 baht. *Sam Lor* drivers make money depending on the number of passengers/clients they receive; participants mentioned a range from 100-300 baht. They may carry goods, such as produce or a shipment from one part of town to another, or people, or sometimes both. Factory workers living in Htone Taung who participated in this study reported getting 100-150 baht per day and 10-15

baht more per hour of overtime work, unless they were in a supervisory role in which case they received a higher wage. This compares to people working from home or in informal home-factories doing garment work who report earning only 60-80 baht per day depending on how much they can sew (piece-rate). Participants noted that some vendors or domestic workers (only women) make 80-90 baht per day. Others noted that as domestic workers, they make closer to 100-150 baht per day. This discrepancy could be because the rate of pay is highly contingent on negotiation with employers and may involve deductions for room and board. Only three participants in the two urban sites reported making the minimum wage of 300 baht per day or more (two in Htone Taung and one in Kyuwe Kyan).

While these numbers are not representative, participants noted important differences across genders. For example, a community worker explained that "mostly, only men have legal documents in the family. The wife and children don't have the legal documents. They can be arrested at anytime. They don't have income either" (R5HT CW-1). A resident of Kyuwe Kyan explained that this is also common in her neighborhood and constitutes a key difference between men and women's experience there, though it appears most men are also undocumented (KK F2Fw-2). This may be a consequence of family decisions, and strategies to earn income and ensure childcare. Women participants in both sites mentioned that they used to have jobs until they got married and had children at which point they stayed home to provide care, though this was not true for all women. In addition, when the cost of a passport and work permit, especially one that allows people to travel outside of Mae Sot to earn higher wages, amounts to as much as half a year's salary, it is extremely difficult for people to save

enough money to get more than one, especially if a family is paying off debts related to the purchase of the first work permit. While this is more in reference to the population of workers not employed in factories, this resonates with findings elsewhere, which states that more women migrants are unregistered in Thailand than men (Kanchana and Richter 2011). Another participant in Htone Taung mentioned that men working in construction receive up to 100 baht more per day than women in the same job (HT FGDm-2). He cited different duties on the job, noting that men get paid more because they do more strenuous work such as digging and carrying bags of cement. Participants in Kyuwe Kyan echoed this explanation for a difference in wages between men and women. As this was not the main focus of peer interviews, it remains a question for subsequent research to ask whether such individual experiences are representative of the rest of the population. Additionally, if it is statistically the case that women earn less than men, is it because women are less likely to have legal status, or are women less likely to have legal status because of persistent gender discrimination? An excerpt from a focus group discussion among women in Htone Taung expressed this challenge:

> I: Which kinds of situations can affect the safety of women and children in this community?
> R: Although most women from here want to go out for work, they don't have any registration cards. They have 20-year-old, 16-year-old children. Parents face terrible situations. In a family, only one person can work. Two to three people from a family can't work. They also don't go to other places because they are worried for police fee [bribe], accommodations and the matter of registration card. They can have foods for one day with one day of work. It costs twelve thousand, fourteen thousand to do a passport. It is that expensive! How can people do it!? They have to struggle a lot even to have it for one person. How they can do the passport for all in a family? Employer also doesn't give any job if they don't have any registration card.
> R2: They have to save the money for a long time to make the passport for one person.
> (HT FGDw-2)

This segment from the discussion illustrates the ways that legal status, income, fear of the police, gender, and employment practices are all bound together. A lack of legal status greatly restricts one's choice of employment and diminishes her or his ability to seek redress or change jobs as this participant suggests. "Though we are paid only 120 baht or 100 baht," a 40-year-old woman in Kyuwe Kyan explained, "We have to work here because we have survival problems. We do not have registration cards so we dare not find jobs outside because we worry that we will be arrested" (KK F2Fw-2).

Participants in Htone Taung and Kyuwe Kyan cited workplace problems and the challenges of making ends meet. Some participants explained that receiving irregular pay greatly destabilized them. For example:

> The problem was that an employee was not paid by his employer so he was not able to pay his rent. Then the landlord asked, "Why don't you pay rent?" He replied, "I am not paid by my employer yet so I cannot pay." Then the landlord said, "What do you have?" He said, "All I have are two containers. If you want take them." Then landlord said, "Fine, bring the two containers and put them in my house. Only when you get 900 baht come and take them back." There are still many people who do not get paid by their employer. (HT F2Fw-7)

With wages so low for migrants, participants "work one day, eat one day" (HT F2Fw-8) without saving. A participant from Kyuwe Kyan who works as a mason recalled that he could not depend on his employer to pay him what he was owed:

> The employer had to give me 1,600 baht for ten working days but he gave only 500 or 600 baht. When he cleared all the inventories, he did give us the rest of our money. I had to receive 2,000 baht or 3,000 baht from him so I decided to resign from his work. Then, I switched to a new job. (KK FGDm-2)

As this quote shows, despite uncertainty, participants indicate that they have a strong sense of mobility, even if that means moving from job to job within a field of options restricted by a lack of legal status. Day-to-day life is clearly precarious for most participants, but it is important to recognize that this does not render them helpless or

passive. In the case above, a worker was able to receive the wages he was owed and decided to move on to seek other employment. But another participant explained a different outcome for her husband:

> The employer offered a job to my husband on a construction site. [My husband] asked for money when there was a lot of money owed. They [employers] refused to pay it. After asking three times, he was killed when he asked for money a fourth time. (KK F2Fw-7)

Most participants have not experienced such tragic incidents, but the fact that they happen at all, and with some regularity, serves to instill a deep sense of insecurity in migrants in this space.

In addition, employers "cut the money from [employees'] salary" to apply for work permits and pay the associated fees (HT CL-1). Participants complained that income does not meet the cost of living in Thailand and so migrants "face difficulties in paying house rent fee, electricity bill and water bills" (HT CL-2). Such difficulty means that migrants working in factories come to really depend on overtime work where they can earn an extra ten to fifteen baht per hour, sometimes working late into the night. This also means that migrants have limited choices as to their living conditions. However, this means that when orders and the demand for intensive night and day production at factories dry up, workers must make do without overtime or even full-time work and live off their insufficient day rate. When asked if a participant in an interview was interested in knowing more about social welfare programs for migrant women, she answered, "I don't want to know about anything. Only thing I want to know is: Tomorrow what can I eat? In the nighttime, how can I sleep? What job to do and how to do it? That is all I have in mind" (KK F2Fw-8).

In Kyuwe Kyan, participants complained of irregular employment, which puts the

daily earnings mentioned above into context. A male participant in a focus group discussion reflected, "I get between 150 and 200 baht per day. Sometimes, I do not get any money by buying and selling old things" (KK FGDm-2). With so many residents of Kyuwe Kyan engaged in waste picking work, there is nothing regular about their livelihood, except that they can rely on residents of Mae Sot to keep throwing their garbage out. A 53-year-old woman in that neighborhood explained how an irregular and insufficient income affects migrants' wellbeing and safety, "When the bosses come and call for work, some who want to work follow them. If they have work, they are fine. But, if they don't have work, they are not ok. At that time, there is a conflict between husband and wife and [they] beat each other" (KK F2Fw-1). While this participant's words generalize a rather linear path from work insecurity to intimate partner violence, they nevertheless reflect an important perception among some in Mae Sot. This is an issue I pick up on in more detail in chapter six.

Rural context
        Participants' voices in Phob Phra suggest a similar dynamic of precarity, though with key differences rooted in the isolation of Pyaung Gyi Win/Rim Nam and KM48 labor camps as well as in the dynamics of seasonal agricultural work. In terms of livelihoods, there are some differences between these two rural areas given that KM48 is a formal village with a market and small service and domestic work industries. Table 7 below reflects a narrower range of livelihood activities than those found in Mae Sot as participants are much more heavily involved in farm work.

Table 7: Livelihood activities in rural sites

Pyaung Gyi Win/Rim Nam	KM48
Agriculture: all season farming	Agriculture: all season farming
Agriculture: seasonal farming	Agriculture: seasonal farming
Animal husbandry	Animal husbandry
Garden production	Day labor in construction
Vendors (selling and delivering goods)	Domestic work
	Factory work (electric coil)
	Vendors/small shop owner

In Pyaung Gyi Win/Rim Nam, there are only a few employers so most participants work together. In fact, as explained in the introduction, this site actually refers to two adjacent locations. Pyaung Gyi Win, which as mentioned earlier, means "Baldy's Land," is one compound in which the employer is the landlord for the approximately 300 farm workers who live there. Therefore, as one participant responded when asked if there are residents of the camp who work elsewhere, "We are not allowed to do that. If we live here we have to work here" (KM42 F2Fw-1). On the adjacent land, workers are freer to choose their employer, but since this is also the land of a farmer, most just work for him. One participant noted that choice of livelihood depends to some extent on one's legal status, as in Mae Sot. She explained, "Here, they work for hill-side farms belonging to the boss. People with some money or a registration card have their own small business such as selling things, rice and so on. The poor people work on hill-side farms" (KM42 F2Fw-4). In both parts of Pyaung Gyi Win/Rim Nam some residents have enough space to raise pigs and chickens as well as grow small plots of vegetables for personal consumption and to sell or trade with others in the area. Thus, where it says animal husbandry and garden

production under the Pyaung Gyi Win/Rim Nam column in the table above, these lines refer to individual houshold-level production.

Migrants work in similar ways in KM48, though there appears to be a wider variance in employers and types of work. Migrants are spread out in different compounds across fifteen *soi*. Some participants mentioned that they have farm work all year long; they plant different varieties of corn in the dry and rainy season, and mustard and cabbage all year long (KM48 CL-1). With a greater diversity of employers as well as living arrangements that do not always involve migrants living on their employer's land, participants express the ability to be more strategic with their income than those in Pyaung Gyi Win/Rim Nam. In one family, for example, different individuals might work on different farms at different times of the year, on construction sites, as domestic workers, or vendors in the market (KM48 F2Fw-10; KM48 F2Fw-11). And, like migrants in Mae Sot, it is not uncommon for some members of the family to seek employment elsewhere in Thailand to supplement the income of the household.

Looking at participants' responses, there is less of a wage range in the rural context than in Mae Sot. In Pyaung Gyi Win/Rim Nam, where many participants work for the same employer, all those who mentioned their income make between 90 and 150 baht per day (~US \$2.80 and \$4.66), the majority citing the same day rate of 100-120 baht per day. Like Mae Sot, though, participants report that men make more than women, even if just by ten baht per day. In fact, it appears that this difference is part of a scale, as children working in the fields earn approximately 60 to 80 percent of what women make. Though it was not possible for this study to measure the material impact of the wage difference between men and women (roughly ten to 20 percent), it nevertheless reflects

one among many instances of gender discrimination that is sometimes subtle and sometimes blatant. Most participants who noted this discrepancy echoed their employers' explanations about different wages for different work: "The reason they pay like that is men have to work harder than women. That's what they said" (KM42 F2Fw-1). Men manually till the fields and handle fertilizers and therefore get more pay, say respondents. However, one participant, a community worker in Pyaung Gyi Win/Rim Nam, rejected his employer's explanation as he answered why he thinks women are paid less, "This is because…they are women. However, if we talk about labor rights, men, women, and children should get equal an amount of salary without discrimination" (R1KM42 CW-1).

Wages in KM48 varied with the greater range of livelihoods. Working in the coil factory is piece-rate and participants note that beginners tend to make 130-150 baht per day while the more experienced workers can earn 250-300 baht per day, the highest salary of anybody around. Participants suggest that both men and women migrants work in this site. Construction workers, all of who were men, reported getting 130-160 baht per day. Day labor and agricultural work earned around 120-150 baht per day, according to participants, though some women reported receiving only 100 baht per day. Other respondents report that women get 120 and men get 150 baht per day. As elsewhere in Thailand (and the world), many see earning income as a domestic worker as a feminine livelihood in KM48. It is also not a regular form of income, conditions are unpredictable, and until recently there were no registration options for domestic workers.

All these different wages depend to some extent on the employer, though it is likely that farmers communicate and coordinate on wages, given the highly mobile worker population on which they rely. Participants during a focus group discussion

among men in Pyaung Gyi Win/Rim Nam suggested that local government officials

(many of whom are local farm owners or investors) also play a role in setting wages:

> **I1:** How about business?
> **R2:** Regarding work, both husband and wife have to work to support families. At least, if we get 100 baht per day, it just covers our household expenses. However, the Thai village leaders announced not to give [more than] 100 baht to Burmese. If the employer gives more than 100 baht, [authorities] make a problem for that employer. So, we face the problem for our survival.
> **R1:** We can just survive if we earn 100 baht per day. If we do not work for one day, we do not have money to buy food for that day. If we have three family members, 100 baht does not cover our household expense.
> **I1:** Who said not to give [more than] 100 baht per day?
> **R2:** Thai village leader—
> **I1:** They announced with a document?
> **R1:** No, they announced it by car. […] Also, employers told us about this. Thai village leaders told them not to pay us [more than] 100 baht per day. If they pay more than 100 baht per day, the employees will save the money and then go to Bangkok. Some get only 90 baht. (KM42 FGDm-2)

As the participants explain, the rationale for the wage rate at 1/3 the minimum is to keep

migrant workers earning too little to save money so that they will remain stuck working

at a near-subsistence level unable to leave the farm in search of higher wages in Bangkok.

What is not said explicitly here is that because these migrants are also undocumented, the

money they would be saving might go toward either a forged work permit allowing them

to travel away from the border and/or the cost of being smuggled to Bangkok or

elsewhere nearby. All this suggests a level of enforced precarity for these participants

who must navigate multiple levels of employer and government efforts to enforce border

regimes of low-cost production.

Like participants in Kyuwe Kyan, irregular employment constitutes a major

concern and a barrier to wellbeing for migrants in KM48 and Pyaung Gyi Win/Rim Nam.

As one participant in the latter site said, his job is, "cutting corn but I don't have any job

now as there is no corn to cut" (KM42 F2Fw-3). Irregular employment was an issue

highlighted especially by residents of KM48. Nearly half of these participants expressed

the challenge of making ends meet during the dry season. A monk living in KM48

explained:

> As plantation workers, there are many jobs available for them in the rainy season, but in the dry season, it's really hard to get a job as the plantation period is over. At that time they have a very hard time, even to survive for one day. (KM48 CL-3)

Instead of returning to Myanmar at the end of the harvest season, participants indicate

that many workers stay in their labor camp, looking for other work, doing odd jobs, and

waiting for the return of a labor-intensive period. During this low season, some

participants take out loans and accumulate debt. A thirty-four year old woman in KM48

reflected that her and her husband's wage of 100 baht per day is just barely "enough for

our food. No extra." She continued:

> We have been here for five years but we have nothing. We must earn and eat. Now, we have work so we save a little money but when the time we have no work comes, we will eat up what we have saved within one month or so. (KM48 F2Fw-10)

Within single-earner families, this irregularity has an especially significant impact. While

men and women both earn wages in Phob Phra, it is also the case that unpaid care work

falls to women. This means that for many women, they are faced with double the work

and fewer wages. For many participants, when a couple has a child, the mother ceases to

work because no other care option is available.

An important point to note here is that the challenge facing migrants in these

locations to make ends meet, to save money, or even to be mobile cannot be chalked up

to the nature of agricultural work. They are rooted in employer's own concerns about

profit and the fear that migrants will move away from the border in search of higher

wages in central parts of the country. This reflects a shared set of interests among Thailand's leaders and border-based farmers. Indeed as we will see in subsequent chapters, local security officials play an important role in enforcing employers' demands. This reflects a kind of structural violence perpetrated by employers and government actors against migrant workers. It is an indirect violence wherein state policy intersects with local practices of authorities to create work conditions on farms that are near servitude. While migrants in Mae Sot are also subject to the same power arrangement geared towards keeping low-wage labor on the border, they have a much greater choice of livelihoods available to them and a wider range of salaries. Moreover, comparing participants' perspectives illustrates that factory work in Mae Sot, on which most research on this town has focused as evidence of precarity on the border, is a far more secure form of livelihood for migrants than farm work in Phob Phra or informal day jobs in Mae Sot. These qualitative results suggest that formal factories pay more, provide more regular employment (though not without exceptions), and are more likely to register at least a significant percentage of their workers. This suggests a greater need to examine the role of informal labor in reproducing the conditions of labor for factories in global supply chains.

4.2 Access to education, children's well-being

Since Burmese migrants began coming to Thailand in increasingly large numbers in the early 1990s, access to education for youth has been a challenge. An excerpt from one of the co-researchers in chapter three depicted the difficult conditions for minors as he described children left at home when parents and older siblings went to work. Until the mid-2000s, the Thai government did not recognize migrant learning centers, which

were established by a number of entities, including migrants themselves, political groups, religious organizations, and international NGOs. Unregulated and unsystematically established at first, there are a diversity of administrative, curricular, and financial structures in the dozens of learning centers along the border, ranging from schools that originally functioned as ethno-nationalist government entities teaching their curricula in quasi-shelters supported by individuals around the world (Horstmann 2011). With changes in Thai law, migrant learning centers now fall under the umbrella of non-state education services (Lee 2014).[14] As a hub for undocumented migrants, Mae Sot and surrounding border districts have the largest number of schools with 74 learning centers (this includes 12 in Phob Phra and 54 in the broader Mae Sot area) (Salmon et al. 2012). Thai schools also permit migrant children to enroll, but this is most common for migrant families living in or near Bangkok (Lee 2014). In addition, though public and technically free, Thai schools are prohibitively expensive for many migrant families, mostly due to the hidden costs of education linked to transportation, materials, and uniforms (CPPCR 2009).

Despite the proliferation of migrant learning centers and the increasing access for migrant children to Thai schools, Burmese families still face difficulties in accessing education, protecting children's safety, and managing childcare. There is a general lack of valid statistics for the number of migrant children not in school border-wide, but the FIC survey shows that in Mae Sot 70 percent of school-age children from undocumented migrant families and 74 percent of those from families with documents were in school,

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[14] In 1999, the Thai government passed the B.E. 2542 National Education Act stating that all children under 12 in Thailand, regardless of nationality, must have the opportunity to receive a basic education. In 2005, as part of the global "Education for All" movement, the government passed a Cabinet Resolution allowing for undocumented migrant children to access education services.

compared to 93 percent of Thai children in the same age group (Saltsman 2012: 35). This

contrasts with a 2009 community assessment which found that just over half of migrant

school-age youth in or near Mae Sot were in school, either in Thailand or Myanmar

(CPPCR 2009). According to the FIC study, almost a third of undocumented migrants

who reported having one or more school-aged child out of school reported the need to

work as a reason (compared to only six percent of documented migrants and four percent

of Thai nationals) (Saltsman 2012). Qualitative results from that study reflect that barriers

to school attendance include:

> High costs (mostly hidden costs such as uniform fees, the cost of food, and
> transportation), lack of security (making trips to and from school difficult), and
> the requirement of some schools, including Thai schools, for what respondents
> called "recommendations" in order to gain entry into schools (letters vouching for
> students) (p. 35).

What these factors boil down to are poverty and the undocumented status of many

migrants, especially on the border (see also Salmon et al. 2012). Even among those youth

in school, barriers to education still exist, including a lack of access to school materials

and insufficient or unsafe school infrastructures (ibid). Unfortunately this data is not

disaggregated by gender, though qualitative findings suggest parents typically send both

boys and girls to school and participants mentioned both boys and girls who were taken

out of school for work.

The Mae Sot-based Committee for the Promotion and Protection of Children's

Rights (CPPCR) documented additional protection concerns for children, including

exposure to drugs and alcohol, child labor, and violence at home as well as in the

community and at school (2009). There are a great many children on their own in

Thailand for a variety of reasons. For example, many parents in Myanmar send children

across the border for school in Thailand (CPPCR 2009).[15] Families are also separated during deportations leaving children on their own or, more commonly, in the care of relatives. In a 2006 report for the ILO, Robertson and the Federation of Trade Unions-Burma (2006) found widespread migrant child labor in and around Mae Sot, documenting that a majority of child workers were under 17, lacked basic rights, and worked long hours without days off in unsafe conditions for far below minimum wage.[16]

While migrant learning centers and Thai schools are scattered in both Phob Phra and Mae Sot districts, my qualitative findings suggest a difference in access to education and general well-being for youth. This also varies by specific site as participants indicate that access differs according to the proximity of certain neighborhoods and labor camps to schools as well as on family income levels and childcare options.

Urban context
As indicated here, there are major differences between access to education in rural and urban areas. There are four schools run by CBOs (SAW, BLSO, Min Ma Haw, and Moe Ma Kha) and a Chinese private school in Htone Taung alone (see Map 2, chapter 1). The Chinese school lies just outside the community perimeter. This does not mean that all Burmese children in Htone Taung go to school. But fewer participants cited as a problem a low attendance rate of children as compared to other communities. During a focus group discussion, teenage girls in Htone Taung mentioned that there are some households who cannot afford to send at least one child to school. According to these

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[15] For example, CPPCR found that in 2008 there were more than 2,300 Burmese children living in dormitory-style boarding houses in Mae Sot, mostly to attend school (CPPCR 2009).

[16] The minimum legal age for work in Thailand is 15 (under the B.E. 2551 Labor Protection Act of 2008). Non-Thai nationals 15 and older are allowed to register for work permits and, as documented workers, are covered by Thai labor laws.

participants,

> …the uneducated boys have to work as masons, some collect the garbage in the hot weather and work in the garbage cars which are very smelly. Parents also ask them to work for any job they need as they are boys. Parents think that it isn't necessary for boys to be educated. (HT FGDg-1)

In Kyuwe Kyan, participants described a similar dilemma for children not in school, but in this neighborhood, which lies just a few kilometers away, participants expressed that access to education was a major issue for this place. One community worker kept a list noting that there were 50 children in the neighborhood who did not attend school (KK CW-1). Participants stress that children missing school is a product of their poverty, that parents cannot cope with the explicit and hidden costs of schools in Mae Sot. Two teenage girls participating in a focus group discussion in this neighborhood reflect this view:

> R1- There are so many children who can't go to the school in this community.
> R3- Yes, the parents can't afford to send their children to the schools. Some of the schools can enroll free of charge but some schools ask enrolment fees.
> (KK FGDg-1)

To these school-age girls, the consequence they most identified with not being able to attend school is that, "We are looked down on by others because we can't go to school." They also noted that the youth in Kyuwe Kyan who do not go to school end up finding jobs in Mae Sot.

> **I:** Do you have friends who can't go to the school? You already told me that you know the boys who can't go to the school. Can you tell me more about which kinds of problems those boys face?
> **R1:** They are discriminated against by others because they are illiterate.
> **R3:** They will have to breed cows when they grow old.
> **I:** Do they work?
> **R3:** Yes
> **R4:** But, most of them do not work and just spend their parents' money.
> **I:** If they work, what kind of work do they work?
> **R3:** They collect plastic.

R2: Some work as masons.
R4: Some work in the night market.
I: Do they get the same salary as adult?
R2: Yes
R3: No, they do not get the same salary. Adults get 150 baht per day and children get 120 baht per day.
R2: It depends on the work. They get same salary as adults in some work like carrying the goods in the market. (KK FGDg-1)

These participants suggest here that the lack of education for some children in Kyuwe Kyan leads many of those youth straight into child labor performing the same work as their parents. In addition, because there are no schools in Kyuwe Kyan and given the fear of moving about outside of the community, it is also possible that there are some families who decide it is more secure to keep their children at home or take their children with them to collect and resell plastic, even though most schools run by CBOs or NGOs have a transportation system in place.

Rural context

As noted above, there are many more migrant learning centers that are more easily accessible in Mae Sot than Phob Phra. While there are no statistics to measure the per capita access to education services for youth in these two districts, participants in this study highlight some of the differences they experience. A community leader in Htone Taung explains his view of Phob Phra here:

> Getting 120 baht [per day] can support a family's basic needs but they can't send their children to school. There are no schools near the farm. So many children are illiterate. The Burmese children cannot attend the Thai schools. That we can't solve the problems mean these problem will happen continuously. (HT CL-1)

With these words, this leader comments on the link between the struggle experienced by migrants in Phob Phra engaged in low-wage seasonal farm labor and the effects this has on children. While legally Burmese children do have access to Thai schools, and in

practice participants in Phob Phra mentioned that this is one avenue for youth in their locations to attend school, it is possible this community leader in Htone Taung was referring to the obstacle faced by undocumented migrants who are precluded from such an opportunity. To this community leader in Htone Taung, the difficulty in accessing education for some youth in Phob Phra means that they will be less equipped as they grow up to struggle against the structural violence pervasive around them.

In Pyaung Gyi Win/Rim Nam, there are no schools in the immediate compound or the adjacent worker camp. But there are migrant schools nearby and school buses come to pick up some of the youth in these sites for the equivalent of K-12 education at facilities sponsored by grassroots organizations in Mae Sot or larger NGOs. There are Thai government schools in the district as well, which some of the registered migrant youth attend, though none from participants' families. This compares with KM48, which has two migrant schools, one Thai secondary school (*Baan Rom Klao 2*), and a Thai primary school. A participant noted that there is also a Chinese school in the village, though no participants reported sending their children there. Some registered children (including those with "ten-year cards") can attend the Thai school. At the time of my follow-up interviews in February 2014, one of the migrant schools in KM48 had just been displaced into a field for making fertilizer. The teachers were still trying to maintain a functioning school while looking for funding to set up a more permanent site, but at that time they were in difficult conditions for learning. The other school, which is a primary school, is in a private home.

In both KM48 and Pyaung Gyi Win/Rim Nam, there are children who do not go to school and who work instead. A teacher who lives in Rim Nam, which some residents

also referred to as "44," explained that he kept records of the population, including numbers attending school:

> For education, we are here because we are living in bad conditions. I just speak for 44-village only. I am not interested about other villages. There are 700 or 800 children here. Only about 40 students go to school. In addition to the Thai school, there may be 80 students. I do not know about the rest of the 600, whether they are working or wandering around the village or what they are doing.
> (KM42 CL-1)

This participants' words are significant here as he frames his comments about education by highlighting the "bad conditions" in which migrants there are living. According to him, going to school is only an activity for about ten percent of the youth in this site. Among those who are getting an education, as much as 50 percent are attending a Thai school and 50 percent a migrant learning center. Those children going to a Thai school may be from families who are registered workers, they may have been born in Thailand, or they and their parents may have lived for long enough in Thailand to receive a "ten-year card." Students attending migrant learning centers have two options, each not more than a 20-minute drive away.

For some families in Phob Phra, the proximity and cost of an education is less of a factor in making decisions about sending children to school than the day-to-day struggle for survival. A woman living in KM48 implicitly linked the challenge of accessing education with low wages and the difficulties of securing livelihoods, when she made clear that all migrants in her area had to work, "even at the age of my daughter" who was 12. She described the reasons for this, noting, "Everybody has to work, because we all have to pay for food, house rent, electricity and water. In the past three years, we had to pay monthly bribes to police." This resonates with participants' comments in both Pyaung Gyi Win/Rim Nam and KM48 who referred to children working as an everyday

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part of life. With such low pay and irregular work, some families cannot afford to spare an able-bodied member. According to the participant quoted above, this is the case even though children do not always make the same wage as adults. In her view, it depends on the employer, "If it's a bad owner, they only pay 30, 40, or 60 baht per day to the children" (KM48 F2Fw-1).

The consequences of children not going to school and working on farms in Phob Phra are many. Participants above have referenced illiteracy and an inability to escape the poverty of their families. In addition, the community leader and teacher from Rim Nam pointed to significant health issues which can affect children's long-term development:

> We have many under-aged workers who do not know how to handle farming equipment. Especially for fumigation. By doing this work, they can earn more money. As a side effect of fumigation, some people get asthma, some people get serious dizziness and sometimes we even need to send them to the hospital at night. Some kids do not know how to wash their hands after work. Some people got the problem in their lungs. (KM42 CL-1)

Child labor and a lack of access to education is a significant barrier border-wide. In both Mae Sot and Phob Phra, children are missing out on school and, in some cases, working instead primarily due to poverty more than a lack of opportunity. Participants' narratives suggest that both sites in Phob Phra as well as Kyuwe Kyan share the problem of low education rates and a prevalence of child labor. In Htone Taung, participants also identified child labor as an issue but on a lesser scale. There, they did not identify it as a primary concern while participants in the other three sites did. This suggests an inverse relationship between informal work and access to education. Putting these qualitative results into conversation with the FIC study's findings, noted above, it appears that in Mae Sot, the difference between access to education for children from documented families and those from undocumented families is not so great (only four percentage

points, statistically significant at the p < 0.1 level). This may be for a wide variety of reasons, including because documented migrant households still face financial and linguistic barriers to Thai schools and a lack of place at migrant learning centers; because many families in Mae Sot are transient and might not put children in school since they plan to leave; or because parents' care arrangements are not conducive to sending children to school (for example, if parents take their children to work with them). Further answers on this would provide important insights as to the nature of accessing education on the border.

While it would also be useful to statistically determine access to education for youth in Phop Phra and make comparisons, the point is to highlight the way that precarity and structural violence constrain and manipulate migrants' options in everyday life. Participants' voices in Pyaung Gyi Win/Rim Nam and KM48 make clear that the challenges of life for migrants in Phob Phra's farm labor camps in terms of isolation, irregular work, and low wages make education an impossibility for some and child labor an everyday reality for many. Similarly, for residents of Kyuwe Kyan, the work of waste picking, domestic care, and small-scale agriculture is so unpredictable and leaves households with so little to live on that migrants must prioritize survival.

4.3 Access to healthcare

Access to healthcare for Burmese people in this border space has greatly increased over the decades of intensive labor there. The community health center, Mae Tao Clinic, opened in 1989 and quickly became the primary healthcare provider for both migrant workers on the border and internally displaced Burmese people living in southeastern Myanmar or on the border with Thailand. As they have expanded in terms of services, staff, and space, greater numbers of displaced Burmese people have sought

their services. The work of Mae Tao Clinic has spawned several other facilities in the

Mae Sot area, including the Adolescent Reproductive Health Network and Social Action

for Women. There are multiple smaller groups operating as migrant health and social

welfare organizations that provide targeted care focused on men with HIV or herbal

health for women, to name two examples. A large-scale effort by the SHIELD and

subsequently PLE projects has led to the proliferation of health posts and centers,

including in numerous factories and other types of worksites in Mae Sot and elsewhere

along the border.[17] Additionally, registered migrants have gained increased access to the

Thai health system with the establishment of universal low-cost healthcare in 2004 and

an expansion of "community-level healthcare" through district health offices (Samrit et

al. 2010). As of 2012, migrants with temporary passports and work permits must buy into

Thailand's social security scheme with monthly 5% deductions from their wages, which

contains specific benefits for maternity, unemployment, disability, and general health,

though it is still not clear to which benefits migrants have access. Thus, over the years the

Thai government has taken steps to include migrants in their structures of social

support.[18]

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[17] A joint project involving multiple stakeholders, SHIELD stands for Support to Health, Institution Building, Education and Leadership in Policy Dialogue. The project ran from 2006 to 2011. PLE (Project for Local Empowerment) is a four-year continuation to SHIELD. Both have been funded by USAID. See chapter seven for more details.

[18] The Thai Social Security system dates back to the early 1930s (when the country transitioned to a constitutional monarchy) and has evolved over the years to include worker's compensation, maternity leave, disability, retirement, and death (i.e., such as life insurance). Registered migrants gained access to part of this system as a product of the nationality verification initiative, which made tracking individuals and membership more possible. In addition, Thailand sought to bring registered migrants into the fold of their healthcare system out of a desire to more effectively manage and regulate their health; a way to prevent the spread of communicable infectious diseases such as tuberculosis and cholera. At first this took the form of annual payments into the National Health Care system, which meant registered migrants were eligible for low-cost healthcare (30 baht per visit). However, as of 2011, registered migrants have been required to buy into the social security system with monthly payments of 5% of their wage. Questions still

However, there are a number of factors that prevent migrants from accessing healthcare, as this study confirms. The lack of legal status for many of the Burmese in Mae Sot translates to restricted movement. Unregistered, and sometimes even registered migrants explain that they often have a hard time to access healthcare because they are subject to arrest, extortion, and/or deportation if police catch them outside their workplace (Pearson and Kusakabe 2010; Pearson et al. 2006). Canavati and colleagues (2011) note that a main cause of disease for Burmese migrants on the border are vaccine-preventable diseases such as hepatitis, mumps, tuberculosis, and measles because most of the population does not have access to immunizations. They quote a set of parents explaining why they do not take their children to health centers for immunization: "The only reason we would risk accessing a Thai clinic is when our child is very ill because under those circumstances the Thai police would not do anything to us" (p. 529). Of the 1.1 million migrants registered with the Labor Department in 2010, only 24,800 were covered by the Social Security Scheme (Mekong Migration Network 2012).

Additional barriers for migrants to access healthcare are a lack of money, distance from health sites, and a lack of time off work (Hobstetter et al. 2012). Getting to a health center or hospital might mean taking a day off of work and traveling across Mae Sot by paying for a motorbike taxi or *sam lor*—or for those outside Mae Sot, traveling longer distances in a bus, all in addition to whatever costs might be incurred at the health facility. Migrants have also cited language barriers and discrimination as a deterrent to accessing Thai facilities (Mekong Migration Network 2012: 33; Saltsman 2011). While the prevalence of preventable disease among the migrant population is clearly linked to

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remain as to how fair this is, given that migrants—who have two-year work permits—are unable to benefit from some of the system's provisions, such as retirement. See Hall, 2012: 85-99).

their insufficient access to healthcare in Thailand, Thai popular opinion has capitalized on this trend to construct racialized discourse of migrants creating a public health crisis as they bring disease into Thailand (Nigoon 2009).

These barriers have an especially serious impact on migrant women, who are often in a position of sole responsibility over social reproduction, including household health (Pearson and Kusakabe 2012b). The structural barriers noted above mean migrant women experience insufficient access to reproductive healthcare, which leads to a lack of family planning, high mortality rates during childbirth, and unsafe abortions and other procedures (Hobstetter et al. 2012; Sullivan et al. 2004). Mae Tao Clinic reports approximately five maternal deaths per year, often from unsafe abortions, though this is not considered representative of the migrant population border-wide (Hobstetter et al. 2012). Hobstetter and colleagues note that migrant women in Phob Phra face greater difficulties to access healthcare than those in Mae Sot because one or more police checkpoints lie between them and Mae Tao Clinic or Mae Sot Hospital.

Urban context

The Htone Taung neighborhood is located just behind Mae Sot General Hospital, but this facility is primarily accessible only to registered migrants. This is not to say that the hospital discriminates against undocumented migrants, but the latter do not have access to the social welfare benefits that come with registration. Therefore they end up paying the full bill. As a result, undocumented migrants report that they typically only go to the government-run hospital when it is an emergency and they have nowhere else to go. The vast majority of migrants in Mae Sot, Phob Phra, and other border districts look to Mae Tao Clinic as the best option. However, the primary obstacle to healthcare in both Mae Sot and Phob Phra stems from the restrictions on migrants' mobility.

Community workers in Htone Taung articulated that their efforts to bring migrants to health facilities are hampered by their own lack of legal status. During a focus group discussion, one volunteer who works with a number of NGOs and Mae Sot General Hospital described his difficulty:

> It is hard to travel sometimes because we don't have legal documents. Thus, when policemen stop us, we don't have the chance to explain to them. We already talked about this issue with Mae Sot General Hospital and they said they would give documents to us. When the policemen check, we don't have the documents and patients don't have the documents either. At that time, we have to pay bribes to the policemen. This is the challenge and the situation in our community. (HT CW-1)

At the same time the Thai government-run hospital depends on this volunteer for the work he does liaising with the migrant communities in Mae Sot and promoting health education, they have left him unprotected as he fulfills an important service of transporting migrants to the hospital or Mae Tao Clinic, a service that is usually the responsibility of the government. One resident of Kyuwe Kyan explained that people in her community go to Mae Tao Clinic, but must take a "forest path" to get there to avoid checkpoints, which presents its own risks since there are believed to be criminals, drug-users, and gangs on such routes.

Since participants also restrict their movement at night to avoid dangerous elements, some are hesitant to access health facilities when it is past their curfew (either self-appointed or according to the rule of the local leader). A woman participant recalled her own experience with this:

> If a person is seriously sick at night, we dare not bring this person to Mae Tao Clinic. It is dangerous for them. We are afraid of police and hooligans. So, we have to wait till next morning. My child broke his hand around 10 pm. We dared not bring him to the clinic at that time. We could only do palliative treatment for him at home by tying his hand with a bandage and a stick. We brought him to the hospital the next morning. (HT F2Fw-1)

Rural context

Migrants in the two Phob Phra sites expressed similar difficulties in accessing

healthcare, but for them Mae Sot General Hospital and Mae Tao Clinic is between 30 and

50 kilometers away. Participants explained they would go there only in emergencies, as

the quote related to immunizations above indicates. This is not to say that there are no

health services in Phob Phra sites, but what is available nearby provides only limited

services. In Pyaung Gyi Win/Rim Nam, there are no health facilities, though there used to

be a small health post with health education materials in Rim Nam until a fire destroyed it

in 2008. Migrants from there must either travel to the Thai sub-district health office

(*anamai*) at KM44, wait for regular CBO visits, or consult local informal practitioners.

As the teacher from Rim Nam put it:

> A mobile clinic is coming once in three months […] Since the IRC clinic and
> Wadaw clinic burnt down in 2008, we face more difficulties. Mostly, we just go
> to a small pharmacy and buy our own concoction from the medicine seller. One
> time-drink, three kinds of medicine concoctions or four kinds, it costs 25 baht. We
> solve the problem like this. And we call Aphone [illegal medicine practitioner].
> By curing with him, there is no language barrier. (KM42 CL-1)

Such a challenge in terms of access is serious in Rim Nam, according to this leader and

teacher, as there are acute health issues there. Residents there need to buy their own water

from trucks that deliver on a weekly basis and they store it next to their houses in large

blue plastic oil drum containers. But, as this teacher suggests, this water is not enough

and alternative sources are not clean:

> For health, we always have water problems. We cannot have clean water
> especially in March and April. We always have skin disease because of unclean
> water. We even have to buy unclean water. Many get skin infections during the
> rainy season. Some kids including my children [students] got dengue fever and
> died. (KM42 CL-1)

Migrants living in KM48 do not have to travel far to access some minimum level of

health services, as there is a sub-district health office in the village with "community health volunteers" who work to disseminate health awareness information. This also enables the Thai health system to monitor for potential outbreaks of tuberculosis, dengue, cholera, and malaria (malaria is virtually non-existent in Thailand save for border areas because it is still prevalent in Myanmar). The health facility enables access to medication for HIV-positive migrants as well. Participants noted that though there is a health facility in their village, only registered migrants are likely to go there. Unregistered migrants are more dependent on the community health volunteers, informal practitioners, and the occasional visit from doctors or other health workers when serious problems arise. Some participants, even those who are registered, complained that the relatively low cost of visits to the district health office was still too high for them to pay, based on the wages they get.

> [A]t this time of the year there are not enough jobs. Some people don't even have enough money to buy medicine when they are sick. If we went to *anamai*, it costs fifty baht. Once it was only 30 baht. So we just go to an unprofessional practitioner and buy his concoction. One dose with four or five pills costs only five baht. (KM48 CW-1)

This resonates with the trend of migrants seeking medical help only in the case of emergencies. A community health volunteer herself, the participant noted above relies primarily on self-medication. Presumably she might be more qualified to do that than others given that she has had some medical training, but nevertheless she indicates a narrowing of options for healthcare because of financial reasons.

Participants in KM48 also pointed to nighttime dangers as a source of risk that sometimes prevented them from going out to seek healthcare at night. For example, one community worker shared that drug users hanging out at night where there are no street

lights next to the sub-district health office assaulted her 16-year-old son who was on his

way home from work.

These examples suggest that migrants must reframe the way they think about their

options when it comes to seeking health care. Participants shared their strategies for

circumventing restrictions on their mobility. Palliative care for mild injuries and

consulting with illegal and informal healers are two solutions that participants noted, but

both of these come with significant risks to health and safety. As a monk in KM48 put it:

> For those who don't have any legal documents, it's very hard for them to go to the
> clinic and hospital when any health problems occur because they have to be afraid
> of getting caught by the Thai authorities. Some people do not deserve to die, but
> they don't have any documents to go to the clinic or hospital, so they just pass
> away without getting any care. (KM48 CL-3)

Barriers to healthcare for migrants constitute infrastructural violence as Rodgers and

O'Neill (2012: 404-405) frame it in the sense that they are the "instrumental medium[s],"

and material representations of structurally imposed suffering. A lack of access to clean

drinking water, reproductive health, or basic physical care is the result of a complex

power arrangement in which migrants are positioned geographically, politically, and

economically in such a way as to prevent them from the same rights to these important

components of infrastructure that others in Thailand enjoy. In that they are stuck in

employer's compounds and relegated to traveling on back roads at odd times to avoid

police, physical space on the border appears differently for migrants, especially those

without documentation.

5. Conclusion

As the monk quoted in the last section says, "Some people do not deserve to die,

but they don't have any documents to go to the clinic or hospital, so they just pass away

without getting any care," he puts into focus the violent impact a lack of legal status can have on one's life. While undocumented status does not signify a death sentence, it demarcates the boundary between the right to inhabit visible space and the necessity of remaining in the shadows of a state's formal systems where migrants bear the weight of many constraints, from earning a wage far below the country's minimum to feeling a level of fear too immense to seek urgent health care.

As I have shown in this chapter, the space of illegality and deportability in Thailand is a violent one, as it is in many places around the world. In this border zone, even those migrants who have documents face a variety of conditions that render them precarious. The everyday brutality of poverty, restricted rights, and a lack of access to vital services for Burmese workers in Phob Phra and Mae Sot performatively produces a category of migrant that reflects both alterity and disposability. By focusing on precarity in this chapter, I have shown that the multiple forms of structural violence that suffuse the border area not only give rise to suffering and hardship, but also have a shaping influence. As invisible violence weighs on migrants, it also reminds them of the particular set of constraints and limited opportunities that has a governing or ordering effect on their lives. Such precarity is thus implicated in the work of producing political subjectivities that are unique to supply chain spaces.

Moreover, precarity's manifestation in quotidian struggles to earn enough money to put food on the table, send children to school, or pay bribes to police on the way to a clinic and still have the amount needed to cover the cost of care gives meaning to the delineating effect of migrant illegality. That is, the difference between migrants and citizens and between documented and undocumented migrants lies less in the official

determination of status and more in the performative actions of police who maintain extortion rackets, of employers who pay 1/3 the minimum wage, and immigration officials who stop migrants from leaving Mae Sot for central Thailand. These repetitive exchanges are equally as generative of status for migrants as the daily experience of not having clean water or protective gear while spraying fertilizers. The lives of agricultural workers, *sam lor* drivers, waste pickers, domestic assistants, and factory laborers are mediated by these daily encounters. But these reminders of status do not thrive independently. Rather they are ultimately a product of concerns for national security and market-oriented calculations on the part of the Thai government and mobile capital. These are the factors that lead to certain types of immigration policies and worker registration schemes which construct flexible categories of workers. In this way, the violence of government and market machinations spawns a plethora of other types of structural violence that performatively demarcates territories and tempers migrant subjectivities.

Comparing the situation in Phob Phra and Mae Sot in terms of livelihoods, child welfare, and access to healthcare, I have shown that border spaces are not homogenous zones with uniform social conditions. But it is not possible to state that rural is more violent than urban or the other way around. Migrants in all four locations presented different ways of articulating suffering and the constraints that it places on them. While migrants in Pyaung Gyi Win/Rim Nam or KM48 are geographically remote, factory workers in Htone Taung are often stuck inside their place of work six days a week, and residents of Kyuwe Kyan feel they are cut off from the world even though they are just on the edge of Mae Sot—all different ways of phrasing exclusion. Within each of the four

sites there are significant wage differentials as certain households have several income earners, members with work permits, and steady work while others have multiple children and only one wage earner with irregular work. The same is true for migrants' ability to access healthcare or education services. While legal status makes a significant difference for migrants' wellbeing as the FIC study shows, registered and unregistered migrants alike must contend with various forms of structural violence. All this suggests that the dynamics of export processing zones like Mae Sot do not necessarily have a monopoly over the production of precarious workers since violence falls upon all workers in all four sites, including those in Phob Phra, which is outside the EPZ area. The border itself, which has been discursively and physically constructed over time as a space set apart from the rest of the country, presents a history of particular power relations that intersects with the demands and interests of state and capital to engender certain realities for migrants there.

Having considered here the multiple forms of structural violence that produces migrant precarity on the border, I have given less attention to migrants' agency and the gendered nature of production and subjectivation that takes place amidst this violence. This is an angle I pick up in the next chapter, where I look at how such forces result in forms of social organization that fracture sovereignties far beyond the effects of government immigration policies. These constitute technologies of governance that manifest themselves and make certain kinds of order through gendered discourse about tradition, community, and homeland.

Chapter 5—"Make big problems small and small problems disappear": Gendering order, restorative justice, and survival in border spaces

1. Introduction

In the last chapters, I built a sense of how the border, structural violence, and precarity are contingent and interconnected. At this juncture, I take these building blocks and provide an analysis that demonstrates the generative nature of the border. I center my gaze on borders as *fabrica mundi* (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013), spaces that are constructed politically and economically and that then produce particular political subjectivities and modes of social organization. In the way that border spaces lead to certain dynamics of production and sovereignty, they also contribute to the fashioning of gendered conceptions of self, group, and place by making use of cross-border networks and the exceptional status migrants have in terms of the state and capital. In particular, in this chapter I look at the ways a plurality of governance regimes manifests itself in the four migrant settlements and at how various actors attempt to address social problems, particularly social conflicts, in these spaces.

Such a focus means that this chapter considers how social conflict and its resolution constitute interactive moments for the construction of meaning (Rössel and Collins 2001; Simmel 1955; Wagner-Pacifici and Hall 2012). To Simmel (1955: 18-19), conflict and the tension surrounding it are part of what constitutes a collectivity in the sense that it is a key aspect of relationships and serves also to iterate, demarcate, and reaffirm a groups' boundaries. With this in mind, I consider moments of conflict to be doubly liminal, as interactions that represent transition—in the sense they are generative—and as social and power relations defined by displacement and movement.

Michel de Certeau's (1984) concept of "tactics" is significant here as well as it

helps spotlight practices of subordinated groups that reshape or alter relations or spaces

constructed by more dominant forces. To de Certeau (1984), strategies represent the

conscious tools, calculations, and maneuvers that reproduce dominant systems,

structures, knowledges, and relations, while tactics refer to the absorption of such forces

through repetitive consumption and their inevitable altering and rerouting on the

individual level to produce new social forms. "Strategies are able to produce, tabulate,

and impose…spaces," writes de Certeau, "…whereas tactics can only use, manipulate,

and divert these spaces" (ibid: 30). Tactics are the "cross-cuts, fragments, cracks and

lucky hits in the framework of a system" (ibid: 38). The interaction between dominant

systems, such as the local enactment of global supply chains, and local interpretations

and ways of being in reaction to and within those systems proves, as I show in this

chapter, to be an important lens to analyze life on the Thailand-Myanmar border because

it helps us to understand how precarity and the conditions of production might give way

to particular social forms that are of these exploitative hierarchies, but that also extend

beyond them as well.

I apply this kind of "border thinking" to consider the productive nature of

violence and precarity in this context (Mignolo 2000). I stress that by examining the

means through which order is manifested for migrants in this border space, it is possible

to identify some of the ways in which the violence of advanced capitalism, biopolitical

governance, and migrant networks of power intersect to cause shifts and multiplications

in sovereignty. Benjamin's (1978: 295) notion of law-making as "an immediate

manifestation of violence" is useful here as a way of looking at how order-making in this

context can be about protection, submission, and creating homogeneity over difference—

all mechanisms for the reproduction of violent hierarchies. I show that the ordering of migrant workers in these border spaces does not always take the form of workplace rules enforced on a biopolitical level. The construction of space as violently productive involves a sense of order-making that extends beyond the economic and beyond the state. As Mezzaddra and Neilson (2013: 195) point out, "The assemblages of power that come together in these contexts are almost always highly differentiated" in that "they bring together and even combine different forms of sovereign, disciplinary, and biopower in distinct and highly contextual formations."

In a sense, I offer a notion of legal pluralism here as a way to think about the complex arrangements of power in border spaces that are linked in to global supply chains. As Pospisil (1971: 107) wrote in his formative work, "Every functioning subgroup in a society has its own legal system which is necessarily different in some respects from those of the other subgroups" to the point that "virtually every society is legally plural" (Merry 1988). But what I am referring to here is less about different laws for different groups, and more about a multiplication of laws for one group: Burmese migrants. The extent to which parallel justice mechanisms are part of a redrawing of territory and a multiplication of borders bound up in regional and global forces requires new consideration of how certain subjects relate to and produce sovereignties and political subjectivities in their everyday practices and interactions (Lund 2011). Borders between legality and illegality shift constantly and are fluid and contingent with gendered dimensions as well. This means that borders work to "regulate rather than exclude legal and illegal migrant labor," to the extent that migrants are living in the interstitial space "between law and non-law" (Brown 2008: 16-17). Thus, the experience of legal plurality

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in everyday life for Burmese migrants is reflective of their own experience as well as broader forces in motion.

This chapter deals with the resolution of social problems that are, in one sense, commonplace issues dealt with by people in multiple, non-precarious situations around the world. Migrant workers struggle with alcohol and drug abuse, intimate partner violence, debt and loan issues just like citizens. But the context of these problems (as shown in the last chapter) and their resolution (as I discuss in this chapter) are what sets migrants in a space apart; what draws a border between them and subjects (whether citizens or not) who are not working in such exploitative circumstances. Comaroff and Comaroff (2006: 20) point out, "As governance disperses itself and monopolies over coercion fragment, crime and policing provide a rich repertoire of idioms and allegories with which to address, imaginatively, the nature of sovereignty, justice, and social order.".

I structure this chapter around two narrative accounts of dispute resolution processes, each from mediators describing their work. Rather than breaking these up into smaller excerpts, I follow Riessman's (2008) model of displaying lengthier segments of narrative, that is, stories or longer pieces of an interview to convey both participants' style of presenting their perspectives and the fluid way in which certain topics and themes flowed together during conversations.[1] I introduce each narrative and then provide a brief description to add relevant details that help further understanding. The first narrative pertains to solving problems in Phob Phra communities while the second relates to Mae

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[1] This method of analysis should be distinguished from linguistic narrative analysis (see for example, Riessman 2008), which I do not claim to be doing here since the latter emphasizes studying excerpts for the meaning conveyed through linguistic and literary components. As noted in chapter 3, the analytical methods I apply here are thematic narrative analysis and discourse analysis.

Sot sites. They both represent the work of organized groups who identify as grassroots migrant social welfare organizations. As such, they reflect the perspective of local migrant power-brokers as opposed to the ordinary migrant workers who live in the four sites where this study was conducted. To maintain some balance here, I provide several excerpts from the latter as well throughout the chapter to put them into dialogue with the longer narratives. In my analysis and interpretation of these two narratives, I bring in the voices of co-researchers and migrant workers in KM48, Rim Nam/Pyaung Gyi Win, Kyuwe Kyan, and Htone Taung.

In addition to dividing the chapter by narrative, the two main sections also correspond to two levels of analysis. The first deals with socio-political networks and borders more from an institutional and systemic perspective while the second half is focused on the discursive constructions of gendered order. Central to this second part is the way that mediators and power-brokers rely on particular notions of gender to articulate conceptions of state, homeland, morality, tradition, and order. It is by looking at both the structure and the discourse of governance in this context that it is possible to deepen our understanding of the complexity of migrants' political subjectivation.

2. Dispute resolution and technologies of governance

In this section, I use Narrative 1 below as an example of a complex and cross-border mode of governance for Burmese migrants. I am particularly interested in what this segment reveals about why such groups operate the way they do and how they consolidate their power in social networks that are at times local, situated across boundary lines in complex ways, and that engage with official actors of the Thai state. This section does not focus especially on gender, but lays out the architecture of

multiplied governance mechanisms that I show in subsequent sections have gendered implications.

Narrative 1: Kaw Mu Rah-Karen Youth Organization (KMR-KYO) mediator

The first narrative comes from a representative of the Kaw Mu Rah Karen Youth Organization (KMR-KYO), a group that has operated on the border since 1979.[2] High-ranking members of the Karen National Liberation Army and the KNU formed KMR-KYO not as a branch of the government in exile but as an informal network of governance. The name Kaw Mu Rah refers to the place in Karen state where certain key military figures in the KNU apparatus are from. These senior officers formed the KMR-KYO as a way of extending the reach of the KNU into Thailand, though not explicitly. From their inception through the time of writing, the KMR-KYO reports directly to the central level of the KNLA. In practice, the KMR-KYO maintains a low profile in Thailand, particularly since they operate as an unregistered organization and a somewhat informal network. They operate only along the border areas in Tak province, in Phob Phra, Mae Sot, and Mae Ramat districts. They do not receive outside funding, and its members do not officially draw salaries. This interview took place in Thai and Karen languages. I was able to conduct the Thai sections myself with some interpretation assistance while Sweet interpreted the Karen language parts into English.

HSAR MOO: *Our purpose is to go and organize Karen people who fled from Burma and spread out everywhere unorganized. And our role is to go and organize them, put them back together let them know that we have to be together. The scope of KYO is to work for people who stay together in the community who are not only Karen but also*

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[2] This group is not to be confused with another by the same name, the Karen Youth Organization which operates primarily in the Karen-majority refugee camps along the border. The KMR-KYO shares only the name with the camp-based KYO. While the Karen National Union formed the KYO to organize youth activities in camps and educate youth on a particular historical narrative of Karen history and politics, KMR-KYO, despite its name, does not actually have a focus on youth at all.

Burmese people. The KNU has their own law, but they cannot operate fully and they have no court [here]. So they only handle the case traditionally as village heads have done for their villagers since long ago. Like leaders of the community who help with mediating cases. For example, when fighting occurs between couples, they mediate for them, have them sign promissory notes that say they will not do it again. If they repeat, the offenders may have to pay a fine. They have to promise they will not use violence again. That is the method that is used. This is only for small fights between a couple or in the family. But the next stage is if they repeat [an offense] or if someone breaks the promise. Then they'll have to pay a fine. If we don't do it this way, they will not be afraid of us. When a criminal offense has happened any place along the border area, we ask KYO people who stay in that area to refer it to the Thai village head first. If the village head decides to refer it to the police, then the case will go though the Thai justice system. Because we are in Thailand and the event occurred in Thailand. Sometimes if the case is not too serious the village can mediate it. This is how we work. But we do have authority to mediate all smaller cases. The method of mediation is easy. Our principle is to make big problems small and to make small problems disappear.

Debt and loan cases where people don't pay back their debt are very common. We deal with such cases to protect the migrants. If a debt and loan case is between migrant workers, and we do not get in and help out, sometimes it can lead to a murder case. Because they can do it [murder] when they get angry. Sometimes such cases between migrant workers don't involve big money—only four or five hundred baht [US $12.50-15.50]—but for them, they have to work many days to make up that amount. [...]

Sometimes there are also cases about adultery. This is also a big problem. Just imagine the husband of a woman is not happy, he gets angry and commits a serious crime. We sometimes use negotiation for this. For example, we ask if she can forgive him and stay together with him. The man who commits adultery may have to pay her compensation. We don't decide how much the compensation is but it is the result of negotiation between the two parties. We just produce a promissory note for them to sign. It is written that they are not going to repeat this behavior. But if they repeat it again we have to think how to punish them so we may have them pay fine or another form of punishment or community service order. We talked about those possibilities first then we make a promissory note.

You see, the problems like this, like debt and loan and adultery, if we do not do it ourselves but if we bring it to Thai Justice, the Thai government will not accept those cases. Because [...] when problems occur there is no evidence. When there is no written document relating to debt and loan, the police cannot proceed with the case. With adultery cases, police also do not know how to charge them. Therefore, we have to use the method that is called community wisdom. [...] What we are doing is helping Thai village leaders in their work such as we help with dealing with small issues.

ADAM: *And what about bigger issues?*

HSAR MOO: *Even robbery, like for only a small thing, we can mediate it too. This is for robbery or theft between migrant workers. We have the robber pay compensation. For example, we negotiate how much they will have to reimburse the victim when they steal their bike. This is a criminal offense, but we mediate it because it is not serious*

and since the parties are both Burmese migrant workers. But, if the theft is between Burmese migrant workers and non-Burmese, we do not dare to interfere. That case, we will refer to the Thai justice system because we are afraid that more problems will follow later. In any case, if both parties do not agree, we cannot force them. Only if both parties agree, we can produce a written document about their agreement just to be a kind of evidence. We can do that. [...]

ADAM: *And how about a divorce paper or something like that?*

HSAR MOO: *Divorce paper, we don't do. If a couple is fighting, and the man continues to commit violence against his wife, we have to plan a punishment for him. It can be a community service order or a fine that becomes a community fund.*

ADAM: *Like what kind of work?*

HSAR MOO: *Depending on the community. What kind of thing will benefit them? Sometimes they have to clean the learning center or clean anything. We just do like that. Don't really know how to punish him. We have to use many forms so that problems will not be big. If we ask, "do we do every process legally?" we may not in some processes. But if we don't do like the way we do, and plan to refer to the Thai justice only, the police do not accept some cases. They do not give protection to some cases so if we let it be, then domestic violence can be more violent.*

ADAM: *So if KYO is not present on the border to help…I see that there are a lot of problems like domestic violence and other issues—*

HSAR MOO: *True, true, a lot. The example yesterday we call it sexual abuse, though not rape. The mother [of the victim] came and reported. I said, "You need to report it to the police because it is the case that we cannot mediate." Mother of the woman does not want to because she afraid since she is in-charge of a gambling outfit. If an investigation started and [the police] found out about the gambling, then both parties will be guilty by law. So KYO asked, "How do you want to do it? What do you want to be satisfied?" The mother of the victim said she would like 300,000 baht [US $9,300] as compensation. Oh ho! We asked why that much. "Can you talk and agree to the amount so both can be satisfied because the man has no ability to pay that much. If you go to the justice system, both parties will be guilty." So finally, the mother of the victim agreed to receive 5,000 baht [US $150] as compensation. The man paid 5,000 baht. If we look, both are legally wrong. We don't say that we did the right thing for this but as long as they both agree, we don't say anything. If one party cannot be satisfied then we must proceed to the legal system. [...]*

This exemplar, which describes the KMR-KYO's efforts to make order and keep peace in a context of structural violence and precarity, raises a number of important questions. For example, what are the broader implications of the discursive elements KMR-KYO and groups like them use to legitimize their work? How are ideas of authority and governance constituted here? How does order actually manifest itself in an everyday sense for migrant workers? And, what do the methods of this group and others

like them tell us about the circulation and (re)production of gendered concepts of home, displacement, and tradition? In addressing these questions, it is crucial to give attention not only to the language of those representing top-down governance mechanisms, but also to migrant workers and individual mediators who provide a perspective from the level of everyday practice. I frame the following section in terms of the three questions mentioned above; by looking at both levels of discourse in this way, it is possible to build a sense of how borders are productive spaces with particular modes of social organization that push us to rethink the relationship between gender, migration, and the nation.

2.1 Legitimizing tactics

In Narrative 1 above, Hsar Moo deploys a number of conversational devices to both explain and justify the work of KMR-KYO. As I show, these are important not only for illustrating how this group legitimizes their work, but also for what it highlights about the connection between the use of symbol and allegory and the order-making power of discourse. I divide this section into two salient themes from the data that are well illustrated by Narrative 1: (1) The portrayal of cohesive community and (2) The need for protection against violence. Informal groups use the latter tactic to explain their role and in so doing affix people to certain gendered notions of community, tradition, and order.

When Hsar Moo explains his group's existence as a function of Karen displacement, his words almost take on the structure of a narrative and make important references to tradition and community. He depicts a simplified version of a story in which people are uprooted and lost in Thailand. His main point here is to spotlight the need for a group to "organize" the wandering Karen refugees for their own benefit and wellbeing and "put them back together." Implied here is a notion of a once cohesive community of

Karen people; part of a historical, social, and political narrative that has particular

strength among the networks of Christian (particularly Baptist) Karen people on both

sides of the Thailand-Myanmar border (Horstmann 2011). Horstmann (2011:86) points

out that "[w]hile the physical space of a Karen homeland *Kawthoolei* has been gradually

lost, the spiritual idea of a 'homeland' is still alive" though at the expense of the actual

socio-linguistic and religious diversity of the Karen population in Myanmar and

Thailand.[3] Part of this narrative is the need for Karen people to re-organize in a diaspora

and together maintain the idea of *Kawthoolei*. Hsar Moo's account portrays what Charles

Keyes (2008) refers to as "ethno-fiction," a version of Anderson's (1991) "imagined

community," in which groups assert particular notions of history that privilege certain

collective ethnic identities over others. As Anderson argues, whether these bonds are

factual or based in fiction is less important than the way or style this construction takes

place (1991). Hsar Moo suggests that over time, this mission has changed to one more

focused on governance and only sometimes pertaining to the work of maintaining

concepts of ethno-nationality. This is because increasing numbers of non-Karen people

from Myanmar have joined the Karen displaced in Thailand.

As Hsar Moo suggests, part of the effort to bring organization to displaced people

on the border includes the use of "traditional methods." These methods, as Hsar Moo

explains them, include a practice he defines as "mediation" in which parties to a conflict

come together, agree to end their conflict, and sign a promissory note to affirm their

resolution. Fines are also involved for parties that refuse to abide by the signed statement

or, depending on the conflict, one party may need to pay compensation to the other.

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[3] *Kawthoolei* is the Karen language term for the Karen nation.

Aside from or in addition to fines, a failure to refrain from fighting or violence may also incur a punishment, the nature of which is to be determined by mediators in that situation.

Describing such practices in the terms of "tradition" clearly give some level of legitimacy to the work his organization does to resolve disputes, especially as he stresses that KMR-KYO practices methods used in "villages since long ago." With such words, Hsar Moo links the practices of his mediators to the notions of convention and custom. Referring to the methods of dispute resolution as "community wisdom," it becomes impossible to critique his group's practice without also assaulting Karen culture overall. While it is possible that the work of KMR-KYO to resolve conflicts relies on tactics learned in KNU controlled areas in Myanmar, Hsar Moo's comments gloss over what is in reality a complicated zone of mixed control (Smith 2007; South 2011). In this sense, his use of the concept of "tradition" not only justifies the work of his group, it also is in service of the broader goal outlined above of defining a notion of homeland or nation. In addition to material symbols of nation-hood that are prevalent in refugee camps and Karen-migrant villages in Thailand (Horstmann 2011), perhaps it is also possible to consider dispute resolution tactics as part of an "invented tradition" that conveys a factitious sense of continuity between current practice and an historical order of things in the homeland (Hobsbawm 1983).

A second device Hsar Moo deploys to justify the work of his organization is the repeated reference to violence. He states explicitly that due to the Thai government's reluctance to solve petty crimes among Burmese migrants, and because of the precarious conditions in which migrants find themselves, a small problem can often erupt into physical brutality. Debt and loan cases, Hsar Moo argues, can become murder cases, even

when the amount owed is only four or five hundred baht. Spouses can commit revenge on

unfaithful spouses. Stressing the desperation of migrant conditions, leaving them in what

he describes as a lawless space means that violent chaos will be rampant. He depicts a

tense scene for migrants on the Thailand-Myanmar border, where serious violence is

always a possibility, and never far off. KMR-KYO is there to address this and "make big

problems small and…small problems disappear" instead of the other way around.

Another participant who acts as mediator seconded this perspective, "In the past I was

fighting alone for the Burmese people. At that time there was no organization." But, he

felt that "KYO must be organized because in our Phop Phra township, child trafficking

cases occurred, rape case occurred, killing occurred, so on and so forth that we have to

face" (UWMPP). Like Narrative 1, this excerpt portrays a story of origin that begins with

a violent and out of control landscape in need of an entity to make peace and order. Even

mediators not working with KMR-KYO explain the origin of their work in the stark

terms of a violent past:

> When I began to work around here, Hmong people and Burmese people were
> fighting all the time. When Hmong and Burmese fought, they would kill our
> Burmese people. So I went and told the village head, "Wait a minute. If you kill, I
> will let you kill, but listen to what I say first. If we, Burmese people are wrong,
> you will kill them. If Hmong people are wrong what action do you want us to take
> against them?" When I asked him like that, he understood and said, "If we kill
> each other, things will get messy. There will be a big issue between us." If Hmong
> kill Burmese and if we kill Hmong when they are wrong, big problems will occur.
> The village head said, "That doesn't work. If Hmong people are wrong, fine
> them." So we talk about the two parties who were fighting. I said, "Now the
> village head can fine both of them as both are fighting. (UOHMPP)

In this narrative, the participant uses descriptions of violence to explain how he started

his work as a mediator and to convey a trajectory moving from destructive chaos to a

kind of localized order. Though there is no reference to homeland or tradition, this

mediator does frame his account in terms of ethnicity and nationality in the sense that Burmese people as a collectivity were under attack from another ethnic group, the Hmong in this case who have legal status in Thailand. Thus, the participant uses violence to convey a sense of group solidarity as well as to stress the need for the kind of intervention he provides. In the excerpts presented, narratives of violence form a link between broader structural conditions that constrain migrants' options for survival and the need for particular forms of order-making that are informal and rooted in Burmese or Karen group identity. As I show in the next chapter, the role violence takes in individual and collective narratives is an important aspect of gendered political subjectivation.

2.2 Constitution of authority and governance

Results from interviews and focus group discussions illustrate complex power arrangements between migrants, employers, and the state. Narrative 1 shows that far from ad hoc responses to social problems, Burmese migrants are engaged in a process of setting up and reproducing structures to govern and order themselves, though not without the involvement of local Thai authorities. These modes of social organization are many and diverse. While the narrative shown here is a rather top-down example, even as this group seeks to define itself as a loose-knit network or a membership-based organization, many participants living and working in migrant settlements speak of smaller ordering arrangements that relate only to those Burmese households within a labor camp or landlord's compound. I take all such instances as building blocks to conceive of broader themes related to migrant survival and discourse.

In Narrative 1 above, the representative of KMR-KYO mentions explicitly a unique positioning of institutional and political networks to support the maintenance of

order in migrant communities in Phob Phra and elsewhere along the border. In a clear

reference to a cross-border source of power, Hsar Moo explained that his group was

created and receives its directives from a Myanmar-based ethnic armed organization, the

Karen National Union and the Karen National Liberation Army. As chapter two

demonstrates, the KNU and its military have been most active in the border area during

their more than six decades of struggle and they have wielded authority for much of this

time on both sides of the border. Studies refer to the KNU's presence in Thailand

primarily in terms of their implicit role in managing the seven predominately ethnic

Karen refugee camps in Ratchaburi, Kanchanaburi, and Tak provinces (McConnachie

2014; South 2011). In my own previous research, I demonstrate connections between

camp management and the KNU and the KNLA as members of camp security in more

than one camp noted their former roles as combatants (Human Rights Watch 2012).

However, as chapter two notes, the KNU has a long history of involvement in Thailand

outside the camps, including during the years of Thailand's civil war and the

establishment of cross-border religious networks (Horstmann 2011). The presence and

work of the KMR-KYO in Phob Phra relates to these decades-old connections.

Does this mean that migrants in Thailand are ultimately governed and organized

by a group or groups based in Myanmar? In fact, Hsar Moo indicates in Narrative 1 that

the situation is a bit more complicated. Just in the first paragraph, he mentions both that

his group applies some version of KNU law for migrant communities in Thailand and

that it is also important to operate within the Thai legal framework. He stressed multiple

times the importance of working with Thai authorities to promote access to justice for

migrants. Other groups who solve conflicts did the same; for example, one emphasized,

"The People's Volunteer Association does not have its own law. It is a social

organization and it is in Thailand so it does things according to Thai law." The deliberate

recognition of their place within the Thai sovereign-juridical structure is strategic here as

such groups know that their work falls somewhere between the boundary of inside and

outside that framework. Yet Hsar Moo's reference to both KNU law and Thai law is not a

contradiction. Rather, he constructs an argument to show that his group almost reluctantly

plays a role in solving conflict using "traditional methods" precisely because of migrants'

partial exclusion from the Thai justice system. And, he insists, they know their place.

When cases involve Thai nationals, KMR-KYO does not attempt to deal with the case

outside the governmental system. Thus, he inserts a role for KMR-KYO as an

intermediary to bridge the gap between the informal space of chaos and violence into

which a precarious system thrusts migrants and the formal space of the Thai law, which

may include migrants once the case reaches a certain level of severity or involves those

considered entitled to formal justice.

However, rather than a stable system, there is a flexible and performative quality

to this order-making just as there is a flexible and performative quality to the

interpretation and application of Thai law and policy, as noted in chapter four. As Hsar

Moo's account of handling a sexual abuse case illustrates, the lived reality is different,

and sometimes KMR-KYO takes on more than they think is appropriate because they

believe the Burmese parties to the crime or conflict will not get a fair trial in the Thai

system. This is the case with many other mediators and groups interviewed for this study.

Hsar Moo makes clear in this example that his group thought the sexual abuse case

should go to the Thai legal system, but that it was the protestation of the victim's mother

which kept the process informal. He implies a level of collaboration between KMR-KYO and migrant parties to a conflict to determine the best course of action, that is, whether a case should go to the legal system or remain in the legal space of the group's "traditional" or customary rules. As chapter four suggests, this reinforces the idea that the law for Burmese migrants is made and remade in practice by an overlapping arrangement of power, part of what constitutes the border space as a structurally violent and precarious one. Or another way to say this is, "law and lawlessness are conditions of each other's possibility" (Comoroff and Comoroff 2006: 21). As long as Thai nationals are not involved, the extent to which migrants have access to KNU law or Thai law or any law at all is unpredictable and more contingent on the stakeholders involved in the conflict than on the situation itself. As Butler and Athanasiou (2013: 129) write, "the law is produced and elaborated every time it is invoked in the scene of its anticipation" (see also Ewick and Silbey 1998). That is, migrants' place before the law is performatively constituted through interactions and discourse. What this also means is that to the extent to which law is an element of sovereignty, the movement in and out of jurisdictions in this way is also indicative of a certain permeability and flexibility to the quality of state boundaries. However, rather than implying that migrants move in an out of legality with ease, I argue here that their place within the sovereign-juridical space and the constitution of the border is a function of the work of individuals, informal authorities, and state actors in a context of migrant precarity and illegality.

Fragmenting conceptions of how order is constituted even further is the notion that informal groups of power brokers like KMR-KYO are, in fact, loose-knit and made up of more local-level articulations of authority. No migrant worker who participated in

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this study mentioned the KMR-KYO group by name. Instead, they referred only to Burmese community leaders who do mediation when social problems arise. Yet, upon further research, I find that many of those leaders mentioned are, in fact, affiliated somehow with KMR-KYO in a voluntary capacity (KMR-KYO pays no salary). Less an organization with an established hierarchy extending from the village/community level of migrant workers in Thailand to the upper echelons of the KNU, the KMR-KYO more closely resembles a core group of individuals affiliated with the Karen government in exile who are in touch with migrant community leaders and who occasionally engage in some form of dispute resolution themselves. Maintaining a shadowy and vague role is part of their operational strategy to operate behind the scenes. The individuals doing dispute resolution, not the organization, make the impression on participants.

From this perspective it becomes necessary to envision governance on the border as stemming from a multitude of groups, many operative only in one cluster of houses, one labor camp, or in two or three villages. Such sources of order are often not in concert with one another. Conceiving of governance in this fashion raises questions about how certain groups or individuals constitute order-making authorities and how the many local-level practices are important on a broader level in terms of conceptions of social organization and governance in border spaces. As I explain in the following pages, such questions pertain to how certain individuals gain and maintain power as well as the multifaceted manifestations of power as an order-making force in this context.[4] I present two examples here; the first describes a Thai man in the Htone Taung neighborhood who

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[4] Although stories explaining mediators' and leaders' sense of vocation for such work were not the focus of this dissertation and therefore are not the subject of detailed analysis, I touch on this issue both in this section as well as in chapter seven.

Burmese residents there have looked to as a source of authority who can resolve disputes and make peace. The second is a Karen local leader who was affiliated with KMR-KYO until recently. In neither case was I able to interview them. The first passed away in early 2014 and the second moved back to Myanmar for business. Nevertheless, participants at all levels of this study mentioned these individuals frequently enough that they merit consideration here.

Ah Baing Gyi [Big/older brother][5]

The following brief profile provides one example of locally derived power that can have broader implications for the formulation of order and sovereignty vis-à-vis migrants. The moniker "Ah Baing Gyi" refers to a retired Thai police officer living in the Htone Taung neighborhood who speaks Burmese and acts as a problem-solver for the migrants. In contrast to earlier excerpts, his power does not come from a complex network extending beyond the bounds of Mae Sot—or Thailand for that matter—but rather from his institutional affiliation with the police, personal connections, linguistic abilities, and long-term tenure in the community; that is, it is more locally derived. In a way, this is characteristic of the Htone Taung site as it resembles a more established neighborhood with both Thai and Burmese residents figuring out how to live together. It is also a locale inhabited by multiple CBOs; a physical space where residents recognize informal hierarchies that have developed over time. One participant echoed the local nature of Ah Baing Gyi's power as he compared him to other individuals who had tried to assume the role of "community leader" before. "In the past," he said, "the old man who

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[5] Ah Baing Gyi is not the individual's real name. The term, which is a mix of Burmese and Arabic, is an affectionate moniker for a male elder in Burmese Muslim communities.

owns the wood shop worked as a community leader but he couldn't take this responsibility for too long because of so many rivals" (HT CL-1). This illustrates a level of competing individuals or factions; the one who can neutralize a threat from rivals is the one who can govern successfully.

Yet, the authority of power brokers like Ah Baing Gyi is confined by invisible boundaries bisecting communities allowing for rule over discrete areas and not others. When describing one incident, a participant from Htone Taung pointed out, "I can't inform [this case] to Ah Bi because it happened in a different community. If I report to Ah Bi, he can't do anything because it is not his community" (HT CL-1).[6] However, within the bounds of his space, Ah Baing Gyi is the ultimate source of power:

> If problems happen we cannot call an organizations from outside. A Baing will not give permission to do that. A Baing doesn't give permission because in this way the section will become disorderly. We just have to do it with him. If he decides, we must accept it […] Whether problems are between husband and wife, between women and women who argue over their children, debt and loan issues—once he decides for us, we have to accept. "I am not happy with the decision of A Baing, I will go to the police station," we cannot do that. He closes all channels. People who live in this section are his people and he will discipline his people on his own. That is his absolute way of working. If he disciplines us as a parent we must accept it. We must accept it and get satisfied. (HT F2Fw-7)

Such words convey the sense of a clear jurisdiction for Ah Baing Gyi who, according to this participant, stands between migrants and any other type of authority, including the police, when a crime or a conflict takes place in his area. The language of possession and paternalism deployed here is extremely evocative of the type of rule Ah Baing Gyi maintained in this section of Htone Taung. He appears here as an authoritarian father figure who dispenses his sense of the law in an absolutist sense.

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[6] Ah Bi is another nickname for Ah Baing Gyi. Bi may be his Thai nickname, but this is not clear.

Participants spoke of his role in resolving interpersonal conflicts, including intimate partner violence. "When [couples] have a problem," one community worker in Htone Taung explained, "they go and complain to Police Ah Baing Gyi. At that time, Police Ah Baing Gyi asks men or women about their problem. Then, Police Ah Baing Gyi reprimands the couple"…

> For example, Police Ah Baing Gyi told them that the two of them came and worked in Thailand to find money for their future. If both of them are working hard, "two of you can collect enough money to go back to your home country. But, if the two of you keep finding problems like this, I will give you a severe punishment." At that time, the couple keeps quiet and avoids the problem because they know that Police Ah Baing Gyi has power. (HT CW-1)

Reinforcing the idea that Ah Baing Gyi is a strong leader, this participant's words indicate her perception that migrants fear and obey him, aware that his power can turn to force if migrants do not heed his directives. His goal is to bring order to conflicting parties by reminding them of their purpose in Thailand: earning money. But if they cannot refrain from fighting, they will get a "severe punishment." The lesson here for migrants is significant: stay quiet and be good workers.

Saw Htoo

This second profile introduces a different sort of authority figure who not only illustrates the fragmentized structures of order-making on the border, but who also confounds any expectation of a normative sovereign-juridical structure in this space as well. Saw Htoo is a Karen man from Myanmar with Thai nationality. He was part of the KMR-KYO apparatus up until 2013. He had a house in the KM48 village and resolved disputes in the area. During four key informant interviews, two assessment interviews, and five focus group discussions—all of the latter in the Phob Phra sites—participants mentioned this individual as an important, though controversial leader:

MIN MIN: How about the security issues? Will you inform the police?
R4: We won't inform to the police but we will inform to the related authority.
MIN MIN: What is related authority?
R5: Related authority means our bosses.
MIN MIN: Why don't you inform the police?
R3: We will inform related authorities, that is U Saw Htoo, first because he governs both Burmese and Thai. He will inform to the police when needed. (KM48 FGDm-2)

In this excerpt, one participant appears to see Saw Htoo as powerful enough to control not only the Burmese migrants, but also the Thai people in the area. When asked if there is a local Burmese leader during a women's focus group discussion, one participant answered that employers "organized our Burmese and appointed a Burmese leader. However, people don't respect him, don't pay attention to him and aren't afraid of him as he is Burmese." Another participant added, "They aren't afraid of anyone apart from Bo Saw Htoo" (KM42 FGDw-2).[7] Not only intimidating, others note that Saw Htoo had a reputation for abuse and corruption. Referring implicitly to Saw Htoo, the director of a migrant social welfare organization in Mae Sot said:

> In Phop Phra there is a group who acts like gangsters. In the village, people have to be afraid of them because they associate with the police. They are people from Burma, but they associate with Thai police. In cases of couples fighting, [this group] doesn't just mediate for them, but they make them pay money too. (AAMS)

Though he was working, at least nominally, for KMR-KYO, no individual directly linked him to this organization. They referred to him instead as a strong Karen leader or as somebody related to the KNU, but always in a vague way, like in the excerpt above. In this sense, Saw Htoo's authority is completely local as it is based on an association with certain police in the area. Yet, in another way he represents the trans-local set of ideas

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[7] "Bo" in front of Saw Htoo's name is a Karen honorific for military commanders.

(including homeland, tradition, and community) that is rooted in the Karen struggle for autonomy and that forms the basis of KMR-KYO's mission. (Aware that his rough tactics ultimately get in the way of their work, KMR-KYO leadership actually removed Saw Htoo from his position in 2013. Nevertheless, respondents continued to refer to him as an ongoing source of power in the Pyaung Gyi Win/Rim Nam and KM48 areas.)

A third way that Saw Htoo's role is important here is the assumed relationship with local authorities. Like Ah Baing Gyi, who is a retired police officer, Saw Htoo maintains some connections with local police who, though they do not often get involved in crimes that transpire among Burmese migrants, continue to be a source of power in the area. As armed actors of the Thai state, one might assume that they hold ultimate power over the various local and informal authorities. But as the excerpt above shows, some migrants hint that this may, in fact, not always be the case.

Narrative 1 above, and the brief profiles of informal authorities like Saw Htoo and Ah Baing Gyi, reveal a complex arrangement of authority between larger groups like KMR-KYO, local mediators, employers, and Thai security officials. In all four sites in this study, migrant worker settlements rely on a Burmese leader who is an interlocutor with an employer, landlord, the police, or an informal group. As one participant in Htone Taung averred, "There is a person called U Win Sin. Thai police made him a leader. People talk with him. All people from this quarter rely on him. He takes responsibilities until the area of Madi Nar" (HT FGDw-1R5). A proliferation of local leaders appointed by various actors engenders, as this excerpt suggests, a multiplication of borders between different groups of migrants with different authorities and, often, different rules and methods of maintaining order. Three of the grassroots migrant welfare organizations

interviewed for this study confirmed that they also appoint such leaders to keep order, as they have identified that order maintenance is crucial for the wellbeing of their target populations. One director of an organization in Mae Sot reflected:

> In the past when this kind of case occurred, people thought, "It is not my business," and they would not get involved as they were afraid. But now, we have community leaders in those communities. Community leaders have to deal with social affairs. We trained some people to become community leaders and we are informed about the cases from them. If cases occur, the community leader reports to us or sends a message to us. (AAMS)

In the two Phob Phra sites, employers and landlords usually choose the leaders in individual compounds, though there are also some participants who state that their leader is in charge because he has been in the compound the longest. A Thai employer and landowner in Pyaung Gyi Win explained that in response to intimate partner violence, he "mediated and asked them to stop quarreling because it is very noisy" (TNp10). According to him, migrants will report social conflicts to "employers, the village head, civilian preparedness volunteers, or the police," and he acknowledged that typically migrants handle problems within their own families or households. On the other hand, a migrant in Pyaung Gyi Win/Rim Nam who also works as a volunteer for multiple NGOs explained, "For me, I can't speak Thai. The village leader can't speak Burmese. So, they can't solve the problems. The Thai village leader selected a Burmese leader to solve the problems" (KM42 CW-1). In such cases, "The owner just talks to the group leader about what we have to do" (R1KM42 FGDm-1). While most participants in Kyuwe Kyan named a local Burmese leader as the one responsible for maintaining order, one pointed to the landlord for this role, saying, "There is a Thai Muslim who is the landlord in this community. When the violence cases happen here, people report to this landlord. So, he solves the problems" (KK F2Fw-2).

While the above excerpts reflect the importance of local individuals and collectivities in the manifestation of governance technologies, it is important to consider how the dispute resolution mechanisms in migrant spaces are situated within societies where village-level adjudication is common practice. That is, it is not uncommon in Thailand or Myanmar for people to rely on community-level solutions that are similar in process to what I have outlined above. Indeed, many scholars consider village-level justice to be the "traditional" way of solving most conflicts in both of these countries (Callister and Wall 2004; MDR and Kempel 2012; Kittipong 2003).

Kittipong (2003: 8) notes that in Thailand, "many conflicts were resolved, with mutual consent and satisfaction of the adversaries, within the communities by respectable persons in the communities, mostly the elders, village-leaders, etc." Using the term *yutitham samarn chan*—which translates to "justice for social harmony," Kittipong laments the loss of such traditions with the rise of a more centralized system of governance in Thailand, but notes that contemporary decentralization creates space for a revival of community justice and restorative justice. The Thai Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Justice have both initiated nation-wide programs to train village-level authorities on mediation techniques; several dozen villages now have government-established community justice centers where Thai village residents can have their disputes heard and resolved. Wanchai (2010) studied local dispute resolution methods in Thailand's deep south in Pattani, and in the Isan region in the Northeast, and found different but equally effective mechanisms to maintain peace and order, in the predominately Muslim south relying on religious networks and in the Northeast on kin-networks. Wanchai also observed in Phetchabun province a system implemented on the

sub-district level where residents of seven participating villages approved a set of rules to govern themselves, which include fines for disrupting festivals, excessive drinking, and loud noise after 11 pm. A committee of elders adjudicates such offenses.

In the early 2000s, several scholars in Thailand looked in particular at the possibility of including intimate partner violence cases in restorative and community justice mechanisms because of both an increasingly documented trend of such violence and a collective sense that the criminal justice system in Thailand has failed both victims and perpetrators (Angkana et al. 2004; Kittipong 2003; Chitruedee 2006). All note that police hesitate to get involved in such cases because of the view that intimate partner violence is a family problem. Police involvement, according to a community leader interviewed by Angkana and colleagues, "leads to divorce. In cases where the accusation is taken to the police, it is difficult to reconcile because it destroys the honor of the husband" (Angkana et al. 2004: 9). Many see restorative justice as an ideal alternative as it allows for the option of maintaining family unity.

In 2007, the Thai government responded to research findings, creating a legal mechanism that allows for intimate partner violence to be handled in the court or to remain within the family. The Domestic Violence Victim Protection Act, BE 2550 of 2007, states, "the court shall…cause the parties to settle the case for peaceful cohabitation of the family," albeit with the protection of the rights of the victim as a priority (Section 15). This law codifies a restorative outlet for intimate partner violence cases, empowering the court to impose a sentence of rehabilitation for the offender (Section 12). Section 16 allows for "a mediator which is a person or a group of persons who are fathers, mothers, guardians or relatives" or a variety of other actors including

social workers or a social welfare agency to resolve such disputes as long as they submit a report of the result of the mediation to the court and the judge deems the results fair. Emphasis on protecting the honor of the parties involved, codifying a preference to keep families together, and effecting a legal area for informal familial management of intimate partner violence reflect not only the recognition of the role of local justice mechanisms, but also the utterly gendered and collectivist nature of such processes in Thailand (as elsewhere). In addition, it is inevitable that in practice, a wider variety of actors than those mentioned in the law are involved in mediating such conflicts, do not do so as a court-sanctioned remedy, and rely on methods and networks of power that are beyond the normative legal framework. In my own fieldwork, I found that village-level justice centers in the border areas of Thailand were often minimally run or non-functional with greater reliance on informal but respected individuals to deal with problems.

There is less written on contemporary strategies for dispute resolution and legal plurality in Myanmar, though I mention later the relevance of the colonial era's conception of such practices. At this juncture, it is important to note the great diversity of governance mechanisms in Myanmar, including highland spaces controlled fully or partially by a multitude of ethnic armed groups, divided further into hundreds of smaller territories controlled by patrons offering security for local residents (Jolliffe 2014; KHRG 2010; South 2011). For a large part of the country, particularly in the lowland areas that have been less affected by conflict (such as the Aeyeyarwady delta and the Dry Zone), it is quite common for village level authorities to resolve minor disputes, or even sometimes more serious issues, outside the criminal justice system. Village-tract level dispute resolution relates to the official duties of village-tract administrators (VTA) as

stipulated in the 2012 Ward or Village-Tract Administration Law (see chapter 7:

functions and duties of the ward or village-tract administrator). The law provides for

VTAs to resolve disputes, maintain peace and order, and to manage disciplinary matters

for residents. In recent years, unpublished reports for development agencies document the

practice of village-level management. Although village-tracts are the smallest

administrative unit in Myanmar today, most of the work of maintaining order and

resolving disputes takes place on the village level with village administrators (those in

leadership positions over 100 households), area leaders (ten households), village elders

and respected persons all playing a role in this work, with much variance from village to

village (see Anonymous 2011; MDR and Kempel 2012). There are also village militias

throughout the country involved in maintaining security and enforcing local rules (MDR

and Kempel 2012). Such actors are agents of the state in Myanmar, unlike village heads

operating in areas still mostly controlled by ethnic armed groups who are part of those

ethno-nationalist governance structures. Nevertheless both maintain significant autonomy

when it comes to the day-to-day management of local affairs.

A key difference between the mechanisms in Thailand and Myanmar discussed

above and the practices for Burmese migrants on the border is the extent to which the

latter is rooted in exceptional networks of power that are connected to, but largely

detached from, the power structures of the state. This jumble of overlapping hierarchies

and mechanisms for making order are contingent on local, trans-local, and cross-border

relationships. A look at these networks shows that authority is constituted in connection

to the state but not necessarily under the state's bureaucratic, political, or institutional

power structure. Instead, authority is constituted via a series of interlocked power

saturated networks of which local Thai officials are one part, though not necessarily the head. The work of restorative justice for migrants has been outsourced to a series of well-connected power-brokers.

An example that involves KMR-KYO illustrates this most clearly. U Oh Han, a Burmese man who works full time as a mediator, and who started affiliating himself with KMR-KYO in the recent past, described the aftermath of a child abduction case to which he responded near KM48:

> We returned the girl to her parents. The KYO leader returned the man to his employer. Right now, KYO does not have a place to detain people. So they asked the employer to take responsibility with contract. The employer said yes so KYO asked him to put his signature. Whenever they need to call [the offender], he must be there. If he is not there, the employer is responsible. (UOHMPP)

When asked what the role of local authorities were, the mediator continued: "The difficulty is our village head. We called the village head and the *Or Bor Tor*. We informed them about the man. Then they asked for the man, but I did not hand him over because I was afraid they may kill him." And in terms of the police, he replied, "I didn't ask them to arrest him. I just asked them to bring the case to the KYO office in Phop Phra and they did it." For this case, KMR-KYO (referred to only as KYO above), assumed responsibility for making the arrest of a man who allegedly kidnapped and raped a young girl, but instead of turning the offender in to face the consequences of the Thai legal system, KMR-KYO, in order to protect him from what the mediator perceived to be dangerous local authorities, got the police to send the man back to his employer with the instructions to restrict his movement, effectively subjecting him to a kind of servitude.

This case confounds and inverts much of what might be considered a normative bureaucratic-legal framework. The employer becomes the offender's warden at the same

time he continues to extract his labor-power; police become informal actors who transport offenders of serious crimes to sites of unofficial detention not under their control; and an informal group with power that cuts across the border represents what migrants come to see as the real source of power in their area. On the other hand, the young girl, who experienced abuse in this story and who does not receive care in the aftermath of her abuse, continues to be a precarious migrant in a context of structural violence. For all the different varieties of authority assuming some part of the power to govern and make order among migrants, none in this story really seemed to look out for the wellbeing of the victim. Instead they only reproduce the violence that is already around her.

Thus, authority in this context is constituted through precarity in a way that reproduces precarity. The diversity of authorities and regimes of governance discussed here reflects what Teubner (1997: 7) calls a "new living law growing out of fragmented social institutions." The border zone in and around Mae Sot is a space removed "from… normative arrangements" which "allows a plurality of legal orders…and even cultural styles to emerge" in the service of producing flexible labor regimes (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013: 208). The powerful individuals and groups that I mention in this section are only able to wield the control they do because of the violent nature of the space in which migrant lives are situated on the border. As the Thai government cedes its monopoly over the permissible use of force and as a variety of overlapping entities assume the state's responsibilities to provide protection and administer justice, "social order itself becomes like a hall of mirrors" (Comoroff and Comoroff 2006: 34). In this space where sovereignties and boundaries have proliferated and shattered the border's

geography into dozens of imbricated discontinuous shards, migrants are further constrained by this disorderly array of orders.

3. Migrants' everyday experience of a plurality of orders

While I have thus far explored the fractured geography of order-making on the border, a question remains as to how ordinary migrants experience such technologies of governance and what their role is in the maintenance of order. For those cases that do not go to the Thai legal system, a variety of informal sets of rules apply in solving disputes. In addition, migrants are aware of rules they must obey in their communities and workplaces. It is not the case that migrants who do not access the legal system inhabit a space of lawlessness. On the contrary, they often remain under tight regimes of biopolitical control. This raises the importance of distinguishing between law as sovereign code and law as an informal set of practices and rules that govern particular subjects. In Ong's (2000) notion of graduated sovereignty, this distinction is key as it is an illustration of the difference between those in a territory subject to a state's sovereign laws and those who are in a specially designated territory, subject to rules and regulations that adhere more to market-oriented practices, such as the guidelines dictating behavior on a factory floor or farm. Ong (2006: 85).notes:

> In the industrial zones of Sumatra and Java, the army works hand in hand with factories to maintain social order among the labor force of seven million people…earn[ing] less than a living wage in factories operated by ethnic Chinese and Korean subcontractors for brand-name companies such as Nike, Reebok, and Gap…Widespread surveillance and much of the daily control of female workers center on their bodies: in the provision of food, in the granting or withholding of permission for menstrual leave, in the pressure for family planning, and in the physical confinement imposed during work hours.

In such a way, states work together with employers to order lives of workers in ways that

are different than in other spaces or for other groups. However, on the Thailand-Myanmar border, migrant workers are neither entirely part of a market-oriented scheme to order subjects in such a way as to extract a maximum of labor power nor subject to the laws and policies of Thailand. Just as governance is fractured in this context, so are the laws ordering life. Regimes of order appear to come from multiple sources at the same time and include biopolitical control, surveillance, and moral discipline that adheres to a variety of ethical frameworks, which often manifest themselves in ways that play on racial and gendered hierarchies. In this section, I briefly look at how migrants view and incorporate such regimes as they participate in restorative justice processes, engage with different systems of rule-making, and perceive themselves as governed and governing subjects.

3.1 Management of social conflict

Participants expressed some ambivalence regarding the ways authorities deal with social conflict that arises in their community. Most discussed such practices as permanent or semi-permanent features of everyday life. Migrants go to leaders within the community or external mediators/authorities (including those that work on behalf of a larger organization) to get help resolving debt and loan disputes, divorces, intimate partner conflict and violence, or to settle any variety of other conflicts. For example:

> When husband and wife quarrel with each other and live separately, she informs the community leaders that she doesn't receive any support from her husband. So, the community leaders call her husband and ask him. If the girl has no house to live, the community leaders told her husband to rent one house for her and pay the house rent fees monthly. They try to negotiate between the couple. (KK F2Fw-7)

A 30-year-old woman in Kyuwe Kyan explained it in simple terms, "If this person is wrong, this person has to compensate. If another person is wrong, that person has to compensate. Compensation is 2,000 baht. If [leaders] ask to pay fine, both the man and

the woman have to pay 500 baht each" (KK F2Fw-5). What this participant indicates here

is that 2,000 baht [~US $62] is a standard penalty for a variety of petty crimes such as

theft or verbal abuse. Once a conflict between partners becomes so loud or so violent that

other community members or leaders consider it necessary to intervene, local leaders in

Kyuwe Kyan will require the couple to pay a fine of 500 baht [~US $15.50], regardless of

who is guilty. Some participants explained that members of the community are

sometimes reluctant to have their domestic disputes handled by their leader because

ultimately this means the household loses 1,000 baht [~US $31]. During a focus group

discussion with community workers in Pyaung Gyi Win/Rim Nam, participants explained

the challenge in making peace between two people engaged in a personal conflict:

> **R1:** It is difficult to handle. Although we reprimand them as we are Burmese, some follow our words but some do not.
> **R2:** They say to us, "This is our problem. Is it your business?" But they pay attention when the people from other places come here. They don't care about people from here. […]
> **R1**: We will tell them not to fight each other. If we can't control it, we will report about this to related organizations. If they do not accept our negotiation, we will refer them to the police office or Thai village leader. (KM42 CW-1)

In such cases, these community workers are not acting as leaders who dispense justice,

but as concerned members of the labor camp who want to keep order and prevent a

problem from escalating. These two participants suggest, though, that other workers in

their camp only tend to listen when outside groups come to resolve the situation,

including individual authorities or KMR-KYO. This is because such groups wield greater

power and can more effectively act on threats to bring police into the situation.

For other participants, the role of the local Burmese leader is the closest they can

get to a sense of justice and right over wrong. When asked how she thought about the

leader's role in solving disputes, a 34-year-old woman in KM48 answered:

R: As we are Burmese, we like it. If he decides, he makes it absolute. Those who are guilty will be treated as a guilty person. When he disciplines, people must be quiet. If the man is not quiet, if he needs to punish him with his hand, he also punishes him [like that]. If he needs to talk, he talks. It can be hard or it can be soft depending on the situation. The leader is like that. Mostly we obey when the leader says things. (KM48 F2Fw-10)

Although this participant describes a somewhat autocratic leader in her compound, she makes clear her view that this is a positive influence as it ensures a level of peace and order. Though some participants were critical of the kind of firm authority they encounter in their communities, most in all four sites expressed approval for leaders who can bring and keep order.

3.2 Rules, edicts, orders

A diverse array of authorities in the border space divides migrants up into discrete locales, each one subject to different or overlapping structures of power. The mechanisms of order in each of the four communities varied, though the most common mentioned explicitly by migrants was a restriction imposed on their movement. For example: "One is not allowed to enter after 7 pm and the door is closed at 8 pm. In the morning they open at 5 am, 6 am as the workers go out," as a 41-year old Burmese woman in the Pyaung Gyi Win compound said (KM42 F2Fw-7). Another example of this comes from a Burmese woman in Kyuwe Kyan who explained:

I: Who prohibits them to go outside?
R: The community leaders… If someone from the community goes outside, the community leaders have the right to ask them where they are going. It is not allowed to go out after 8pm. the guards watch and check every night. There is a group of guards (10 people in one group). People can go outside [at night] only after informing this group. (KKF2Fw-7)

In this case, the participant alludes to a curfew and guards to enforce it among the migrant population, though it appears residents can exit if they need to, as long as they can provide an appropriate explanation.

In some sites, leaders' rules about movement have particularly gendered dimensions to them, and women tended to face greater restrictions than men. This was especially the case in terms of rules established by Burmese leaders as tactics to protect whom they see as the more vulnerable members of their community. For example, a community leader in a KM48 compound explicated, "Girls cannot go freely, especially at night even within our village. If we went out, we would have problems. Even we men have problems, let alone girls going out alone. A lot of drunk Thais and Burmese, and Myot" (KM48 CL-1). This was not uncommon. In fact, in all four sites, participants mentioned the need for order in this way, restricting in particular the movement of women and girls for their own safety.

While the extent to which migrants feel they must follow such rules strictly varies from place to place and depending on the amount of power attributed to leaders in those spaces, a participant in one compound in KM48 stressed that breaking the rules meant a problem with the landlord. "If anyone talks back to the house owner," said the participant, "the person will be kicked out. House owners do not keep someone they do not like" (KM48 F2Fw-10). This is because in KM48 migrants are spread out in smaller compounds—between a few to more than a dozen houses in a compound—and in some cases, people find themselves living next to their landlords while in other spaces, they are alone without landlord or employer.

Migrants also highlighted other types of rules that governed their general behavior

in the community. A 38-year-old woman explained:

> The Karen group, they tell the people not to drink and not to make noise in the community. I am glad to have those groups in our community. They make sure that in the morning we can go to work. Many people who live in this community are daily paid workers and they have to wake up early in the morning. (BR6)

As this excerpt shows, such proscriptions on excessive drinking and noise are directly linked to migrants' ability to get up every morning and perform the labor they are there to do.

Participants pointed out that in addition to these more explicit marks of order, there are also more abstract forms of regulation that affect their choices and their wellbeing. For example, instead of arranging for employees to get legal status, some factories print their own IDs that they give to workers, informing them that it is a form of protection that will enable irregular migrants to travel freely within the bounds of Mae Sot. These IDs only enable migrants the level of protection they do because employers pay police to stay away from those factories and their workers. This creates an alterative and informal form of legality for migrants that is completely contingent on their employer and his or her agreement with local police. If payment stops, these workers go back to being completely "illegal." For the many workers who live where they work, whether on a farm, in a factory, or in the employer's house as a domestic worker, bosses are increasingly empowered to make decisions about migrants' healthcare, as this 35-year-old woman in Htone Taung reflects, "The factory gives us medicine when we are sick. When people are seriously ill, they sent them to the hospital" (BR29).

3.3 Self-regulation, self-governance

The fear many of these migrants live with (as noted in the previous chapter) means that the ordering of their movement in this way was sometimes welcome.

However, participants typically saw these as protective measures. When asked what kinds of protections there were in the compound, a participant commented, "They protect us by keeping us in a compound." Thus it is not surprising that despite the many forms of governance present on the border, by far the most pervasive mechanisms for making order came from participants themselves. Responding to their sense of insecurity and fear for their safety, migrants in this context frequently described measures they took to protect themselves that also constituted a form of regulating their behavior, including their movement and their decisions for care. A participant in Pyaung Gyi Win/Rim Nam said, "There are difficulties in this community. People dare not go outside at night after 8 pm including men because there are criminals" (Rim Nam FGDm-2), indicating that there is some element of self-regulation in remaining in the compound after dark. Citing fear of criminals lurking outside labor camps, it was more common for participants to curtail their own movement outside in the evening than for employers, leaders, or landlords to impose a strict curfew. As one participant noted, "We dare not go outside at nighttime if there is no electricity. We have to buy food early when we want to eat. The glue sniffers are very bad" (R3 KM48 FGDw-1).

While this is in response to a fear of violence lingering outside one's house or labor camp compound, it results in a distinctly gendered form of biopolitical control. In Htone Taung, a community leader added:

> They go to the factory from home. At nighttime, parents pick them up from factories. Some come back home with group. The girls appoint with their boyfriends to meet secretly so their parents worry about that […] It is unseemly for girls to go out alone. That's why I reprimand them not to go outside alone like that. (HT CL-2).

In this excerpt, this participant explains that once young women get off of work from

their factories, parents need to be vigilant in ensuring their girls come directly home instead of meeting men. Parents, garment factories, and community leaders are working together to maintain a certain kind of gendered order among workers. Participants cite the prevalence of rape and disorder around them when articulating the need for extra care in regulating the behavior of young women. The structural violence that presents a constant risk to migrants motivates people to restrict themselves to the extent they will go out only when the situation is urgent, as this excerpt from Htone Taung suggests:

> **R1:** There is no specific restriction in here.
> **R2:** They don't go out after 8 pm.
> **R4:** They don't go out at around 10 pm by themselves as there are not many people outside. They just follow this rule by themselves. They stay home and watch movies.
> **R3:** If they need to go to the clinic or hospital, they go but if nothing special to go out, they stay at home. (HT FGDw-2)

Even when the situation becomes serious, migrants must make decisions about what kinds of care they can manage for their bodies. In Htone Taung and Kyuwe Kyan, migrants reported the risks of taking alternate routes to Mae Tao Clinic; they had to subject themselves to further risk in the process of going out. One's legal status also determines the type of care one can receive, as illustrated below:

> During an emergency, we choose this road (Oo Htote Road) because it is close to the hospital and Mae Tao clinic. The people who have legal documents are sent to Mae Sot hospital whereas the people who don't have legal document are sent to Mae Tao Clinic. This is the only one road we have to use because it is short cut. (HT FGDw-1)

These types of constraints and choices are a product of both migrants' precarious status as well as their fear of the violence they may encounter. I deal with the latter issue in detail in the next chapter, showing how violence takes on a communicative role and leads to the construction of certain gendered subjectivities.

Ultimately, migrants show that orders imposed from specific leaders are

intertwined with these types of efforts to self-regulate movement and behavior. The way

that migrants in all four sites interpreted threats to their security through a gendered

perspective can contribute to an understanding of how biopolitical control,

governmentality, and the structural violence of border spaces converge to produce

particular kinds of regimes of order. An excerpt from a focus group discussion among

women in Pyaung Gyi Win/Rim Nam helps illustrate this point:

> **R3:** Now, there is a rule that Burmese are not allowed to go out at night from 8
> pm. 9 pm is the latest.
> **I1:** Who passed this rule?
> **R1:** This rule was made by the Burmese village leader. Both men and women are
> not allowed to go out after 9 pm. If someone goes out, this person will be
> recognized as a thief, robber or bad person.
> **R5:** They [Hmong] also pulled forcefully even their own ethnic young girls. They
> put young girls in the car and run away. A guy from 48KM came and took a
> young Shan girl. It was frightening when they came to get her. Our Burmese
> people here were afraid to help her. They dragged her as a dog and a pig. It was
> impossible to hear from outside as it was a brick building […] She could not
> struggle free.
> **I1:** How do you deal with that kind of violence?
> **R1:** We can't do anything against them [Hmong people].
> **R4:** If they do something wrong to our people, all our Burmese will do something
> back to them. Even if we can't do anything, we will report to related
> organizations.
> **R5:** If the victim is Burmese, we will try to help her as much as possible, even if
> we die in the process.
> **R2:** The styles of our young ladies are not appropriate. They wear short skirts or
> pants [and] these people are more willing to do bad things to them. That's why,
> bad things happen.
> **R4:** It depends on their (Burmese girls') behavior as well. It is also happened
> because they don't live in an appropriate way. We can't blame others.
> **R3:** We found a young lady when we came back after harvesting chilies. "Aw she
> dresses like that. How bad it is!" I felt like that in my heart. They can dress like
> that. For me, I am not happy to wear clothes like that. That's why hooligans
> followed her. My husband and I were on our bicycles. It was already 8pm. Many
> young boys followed her from behind.
> **R4:** The leader should reprimand those girls. (KM42 FGDw-2)

This excerpt shows the natural flow of conversation between participants and the

facilitator, from describing rules in their compound to recalling a story of outsiders—

Hmong men from a neighboring community, in this case—raping a young Burmese,

ethnic Shan girl. Participants describe a commitment to helping Burmese who experience

abuse. While some express a sense of powerlessness to stop such problems, one

participant conveys the possibility of revenge or justice either at her hands or via some

organization that resolves problems on behalf of Burmese people in that area, quite

possibly KMR-KYO. But the conversation quickly turns to a discussion of how such

incidents of abuse are linked to the attire of young women, changes in fashion, and a loss

of what these participants consider traditional dress. Participants use the claim that

women who dress "inappropriately" bring on the sexual abuse they get—a ubiquitous

comment found in every corner of the world—as a call for order and control amidst

widespread violence. Reference to gender in this way is a sort of trope for articulating

precarity, a site to project insecurity and anxiety about migrants' difficult conditions.

While such gendered comments can be found everywhere, in this context they cannot be

untangled from migrants' insecurity.

4. Gendered discourses of morality in sites of precarity

While the previous section looks at governance in terms of systems, networks,

and informal institutions, that is, modes of organization prevalent in the lives of migrants

on the border, I consider now the discursive level; the narratives of tradition, gender, and

home/away that migrants' evoke as they consider and describe their experiences with

order-making and dispute resolution. It is on this level that we see more clearly how

migrants—including those in positions of power—make meaning out of these systems. I

start with the second narrative of the chapter, which I will engage in subsequent sections

with an analysis that involves the voices of participants from all four migrant settlements and other migrant social welfare organizations.

In this narrative, I introduce the work of the People's Volunteer Association (PVA). A former member of the ABSDF (All Burma Students Democratic Front) founded PVA in 2004 to protect Burmese migrants in Thailand and help them gain access to crucial services, including healthcare and education. They are part of NGO networks in Mae Sot that meet regularly to coordinate on child welfare, women's protection, and labor rights. In contrast to KMR-KYO, PVA operates openly on the border, primarily in Mae Sot. They are a membership organization and boast having a volunteer base in the hundreds in Tak's border districts. It is not uncommon in Mae Sot to see young Burmese men cycling to work at factories or elsewhere wearing PVA t-shirts, which are army-green and have the image of a dove inside a six-pointed star. At the time of writing, they had 285 "likes" on their Facebook page, which links to other social media sites that mention them and news coverage of the group.[8] This page also states their *raison d'être*:

> No one/organization comes up and stands up to solve all the problems of our Burmese migrant workers regardless. The situations demand an organization to defend our people. And, that's the reason for us to form PVA. People must know that they have the organization named PVA to depend on no matter what.

PVA works in multiple migrant settlements in Mae Sot, but in terms of this study, PVA is particularly relevant for Htone Taung and Kyuwe Kyan. In recent years, they have increasingly worked with predominately Muslim communities, coordinating with a religious council to address social problems. They do not appoint local leaders, but work with them or directly with the migrant workers who file complaints. Though they work

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[8] For their Facebook page, see: https://www.facebook.com/pages/People-Volunteers-Association/199415453432990 (Accessed on 16 July 2014).

openly in Mae Sot, they are still not a registered organization and most of their members are not documented so they occasionally face arrest. Participants in both Kyuwe Kyan and Htone Taung sites noted that PVA plays a central role in resolving disputes. Some participants consider PVA a primary actor for this, but overall, findings in both sites suggest that PVA is more engaged as a back-up to the Burmese leaders embedded in communities. Local authorities we interviewed also explained that they rely on PVA when parties to a conflict reject their orders. This is because PVA can mobilize their volunteers, but also because they have connections with local police. PVA will also detain individuals in their office if they are drunk or acting violently, locking them in a room for some duration of time until they can safely interrogate them.

PVA works in a way that is far more centralized than KMR-KYO. Though they claim to have an expansive network with community leaders up and down the border in Tak province handling cases, the majority of clients come to their office in Mae Sot for dispute resolution or to file complaints. Between one and three people from PVA sit behind a desk outside the office and hear cases from migrants who come in (or who were brought in). PVA staff keep log-books of all cases they have dealt with; each entry is handwritten and signed by the PVA leadership, often by the founder of PVA who states his position as Central Leadership Committee member. There are multiple volumes from all the disputes PVA has handled over the years pertaining to intimate partner violence, sexual harassment, labor disputes, debt and loan cases, theft, drug abuse, disturbing the peace, and a variety of other crimes. Parties to the conflict sign the case notes and promissory statements that come from the resolution process to signal their acquiescence, and PVA can then use these documents as evidence if problems arise in the future.

One volunteer heads a Women's Affairs Department at PVA and is also responsible for child protection. This department liaises with other NGOs and CBOs, offers counseling to victims and discipline to perpetrators, and assists with referring cases to relevant services, including Mae Sot hospital. In addition, PVA runs a school in Mae Sot, participates in handling labor disputes between employers and employees, and sells membership cards renewable monthly that are supposed to prevent stops by police.

The following narrative represents an interview done in Burmese with English translation. When relevant I include the voice of Sweet who helped with interpretation. The names of participants have been changed to pseudonyms. Ma Say refers to a woman volunteer and Maung Law is a male volunteer.

Narrative 2: PVA responds to domestic violence
ADAM: *What is the method for dealing with domestic violence cases?*
MA SAY: *For example, a man beats a woman. He beats one time, two times, and more so women who suffer cannot stand it any longer and come and inform us. If we get informed, we get the man to come with us […] I want to give you a real example. He is a Karen man and his mother is a school director, he said. He beats his wife in that way. How I dealt with this, I will tell.*
"Why do you drink alcohol all the time? How many bottles do you drink each day?"
"Five bottles he said." Apa! [oh my] so, "If you drink five bottles a day can't you reduce it to three bottles a day? From three to two, from two to one from one half bottle and at the end if you can completely stop drinking, your family will be peaceful. In your family, in order for your wife and children to respect you, you must be a good person. You don't have to be [in] our office like this. Your wife does not have to feel pain about you. Men are the head of the household. If the wife and children who depend on the head of the house do not love but hate and are afraid of the head of the house, this is not good. They must love and respect you." That kind of thing, I told people. When I said this, the man cried […] This is not the first case. I saw many cases like this. He looked at me and said, "I know, my mother is also a teacher." I said, "If you mother is a teacher you must know a lot. You must feel sorry for your mother as it affects her dignity when you got drunk and make problems." I told him that and he was so quiet. He promised me but I don't know if he will keep his promise or not. He said he will reduce the amount he drinks and eventually quit drinking. He will not make trouble at home any longer. Six months have passed by and his wife doesn't come again. […]
ADAM: *Are there other ways you discipline the people involved in such a conflict?*
MA SAY: *First I ask, "What is your nationality?"*

"Buddhist."

"How about parents? Are they wild like you?"

"Not wild."

"So why do you have to speak like this? If you speak like this and people hear it, it is not good for your own dignity. Even if you get upset, pretend you don't see. It can reduce your emotions too. It can reduce a lot of your stress too. It is not the right thing to shout. When people hear don't you feel shy?" They have children. "As you have children, if you are wild like this and your children see this every day you cannot say your children will not speak the same way you do. And when your children are growing, they will have to socialize themselves with people around them. 'Don't go close to this girl, this boy, their mother's personality is very wild.' The children will experience that exclusion from people around them. Then these children will become more wild."

MAUNG LAW: *In all issues we use culture and religion to discipline them as the clients are from many different religious backgrounds. If they are Muslim we have to mention the teaching of Islam, we have to talk according to their religion so that they like to hear what we say. We also let them know the legal aspect, what laws they are breaking and what the punishments are. In religion for example, in Buddhist teaching, what kinds of evil they will receive. No one likes what they do, our families don't like, others also don't like it, so when we do something that no one likes, they cause problems and so they have to face the consequences—*

MA SAY: *Religious, legal—*

MAUNG LAW: *We discipline them with religious teaching, legal teaching, cultural teaching—*

MA SAY: *Social—*

MAUNG LAW: *Socially also. As you do things that people around you cannot accept so you are guilty. They must understand this. Okay, now say it.*

MA SAY: *The reason is, when a man becomes the head of the family, he has responsibilities as the head of the family. In order to have enough food and clothes for his family, if they live in another country they have to rent a house, there is no way to own a house. He'll have to pay rent for the house, the water and electricity bill. Food and clothes and plus food for babies. Those are the responsibilities of a father. However, here [in Thailand] people do not divide what is the father's role, the mother's role. Mom works, father also works. The income of both will cover the cost for family wellbeing. If they have extra, they will keep it as extra. They may eat better food, wear better clothes or give donations. Like that. Man has a responsibility as a man and woman has a responsibility as a woman. This is what you already know too, Adam. [laughs]*

ADAM: *So what about the cultural side?*

MAUNG LAW: *About culture. For a woman, according to our Burmese culture, as a woman is a house wife, she has five duties as a man also has five duties according to Buddhist teaching. The five duties of wife and five duties of husband—*

MA SAY: *In Burmese traditional culture.*

MAUNG LAW: *The five duties of wife and the five duties of the husband. Since we have those kinds of rules we use them to control people and discipline people.*

ADAM: *[um] I see. Okay. [um] do you know what those are? The five, do you—*

MA SAY: *The five duties of the wife in our Burmese culture. Treat your husband as your master. Keep and use your husband's money neatly. When your husband comes back from work, talk sweetly to him and prepare nice food for him. Prepare and maintain the bed and yourself according to the desire of her husband. Be loyal to your husband. Deal with your husband with full honesty. As a woman, these are the five duties but it can be translated to a lot of meaning.*

ADAM: *And what points for the man?*

SWEET: *For man, find money and give to your wife. And second one is give your time and love and care to your wife. Third one is treat your wife as [er] see your wife as [er] oh no. Be kind to your wife as if you will be kind to your mother and your sister.*

MA SAY: *Then be loyal to your wife. Be with only your wife. Then don't betray your wife.*

MAUNG LAW: *Anything relating to Burmese cultural teaching are in the lawkaniti...the lawkaniti-kyan.*

This narrative is rich with meaning about both the significance of dispute resolution methods and the ways participants discuss such methods. Mediators describe their attempt to appeal to the parties' sense of gender, honor, dignity, family, culture, and religion. While the outcome of PVA's adjudications typically involves some form of compensation or community service work, as the narrative above suggests, PVA also emphasizes a form of moral disciplining in addition. Ma Say and Maung Law highlight four ways of instilling morality into their disciplinary methods, according to Narrative 2 above. First, they appeal to a cultural-religious narrative derived from religious texts to explain rules and roles. Second, they refer to a sense of social dignity; an attempt to make offenders aware of how parents and people in a surrounding community might see them based on their behavior. Third, Ma Say and Maung Law ask offenders to recall their purpose for being in Thailand, reminding them that they are there to pursue financial gain and that excessive drinking or social conflict is counterproductive to that goal. And finally, the PVA mediators rely on particular interpretations of gender roles to guide offenders in seeing how they should reform their behavior. They deploy idealized images of men and women to push offenders (who are men in the narrative above) to reflect on

how their behavior upholds or degrades their masculinity. Like the local leaders described in the previous section, PVA sees its role toward the migrant community as a protective one, arguing that they address social problems and conflicts for Burmese migrants when nobody else will, instilling migrants with lessons to improve themselves.

All these tactics, I argue here, are part of the complex arrangement of governance on the border. The reliance on ethical codes to maintain order on the border is a strategy we found in all four sites, though mediators in Mae Sot are most expansive and explicit about this. The data reflects that mediators often rely on narratives of morality, which include some combination of these codes to explain their methods to co-researchers and me, and to draw connections between their work and the broader dilemmas facing Burmese migrants in Thailand. By looking at the intersection of gendered discourse and the resolution of social problems among migrants, I can see how gender becomes a tool for producing particular modes of social organization in this border context. I analyze this discourse here and consider how such productive power deepens our conceptualization of how migrants survive and negotiate displacement. This also furthers an understanding of how the dynamics of capital and questions of family, morality, memory, and tradition are interlaced in the fashioning of a new kind of worker "suited to the new type of work and production process" in this context (Gramsci 1971: 286).

I divide this section into two parts, looking first at the narrative above and other excerpts from Burmese migrant participants in the four sites to put together an analysis of how custom and religion constitute a gendered discourse to make order among worker-subjects. In the second part, I focus in particular on the use of gender in the form of gendered hierarchies as a tool of governance.

4.1 Custom, dignity, and religious-moral discourse in the resolution of social conflicts

The religious-moral framework that PVA mediators outline in Narrative 2 is one

other participants echo in descriptions of methods for resolving intimate partner violence

and in framing their mission. However, as I show in this section, it is a contested and

socially constructed discourse that relates more to mechanisms of social ordering and less

to faith-based doctrines. Like Ma Say and Maung Law, several participants, especially

those in a leadership position, explained their use of religion or ethics as a set of rules to

live and judge by as well as a popular discourse capable of persuading or mobilizing the

average migrant worker, whether Christian, Muslim, or Buddhist. Buddhist monks in

Phob Phra described using Buddhist teachings to solve marital problems; a pastor in

KM48 explained using teachings from the bible for the same purpose; and participants

note that imams, elders, or other respectable people in Mae Sot's Muslim community

often handle family cases for other Muslims in their communities, sometimes in

conjunction with PVA. Such tools in dispute resolution are considered to be "customary"

or "traditional."

On the one hand, analysis suggests that this appears to be a logical strategy

because multiple participants—nearly half—cited religion or cultural custom as a guide

through or explanation of their situation. Numerous Buddhist participants mentioned that

they use religion to find peace amidst difficulty, advising themselves "according to the

Dhamma when problems happen," for example (KM48 F2Fw-5).

While on the surface it appears a common, perhaps ubiquitous practice to rely on

religious authorities for such issues, it is nevertheless important to interrogate the

doctrines or methods referred to as "traditional" or "customary." In the case of religion

and custom, what is commonly referred to as "traditional law" and "Burmese Buddhist

customary law" are in fact constructions of the British colonial era that have left a lasting

legacy on discourses of law and society. As initially Burma was a part of the British Raj,

the Anglo-Indian laws developed and applied there extended to the Burmese. This

included a system of legal pluralism that allowed for different religious-moral laws to be

applied to four main religious categories of Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, and Hindu for

cases relating to inheritance, marriage, divorce, and adoption (Hla Aung 1968; Ikeya

2012). Ikeya (2012: 27) notes that this had the effect of reifying ethnic boundaries in

colonial Burma. This designation, which was part of the Burma Laws Act of 1898, meant

that family issues were not subject to the formal Anglo-Indian legal system, but rather to

a notion of religious customary law. Institutionalizing the informality of family law was

born from two false assumptions, in addition to gross generalization. First, the English

divined that Burmese family conflicts were best dealt with outside the legal system; that

"in the Burmese family system the reasonable is to precede the legal" (Jardine 1882: 197,

quoted in Furnivall 1948: 131). And second, the British supposed that the "custom" upon

which Burmese relied to decide family cases was from a religiously derived text, the

Dhammathats, when in fact these were more annals of Burmese rulers' principles and

beliefs than religious doctrine, even if these rulers were influenced by Buddhism (Hla

Aung 1968; Davids 1932). In their Orientalist approach to understanding Indian and

Burmese societies and social structures, the British appropriated and adapted local

knowledge to fit their conception (McGeachy 2002).[9] As the Burmese legal scholar

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[9] The British also constructed plural legal regimes in colonial Malaysia as well, designating Muslim law as
the preferred source of authority for deciding cases related to marriage and inheritance. It is worth noting
here that during the colonial epoch, as Siam attempted to assert control over all the various peoples within
its designated territory, the government enacted a similar legal pluralism in the predominately Muslim areas

Maung Maung (1963: 13) writes,

> Burmese customary laws are civil, not criminal laws, and secular, not
> ecclesiastical laws. Buddhist ethics have doubtless influenced their development,
> but the term "Burmese Buddhist Law," which was fixed on them under British
> rule and which has passed into common usage, is strictly a misnomer.

The effect was threefold. First this inaccurately conflated a sense of custom and religion
in colonial Burma that divided different ethnicities and religions from one another.
Second, this move cemented as law the construction of customary law for dealing with
family disputes. And third, this simultaneously romanticized and exoticized local
methods for dealing with disputes as statically "traditional" and unmoving. This is not to
say that these colonial practices form the basis of what mediators are doing in Phob Phra
and Mae Sot. To infer this would be to privilege the colonial narrative and ignore the
more complex relations that developed on the ground in Burma and then Myanmar
during that time as well as in the intervening decades. However, I highlight this history to
show that the notion of religion, law, and custom as united in Burmese tradition, is, in
fact, not an accepted reality.

In practice, the use of religious customary law to solve family conflicts is
contested and not always something leaders choose of their own accord. While many
leaders acknowledge their use of morality, culture, custom, and religion as tools to solve
intimate partner violence among migrant workers, they tend to agree that cases
constituting serious crimes or involving serious violence—often highlighting especially
murder and rape—should be handled through formal legal channels. However, the data
reflect that this only happens a fraction of the time, meaning that authorities instead use a

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in the south that was modeled after the British colonial system. See Loos 2006, who argues that the vestiges
of this pluralism can be found in contemporary Thailand's southernmost provinces.

blend of custom, such as a code of ethics, and local interpretations of the law to mediate

for people who have suffered gender violence. This raises questions about how the

decision to use religious codes as tools for the resolution of disputes is a product of

structural violence and precarity. For example, a religious leader in Kyuwe Kyan

complained that Thai village heads and police placed the expectation on him to govern

his neighborhood because of his role as an imam, but that he is reluctant to do this work

because he feels unqualified for the task and that it is not his responsibility:

> Whenever the police and headmen come, I never try to avoid them because I am
> not wrong. I feel shy because I am doing religious work and if the community
> members commit the crime, the police and headmen will definitely ask me,
> "Don't you control them as their religious leader?" Although I try to control them,
> they do not listen to my words. They know I am responsible for controlling them
> but I don't do it so they are mad at me. It's not my business. It is the
> government's business! (KK CL-2)

It is not surprising to see this imam's frustration. From his account, it appears

government officials have thrown responsibility for security in this settlement to him and

his religious means for order-making, and they blame him for his apparent shortcomings.

It is also the case that migrants do not always prefer to have their social problems

dealt with using religious language or an appeal to customary or traditional ethics. This is

especially true for those migrants working with women's rights organizations. A resident

of Htone Taung who works for a Burmese organization that provides social welfare to

women and children attacked the use of religious or "traditional" language:

> Gender discrimination occurs because of the religious belief. The conservative
> thinking still influences Burmese people. For example, women are born for doing
> household chores and men are born for doing business. Women need to have a
> domestic habit to support their family after getting married. The qualities and
> abilities of women decrease after getting married because women have to do
> household chores and men have to find money. At that time, men think that they
> are the only ones who are responsible for finding money to support their family.
> Thus, they didn't value their wives. (R5 HT CW-1)

To this participant, the use of religious doctrine to solve problems related to gender violence is a sign of traditions that need to be changed, not reinforced.

The fact that it is inevitably often up to Burmese community and religious leaders to try to restore order, issue justice, or piece back together a torn community in the wake of violent crime is no doubt a product of migrants' precarity before the law. A Burmese lawyer working in Mae Sot told me that while intimate partner violence is a crime in Thailand, "the problem is that our Burman people do not have the capacity to solve the problem in the legal way. They cannot afford to wait, they cannot afford to do it." He specified that this is because of fear ("if they hear about the courtroom, the police, then they are already worried"), money, and because they cannot get away from work (BLC). Thus, a lack of free and fair access to the criminal justice system relegates them to having serious problems solved—or left unsolved—by informal authorities who explain their work as more of a necessity than a choice or a desire for power.

Because of the way religious texts have the potential to limit the rights of women, leaders' reference to faith-based doctrines to solve domestic conflicts has serious gendered implications as well, as the participant who works with a women's rights organization indicates. A frequent issue participants noted in this regard pertained to divorce. Several women recalled the pressure some religious groups (or groups who rely on religious texts) placed on victims to stay with abusive partners, citing Buddhist, Muslim, or Christian "custom." That said, mediators interviewed who mentioned divorce not only referred to such doctrines, but also to their role and the role of organizations like theirs as not to separate people but to keep them together. In that this suggests a perception that divorce only leads to further social atomization and alienation among

displaced persons, the burden of social cohesion and unity ends up disproportionately on the shoulders of those who face abuse. In this sense, religion as a set of ordering discourses, constitutes a gendered response to the conditions of precarity.

By placing the constructed nature of "customary religious law" within the border context, it becomes possible to see how the reified assumptions and expectations the Thai state maintains about migrants resonates with the lack of access those migrants have to formal legal mechanisms. The result is a normalization and naturalization of migrants' use of religious doctrine to solve intimate partner violence, as if it were actually preferred as a method. In this way, it becomes possible to imagine how precarity and displacement partake in the construction of traditions that are associated with a notion of a homeland even when such practices might be anything but standard in Myanmar.

4.2 Gendered morality in a changing context

In addition to references to religious texts to solve problems, participants deployed concepts of gendered hierarchies on multiple occasions. In certain instances this was in the context of describing how mediators discipline parties in a conflict. At other times, participants relied on gender categories and tropes to frame a discussion about changes affecting the Burmese population in displacement. I show in this section that both are important for understanding how central concepts of gender are to the way migrants make sense of their experience and develop strategies to ensure their wellbeing and that of their families.

4.2.1 Gender and behavioral change

PVA representatives demonstrate that their use of what they refer to as religious texts and "cultural guides"—the *lawkaniti* or *lawkanniti-kyan*—with key points to remind

men and women of their appropriate roles. These go hand in hand with exhortations of

what religious laws offenders broke and what kinds of karmic punishments they can

expect to face. In part the mediators indicate that their use of religious language fits what

migrants like to hear, but beyond this, the gendered concepts of morality they espouse

also seem to underlie much of their analysis of why violence has taken place and how

couples can re-order their life to restore harmony. As such, I argue in this section that

participants frame gender as a cultural concept in their efforts to foster a sense of

community and make order.

PVA's reference to cultural guides refers to a collection of maxims recorded and

revised over the centuries during the pre-colonial period. The *Lokanīti* was a Sanskrit

language text including 109 sayings originating in India and then traveling to Ava (now

Myanmar) possibly in the 15th century where it was translated into Pali and brought more

into line with Burmese ethical beliefs, borrowing maxims from the *Dhammapada* and

expanding to 167 stanzas (Sternbach 1963; see also Gray 1886).[10] Another version of this

text, the *Niti Kyan* in Burmese contains 211 maxims and, at least at the time it was

translated into English in 1858, was thought to be in everyday use in monastery

teachings, a foundational code of ethics in the precolonial and early colonial system of

Burmese education (Fowle 1860). The collection contains chapters relating to "the wise

man," "the good man," "the evil-doer," "friendship," "women," "kings," and

"miscellaneous" (Sternbach 1963: 332). Some sayings include:

> 38. A woman separated from her husband for thirty days endangers her chastity;
> 73. A woman is the best and sweetest of blessings; 76. A good mother teaches her

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[10] There is some discrepancy as to the number of maxims in the Lokanīti with Gray (1886) and Sternbach (1963) indicating 167 and Khin Win Kyi (1986) writing that there are 165 stanzas. This could be due to different versions of the text or numeration of the maxims.

son to speak fairly, and a good father teaches him to act honestly; 127. Trust not a woman who has separated three times from three different husbands; 134. A good wife is as a brother to her husband when he eats or dresses, resembles a sister in modesty when in private with him, a slave when he is preparing for a journey, a friend when in difficulties; she comforts him quickly to sleep, she attires herself neatly to please him, she forbears kindly when he is angry; 149. A man who is married and has a family, but stays at home without working, or exerting himself for their benefit, is lazy and good for nothing (Fowle 1860: 255-262).

The *Lokanīti* or *Niti Kyan*, commonly written also as *lawka niti*, has remained a source of important sayings and is ubiquitous; with more recent editions written (Sein Tu 1962), it is printed as small booklets and widely distributed by the government and government-associated groups (e.g., New Light of Myanmar 2003). While, because of its prevalence, it may not be surprising that mediators quote this text, it nevertheless indicates a clear strategy to maintain gendered order in this border context and not just a method to inspire reflection or to teach or maintain some aspect of Burmese culture. It suggests a particular interpretation of "custom" that happens to contain gender hierarchies developed over the last six hundred years.

The use of such gendered religious-moral frameworks in leaders' efforts to resolve disputes was common in all four sites, though only PVA explicitly mentions the work of the Lokanīti. A 40-year-old Burmese woman in Htone Taung who occasionally manages couple disputes explained her strategy:

> A girl must understand her husband's work. "When your husband gets back from work and calls you, this is your duty to make sure you respond. Maybe he needs to drink water, or eat rice, because those are your duties. Setting the bed is your duty. If he takes a shower, giving him a towel and *longyi* is your duty. If you fulfilled all your duty, then your husband, he won't have any problem with you. He is responsible to feed you. He has a duty for your welfare. As he is responsible to ensure your wellbeing, listen to what he says as he also must listen to what you say." That was how I handled their couple issue. (HT F2Fw-7)

Though she does not refer to any particular text, her words practically mirror some of the

maxims quoted above. A couple in KM48 explains that they offer different moral

guidelines to the man and woman; each one speaking to both. To the man, they appeal to

his responsibilities as a father and his identity as a man:

> **Female mediator:** I tell him "You go gambling, you drink alcohol. You also have children and a wife. They also have to eat. You do not bring them food. Instead you ask her to find money for you to go gambling. So what do you think of yourself?"
>
> **Male mediator:** Here money problems are the most common so I talk about money. "Little brother, today how much did you spent on your alcohol? You still have a future to think about and about your health, too." […] "Today, you worked and made 100 baht [US$3.00]. Little brother, you drank up 60 baht. Sometimes you may even drink up 100 baht with friends. Your wife at home has no food to eat. Your children at home have no food to eat so they will cry, and if they cry, can you put up with hearing it?" As a man, we discipline them in that way.

For women who come to report cases or who are involved in cases to this couple, the

male mediator refers to women's responsibilities and duties, while the female mediator

encourages the woman to be patient:

> **Male mediator:** And I say to her, "Little sister, it is not nice to behave in that way. Your husband is working to bring income so when he comes home your role is to cook and give him food. You have to treat your husband nicely. Keep every thing neat and tight. Treat a man as you should treat a man. Female roles must be fulfilled."
>
> **Female mediator:** I try to discipline them as if I was them and this is how I would feel when I hear these words. The people here listen to me and that is why it works. What I say is listen to both the man and woman […] Then I will tell his wife, "Try staying with him for three months or six months. Then if you are not fine, come back to me. Then when she agrees, we make a promissory note for them. After we make promissory note they get together peacefully again. (UWMPP)

While the tendency for authorities to apply such gendered narratives as

disciplinary measures is significant in its own right for what it indicates about the types

of ordering influences imposed on migrant minds and bodies in this context, it is

important to further question their deployment. That is, what do the uses of such

narratives say about tactics to manage and survive displacement? The particular

combination of economic logics, gendered norms and maxims, and references to social/community fabric in migrants' narratives suggests that scolding offenders and victims to be better men and women is more than a tactic to resolve disputes according to a notion of tradition. Rather, I argue, it is a way of creating a sense of tradition to help strengthen ties, foster a sense of community based on shared values, and maintain order among a population on the move affected by poverty, separation, and displacement.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I show that migrants are neither entirely part of a market-oriented scheme for organizing transient people into workers from which employers can extract a maximum of labor power nor much subject to the laws and policies of Thailand. Yet, this is also not to say that migrants are fully beyond the law and reliant only on their own networks of power, including those from ethno-nationalist political groups operating in exile. Instead, I assert that the living and working conditions in which Burmese migrants find themselves signifies state boundaries, and the commonly held notions of sovereignty that go with them, fractured and multiplied into the heterogeneous global spaces of what Sidaway (2007) calls postdevelopmental geographies. The overlapping and sometimes competing sets of power relations that are evident in migrants' narratives about dealing with social conflict suggest spaces and subjectivities that make use of, are influenced by, and transform market dynamics, state governing technologies, and informal social networks simultaneously. These arrangements, in their proliferation of hierarchies and modes of social organization reflect the unmaking and remaking of borders.

I have argued that discursive power in this context is constantly in flux and always important. What becomes clear is that the border itself, with all of its diverse and contradictory technologies of governance and discourses inserts itself in all power

relations and imposes a sense of inevitability for the harsh conditions migrants face. This emerges as a perception of fixedness upon the people subject to border governance and their ways of ordering each other there. In reality, however, such structures and relations have only momentarily coalesced in that territory, a result of large-scale displacement, state regimes of power, and the demands of capital.

Discourse about tradition, custom, and religion are all deployed on the border as a way to make order and assert community among Burmese displaced in Thailand. In the resolution of interpersonal social conflicts, particularly intimate partner violence, power-brokers legitimize their methods through the circulation of discourse about morality and frame their work as traditional dispute resolution derived from village-level practice in Myanmar. Migrants and power-brokers within migrant settlements repeat memories of traditional life in Myanmar, referring to gender roles, Buddhist, Christian, or Muslim religious laws for families, and the importance of providing this moral framework for migrants. However, this ascribes less to contemporary lived experience in Myanmar and more to an image of cultural and religious pluralism constructed during the era of colonial Burma.

I find that this discourse and the practice of resolving domestic disputes has the effect of instilling a homogenizing constructed narrative of "traditional" gender roles among migrants that overlooks ethnic, social, and religious differences. I find that this is a reaction to the perceived collapse of social fabric among Burmese people living in a context of migration and displacement. Thus, spaces designated as sites in a supply chain are also sites for the production of gendered identities that overlook an actual diversity of lives and experiences in Myanmar and that offer particular narratives for conceiving of one's homeland. The way that such discourse is gendered has implications for the construction of particular migrant identities. Gendered discourse helps migrants make

sense of their experience at the same time it has an ordering effect. The conservative moral overtones reflect a kind of gender reaffirmation, re-asserting some idea of the traditional to keep together a social fabric perceived as torn (see chapter six for more on this) (McGuffey 2005). To the extent migrants adjust themselves and regulate their bodies on a biopolitical level in accordance with the circulating notions of custom and gender identity, they will also be living up to implicit standards of a migrant work ethic that coincides with the demands of mobile capital.

While this suggests that migrants' precarity plays a role in shaping social order on the border, the systems that materialize are not contained by or produced solely by that precarity. Rather they are unique forms that make their own borders in ways that go beyond the influence of global or regional supply chains as well as states' efforts to regulate and contain people. In this sense it becomes possible to envision how the reterritorialization and resocialization work of capitalism does not always result in the iterative performative reproduction of itself and its dynamics in endless feedback loops. This leaves space for what Butler and Athanasiou (2013) refer to as dispossession without possession; the amelioration of some or all of the exploitative dynamics that are so common to displacement and dispossession today but in ways that do not reproduce existing class, race, or gender hierarchies that are intrinsic to advanced capitalism. To conceive of knowledge production and social formation in this way is to apply what Mignolo (2000; see also Mignolo and Tlostanova 2006) calls "critical border thinking," which seeks to privilege and surface knowledges that have been subjugated by dominant historical epistemologies rooted in modernity/coloniality and reveal subjectivities that are *of* these hierarchies but that do not necessarily reproduce them. It is to subsume and redefine the conditions of precarity—and its historical roots in colonial orders (what Quijano (2000) refers to as the "coloniality of power")—for the purpose of ascribing to a

logic not girded by modernist/colonial systems of knowledge.[11] "What border thinking produces," writes Grosfoguel (2008: 16), "is a redefinition/subsumption of citizenship, democracy, human rights, humanity, economic relations beyond the narrow definitions imposed by European modernity." In this sense, the result of border thinking is Anzaldúa's (1987) "new mestiza" and W E B Dubois' "double-consciousness," (Gilroy 1993), which do not reject the oppressive structures and epistemologies that give rise to racialized and gendered categories, but rather appropriate and redefine them to assert decolonized identities with alternative local histories.

All this is not to say that the formations of social order and the narratives about gender and community among Burmese migrants on the Thai-Myanmar border are necessarily evidence of "new mestiza" identities, or that they have a liberatory tone. Certainly, as this chapter has shown, migrants may be just as likely—if not more likely— to reproduce as to subsume/redefine gendered hierarchies in the development and deployment of tactics to deal with social conflict. Instead, the point is to show that precarity, the logic of global supply chains, and the gendered hierarchies that have become intrinsic to them are constitutive forces within a complex system that do not have a monopoly on migrant agency and, in fact, can lead to unanticipated social formulations that make use of certain concepts and serve as important tools for migrant' survival or struggle, just as they also further certain forms of domination. What this implies is that in their subsumption of extant hierarchies, modes of social organization born—at least in part—from the conditions of dispossession have the potential to have a decolonizing or resistive effect on certain relations or structures at the same time it can reaffirm or even strengthen other hierarchies.

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[11] This relates to what Foucault calls an "insurrection of subjugated knowledges," which is essential to his genealogical method (1980: 81-82).

Chapter 6—Communicative violence in the production of gendered borderlands

1. Introduction

As Judith Butler reminds us, gender is constantly in play despite its appearance as an already constituted set of identities (1990). That is, discourse and interaction performatively reproduce perceptions of fixed categories with stable meanings. Gender is made in the resonating and power-laden spaces between consciousness (cognition) and repetitive encounters (recognition). The spaces of displacement and those of mutated governance regimes, such as borders and economic zones along production networks, are places rich for the study of gender in flux. People are on the move, making new lives at the same time they grapple with the old; invariably migration and displacement reflect a tension between unmaking and remaking. The phenomenon conjures images of deracination and torn social fabric on the one hand and, on the other, reconstituted families, practices, and communities, stretched across space and time, not necessarily lost but always shifting in different directions that resonate with new relations of power.

Gender is situated in this dynamic. In spaces of migration, gender is still, as always, performatively reproduced, but the demands of capital, the technologies of biopolitical governance, and the ungrouping and regrouping of people in collective forms of living and working force their way into notions and enactments of gender categories, giving life to changes and new trajectories. The study of such spaces shows that gender must be conceived of as a set of beliefs that cannot be unyoked from conceptions of state, homeland, morality, tradition, and order. Each is bound up in the other as migrants attempt to navigate their way in new lands.

In what sense, then, is gender a tool to make meaning in a context of displacement? The question of how migrants make sense of where they are and where

they have come from is a topic that has defined much of the social science literature on migration in the last decades, from questions of identity (Waters 1999), to memories of an invented homeland (Malkki 1995; Turner 2010), to the politics of integration (Haller et al. 2011; Portes and Rumbaut 2001); livelihoods (Jacobsen 2005); and the formation of transnational networks (Faist et al. 2013; Levitt 2001; Vertovec 2009). Work on gender and migration has been quite varied across the disciplines, with calls for greater consideration of how displacement and movement affect women and men in particular ways (Indra 1999); analyses of the way that genders shift as a result of migration and transnational networks (Smith 2006); the intersection of globalized labor regimes and the reproduction of gender inequality (Mills 2003); the ways that migrants face interlocked hierarchies of race, gender, state, and supply chains (McDowell 2008; Ong 2000); and the dynamics of care and social reproduction stretched across borders (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002; Pearson and Kusakabe 2012). Such work is crucial for the way it brings to the fore the importance of distinguishing the different experiences men and women have had with migration and pointing to the gendered nature of violence, war, migration, and displacement.

This chapter considers gender a productive force, following Butler's school of thought, as I show that conceptions of gender among Burmese migrants in Thailand are part of a process of negotiating the challenges of a new and hostile place. Rather than presenting participants' understandings of gender, I tease out the threads of gender-making from the interstices and intersections of migrants' attempts to make order out of a harsh and unwelcoming everyday life in factories, farms, and among the waste piles of capital's invisible underbelly on the border. In particular, I am interested in how the socio-structural and interpersonal violence of the border space has a communicative force

for migrants that is linked to their performative production and reproduction of gendered meanings of displacement. This is to argue that just as practice and discourse produce and reproduce gender, these performatively constituted gendered identities are also then implicated in the way we see our world around us. In the context of the border and the lives of migrants, I look at how practices and narratives related to structural and interpersonal violence shape and are shaped by gender. Participants in this study rely on narratives of violence, including gendered violence, to make meaning of their experiences and the relations around them. At the same time, they refer to the encounters of daily life in a way that constitutes and applies certain notions of gender identity.

In this sense, I bring together some of the cognitive dynamics of displacement, violence, and the fluid nature of gender to deepen an understanding of political subjectivation among Burmese migrants in and around Mae Sot. It is in this sense that notions of gender can come to be situated within realities constructed from amidst the iterative relationships among capital, sovereignty, and ethnic/racial identities. In such moments, it is possible to see the ways that the category "'woman' becomes the site of multiple contestations" (Skidmore and Lawrence 2007: 27).

To lay out this argument, I start with a more detailed explanation of this chapter's conceptual framework, putting gender work into conversation with violence as a discursive tool. I approach the topic of violence cautiously in this chapter; rather than looking at it head on in all its horror, I subject the topic to something of a sideways gaze, to reference Žižek (2008). Research on the Thailand-Myanmar border has, perhaps unwittingly, turned violence against Burmese migrants into a sort of spectacle of the grotesque through such an overwhelming focus on rights violations. While this dissertation is certainly at risk of doing the same, I attempt here to use my discursive

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analytical approach to see how the conspicuous nature of violence narratives is involved in the gender work of the border and in the constitution of particular political subjectivities for migrants. To show how the literature reveals certain issues while ignoring others, in the next section, I briefly consider some of the ways that various studies over the years have conceptualized violence on the border. I then turn toward the discourse of violence that migrants deploy to explain their situation. I compare and contrast individuals' articulation of everyday structural and interpersonal violence to put together an interpretation of how Burmese migrants in Thailand experience and make meaning out of precarity. I show the particularly gendered nature of both the violence and the perceptions it engenders. As beliefs about masculine and feminine identities feature heavily in migrants' attempts to make sense of the violence in their lives, I also discuss how particular conceptions of gender help frame interpretations of everyday life. In that such gendered references can have a productive or shaping effect on migrants, I find similarities here to McGuffey's (2008: 216-217) concept of "gender reaffirmation," which refers to the way social actors "extract dominant conceptions of gender, race, and class from the macro world to interpret their personal experiences" as they recover from sexual trauma perceived as threatening to heteronormative gender identities.

In the last part of the chapter, I look to the importance of collective memory for those negotiating the challenges of displacement. Following Malkki's (1995) seminal text on this subject *Purity and Exile*, I consider how narratives of migrants' past in Myanmar are, in fact, tools for making sense of the present in Thailand. Supporting the chapter's argument, I analyze particular memories of sexual violence and its resolution as mechanisms that both help explain the experiences of displacement and reproduce a gendered framework of morality.

2. Genders in flux, violence as communicative

This chapter builds on the work of scholars who regard gender as produced and producing; discourses, perceptions, and behaviors to be made iteratively at the same time they exert an influence to shape the nature of production networks (Bair 2010; Hewamanne 2008; Hoang 2014; Ong 1987; Salzinger 2003; Wright 2006). Such scholarship changes the way we see both gender and the systems and relations of capitalism. Neither are fixed; both are iterative and contingent in that they are involved in performatively constituting one another.

2.1 Gender and capital: mutually constituting relations

This includes analyses of the everyday practice and discourse of factory managers and workers as productive of ideas of femininity and masculinity that are situated in both local sets of norms and ethics as well as narratives of global capitalism (Bair 2010; Salzinger 2003; Wright 2006). Particular gendered identities arise from iterative everyday movements, exchanges, and practices in which social actors bring to life their self-perception and the expectations they pick up on from others. That said, "gender domination is never a thing in and of itself" as these moments of practice and discourse are sites where multiple gendered "hierarchized domains" collide, including "the body, the family, civil society, the nation, and the transnational arena" (Ong & Peletz 1995: 4).

One of these domains is the myth of the "disposable third world woman," which Wright (2006) identifies as central to the ideology of contemporary capital accumulation and which is manifested in multiple different ways in different sites of production. Less a coherent set of ideas, the "myth" Wright discusses is more an agglomeration of disparate but often imbricated beliefs and norms pertaining to acceptable or appropriate treatment of women workers. Wright calls this myth a "productive technology" (2006: 12) that

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managers attempt to enforce in various ways rooted in their individual assumptions, the demands of their firm, and other intersecting hierarchies linked to race and class. As such, these ideas help to justify a certain level of direct or abstract violence inflicted upon women's bodies and minds; violence for which women subjected to this myth are considered ultimately accountable (Wright 2006). This technology is productive in that it leads to the interpellation of identities linked to ideas of disposability, femininity, and the "Third World." Similar to this is De Genova's (2002) notion of deportability, which refers to the pervasive collective rationalization of harsh treatment to migrants and the normalization of technologies of expulsion under the logic of legality. This is a set of discourses and practices that effectively reproduces certain migrant identities; even as people on the move subvert such treatment and restrictions, they respond to this dominant characterization.

Despite the manifestation of these gendered narratives and discourses wherever migrants and capital accumulation operates, Mills (2003) reminds us that the dynamics of production do not create the same gendered ideas everywhere. Rather, employers and workers invoke diverse interpretations of feminity and masculinity as they voice logics of recruitment and discipline or conceive of modes of resistance or autonomy. Yet, in this way, concepts of gender among workers and managers shapes the dynamic of individual production sites, lending a diversity to the manifestations of capital accumulation. Moreover, it is possible to resist certain gendered narratives encountered on the factory floor while reinforcing others (Wright 2005). This is because any given individual must negotiate multiple levels of gendered expectations and identities simultaneously in ways that intersect with race/ethnicity, class, nationality, and geographical location/origin (Hewamanne 2008; McDowall 2008; Mills 1999). These intersecting hierarchies lead to

the types of inequality that enable migrant work to be characterized with such social violence. Both men and women migrant laborers encounter this violence as refracted through varying expectations of masculinity and femininity. In this sense the production of gender, capitalist relations of power, and migrant experiences are intertwined.

This chapter also places emphasis on the ways that gender is an important framework for understanding shifts in the everyday experiences of migrants. That is, an analysis of varying gender ideologies can provide a lens for understanding differences in the dynamics of settlement and return for men and women (Hochschild 1989; Smith 2006). In this chapter, my focus is primarily outside of work hours as I analyze migrants' discourse about life at home and in their communities, though I still consider these to be sites and dynamics embedded in and affected by the relations of production. This is because as "capital is driven to deliver higher productivity and profitability" and as labor assumes greater risk and flexibility, "a growing number of precarious workers are unable to support a household, and under these circumstances, the capacity of labor to reproduce itself becomes uncertain" (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013: 90). Putting these ideas together, I suggest that as the dynamics of capital in border spaces like Mae Sot contribute to the production and reproduction of certain notions of masculinity and femininity, it is also the case that these identities then shape various perceptions of experiences and knowledges in that border space. This is a view of gender and other hierarchies as mutually constitutive.

2.2 Making meaning and producing gender through narratives of violence

Because of the prominent place violence has in narratives in and about Mae Sot, it is important to include and theorize its role in this context. Specifically, I consider how discourse about violence is a means to offer certain representations of gender, and how

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this discourse is also a way to make sense of gendered practices and experiences. To write about violence as productive in this way is to analyze it for its communicativity, to look at what it reveals about the relationships among individuals, families, communities and states. As Rosalind Morris (2006: 59) explains, the communicative power of violence:

> …may be contained in the family or staged in the public realm. It may demonstrate the presumptive immunity of the [perpetrator] to the state's interventions or call the attention of the state to its own inadequacy. It may express the solidity of patriarchal authority as the absolute right to exercise force, or it may be a means for asserting sovereignty in the face of competing and uncertain claims to power. And this is true of all violence.

That is, even as sexual violence always involves a violation, the communicative force of violence shifts temporally and spatially in ways that are contingent on broader social factors, including widespread structural violence and precarity. Key to this form of power is the visibility or invisibility of violence. Visible violence is in the public view and threatens repetition and memesis, while "acts of violence may [also] express power precisely to the extent that they prohibit their own revelation," including the violence of the home and that which is perpetrated by the state in a covert manner (such as torture or disappearance) (Morris 2006: 79). The power of both often manifests itself in the language of morality. Sexual violence that is visible can be a symbol for many things, including a lack of law; for being beyond the law; for a lack of social mores, structures, or community cohesion to prevent such abuses from happening.

Thus violence of this sort—and its visibility or invisibility—is imbricated with the production and reproduction of gendered subjectivities in multiple ways. Gender ideologies intersect with the representation of sexual violence as individuals and collectivities overlay horrific acts with moralized interpretations of good women and

good men (Das 2008). As well, in the state's interpretations of and responses to domestic violence, which often articulate boundaries between privacy (home) and public (the state/community), authorities (whether state or otherwise) reproduce gendered notions of acceptable and unacceptable violence. In the realm of the visible, sexual violence, such as that depicted in the scenes of torture at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq that were captured in photographs by British and US torturers themselves, can serve as a tool for stripping humanity through acts of emasculation (Razack 2005). For those who find themselves surrounded by multiple forms of violence (e.g., structural, collective, and interpersonal) and labeled as victims or as violent themselves, Das (2007b) asserts that the conceptualization of this violence as ordinary or everyday often manifests itself as a fear of potential aggression that allows for management and certain forms of gendered governmentality.

In this sense, I use discourse about domestic and community-level violence to frame political subjectivity and personal agency vis-à-vis the state, employers, cross-border networks, and the law. In the context of the Thai-Myanmar border, migrants discuss violence as a symbol for their gendered position before the law and for a lack of social structures and community cohesion to prevent such abuses from happening. Power is also imbued in discourse about migrants and violence, whether from scholarly and NGO research, the state, or society in the sense that such discourse tends to normalize violence among this group as a result of culture or social dislocation. Crosby and Lykes (2011) explain how it is possible for "expert" discourse to reify gendered images of victimhood at the same time that individuals who have faced abuse in the past can transgress these images of powerlessness to claim an empowered survivor identity. Such contested relations are part of what inevitably constitutes migrant identities, because is in

this sense that, as Morris (2006: 80) writes, "sexual violence often erupts in the abyssal space between personal agency and political subjectivity."

2.3 Mythico-histories, feminine visibility, and images of order

A particular manifestation of violent narratives that surface on the border and that have a communicative effect are those relating to memories of life in Myanmar. Burmese migrants' accounts about order, displacement, and the gendered resolution of disputes are rich with references to "home" as an analytical category distinct from "away" in Thailand. Discussing "memory" here, I refer to the social and collective narratives migrants produce about gender identity and dispute resolution in Myanmar. Rather than debating whether or not these are factual histories, I refer to Halbwachs (1992: 40), who wrote, "the past is not preserved but is reconstructed on the basis of the present." Viewing memories as social constructs, it becomes possible to consider the ways in which individuals and groups can use interpretations of the past to negotiate the present as well as how the present dictates the nature of recollections of the past (French 2012).

Moreover, in recent decades, scholars have increasingly recognized the centrality of collective memory to discussions of how societies move forward in the aftermath of both individual and mass violence, constructing particular narratives of the past and erasing others (Hayner 2002; Moon 2009; Rosenblum 2002). Thus, I am less concerned with analyzing individual memories and more interested in learning what the recollection of past experiences and realities pertaining to violence says about the present and about gender. This is to look at memory as discourse that is individually produced through the process of personal telling, and collectively significant for the narratives they generate.

I consider it important to engage with participant's recollections and comparisons between life in Myanmar and life in Thailand as I view such narratives to be what Malkki

(1995: 54) calls "mythico-histories," that is, "a set of moral and cosmological ordering stories: stories which classify the world according to certain principles, thereby simultaneously creating it." Such a concept is useful here because it enables an analysis of memory as socially productive. This is, in part, the nature of myth, which, as Asad (2003: 29) writes, is "not merely a (mis) representation of the *real*. It [is] material for shaping the possibilities and limits of action. And in general it appears to have done this by feeding the desire to display the actual." By being grounded in the work of memory, mythico-histories partake in the interpellation of certain gendered identities as they invoke a fabricated interpretation of the past to order the reality of the present through the imposition of certain perceptions and hierarchies (Althusser 1971). In the context of migration and capital accumulation, these narratives of memory normalize and help explain current gendered power relations in the wake of displacement in terms that make sense of present conditions and assert dominant perceptions of how to survive (Wright 2006).

3. A place rife with abuse: Mae Sot under the lens of research

Much of the scholarly research and studies conducted by NGOs about Burmese migrants in Mae Sot over the last ten to fifteen years has made note of abuses migrants experience at the hands of multiple actors, including police and other security officials, employers, landlords, smugglers, and brokers, to name a few (Amnesty International 2005; Arnold and Hewison 2006; Zaw Aung 2010; Campbell 2013; Caouette and Pack 2002; Human Rights Watch 2010, 2004; Kusakabe and Pearson 2010; Pearson et al. 2006; Pearson and Kusakabe 2012a,b; Robertson 2006; Saltsman 2012, 2014). Migrants, particularly those without documents, are subject to harsh treatment by Thai security

officials, such as extortion, verbal harassment, or even physical violence, which often

take place at the approximately half-dozen informal checkpoints set up in and around the

town (Human Rights Watch 2010). Thai authorities have been linked to the trafficking of

Burmese women into the sex trade and men into the fishing industry (Feingold 2013;

International Labor Organization 2013; Leiter et al. 2006). Afraid of arrest and abuse by

authorities, migrants often rely on unscrupulous smugglers who sometimes extort them

for all their money or put them into dangerous or even fatal situations (Gjerdingen 2009).

In 2008, the Labor Rights Subcommittee of Thailand's National Human Rights

Commission found that:

> [W]hen migrant workers appointed a representative to bargain about wages or
> welfare, the employers harassed them, discretely arranged for physical attacks
> against them, had them arrested and charged with criminal offenses, and as we
> always found when there was bargaining taking place or a dispute within the
> factory, called in the police to inspect the workplace ([translated from Thai]
> NHRC 2008: 194, quoted in HRW 2010: 91).

In this sense, collusion between Thai security forces and employers is not uncommon.

As noted earlier, employers often deduct from workers' wages for police protection fees,

making it a matter of agreement between them and police as to when raids take place. A

2010 report by Human Rights Watch contains a succession of tragic stories describing

employers' physical abuse of their workers, especially in the context of negotiations for

compensation (see for example, pages 88-94).

Research on this topic portrays such a dire situation for Burmese migrants in Mae

Sot that it is hard to imagine why they might stay and continue to work there at all.

Results from the FIC study in 2011 show that 15 fifteen percent of undocumented

migrants and 11 percent of those with documents reported experiencing harassment by

authorities or employers in 2010. Compared to reports that compile page after page of

abuses against migrants, this statistic might seem low. Most migrants have not experienced direct harassment or physical abuse by authorities. Nevertheless, a more than one in ten ratio for harassment by authorities or employers is more than sufficient to ensure that migrants remain aware of the prevalent risk to their safety. The statistical information presented here does not refute the qualitative data of so many reports and studies, which, it is important to note, do not claim to be representative. Rather, I find these quantitative data enhance one's understanding of the situation by enabling a contrast between abuse experienced and a more ubiquitous fear of that abuse. Indeed, in this dissertation's qualitative research with more than 150 individuals, few reported physical abuse at the hands of authorities, employers, or others, but 64% articulated in unequivocal terms their fear of arrest, deportation, and violence.

With much research focused on the abuse migrants experience at the hands of authorities, there is a gap of information available about social conflict and interpersonal violence among and between migrants. A series of UN and NGO reports in 2006 attempted to address this gap in terms of the refugee camps, and there is some data about violence against women in migrant areas. According to a 2006 survey of close to 2,300 refugees in three camps (Mae La, Ban Mai Nai Soi, and Ban Mae Surin), three quarters of camp residents identified problems related to alcohol consumption as a key protection concern, and 60 percent pointed to the threat of physical violence (IRC 2006). Between 2003 and 2006, 350 protection incidents were reported to the UN refugee agency (UNHCR), showing an increase in reporting of domestic violence, rape, and physical assault (other than rape) (UNHCR 2006). In a 2010 "mid-term" assessment, IRC found that 15 percent of refugees experienced violent crime in the two years prior to the survey, 12 percent experienced family disputes, six percent cited debt and loan issues, and four

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percent mentioned gender-based violence (IRC 2010). Only two percent mentioned abuse

by camp authorities (who are refugees themselves) or by Thai authorities. This reflects a

similar situation outside the camp, as documented by the FIC study, which notes that ten

percent of migrants (including registered and unregistered) mentioned experiencing

physical assault in the previous 12 months by a variety of actors, including authorities but

also by gangs, people within their communities, or family members (Saltsman 2011).

Reporting is extremely low amidst fear and mistrust of officials (International

Commission of Jurists 2012; IRC 2011).

Research suggests widespread prevalence of gender-based violence and exclusion

from basic social services for Burmese migrant women (IRC 2011; O'Kane 2006; Maung

and Belton 2005). However, many women often do not seek treatment or report abuse out

of fear of being blamed, mistrust of the Thai justice system, or because of cultural biases

against accessing family planning services (Hobstetter et al. 2012; Leiter et al. 2006;

MAP 2010). In addition to workplace abuses, research indicates widespread intimate

partner violence in migrant communities on the border (Caouette et al. 2000; Maung and

Belton 2005). Because of low reporting, and due to challenges in accessing isolated

migrant worksites, there is no statistic for the number of migrants who experience such

abuse.

All this underscores the importance of looking at how migrants experience and

interpret the violent places in which they are situated. By doing this, one starts to see how

violence-inspired fear might push migrants to make interpretations about space and to

give meaning to stories about incidents of brutality in ways that render such acts

communicative in important ways (Morris 2006). One also sees the overlap between the

structural violence of migrants' living conditions as well as their precarious legal and

employment statuses. My goal in putting interpersonal violence into conversation with structural violence here is not to make a causal argument, but to show how the two are intertwined with one another in terms of how they shape migrants' perceptions of the people and space around them. Relying on migrants' accounts and narratives to highlight this connection between the local and personal, on the one hand, and the broad and systemic, on the other, addresses an important gap in the literature cited above. This is because it shows that interpersonal violence is neither an isolated phenomenon nor merely a product of cultural trajectories.

4. Representations of perceptable violence: the power of fear

Qualitative analysis reveals that migrants sometimes wavered between talking about violence in great detail and sometimes hesitating to discuss it at all. While some of this variance was between participants, with some more forthcoming than others, it was more often the case that this difference arose depending on the topic. That is, there were certain forms of violence that seemed to leap out of people's mouths—even (or maybe especially) when co-researchers had not asked specifically about violence—while other types of conflicts or incidents remained hushed. In this section, I focus in particular on the forms of violence that participants wanted to make more visible for co-researchers, and I ask what their communicativity means in this context. I find that dividing results between the rural and the urban sites helps convey some of the subtle differences in migrants' experience between Phob Phra and Mae Sot.

Urban sites

In general for migrants in Thailand, a lack of legal status puts one at great risk for many different kinds of harm. In some cases, even being registered does not protect people from threats to their safety and wellbeing. Participants cited both the risk of

encounters with police and the prevalence of robbery and violent crime all around them.

Direct encounters with authorities and individual as well as collective fear of violent

gangs or police framed migrants' perception of their world and their options. In Htone

Taung, some participants were aware of violence near them, but this was usually

perceived as violence outside their neighborhood. Htone Taung is seen as a relatively safe

place, besides the need to remain vigilant about avoiding police. There, the fear is of the

outside, including police, thieves, drug addicts, gangs, traffickers, Thai male teenagers

roaming the streets, and others. Participants from Htone Taung were generally afraid of

police and delinquent outsiders, as compared to Kyuwe Kyan where there is a palpable

fear of people *in* the neighborhood or in adjacent areas. In Kyuwe Kyan, a lack of legal

status inspired widespread fear of authorities, and residents there also perceived

dangerous social problems related to drug consumption in their neighborhood.

Raids on workplaces or houses, which, in turn, lead to extortion at police stations

or deportations mean that even spaces migrants considered safe or personal spaces are

subject to disruption and violation. One participant recalled that not long before the

interview:

> The police tried to catch a guy who did drug trafficking. That guy ran into our
> dormitory and police checked the people in the dormitory and they found that all
> of us don't have legal documents. So, police arrested all of us in the dormitory.
> (HT CW-1)

Because of incidents like this, unregistered men and women participants explained that

everywhere in Mae Sot is dangerous for them. They reflect that over the years they have

become habituated to fleeing when they think the police might be around the corner.

When police come to their neighborhood, "All of us are afraid," one male participant in

Htone Taung said. "Even though we have passports, we try to stay away when we hear in

advance that the police will come to our section" (HT FGDm-2). The excerpt above indicates that law enforcement practices sometimes ignore formal distinctions between legality and illegality, treating all migrants as lawbreakers. Such pressures force thinking about safe and unsafe spaces to inhabit.

These references to fear show that violence can have the effect of laying virtual boundaries all over Mae Sot. In addition, violence becomes more intimately involved in shaping the political subjectivity of migrants. As the following excerpt illustrates, migrants take in stories of murder and crime and make meaning out of how police respond, interpreting their place vis-à-vis the state in a high-crime landscape:

> They do drug trafficking and kill people. Last summer, women and a child were killed. Last month, one man was killed in that dormitory. Because of these cases, police come to our quarter frequently. This is not our country so we can't do whatever we want. Police don't value Burmese people's lives. (KK CL-2)

In these words, one finds a sense of frustration with both the high level of murder and other types of crime in the area and the role of police who come to the neighborhood when such violent crimes take place, but who, according to this imam, do not respect Burmese people or value their lives. As this segment from an interview illustrates, multiple participants in and out of Kyuwe Kyan referred to this neighborhood as an extremely dangerous one. They brought up the regular occurrence of violence there.

One sees how participants both articulate fear of multiple actors simultaneously as they explain how they have to shift their movements to avoid such problems. For women, this produced a particularly constraining environment. One of the participants who was robbed expressed the fear she felt after that incident, noting, "From that time on, I was afraid whenever I heard the sound of motorcycles. I dared not bring my mobile phone or money when I went out. But it is impossible to go out without them [and] so it happened

to me again" (HT FGDw-1). Women participants also recalled their strong sense of fear of police. This pertained to police raids as well as incidents when migrants run into checkpoints. As one woman in Htone Taung mentioned:

> **R1:** In the past when they were caught, they would be released by paying 100. Recently I went out for changing something and I was caught. I was asked to pay 3,000 to 4,000 but was released with 1,000. So I am not happy to go out. If I need something I just try to find it around here. If it is important I go to the big market and sometimes I am not caught. We have to be afraid of going out like that.
> **I1:** So people in the community cannot go freely because they are afraid that they will be caught by the police?
> **R1:** Yes, the situation is like that.
> **I1:** So can women and young women go out of this community?
> **R1:** Those who have documents go out, those who do not have documents do not go out very often, only if there is some important issue, they go out. (HT F2Fw-2)

Given the wages of participants in Mae Sot, the amounts mentioned in this excerpt can equal more than a month's salary. While most participants mention having to pay the police bribes between 100 and 500 baht at standard checkpoints, several did mention such larger demands. A participant in Kyuwe Kyan mentioned that just the day before her two children were returning from work and when police stopped them, they each had to pay 1,500 baht, more than ten days wages. Another participant, a woman in Kyuwe Kyan, mentioned, "I was imprisoned twice for 45 days. I was arrested by police when I went to sell watercress" (KK FGDw-2). Putting these words into context, one understands that migrants are caught between an immigration system structured to keep them flexible, the challenges of surviving as low-wage undocumented laborers, and local actors who simultaneously enforce the law and abuse their power.

When asked to articulate particular areas that generated fear, during the community mapping exercise, participants tended to refer to the entry points and other places along the perimeter of the community. For example, a group of women in Htone Taung discussed recent incidents in their area:

R6: The robbery happened at the entrance road to Mae Sot Hospital. Necklace was robbed at that place. People heard that one girl was shouting for help but they couldn't find the criminals. It happened yesterday.

I: Where was it?

R3: Here. That road is also called Oo Htote Road. That road is the worst. Oo Htote road and the hospital road are the same.

R2: There is no light. My purse was robbed near Kaw Yone last one or two years ago. Money, wallet and mobile phone were robbed. It happened around 2pm.

I: Where is Kaw Yone? Is it located on Oo Htote road?

R4: It is located at the back of Mae Sot Hospital. This place is the front of Mae Sot Hospital, but that area is at the back of the hospital. Here is the road, which is located at the back of the hospital. I was robbed at that corner […]

I: So can people go freely in this area?

R1: It is impossible at night. But it is possible to use this road in the morning. Police do arrest though. All people are afraid of using this road. Parents don't allow their children to go this place. Even they need to use this road, the parents allow them only when adults accompany them.

R3: They've heard that rape cases have happened in the past. They are also afraid to be shot by criminals. (HT FGDw-1)

While both men and women encounter the same constraints, the threat of sexual violence and pressures on women to manage the domestic arena mean they face an added risk when they are robbed or arrested. The mention of rape was a frequent occurrence in women participants' stories of threats to their safety in surrounding areas. Participants mentioned whole areas that are off limits, demarcating hostile spaces according to the assumed presence of police or criminal outsiders. In one case, a participant in Htone Taung pointed to Kyuwe Kyan and explained that women in particular should not go there "because there are so many amphetamine users there" and the participant worried "that they might rape the women. Sometimes, they rob the guys or fight with them too" (HT F2Fw-5).

Several discussed murders and rapes that had taken place over the years—including quite recently—in the neighborhood or nearby. The images conjured up in these narratives are disturbingly detailed and full of meaning. At least three participants discussed one case in particular:

Previously, the married girl was raped and killed at Myay Ni Road. We went and saw [their bodies]. She was a Karen girl. Her husband was also killed. They put the sticks into her vagina by hitting. As they are Burmese, what law will take care of them? They also have no relatives. If their relatives were here, they would open the case for them. We won't feel anything bad if they did like this to a beautiful rich young girl with relatives. But, they did it to the couple that collected plastic for their livelihood. Her husband was disabled and she suffered mental illness sometimes. (KK F2Fw-6).

Other stories participants in both Htone Taung and Kyuwe Kyan told were in a similar level of detail. As this story does, the others also contained moral lessons to imply themes of justice and injustice, victimhood and power, violent life and death, isolation and alienation, legality and illegality, and right and wrong. The moral themes of justice and injustice and legality and illegality underscore migrants' perceptions that they are on their own in Thailand and that they have no recourse to justice. Like the story above, the group of women in Kyuwe Kyan expressed that this sense of impunity is particularly acute when the case involves poorer migrants, such as waste pickers:

R2: Some people don't have shelters or food to eat. So, they collect plastic. They live and eat beside the road. They sleep in any kind of shelter they find. So, they are raped and killed when they meet with criminals. Boys are also robbed and killed.
R3: They take money if they find money.
R1: Then they also harm people.
R2: Previously, a wife was raped and both husband and wife were killed.
I: When did this happen?
R2: It happened recently. That couple collected plastics. They were killed.
R4: They died and they didn't get anything.
I: What do you mean they didn't get anything?
R3: I mean we haven't heard anything about that case; nobody arrested the culprits. (KK FGDw-1)

Stories of rape punctuate such statements as the epitome of violation and erasure of sovereignty in the absolute negation of consent. In this, women's vulnerability comes to symbolize the hardship and marginality of migrants. Participants in Mae Sot evoke an image of an extraordinarily violent world for migrants there, especially those who are undocumented. Subject to arrest and extortion by police, they are also at risk of theft or

worse at the hands of perpetrators they often vaguely refer to as "criminals," often Thai

or Burmese gangs. And one thing participants make clear is their sense that they do not

have access to justice within the Thai legal system. These conversations and narratives,

which invoke an image of violence on almost mythical proportions, convey migrants'

sentiment that they are on their own in Thailand where they are subject to many

predations. Without anybody to look out for them, they must take care of themselves.

Rural sites

The communicative power of violence that I refer to in the previous sub-section

applies in the rural area of Phob Phra as well. Participants in Pyaung Gyi Win/Rim Nam

and KM48 highlight in particular aggressive men from other ethnic groups who prey on

young Burmese women. They also note the predations of corrupt police. The isolation of

Phob Phra weighed heavily in migrant conversations. Fear and accounts of assault,

particularly rape, take on a tone of legend passed through labor camps and shaping the

way migrants' see their work sites and the broader world around them.

As in every other community, residents of KM48 expressed fear of the police.

They describe running away from police when raids take place or just when police come

near their area. There is a police box (small station) in the middle of KM48 so the police

are a regular presence here. As a monk in KM48 noted, it is not always necessary to fear

the local police who have built a relationship with the migrants, especially the community

leaders, over time. This relationship is often transactional, like with a protection racket.

In some cases migrants must pay directly and in others, their landlords or employers

make such payments and add the amount to the cost of rent or deduct from wages. The

real problem with police, one community leader said, is with those who come from the

outside, who are not local. In such cases, the monk explains, "If the authorities from the

other areas come and check here, then migrants have to run and hide. This is one of the

big problems for the migrant workers who are here" (KM48 CL-3). In Pyaung Gyi

Win/Rim Nam, a group of men discussed the dangers they perceive when police come to

their area:

> **I1:** What do people here do when the police come?
> **R4:** All run away.
> **R3:** If they were coming now, we would have to run.
> **R2:** We had to run away even in the funeral service because the forest rangers come. When his [pointing to R3] father passed away, we had to run away during his funeral service.
> **R4:** If we do meet the police, we dare not talk with sign language or stand face to face with them. Sometimes, they shoot at us.
> **R5:** If we think we can escape, we can run. If not, we shouldn't run and stand with our backs to them. If we do, they will shoot.
> **I1:** Have you experienced this?
> **R4:** Yes, one of my friends was arrested when we ran away together.
> **I1:** Do they shoot—
> **R2:** Mostly, they do not shoot. They kick, punch, and hit them when they catch them.
> **R3:** We have to keep our head down and sit when we are arrested.
> **I2:** If you run away, they kick or shoot you. If you do not run away, they do the same. So, why do you run away?
> **R2:** The reason to run is that if arrested, they will send us to Myawaddy and we may be sold to human traffickers or we at least have to give money on that side. Police have contact with them—
> **R3:** If we were deported to 999 gate[1] on the Myanmar side, we would have to pay at least 1,500 baht or 1,700 baht—
> **R4:** If we cannot pay, we will be sold to human traffickers—
> **R5:** In addition, when we come back to this place again it is difficult for us too. We have to give 100 baht to each checkpoint. (KM42 FGDm-2)

This account conveys a clear image of the multi-layered fear migrants in this area have of

police and other local authorities. It is not clear from this discussion if authorities actually

beat or shot at these men, but what is significant here is the extent to which notions about

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[1] The mention of 999 gate here refers to one of the main piers along the Moei River just outside of Mae Sot where Thai police deport Burmese migrants. Previously, the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) managed the gate on the Burmese side, until they were absorbed into the Border Guard Force in 2010. Research has noted frequent abuses of deportees at this gate, with those who cannot pay sometimes subjected to forced labor or sold to traffickers (HRW 2010; HRW 2012).

such violent treatment at the hands of authorities and the powerless position of migrants has been interpellated as an awareness of status and life in Phob Phra. This pervasive narrative of vulnerability is also present as individuals consider possible recourse for traumatic experiences.

Important also to note in the previous excerpt is the mention of trafficking, as it relates to the total abnegation of an individual's agency through the loss of one's freedom of movement and autonomy. It contrasts with the notion of smuggling, which, in referring to a "choice" made by migrants to travel illegally, contains an element of agency.[2] KM48 lies near to well known smuggling and trafficking routes where agents and brokers bring migrants from Myanmar or elsewhere on the border to major urban areas, especially Bangkok. Participants referenced the prevalence of both trafficking and smuggling, expressing fear of brokers who operate in the area. A highly gendered term, when the men in the previous excerpt mention the threat of trafficking upon being deported, they are stressing, in a sense, the possibility of humiliation, loss, and emasculation. For women, on the other hand, the discourse on trafficking often refers to forced sexuality, the subsequent loss of morality, violated bodies, and victimhood. As Adrijasevic (2007) notes, there is something violent about this representation of violence in the way it reproduces certain gendered hierarchies. A leader among migrants in KM48 village told interviewers a story of a girl who had been trafficked to the center of Thailand and then raped by brokers when she was trying to return to the border. He stated that he and others in the area try to…

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[2] The notion of choice here is a complicated one and needs to be considered in a way that takes into consideration the set of constraints on individuals who, under various forms of duress, might be choosing the "least worst" option from among a series of unpleasant possibilities.

> …stop [girls] not to go there by crossing that jungle to Bangkok. But they don't care and some come back crying and we help them for medicine and they go back home. Sometimes we have to rent private cars to sent them back to Myawaddy. Sometimes Thai authorities then arrest the girls and make them to be like their wives. At that time we steal them back, hide them, and sent them to Myawaddy. (KM48 CL-2)

Within the language describing the trauma of trafficking and rape for young girls, there is a disciplinary undertone to the speaker's words in that he emphasizes the warning he issues to young women, their disregard as they leave the safety of the community for the hands of brokers, and the consequences in the form of sexual violence—potentially at the hands of multiple actors, including police. This reinforces the sense of gendered morality affixed to the notion of trafficking in which women who break the rules get raped and therefore are, at least in part, to blame for their own victimhood. With this interpretation in mind, the speaker's words, which note the role he plays in rescuing the women—stealing them like property—imply a sense of saving women not only from traffickers, but from their own ethical errors. At another point in the interview, this leader indicates that from what he sees, issues related to trafficking have decreased in recent years, as has the smuggling of amphetamines through that area. He attributes this to the departure of a particular gang that was engaged in both human and drug trafficking as well as an increase in avenues to gain legal status for migrants. Nevertheless, his words are effective in conveying a sense of the types of violence prevalent in his area, how these impact the men and women there, the informal ways in which he and others responded in an effort to save their fellow migrants, and how these mechanisms come with gendered implications.

As the previous excerpt shows, participants frequently made an effort to articulate the involvement of authorities in trafficking and the sexual abuse of migrant women in order to highlight the inversion of ethics and their place before the law. In a discussion

about safety, some participants contrasted employers and police, illustrating how employers are sometimes patrons who protect migrants against the predations of the police who might wish to arrest or extort them. At such moments in the discussion, participants overlook the fact that employers do not register their workers, keeping them vulnerable to arrest and deportation. This is telling about the migrants' perception of the police, the law, and their place vis-à-vis the state.

When asked how he thought communities should respond in the event of sexual assault against women, a teacher in Rim Nam answered:

> I have seen a lot of cases like that. They have problems with reporting to the police since they do not have any legal documents. And then, they just come here two or three days after the rape, and say they were raped so we don't really know how to help them. At that time, we had no idea how to handle her health. Yes, we can manage to send the case to the authorities but the girl was afraid to see them because she does not have any documents. This is happening everywhere. In the end we have to solve this with our traditional way, going to the village's midwife. Maybe, these girls have to drink a kind of herbal liquid. We are not doing any legal action, but just protecting ourselves. We are so afraid to go closer to the authority's area, let alone take action against them. Because we do not have any legal documents [silent]. (KM42 CL-1)

Such words state clearly the complicated position of people who experience rape in this context as well as those migrants who attempt to provide assistance to them. The precarious state into which migrants entered when they crossed into Thailand, both in terms of government policies and the everyday work of local actors, leaves migrants like the speaker and the women in his story in a space of limited options that is defined by violence. This last excerpt also reflects the ways in which people make certain decisions about care based on an assessment of choices, which is structured by the violence of precarity. In the excerpt above, the teacher implies that the only way to respond to the rape of women in the community is to try to help them get an abortion through "traditional" means.

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More than the police, however, it is primarily criminal gangs, drunk men from other ethnicities, and drug addicts who feature heavily as sources of danger in participants' descriptions of fear and violence. Stories about these actors largely serve to constrain women in their movement and behavior. One community volunteer recounted her own experience witnessing her son being assaulted by "local drug users." They "hit my son with their liquor bottle against his head" (KM48 CW-1). This incident reminded her that, "It's not safe for women and children to go out at night at this area, especially behind the *anamai* [sub-district health office]." A community leader in KM48 reinforced this notion, saying, "Girls cannot go freely, especially at night, even within our village. If we went out, we would have problems. Even we men have problems. A lot of Thai, Burmese, and Myot drunkards." When interviewers asked what the participant thought about migrants in this area going outside the parameters of the village, he answered, "Cannot! Even worse. We would have to face with robbery, cutting of heads and neck" (KM48 CL-1).

While actual experiences with violence differed from compound to compound in KM48, in both the latter and Pyaung Gyi Win/Rim Nam, participants circulated similar archetypes of bad and dangerous characters lurking outside the boundaries of a village or property. From this perspective, staying isolated and even locked in a house or compound appeared to many as an ideal response to avoid such a threat. No interviews or discussions suggested that narratives of fear and danger circulate purposively among migrants in this area, or that this constitutes anything like a deliberate tactic on the part of employers or leaders to control their workers. Yet, it remains the case that the production and reproduction of violent discourse in this way takes a complex context and boils it down to a few pairs of effective dichotomies with gendered implications. Inside a

landlord/employer's compound and outside; safety and danger; community (Burmese) or foreign (Thai, Hmong, or other). Such binaries make it easier for people to understand their circumstances, what constraints lie around them and what tactics are best for protection. But at the same time, so much violence seems to also communicate to many migrants that their best hope to earn an income, keep it, and be safe is to be a good worker and stay in the labor camp.

As in urban settings, both men and women are at risk of violence. But in both settings, I also find that stories serve an especially cautionary role for women. In Htone Taung and Kyuwe Kyan, the threat seems to be rape and murder. In Phob Phra, rape is also a threat, but particularly as a result of trafficking or the behavior of "others" from outside. While these narratives serve to emphasize vulnerability, in all four contexts, there is ambivalence as well, placing some responsibility on women to constrain themselves or face the consequences. The solution, then, at least in part, is for feminized workers (both women and emasculated men) to not stir up trouble. I include men in the category of feminized workers because unspoken in participants' stories is the notion that harsh treatment towards men has the effect of harming their masculinity; for women who experience abuse, these narratives reify their vulnerability. In this sense, communicative violence is implicated in the interpellation of productive gender identities.

5. Interpersonal violence, displacement, and gender identities

While the last section focused primarily on violence participants rendered visible during interviews and focus group discussions, this part deals with a more intimate level that was not discussed in the same terms. It was not the case that participants covered up the issue of domestic violence. Rather, the narratives of the previous section emerged

first and in great detail when co-researchers asked about challenges or problems in the community. It was only when co-researchers asked specifically about the prevalence of domestic violence that participants began to talk about such trends. This is not surprising for at least a couple reasons, one that is linguistic, and the other normative. In terms of language, as discussed in chapter three, the use of the more official or academic term in Burmese for violence "*ajanpet mhu*" by some co-researchers before they tried the more colloquial phrase "*yaigt*," referring to "beating," may have motivated participants to share incidents that stood out to them as grotesque and horrific. Though it appears telling that a pattern emerged in this study in which participants tended not to frame spousal abuse as a form of violence, this dissertation does not delve deep enough into the linguistic nature of the terms to interpret the meaning here.

The second point is related to the first. Domestic violence is, by definition, intimate and private, and is therefore less likely to be spoken of. Scholarly research has covered well the tendency in most places to silence domestic forms of violence (e.g., Das 2008). Co-researchers and other activists interviewed for this study repeatedly noted that this is the case on the border as well. That said, intimate violence appears as communicative in this context in its own way, more in the form of gendered moralities that both serve an explanatory role in making sense of displacement as well as a prescriptive function, guiding men and women in particular ways in order for them to get by in this challenging space.

Reflecting this dynamic, qualitative analysis reveals a set of four salient themes that emerge from the interview and focus group discussion data about interpersonal violence. These are: (1) identifying links between precarity and violence at home; (2) discourse about gender identities as a way of explaining intimate partner violence; (3)

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gendered morality as explanatory of displacement; and (4) discourse reflecting the everyday level of brutal violence. I find that across all four of these analytical categories are important moral messages that imply participants' ideas about how the violence around them or in their households communicates certain tactics for how best to negotiate the difficult circumstances of displacement. That is, through accounts of and explanations for violence, migrants articulate certain gendered moral guides for how they can make do in this precarious context.

(1) Identifying links between precarity and violence at home

Most common among participants' interpretations of intimate partner violence were references to how precarious labor and living conditions constitute an environment in which interpersonal violence erupts more easily. In the words of a woman in Kyuwe Kyan, "If they have work, they are fine. But if they don't have work, at that time there is a conflict between husband and wife and they beat each other" (KK F2Fw-1).

Framing intimate partner violence around migrants' insecure circumstances adds a layer of understanding to how precarity impacts individuals and households. Participants in all four sites invoked images of couples arguing because of a lack of sufficient resources for the family's survival. Such accounts are structured around certain gendered roles that generalize and caricaturize migrant identities, as the following example shows:

> Some husbands do not give enough money to their family. For instance, their household expense will cost 200 baht but they give their wives only 100 baht. So, their wives are unhappy and then they put the blame to their husbands. After that, problem grows bigger and bigger. If the wives can't find the money to support their family, the situation is getting worse. They borrow money from the others without letting their husbands know. As a consequence, they have to pay a lot of debt. Even I do not let my husband know how much I borrow from other people. If I have 1,000 baht [in debt], I told him that I have 700 baht in debt. This is because I do not want to give him a burden to repay debt. […] Sometimes,

creditors arrive at their home when they get back from work. At that time, husbands know the real amount of debt. Then, problems happen. (HT F2Fw-3)

To this participant, violence stems from an untenable situation at home. Implicit here, however, is the notion that husbands are the primary earners and that wives manage the finances. Both fall prey to a context in which wages do not amount to enough for the couple or the family to survive; the man does not earn enough and the woman cannot spread the income thin enough to cover expenses, incurring debt. Keeping the borrowing and the debt secret here reflects a reluctance to make financial problems known and also a desire to maintain the image of a competent partner. Thus, the burden to reproduce a perception of stability in an environment where stability is impossible falls onto women in this situation. To the extent that migrant households are single-earner, that this earner is a man, and that women often fulfill the role of managing the family's finances, this explanation of how violence arises also reveals the pressure on such women. Reflecting different needs, choices, and likely different gender ideologies, in many cases participants describe situations where partners both find work, where there is not a similar notion that households must be male-earner only. However, even in such cases, participants explain that violence can happen when men place dual pressures on women to earn income alongside them and to play the primary role in household management and care.

Also ubiquitous in participants' accounts of how economic and social conditions relate to intimate partner violence is men's dependency on alcohol. Alcohol featured in interviews and focus group discussions as a primary trigger for violence at home. Often noted together with these accounts of drinking is the mention of how wasteful men spent hard-earned money on whiskey and beer instead of the family. In Pyaung Gyi Win/Rim

Nam, a 40-year-old woman explained why violence takes place in households in her camp:

> I will tell you why. They get 100 baht per day. If they drink one bottle, it costs sixty baht. If they drink a half bottle, it costs thirty and the cost for food is forty baht. So, both expenditures are seventy baht and nothing is left for the family. These are the common problems happening here. (KM42 F2Fw-2)

Participants considered drinking to be a common response for men to the hardship they experience. They noticed that when the harvest season ends in Phob Phra and work dries up, drinking and abuse increase. "When there are many jobs here," a community leader in KM48 said, "there is no problem. When there are no jobs, the problems start, men will drink. If husbands drink and there is no income and no savings, the wives start blaming the men" (KM48 CL-2). The narrative here of a drunk, abusive, and wasteful man is imbued with expectations of masculinity met and unmet. Men are failing in their role of earning income, but they are behaving in a masculine way by being aggressive. When community workers in Htone Taung agree that "most of the domestic violence is caused by business; if the women can make money like men, it can dispel the domestic violence" (HT CW-1), they are espousing an idea for an improved situation in which both adults in a household enter the workforce. In the border space, this means becoming flexible labor. Thus, at times, those individuals proposing solutions to intimate partner violence sometimes take as inevitable migrant precarity just as they often take as inherent the traits and roles of men and women.

(2) Discourse about gender identities in accounts of intimate partner violence

As the previous section begins to suggest, migrants' accounts about intimate partner violence and solutions to that violence are intimately tied to discourse about gendered notions of what it means to be a man and woman migrant. At the same time,

discourse about gendered identities is shaped by the context of structural violence in which migrants find themselves. Above, participants made reference to a seemingly fixed set of relationships between gender and certain roles or behavioral traits. Here, I show how participants' narratives associate the challenges of life in border space, the demands on laborers to produce constantly for low wages, and moralized notions men and women. For a participant in Htone Taung:

> If everything is fine, the married life is prosperous. If there is a business problem, the conflict between the married couple happens. Wives totally depend on their husbands and when their husbands can't fulfill the basic needs of the family, the problems are happening (HT F2Fw-1).

The language of fulfillment of a family's basic needs here derives from the participant's assumption that women are dependent on men for income and that, therefore, men have a particular duty. In reality, laborers face a number of instances in which they might not receive pay. Workers are laid off, employers do not always pay employees, workers strike and forego pay, and the harvest and planting season ends. And yet, it is possible for others to interpret the end result as unfulfilled responsibilities.

Men participating in a focus group discussion in Pyaung Gyi Win/Rim Nam considered a story about a man in another site who does not meet standards of masculinity. "He doesn't live like a breadwinner," they said, "He depends on his wife and does whatever his wife assigns him to do. He is always drunk. Therefore, she beat him" (KM42 FGDm-2). The common roles of aggression and violence are reversed here as the woman in the couple physically assaults her husband who is a drunk, who presumably does not earn enough income or any at all, and who is dependent on his wife, instead of the other way around. Being passive (to his wife) and his lack of income seem together to portray the man in this excerpt as feminine, a point underscored by the action of abuse

the wife committed against him. Other components to the "bad/weak/unreasonable" man

include:

> **Men's focus group discussion: Htone Taung**
> He gets married and he doesn't do any job. He spends his wife's income. He doesn't do any household chores. He doesn't take care of his children. His wife has to do household chores after she gets back from work. He also beats his wife after drinking alcohol. (HT FGDm-2)

> **Men's focus group discussion: Pyaung Gyi Win/Rim Nam**
> The husband wastes all of the earnings by drinking alcohol. There is no saving in their families. (KM42 FGDm-2)

> **In-depth interview (woman): Kyuwe Kyan**
> They told their wives that doing household chores are the wives' responsibilities and working to support the family is their responsibility.They assign them to fill the tank for taking a shower when they come back from work. Although they love their wives, they order their wives to do household chores with power. They are the breadwinners of the families and their wives have to fulfill the responsibilities of wives. (KK F2Fw-3)

These excerpts convey both what these caricaturized men are lacking in terms of

masculinity as well as what the ideal is. Important points here are that men should be

good earners and respectful. If they cannot fulfill their role of earning, at least they need

to help out around the house. Thus, good men are fair and willing to share duties. Taking

a part in childcare and household chores does not affect their masculinity, as long as they

are also earning sufficient income. In Kyuwe Kyan, a 22-year old woman contrasts the

image of a bad/weak/unreasonable man with the idea of a dutiful and appropriate woman:

"I think the women play an important role in reducing the conflicts. As wives, they have

to do household chores and fulfill the responsibilities of wives" (KK F2Fw-3).

The point here is that migrants often seem to frame violence between partners or

the way to prevent that violence in a way that refers to some idea of fixed gender roles.

But, while this may or may not be surprising, these notions of gender cannot be untangled

from the social and economic reality in which migrants find themselves. Thus, I suggest

here that these accounts of genders as fixed to identities and responsibilities are sites

where the insecurity, injustice, and inequality of the border context is displaced as

migrants project a hardship they do not deserve onto themselves as men and women

striving impossibly toward some goal of "tradition."

(3) Gendered morality in a context of displacement

In addition to guiding migrants toward behavioral changes through reference to

gendered identities and hierarchies, participants also used notions of gender as a

metaphor to convey important principles about the individual and the collective in a

context of displacement and liminality to make sense and explain their context. These

moments took place in descriptions of dispute resolution as well as participants'

explanations for why gendered violence happens.

The head of a migrant social welfare organization in Mae Sot elucidates the

relationship between gender and a sense of tradition, loss, reassembly, and change in his

analysis of migrant conditions and his explanation of why intimate partner violence is

especially prevalent on the border. In terms of his understanding of how interpersonal

violence intersects with why migrants come to Thailand, he explains:

> Why are people poor? For example, why can't a [Burmese] family stay in their
> house while others can? Because we have no food to eat. What does the father do?
> Drink alcohol. Hitting, beating up others in the family. Mother has to go out to
> work. I will tell workers, "Why must you become slaves in another people's
> country? This is slavery. Doing the work for others. The work that they do not
> want to do. These things happened because there must be a criminal behind it.
> You guys must cross the border to come here because there are criminals.

In terms of intimate partner violence, he then highlights five reasons. First, he points to

the trend of family separation that comes with migration and displacement, men and

women leaving their families behind, entering new relationships without mentioning their

pasts, and then turning on each other when they become aware that they have violated

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certain mores ("You are not virgin!?" "You are not virgin either and you are a father of how many children already?"). Second, the transient life style of Burmese migrants in Thailand leads to promiscuity and conflict. Women get in and out of relationships too easily:

> Some of them have family or relationships not even in their own village [in Myanmar] but just in another factory in Mae Sot. Stay with a man for one month […] No parents around them to watch over. So they live as they like and then she moves to another factory.

In this example, men get jealous and conflict between ex-partners, current partners, and the "promiscuous woman" ensues. The third point, related to the first two, deals with the contentious dynamics of second or third marriages and dysfunctional stepfamilies. A fourth reason underscores increased alcohol consumption and gambling as a source of domestic violence. Men return home drunk in the evening, having spent most of the family's money on alcohol only to find that their wives blew the rest on the lottery. The result: conflict and occasional violence. Finally, the head of this organization points to the pressure irregular employment places on the family:

> Construction workers and farmers, unlike factory workers, do not have work all the time. Then they do not have money and wives complain, "I want to have money. Other people go to morning market, Sunday market, Wednesday market but I cannot go. Why don't I have money?" Then the wife says, "Why don't you look for another job?" Husband said, "No I only want to work with my current employer. Now there is no job for four, five days so just wait." "No I can't wait," said the wife, and then domestic violence happens.

Within his short analysis of Burmese displacement and these five reasons for intimate partner violence, the speaker moves from a narrative of displacement linked to corrupt and abusive leaders—the criminals he mentions—to a loss of tradition and the destruction of a social fabric built on kin networks, to the pressures on the family generated by insecurity and the financial challenge in which many migrants find

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themselves when working in Thailand. Throughout all these points, which are politically nuanced and include both structural as well as micro-level explanations for violence, the speaker emphasizes certain views of masculinity and femininity. The effect is to offer a gendered lens on displacement and migrants' struggles for survival in border zones. In his analysis, the use of gender serves as a trope for talking about change, loss, and destruction. It thus lies at the heart of both explanations for current conditions and theories for how migrants must behave to survive those conditions. As authorities and migrants performatively assert certain gendered identities through this discourse, the intersection of gender with messages about tradition, community, and loss bears implications for how migrants make meaning out of their experiences and forge distinct subjectivities in this border space.

(4) Discourse on everyday brutality

A final significant theme in the discourse on violence is the extent to which it sometimes seemed to fold into the everyday lives of participants; that is it did not stand out as an exceptional moment. This is not to say that participants were not significantly affected by violence—far from it. But, as participants explained, violence happens all around them to the extent that they are not surprised by it, have come to expect it, and have found ways to navigate it in the same way they manage other challenges of life. This is certainly the case with the structural violence of everyday encounters as it related to migrants' living situation and access to basic services. Excerpts in previous sections reflect the extent to which migrants have come to anticipate acts of violence from authorities and often employers as well. Living in close quarters, some participants also seemed quite familiar with the regularity of domestic conflicts, and they, especially women, incorporated this aspect of their lives into their relationships with each other. As

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I show in this section, participants' discourse reflecting the everyday nature of this violence demonstrates their development of tactics to get by within a particular set of opportunities and constraints.

In the Htone Taung neighborhood, a 38-year old woman noted that violence perpetrated by men against women in couples is common. When asked if she was aware of intimate partner violence, she answered:

> Yes, it happens. They beat their wives during the conflicts. But they have to save their children's face so they reunite after quarreling. If they decide to divorce, they know their children will face trouble. There is some quarreling that happens in this community but within a few minutes, the husband and wife reunite. As husband and wife, they can't resent and hate each other. (HT F2Fw-1)

Such a response serves as an exemplar among the many different references to domestic violence. This is because the participant mentions intimate partner violence but within the same account, notes how spouses return together almost immediately out of consideration for their children. While the welfare of children is often on the minds of individuals stuck in an abusive relationship, migrants in this border space must contemplate the challenges of a separated family in an especially precarious environment, which often tends to narrow their set of choices. Women participants commented that they coach and support each other on how to respond to violence in their household. Some participants encouraged their fellow community members to leave abusive relationships, while others tailored their informal counseling to the survivor's socio-economic status. For example, "We asked her 'can you divorce him? If not, don't leave your home.' We told her like that because she could not divorce him" (KM48 F2Fw-6). Another participant explained that she tried to help some women stay together "because they can have food for only one day after they have worked for one day. If they don't go to work and don't get money, they will suffer more" (HT F2Fw-3). Only if the situation became too serious, involving

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grievous bodily injury or a threat of death would some participants be willing to support the idea of separation.

The response to that violence fits directly into their consideration of the options they have available to them. As a 40-year-old woman in Htone Taung put it, "Don't fight. Don't argue. Don't find cause to hate one another. We need live together in someone else's country" (HT F2Fw-7). In this space of violence, one of the safest options is to stick together, sometimes at the expense of an individual's wellbeing. This, however, means women subverting to some extent their bodily sovereignty in exchange for household or communal order.

Feeling unprotected by the formal justice system and aware of frequent occurrences of interpersonal violence in their labor camp, a group of women from Pyaung Gyi Win/Rim Nam illustrate the way that violence begets more violence in this space. When asked how other migrants respond to interpersonal violence around them, they engaged in a lively back and forth, mixing seriousness and humor:

> **R1:** We will just shout at each other not to do this or to do that.
> **R2:** If it is getting serious, we will make a call as we have many mobile phones here. We tell them [the offender] that we will report it to the border patrol police.[3] [Everybody talking at the same time]
> **R1:** I am getting tired of beating people around here.
> **R2:** Last time a man burned a house down because he was mad at his wife. We tied him up in front of her house.
> **R1:** He kept on calling me "mom" and I asked him to shut up. I don't know how he untied himself. I really wanted to kill him.
> [everybody laughs]
> **R3:** We all beat him and threatened him to put him in the fire.

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[3] When one of the participants mentions the border patrol police above, she is actually referring to the house of a Thai man who works with the border patrol police (*Tor Chor Dor*) and whose property lies adjacent to Pyaung Gyi Win. Participants identified him as a power broker who took care of security in the area from time to time.

R1: We kicked him out of the village. But one of his relative begged us and said he would take responsibility so we let him back in. Even if you beat them, only your hand will get sore…just like beating a dog, they never listen. (KM42 FGDw-1)

This conversation relates to three key points. First, it depicts a violent scene in which bystanders to intimate partner violence reacted with their own violence by beating and tying up the offender. In most cases, participants note they will only respond if household violence disrupts community life. Second, the conversation reflects some link between acts of violence, the response to that violence, and participants' perception of their labor camp as community. One woman, quoted above, explains that they expelled the offender from "the village;" and by village she is referring to the Pyaung Gyi Win compound where migrants live and work for the landowner. This raises the question of how such resonating acts of violence contribute to the constitution or perception of precarious worker space as a community place. Finally, this excerpt serves as an important example of agency in which migrants—especially women migrants—often portrayed as powerless demonstrate their will to act, and do so according to their own methods, albeit violent ones. All this suggests an imbrication of violence on multiple levels with the forms of sociality on which migrants rely to get by and make order.

6. Mythico-histories and gendered memories of order

In the case of Burmese migrant labor camps and neighborhoods on the border, there is no one narrative about home or Thailand. Nevertheless, through the heterogeneity of experiences and recollections, certain salient themes emerge to communicate migrants' conflicting gendered perceptions of community, displacement, and order. The focus on difference here, as opposed to homogeneity, underscores the diverse and constantly shifting context.

During peer interviews, co-researchers did not ask participants to recall their lives or experiences in Myanmar. Nevertheless, it was not uncommon for participants to refer to Myanmar in a variety of ways, including to compare between their homes and life in Thailand, or to share personal observations or beliefs, as the following excerpt from a woman in Htone Taung shows:

> R: Can't I talk about my experience in my village? My experience about violence.
> I: You can.
> R: There was a couple, they were both single. They are cousins but they love each other so much and finally she got pregnant. The girl lives in Yangon but came for a visit to our village where the boy lives. Then they liked each other and met each other everyday in the rice fields and finally the girl got pregnant. The boy didn't take any responsibility for the girl. The girl committed to God and delivered a baby boy looking exactly like his father. The girl sued the boy and was able to put him in jail […] If the boy married the girl, his brothers and sisters said they would cut him out of his inheritance. "Don't marry her. Stay with us, all your brothers and sisters together." He obeyed his eldest brother's wish so he caused trouble to this girl. […] They are my relatives and I witnessed this violence with my eyes. I heard if this kind of case happened here people just kill him, in Thailand. If you ruin a girl you will be killed. (HT F2Fw-8)

This narrative, like many that participants told in the course of interviews or group discussions, is rich with imagery and allegory, and it serves two important functions. First, the participant stresses two aspects of a social system migrants often express they do not have in Thailand: kinship networks and inheritance. Many participants refer to sibling, parental, and extended familial relations as a primary component of governance, not only but especially in rural Myanmar. The speaker implies a mechanism of control and hierarchy whereby elders exert power over others and bear responsibility to ensure obedience and respect among all for the rules, customs, and laws of society. Some migrants note that the absence of kinship is linked to the possession of a freedom from tradition, which allows for people to relate to one another without the watchful eye of family or community. In many migrant narratives, they portray this freedom negatively;

as something that inevitably gets women—and sometimes men—into trouble. However, in the memory shared above, kinship networks did not stop an unmarried pair of cousins from becoming involved sexually with one another or the girl from getting pregnant. Rather the participant suggests that the obedience of the boy to his siblings caused a problem for the now pregnant girl. Nevertheless, the function of this network as a firm but intimate level of order-making is abundantly clear.

A second function of the narrative is in the comparison between Myanmar and Thailand. The participant explains that the methods for dealing with this violence in Myanmar—family interventions and a lawsuit that puts the boy in jail—are different from the severe way the boy would have been dealt with in migrant communities in Thailand without access to the justice system that migrants had in Myanmar. Saying the boy would be killed in Thailand may be hyperbolic (most accounts of problem solving do not end up with murder, though some do end with a mob-like attack on the perpetrator), but it serves to underscore an element of lawlessness in the perception of migrants in Thailand. Thus, the image of informal capital punishment in Thailand reflects the communicative power of violence. In fact, the whole story is a metaphor for violence in multiple forms. The speaker points especially to the violence of abandonment as the supreme act of injustice and suffering in the story, though this act lies in contrast to another image of violence, that of a lawless killing of the perpetrator. The comparison here is important because it illustrates an ambivalence that is fundamental to the narratives of many participants in this study, between a perceived change to tradition that grants more independence to young women and a complete loss of rules that allows for vigilante justice and revenge. Indeed, other participants highlighted this contrast, one reflecting on a hypothetical victim of rape, "Although we want to help her, we can't help

her here in Thailand. If she were in Myanmar, we could do something" (KM42 FGDm-2).

The speaker from the longer excerpt above leaves us with the image of an abandoned pregnant Burmese woman in both Myanmar and Thailand since she leaves open the possibility that such an act could occur in both places. This implies that the speaker considers how certain gender dynamics may not change between Myanmar and Thailand; men still run away and women can still be abandoned. However, the contrast between justice manifested as legal in Myanmar and as a revenge killing in Thailand tells us that the context in which abandonment takes place has shifted. Instead of abandonment as a result of familial power and justice in the courts, we find both the boy and the girl abandoned by order and law. While the speaker victimizes the girl in this story, she also sanctifies her decision to become a nun and "give herself to God"; this act of good in response to sin lies opposed to the act of violence committed by the boy in response to the same sin. Establishing this sense of moral and immoral reactions to improprieties, the speaker implies that justice is done for violence committed in both Thailand and Myanmar, via the courts in one case and a mob in the second.

Moreover, the image of inheritance in this story is not only a thing that siblings can withhold from the younger brother, but a metaphor for home and ownership in a traditional sense that, as noted above, is starkly missing for Burmese migrants in Thailand. All this indicates a perceived displacement of the source of suffering and gender inequality from the realm of tradition to the space of the border and its dynamics of uncertainty and flexible labor. Thus, in this sense, the speaker uses the past and the present to build a narrative of memory that appears to reflect on current conditions through a lens of gendered morality (Malkki 1995).

Comparing this participant's memory with that of others, a pattern emerges around a series of binaries such as good versus bad, moral versus immoral, and order versus disorder. Below I take the themes that emerged in the story above and consider a set of excerpts from four participants, two women and two men, discussing order and justice in Myanmar and Thailand. I find that through comparison, the two male speakers have a different way from the female speakers of integrating gender into their points about governance and lawlessness.

The first segment comes from a Burmese lawyer working on migrant rights in Mae Sot. He recalls a rape that took place in his hometown of Mawlamyine when he was still a student before leaving for Thailand.

Segment 1

R: When I was there, I saw one rape case. As much as I remember. The woman was more than eighteen already. She was about twenty-one. So that girl was mute […] One day in April during *Thingyan* [New Year water festival] a drunk man who was an officer got into the house of the mute woman's older brother who is also an officer. Went to visit. The officer went with his other friends, too, but he was the only one stayed afterward. When the rest went to across the road and were having fun, suddenly a screaming voice was heard and then people ran to see and saw that the officer was on the top of the girl. When his *longyi* and her clothes were tested, the result was rape.

T: Can you say what kind of officer?

R: To tell the truth he was the legal officer. He was the secretary of legal office staff. And at that time, I was a student of law […] I was working in that legal office too. Police came and arrested that little man. The little woman was sent to the hospital and they got evidence. After that, the man was sued in court and all evidence showed that it was rape. I saw what was going on—he was called to talk in front of the judge, other people had to give testimony. This case happened in the section I was living in and was dealt with in the legal office where I was working […] After the court process, he was jailed for 3 years or 7 years…I don't remember…It is totally different compared to here.

I: That's what I want to ask you actually—

R: Yes, so the differences between here and there is: this is not our own land so it is easier for offenders to avoid [justice]. There [Myanmar] they cannot avoid. The house of the offender is known so even if he is not at home, he must come back. He cannot avoid it. There, we have section leaders who take close responsibility. Here we do not have such a thing. Not only section leaders but also *Hseh Ain Moo*. So control is more systematic. There, they have parents for both sides. Not

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only parents but also brothers and sisters. So you are in the frame of rules. So, anyway, here there is freedom and that freedom allows people to commit crime. And I think the crime can be more. (BLC).

While not a witness to the incident, this participant explains his proximity to the case. The offender was his senior colleague as was the brother of the victim. It is hard to imagine how this crime could not have torn through the legal office where the participant worked at the time, disrupting relationships and inspiring self-reflection. The participant mentions that he attended the trial and observed justice in operation, though he does not recall the length of the sentence for his colleague. Yet, the woman the legal officer raped remains in the background of this story. She is doubly mute, presented only as a woman unable to speak who is raped; her wellbeing and survival after the incident is unheard and invisible. The story is clearly less about her and more about what was done to her, the rape and the rapist taking center stage in the memory at the expense of the survivor.

The story renders the act of rape communicative. An act of aggression during *Thingyan*, a holiday known for a kind of controlled disorder when "routine codes of deference to authority are suspended temporarily" (Philp and Mercer 2002: 1,594), the rape is metaphor for the crimes that happen in non-legal spaces. Like the act of abandonment in the first narrative, the rape in this story is the pivot upon which the story turns to make a comparison between Myanmar and Thailand. In response to such a crime in Myanmar, the victim goes to the hospital, medical staff and authorities are concerned with the evidence, which is later presented at court, and the offender faces the full weight of the law. Additionally, the speaker refers to the attachment of individuals to a place as well as the social and kin networks that function to make order in Myanmar, what he calls "the frame of rules." In Myanmar, a rapist cannot escape because he is known—that is, he is not alien, and people recognize him in terms of where he works and lives and

who his relatives are. A rapist is caught first and foremost by his inability to escape his fixed place in society and community. However, in Thailand, rape may occur at any time, not only during the New Year holiday, because for migrants, the border space appears to be a space always outside the law. And in Thailand, when it comes to the Burmese population, offenders can get away, disappear over the border or elsewhere with nobody able to accurately identify or apprehend him. This is because it is possible to remain unknown. To be detached from one's networks and unaccountable to one's parents or relatives constitutes a kind of freedom, as the speaker suggests, but it is a negative freedom to get away with horrible crimes. As another participant put it, "in Burma people stay in their communities where authorities are assigned from the township to the section levels. So things are firmer. Here nothing is firm" (UOHMPP).

Like the story of the two cousins at the beginning of this section, the speaker uses memory here—this time of a rape and how it was dealt with—to make contrast between life in Myanmar and migrants' conditions in Thailand. And in a similar fashion, the speaker drives the point home through binary, a useful literary tool: order opposes disorder and familiarity contrasts with anonymity, the world of the alien in a foreign land. Such contrast reflects the use of memory to bolster the portrayal of the Thailand-Myanmar border space as lawless and in need of order. Though he is recalling life in Myanmar, his story calls for greater governance on the border, and it does so not only through the use of references to law and social networks, but through a certain construction of gender as well. At the center of the binary is the nameless, voiceless victim who can be raped in either Thailand or Myanmar, just like she can be abandoned. In this sense, this story is told in a way that denies agency to women but subjects them to

the violence of dislocation and the ensuing disorder, reinforcing the role of "woman" as a symbol of both suffering and the need for order and community structures.

A second quote comes from one of the co-researchers. Though it is less in the form of a story, it describes the practice of dispute resolution in the speaker's home town in the suburbs of Yangon:

Segment 2
I: So I wanted to ask you a little bit like…um…how did people deal with GBV problems in your neighborhood?
R: In my section I saw disputes between couples. Then their neighbors would scold them. If they didn't stop, the section leadership would come and talk to them; solve the problem for them. Sometimes they came and just said "Hey, will you guys stop or not?" then the conflict ended. The section leader has power. When they would arrive at the section office, both the wife and husband would be asked what happened. After they would hear, then they [leaders] would point to each of them and say, "You don't do this again. You don't do that again. If you do it again, next time it will be worse for you." The couple would have to obey. They couldn't talk back. Then they [leaders] would make them pay a fine and sign a promissory note and then [they would be] allowed to go.
I: Is that method the same as the method you see used in Mae Sot migrant communities?
R: Not the same because there it is our own country, our own people, so things are a little bit better. Here, it is not our country; it is not our village, not our people, not our environment so it is worse here in my view. Back there, people show care to each other more. Back there, when something happens and related authorities come, they have power. So just the presence of those authorities makes the situation calm. Here, [people] don't care about anyone. "I will do what I want to do." I mean there, people were afraid of each other. […] [Here], they can do whatever. I think it is because the Burmese people do not have access to law yet. Because in Myanmar, if a murder case happens, for example, the legal process will start and move on according to the law. If the same thing happened in Thailand among Thai people, the process would be the same. But if Burmese people are killed [in Thailand], there is no law for them. The worst thing is that Burmese women are abused by Burmese as well as Thai men. So, women are more vulnerable. If there are no rules, no action taken, it will just become like *a kot m'shi de jam p'yang p'dang* [whatever can happen if there is no frame]. For example a mat needs to have an edge. If the mat does not have an edge around it what will happen? So, law is a frame for our behavior. Law controls people's heart and desires. This is my view. (MM)

Like the first story, this co-researcher's recollection of dispute resolution in Yangon emphasizes order, power, and community. He refers to section leaders as respected

individuals who can bring calm and peace to social conflict. His account does not convey an overly generous image of leaders as he mentions dispute resolution tactics that include intimidation. Though he explains that the methods he remembers are not the same as what he has seen in Mae Sot, in fact the technique of scolding parties to a conflict, making them sign promissory notes, and demanding compensation appears similar to what mediators and migrants expressed in the previous sections of this chapter. The difference, he states clearly, is the sense of ownership involved with this resolution process in Myanmar. He uses the word "care" twice in this segment, at first to refer to a network of social support, a strong sense of community, and fear. Then, three sentences later, the speaker highlights the opposite—individualism—among migrants in Thailand in an alien environment. Central to the difference between dispute resolution in Myanmar and in Thailand, suggests the participant, is the presence or absence of the law. Like the first story here, rule of law serves as a frame binding people together in a sense of order and community, the border to the mat that keeps the weave from fraying.

Less explicit, but implied here is that the technique for solving problems on the local level in Myanmar is not perfect but it is necessary for the sense of order it brings to people. Such a recollection and comparison with conditions in Thailand serves to underscore the extent to which this co-researcher emphasizes order as a priority above all else, even at the expense of the quality of dispute resolution mechanisms. This implies the co-researcher's belief that order and a strong presence of the law in a place is the key to building a sense of community and the ability to successfully address intimate partner violence there. However, the wellbeing of the couple in the story, including the safety of one or both of them, fades to the background as dispute resolution ceases to refer only to one strategy to deal with gendered violence and becomes primarily a reflection of order

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or a lack thereof in Thailand. Gender comes back into the discussion toward the end of

the excerpt, but it is only to lament the way in which the lack of order leaves women

doubly vulnerable to Burmese and Thai men; they remain perpetual victims of

lawlessness.

A third set of recollections comes from a co-researcher who works for a migrant

worker's association. She describes how she remembers people in her village in Waw

township, Bago district, dealing with gendered violence.

Segment 3
R: Traditionally, in my village, and this also applies to many places in Burma, but I
will talk about my village only. In the village, relating to GBV, this kind of thing
is not something people take seriously. Even when we go up to the village head,
the village head never takes it seriously. When fighting happened between
husband and wife, people normally put blame on the women and say that is
because his wife is groaning (*pwa si, pwa si*) [mimicking the sound of whining]
so it is understandable that her husband would hit her. Yes that kind of thing. If
women are harassed, verbally or physically, again people blame the women
saying that is because she does not behave well so it of course can happen to her.
[…] Next one is a big problem. For example, the woman just stays home and
sleeps in the night. The man who likes her comes and takes her against her will
and if she screams at that time to get help, people will again blame her. When
women get all the blame by people around them for anything like that, we cannot
say they will report to the village head because, in fact, they do not even dare to
inform their own relatives. […]
T: You said earlier when GBV cases occurred, people went to the village head, what
would the village head do?
R: How the village head solves the problem is *ngwe mya t'ya naing* [more money
wins in the law]. If one side gives the village head a bribe that case will disappear
by itself. Those who make a report are weak so they do not dare to report often.
She goes to report for the first time, second time, and if the village head does not
do anything for her, she gives up like that. If the offender goes and gives money
to the village [head] then that case is finished. (ZMTBLC)

The co-researcher's memory of dispute resolution in her hometown differs greatly from

the previous narrative. While the previous excerpt above also includes some critique of

the method, the speaker ultimately places his faith in the Burmese system of community

justice and law. This third segment, on the other hand, is cynical, showing a complete

lack of faith in the village level justice system. Her words reflect a mistrust of order on the local level in her village, and she believes her critiques may be generalized to all of Myanmar/Burma.

Not only are village heads easily bought, she says, they are biased as well. As the vast majority of village tract and village administrators in Myanmar are men with few documented exceptions (KWO 2010; MDR and Kempel 2012), this co-researcher perceives that they tend to side with male parties when adjudicating conflicts in a couple or between men and women. The speaker extends her critique to the broader village population, referring generally to "people" and not just the village chief or head. She describes an environment where women are regularly blamed for the abuse they experience both inside and outside the family. This includes acts of rape perpetrated by men in the community. The image this co-researcher conjures of rape in her village— which appears here as a hypothetical—is not so different from what the speaker in segment 1 recalled from his time in Mawlamyine. But instead of using the story of the rape to make commentary on the law in a way that bypasses the voice of the woman in the story, this third narrative uses the example of rape to comment on the pressures women face in their villages and the way they are likely to silence themselves as a result, instead of seeking help or redress.

This points to an important difference between the first and second excerpts and the third segment above, which is that this co-researcher uses a gendered lens to articulate her critique of local governance in Myanmar, while the previous narratives leave gender in the background. In so doing, she reaches a different conclusion than the others. Given her observation that village administrators are corrupt and chauvinistic, she expresses no confidence in the system of order-making on the local level; to her it represents an unfair

and unjust system. Perhaps because of this, she does not construct a binary between this system and the conditions for migrants in Thailand.

The fourth and final set of memories in this section comes from another co-researcher in reference to the same question about dispute resolution and gendered violence in her hometown of Loikaw, Karenni state.

Segment 4 (NO)
I: Ok so, one of the things that I am interested in—if you have memories about this from the time you were living in Loikaw—about how people were dealing with gender based violence?
R: [laughs] Ah, mostly people don't really think that this is a problem, so they think that this is the internal affair of the family so they don't really interrupt that, and then they just blame to the couple, so I will say they don't really solve those kinds of problems, they just let it be.
I: I mean would you say there's no intervention at all?
R: No--but if they really are killing each other or throwing things—threatening to their lives, then people will interrupt—they will just shout or grab the people, that's it—"stop the violence!"
I: Alright alright....umm, what about other types of GBV—
R: Like sexual—in my personal opinion, I think that sexual abuse is happening but they don't really express the experience…cos I think many people experience these kinds of abuse by their close relatives in the family or in their…cousin or like uncle, like that…so for them they don't really dare to speak up because they will think that they will destroy the family or relative's dignity so they just keep quiet and if...maybe strangers do the sexual abuse to the another stranger, so it can be—some cases pop up to the court, yeah.
I: A lot of other people talked about mediation by like uh *Yakwa Lugyi* [laughs]. But from what you've heard or seen in Loikaw, you don't—it's not so common?
R: But for the mediation for like...because we—I grew up in Loikaw, so maybe a little bit different from the rural area. In the rural area, they have so many ah...like culture...that...especially in our Karenni culture, if you were raped, many people would blame you...because you...like...the way you wear or behave is not really good—that's why you was raped, something like that. And then normally, especially in the villages, the village leader will try to call both persons, the perpetrator and the survivor together and then agree on like the kind of mediation and then finally both have to pay compensation for the village because they thought that this is...how can I say...in Burmese we call *sey kyor deh*—you tried to damage the village's dignity so you have to pay for that, you have to clean that.

In this participant's set of recollections, the work of section leaders or village administrators in Loikaw, Myanmar, to resolve disputes related to gendered violence is

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rare compared to the more common tendency to silence such abuses. Explaining this, the speaker brings greater awareness to the many obstacles survivors of abuse must overcome just to report an incident. This contrasts with the first two narratives in which reporting abuse is taken as a given; something that happens automatically. Like the third segment, this excerpt focuses on both an insufficient system to address gendered violence and a broader criticism of the public's stigmatization of women for the abuses they experience. The speaker stresses that in her town, it is more important to protect the collective unit of the family over the individual needs or rights of any member, particularly the women. Similarly, she notes that village heads are more likely to focus on the wellbeing of the village's image over that of a victim of abuse or a couple in conflict. For this reason, she remembers, authorities demand *sey kyor deh* (to clean) to restore the village's dignity. Focusing on the broader stigma affixed to survivors of gendered violence and flawed techniques used for dispute resolution, this co-researcher does not stress a comparison between an orderly life in Myanmar and the lawlessness of Thailand. This is not to say she considers governance in Thailand to be fair for Burmese migrants. Rather, it suggests a use of memory to focus more on the challenges of securing justice, dignity, and safety for women who have experienced abuse. Also, the work of memory here reifies the concept of culture as a negative force on women (see also chapter seven).

Among these four quotes dealing with dispute resolution and gendered violence, some more closely resemble stories conjured through memory than others. The first segment follows a narrative structure with sequenced events that convey meaning (Riessman 2008: 3), while the other three waver between memories of a social system punctuated with illustrative hypothetical information or dialogue on the one hand, and specific recollections, on the other. Nevertheless, an account of a social system or mode

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of ordering recalled from observations made earlier in one's life is still a form of memory that is important to consider. Whether recalling a specific story or engaging in dialogue, all of these participants build a picture of their hometown and the mechanisms there for addressing conflict and violence, particularly gendered violence against women.

While it is important not to take these images and extrapolate from them to form broad statements of culture and life in Myanmar or of a homogenous "migrant viewpoint," such memories must be analyzed for what they are: constructions of the past made from perceptions of the present to selectively form moral statements. The first two speak more to the notion that societies need laws, firm governance, and biopolitical control to maintain peace and order. It is only through such a system that people can prevent or adequately respond to violence against women. The second two segments differ as they yoke order to gender discrimination, offering a statement that stability and order are contingent on equal access to rights and services for women and men.

Although these accounts do not tell us what life is like for the majority of Burmese people, they inform us how some Burmese migrants perceive their homeland, which is significant in its own right. Further, they reveal the process of discursive selection each speaker goes through to piece together a narrative or a description, choosing certain subjects to highlight or words to use and ignoring or rejecting others. Malkki (1995: 245) reminds us that such acts of subversion and privileging of voice and narrative is a fundamental part of producing and telling mythico-histories.

> The making of cosmological, mythico-historical order necessitates the destruction and subversion, encompassment and ingestion, mutation and revaluation of previously existing or antagonistic orders…Thus, neither disparate, antagonistic orders nor dissenting "others" are ever passive in this process. In so far as these orders are spun in an oppositional context, in struggle, making history inevitably implies the unmaking of somebody else's history. Such processes are…agonistic.

In this way, the second two excerpts above serve as contrast for the first two, spotlighting the ways the first speakers omitted gender and the agency of the female survivors of abuse. Thus, Burmese migrants rely on their present lived experiences in border space to selectively construct a homeland of Myanmar/Burma, which in turn helps make sense of their life in Thailand. It is in the selection of what to recall and what to leave out that one finds conflicting ideas about order, collectivity, and the gendered self in displacement.

7. Conclusion

Though the interwoven themes of gender and production have received much scholarly attention over the years, in this chapter I have subjected them to a rather indirect analysis. That is, this chapter has centered on how the relations of precarious work, challenges of displacement, and practices of gender intersect in a mutually constitutive fashion in the homes and collective spaces for Burmese migrants as opposed to the factory floor or the field. Migrants' narratives about violence outside their workplaces provide an important angle for considering how the dynamics of production and dispossession permeate all aspects of social life for migrants.

From this perspective, it is possible to see that gender takes on a productive force through the telling and retelling of stories of violence. At the same time, these stories produce certain notions of gender that are contingent with the experience of displacement and refracted through the power of collective memory. This is true both for forms of violence that take on a high level of visibility as spectralized accounts, as well as those that migrants utter in language shrouded by moral opprobrium and guidance. The difference between visible and unspoken violence is important in that it reflects those narratives that migrants select to convey the hostility of their experience in Thailand and

those that are not to be mentioned in detail, but that contribute to certain gendered tropes.

Through an analysis of both the spectacularized and the barely spoken, I have shown in this chapter how discourse on violence serves as an ordering mechanism for migrants. Stories of aggressive police and sexual assaults provide a fear of mistreatment that reminds migrants, especially women, that it is better to remain safely in factory dormitories, worker compounds, or homes than to be out and on one's own. Through the symbolic weight given to violence against women, stories reinforce the need for gendered orders within migrant collectivities as they underscore a degree of exclusion, injustice, and lawlessness that define the border space. Women who restrict their movement and remain safe from rape are, in effect, protecting the whole community since their violation at the hands of an outsider would be an annihilation of the sovereignty of the whole collective. It is in this sense that at the same time gender is useful for explaining and making sense of a violent social space, it is also the case that such explanatory narratives reproduce certain ideas of femininity and masculinity in a context of precarious labor.

Looking at gender and production in this way is important because it reveals some of the nuanced aspects of the injustices migrants experience within the dynamics of capital accumulation. The challenging work and living conditions in which migrants live manifests itself not only in low or nonexistent wages, physical abuse, arrest, or deportation, but also in the way that migrants can, at times, project the violence of such experiences that are so endemic to border zones like Mae Sot and Phob Phra onto the identities and relationships of women and men. At the same time, the discursive narrative analysis of this chapter sheds light on some of the gendered subtleties of migrant political subjectivity, which inform how people interpret and respond to the myriad technologies of governance deployed in border economic zones.

Chapter 7—Interpreting intervention: bio-welfare and migrant agency in the response to gender-based violence

1. Introduction

On the first day of the "Core Concepts of Gender Based Violence" workshop[1]—part of a training package aimed at educating and empowering Burmese women in Mae Sot—the lights go down and participants move their chairs closer to a portable screen for a short film. When the facilitators—a Burmese and a Thai woman—switch on the projector, images of women's faces appear moving across the screen bounded within an equal sign. The participants see that they are watching a foreign film that does not take place on the border or in the region. Actress Eva Mendez is shown looking intently at a group of black women and, in the background, her voice says, "Power and control are the reason rape happens in the first place." Another voice narrates as global statistics about violence against women flash across the screen.[2]

"At least one in three women have been beaten," the voice continues, "coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in their lifetime." Different snapshots of women of color in Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East are synchronized with the words "beaten," "coerced into sex," and "abused" which pulse into view. At this point, former US Ambassador at large for global women's issues Melanne Verveer appears, and calls violence against women "regrettably a global epidemic." The rest of the film shows how

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[1] This is a training offered by the International Rescue Committee that usually pairs with modules on helping skills. Facilitators distinguish between sex and gender, and they discuss power, the roots of gender based violence, the needs of those who experience violence, and basic helping skills. This training was offered to co-researchers working on the collaborative action research project as a first set of modules that was followed by detailed discussions on how to implement the methods the group had decided to use for the study.
[2] The film is in English. Though most participants spoke English, there were also interpreters helping convey the meaning of the film in Burmese.

the International Rescue Committee responds to this malady in Sierra Leone through "social empowerment," activities aimed at personalized care for survivors as well as changing men's attitudes and instilling in them a sense of responsibility.

When the film is over and facilitators ask for feedback and reflections, participants share four key themes that they noticed: the importance of empowerment, the link between violence and the abuse of power, the need to struggle for equal rights, and the prevalence of gender-based violence in many countries. As a co-facilitator for the following training module focused on research methods, I sit in the back of the room and wonder what other aspects of the film these training participants absorbed, perhaps subconsciously. What about the racialized associations between gender violence and "Third World" women of color? How about the use of medical language to discuss this violence? And, finally, did participants take note of the emphasis on individual care and the absence of a broader feminist discourse of change? These questions suggest that there are myriad discursive relations of power that are unarticulated but which nonetheless circulate in the training room and have an impact that is sometimes tangible and sometimes not. In this example, such messages transmit via the media of this film, but they also disseminate via other forms of media as well as language, suggestive affects, or subliminal structures of feeling. Power in this sense takes on the form of what Avery Gorden (2008: xvi) calls a "haunting" quality; that is, the process by which "a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known." It is the "ideological substance" of intervention discourse (Lindorfer 2009: 355).

Questions about the interaction of border-located knowledges and those situated in or generated by transnational institutions are important to ask for what they tell us

about migrants' agency amidst the performative reproduction of unequal power relations. As chapter three asserted, the circulation of situated knowledge about displacement and gendered violence on the Thailand-Myanmar border through the practice of humanitarian assessment and intervention reflects the power to privilege certain identities and voices while subjugating others. In this chapter, I take the conversation a step further to look at how humanitarian work contributes to the construction of specific border subjectivities, that is, influences people's senses of self and collectivity, and choices about their opportunities and constraints. Specifically, I ask how migrants interpret and make meaning out of these humanitarian interventions, and ultimately what the social impact or cost of these interventions might be. To what extent do humanitarian interventions support or fragment critical aspects of community, or social, economic, and political networks and women's rights movements fighting for equality?

Such questions are crucial when considering how migrants make sense of their experience of displacement. These contexts are often not only spaces where you see the power of capital's creative destruction, but they are also the targets of international agencies concerned with the welfare of refugees. My role was a participant-observer in this circulation of discourse, knowledge, and logics related to migrants and the nature of violence in their neighborhoods and labor camps. Throughout the period of the assessment, I was often filled with a sense of unease, wondering what types of relations or identities we were peddling unwittingly. Indeed, it was sitting with this discomfort that guided me to analytically interrogate "how that which appears absent can indeed be a seething presence" (Gordon 2008: 16). Though this is an effort that is likely to yield more questions than answers, if, as Gordon suggests, this can contribute to "a more complex

understanding of the generative structures and moving parts of historically embedded social formations" (p. 19), it may be a worthwhile endeavor.

In this chapter, I start by looking at the political nature of the circulation of global discourses about women's rights and their translation and application in these local contexts. I then situate this discussion within a brief review of how activists established local Burmese women's organizations in Mae Sot with differing goals, methodologies, and affiliations. These two sections help frame this chapter's analysis, which is built on qualitative data from key informant interviews I did with activists working for local Burmese and international NGOs and the peer interviews co-researchers conducted with participants in the collaborative assessment. I structure the analysis in two parts, putting the narratives of NGO representatives about how they aim to effect social change toward gender justice into dialogue with migrants' views of NGO discourse as well as their own tactics for dealing with violence. In my interpretation, I find important elements in the analysis that shed light on how the demands of export production systems (such as the garment industry) relate to and interact with the language of local and international groups staging interventions to protect the wellbeing of migrants. This approach spotlights some of the ways migrants not only respond to the discursive frameworks of transnational civil society, but also appropriate or manipulate particular elements as they develop their own tactics to safeguard their survival and their wellbeing as individuals and collectivities.

2. Transnational rights discourse, gender, and the complexity of translation

As activists everywhere make decisions about the use of international human rights language, they must navigate the discourse's contentious terrain (Finnegan,

Saltsman, and White 2010). At the center of scholarly critiques are not so much the actual words that make up the body of human rights laws (which span the political, civil, social, economic, and cultural), but the emphasis on an individualized code of ethics and its assumption as universal, a move scholars critique as simultaneously political and de-politicizing (Hemmet 2011; Moyn 2010; Mutua 2001).[3] To Hardt and Negri (2000: 35-36), this dynamic is not benign; rather the "moral instruments" of humanitarian and human rights work represent "powerful pacific weapons" for the spreading of empire. Critics point to a human rights and humanitarian industry that increasingly focuses on crisis and not structural oppression, the rights of the individual and not the collective, and on suffering and the restoration of a kind of basic universal humanity (bio-welfare) instead of the political (Fassin 2012; Finnegan, Saltsman, and White 2010). Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi (2004) show that state reforms to better incorporate a foundation of human rights have been selective, privileging market-oriented changes over those that address gender and social justice.

2.1 Women's rights without feminism? Individual welfare as gender justice

Engagement with rights discourse is a key dilemma for feminist organizers working to advocate for gender justice. Cornwall and Molyneux (2006: 1180)) highlight four particular challenges to feminist engagement with the project of universal human rights: (1) reconciling diverse feminist approaches which stem from multiple systems of laws and social and religious practices and norms with the liberalist notion of universal rights and systems; (2) the dissonance between the elite language and policy space of

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[3] This paradoxical notion reflects the critique that human rights discourse is political in the sense that it is often aligned with the foreign policy strategies of the "West" at the same time some of the dominant international human rights groups or voices de-emphasize the importance of collective political struggle, in the form of labor movements, for example.

rights and the realities of those women for whom rights is at most an abstract concept; (3) the institutionalization of rights within the work of the state which incorporates doctrines of women's rights but can then also appropriate such language for its own agendas, which might leave many more women marginalized and still subject to patriarchal systems of subjugation; and (4) the proliferation of only certain rights for women under the banner of empowerment but which in reality focus on the inclusion of women and not their entitlement to equality.

While much work has been done in the last four decades to bring women's rights to the fore of debates on development and human rights, the results—even when resembling victories for movements—have not always furthered feminist agendas, especially from an intersectionality perspective (Crenshaw 1991). Murdock (2003) refers to a "move around feminism" in the gender and development discourse to describe this contradiction. As dozens of development and humanitarian aid agencies adopted a "rights-based" approach, explicitly incorporating the language of women's rights, many have eschewed identification with feminism (Cornwall and Molyneux 2006; see also Hyndman and de Alwis 2003). This turn away from, or around, feminism has also manifested itself in a shift in the uses and meanings of "women's empowerment," a term popularized in the 1980s and 1990s with roots in feminist radical organizing, subaltern struggles against class-race-gender intersecting domination, and Freire's (2000) idea of conscientization (*conscientização*), or critical consciousness-raising.[4] Batliwala (2007)

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[4] The UN Population Fund (UNFPA) identifies five components to "women's empowerment": "women's self-worth; their right to have and to determine choices; their right to have access to opportunities and resources; their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home; and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally" (UN Population Information Network ND).

laments the depoliticization of this concept as the emphasis in governmental and non-governmental development work was increasingly on the growth of women's economic participation—e.g., saving and lending. Sen and Mukherjee (2014: 190) criticize the Millenium Development Goals for focusing too narrowly on access to education in its articulation of women's empowerment, missing the other key interdependent dimensions such as "sexual, reproductive, economic including unpaid care, political, legal—and multiple freedoms including…from threats of violence." They advocate for a return to a politically-charged rights-based approach for gender justice.

Thus, currently, rather than dismantling patriarchal structures, one finds an increasing emphasis on the "smart economics" of investing in women; that is, development projects that target women as ideal recipients of aid (Buvinic and King 2007; Wilson 2011).[5] Pittman (2014) underscores how this constitutes backtracking on earlier development goals related to gender equality, a result of a stronger voice for conservatism in the form of religious and market-oriented forces in today's policy spaces. In this sense, more conservative voices seem to present their own latent goals that underlie their manifest discourse (Merton 1957). This selective engagement with women's rights leads to the promotion of a particular package of values centered on independence, self-reliance, and the right to contribute economically to society (Wilson 2011). Elias (2010) explains that this focus reproduces the unequal burden of social reproduction on women by glossing over their role in hierarchies of capital.

This emphasis on an individualistic morality seeps into discourse about gender violence as well. Susskind (2008) explains this as a lack of intersectionality in the work

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[5] For an example of this type of approach see Kristof and WuDunn (2009).

of international NGOs who are often so focused on individual encounters with violence that they do not see or prioritize the myriad other injustices their target population may be facing; injustices that might be collective and linked to class, race, or ethnicity. As Ticktin (2011) asserts, humanitarianism is vigilant about restoring humanity and saving lives, but not about challenging the social, economic, or political systems that threaten those lives. Gendered violence becomes less about gender and more about violence against suffering bodies, with the "woman as victim" trope. Explaining this further, Ticktin (2011: 256) writes, "'Epidemics' of rape are not placed in the context of gendered regimes of property for instance, or of inheritance; they are not approached as possible effects of structural adjustment or imperialist policies which play out in gendered ways." The tendency to medicalize and individualize violence against women dovetails with particular global responses focused on women's bio-welfare as suffering subjects, reflecting a move from their invisible position as poor women to hypervisible victims of rape and other gendered violence (Crosby and Lykes 2011). This supports a politics of the moral as paramount and as justification for intervention (Fassin 2011; Moyn 2010).

2.2 Humanitarianism and hierarchies of difference

At the core of this logic of rights-based moral intervention are important assumptions about need and difference between those who allocate and those who receive assistance (Ticktin 2011; Harrell-Bond 2002). Those in need of protection are imagined as "precarious" or vulnerable beings (Butler 2004). Critical scholarship agrees that none are portrayed as more at risk than women in contexts of displacement and conflict (Dogra 2011; Ticktin 2011; Wilson 2011). Ong (2011) describes the tendency for Western NGOs to conceive of their mission in abolitionist terms as they set out to free migrant women from slave-like conditions. While not disputing the urgency of many displacement and

migration contexts, there is, nevertheless, an overtly racialized tone to this conception of

"Third World" women as the target of intervention; suffering bodies waiting for

"empowerment" so they can exercise their agency (Abu-Lughod 2013; Razack 1995;

Syed and Ali 2011; Ticktin 2014; Wilson 2011). Such an approach bears strong

resemblance to colonial discourses of the vocation to save through civilizing regimes of

order (Scully 2011; Stoler 2010; Syed and Ali 2011). Mutua (2001) writes of key

metaphors of saviors, victims, and savages embedded in human rights discourse. It

should be noted that the humanitarian industry is well aware of some of these dilemmas

and that they have instituted many reforms in discourse and practice (Kennedy 2012).[6]

This has led to an emphasis on agency and empowerment instead of victimhood.

Nevertheless, as I have shown above, this still reproduces certain hierarchical discourses

because instead of interrogating the circulation of power they offer universalizing

constructs, which adhere to some individuals and not others (Hodgson 2011a). While

some argue that this may only be a first step for NGOs working for gender justice who

get caught in a process of triage, identifying the most urgent need first, this nevertheless

renders irrelevant any co-existing situated activism that might seek to challenge broader

structural inequality in these locales (Ong 2011; Wilson 2011). In this sense, movements

of political struggle for justice operating in the "Global South" are often not in line with

the rights-based humanitarian focus on saving lives.

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[6] Certainly, the humanitarian industry of the 1990s is not the same as it is today, even as many
fundamentals noted above remain. UN agencies, governments, and NGOs have called for greater
accountability as well as the reframing of the relationship between human rights and humanitarianism, on
the one hand, and situated populations, on the other, who adhere to alternative moral and ideological
frameworks (Polastro 2014; Young and Maxwell 2013). The industry has also responded to critiques of its
victimization of "Third World" populations; hence the rise of a discourse of agency and participation. This
in part has led to the advancement of the Sphere principles, which among other objectives, aim to integrate
ideas of local empowerment into humanitarian work (Kennedy 2012).

2.3 Womens' rights and the uses of culture

Within the work of women's protection, empowerment, and humanitarian intervention, there is a set of binaries that structure the discourse of rights and that is crucial to highlight. These binaries are between rights and culture on the one hand and between repression and liberation on the other (Avishai et al. 2013). A notion of culture as fixed temporally and spatially features heavily in this discourse about women's rights and gender-based violence, primarily as a negative force (Hodgson 2011a). Part of this has to do with the link drawn between a concept of culture and forms of gender-based violence in the language of international law (Merry 2006; Susskind 2008).[7] International agencies provide a definition of gender-based violence that includes "harmful traditional practices" (IASC 2005; OHCHR ND; WHO 2012), a reference to "particular forms of violence against women and girls which are defended on the basis of tradition, culture, religion or superstition by some community members" (GAD Network). These include "early and forced marriage, female genital cutting…female feticide/sex selection, 'honor' killings, widow immolation or burning…caste-based discrimination and violence, [and] Western women's eating disorders and cosmetic plastic surgery" (Merry 2009: 127). While this language attacks culture in its manifestation as a weapon used by those defending abusive practices, it also supports the framing of culture as a static obstacle to the liberation of "Third World" women.

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[7] Article 2(f) of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) explains that state parties must "take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices which constitute discrimination against women." Article 5(a) requires state parties "to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women." In addition the CEDAW Committee General Recommendation Three describes prejudice against women "owing to socio-cultural factors" and urges "all States parties effectively to adopt education and public information programs, which will help eliminate prejudices and current practices."

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It is also in this sense that culture as a negative force elicits the humanitarian intervention of NGOs or states and their militaries to usher in liberation, though this is also often an excuse for economic or geopolitical agendas (Abu-Lughod 2013). "Humanitarian organizations," write Abramowitz and Moran (2012: 123), "carry into" their work "preconceived notions about the meaning of culture as a determinant of human behaviors" which require "certain forms of intervention." Within this paradigm, culture is indirectly a cause for women's suffering, a complex and yet reified set of beliefs that can be overcome by the introduction of rights. Rights, then, "are weapons that push against intractable culture" to relieve this suffering and liberate women who will be free to realize their own potential as social actors (Levitt and Merry 2011: 81).[8]

Reliance on this particular socially constructed notion of culture leads to particular representations of gender and gender justice. Relationally, within the practice of program implementation, Razack (1995: 50) describes asylum proceedings in Canada as problematic in the sense that, based on her study, interviewers tended to favor those women asylum seekers who "presented themselves as victims of dysfunctional, exceptionally patriarchal cultures and states." Others describe aid strategies which target women as "ideal" and "trustworthy" recipients of development assistance because of both their deficit of power as women in "traditional" societies and their "natural" instinct to care for their families (Escobar 1995; Wilson 2011). Though working in the name of women's empowerment through livelihood strategies, there is a risk that aid agencies will

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[8] Many scholars focus on the issue of female genital cutting (also referred to as Female Genital Mutilation) as a paradigmatic example of this tension between rights and culture (Abusharaf 2009; Hodgson 2011b; Merry 2009). Without defending the practice, Hodgson's analysis (2011b) shows how the zealot-like focus in the "West" on the issue of female genital cutting in Africa as a cultural crime against women detracts from the work of Maasai women in Tanzania who prioritized struggles against poverty and the political marginality of women in their communities.

reproduce hierarchical notions of men as prodigal and women as efficient and caring.

These ideas are rooted in unequal power relations as they heap domestic responsibilities

on women. As Wilson (2011: 318) puts it:

> These well documented gender disparities in the use of income and resources stem from specific patriarchal structures, institutions and ideologies, notably the gendered divisions of labour and responsibility, and the various constructions of 'good' mothers/daughters/daughters-in-law as those who 'make sacrifices' for their families.

The image of vulnerable women in need of help to realize their agency conveys and

reproduces "traditional" structures of domination that deny women all forms of power. In

this sense, gendered assumptions yoked to concepts of culture such as these are ever

present but all too often invisible to the very actors who implement the policies and

practices. This is part of how gender is produced and also produces subjectivities on an

everyday basis in ways that are linked to racialized worldviews (Butler 1990). It also

relates to a broader process of structural violence in Farmer's (2004) framing of the term

in that it implies a process of erasure wherein colonial legacies and economic exploitation

are invisible behind more prominent cultural explanations (see also chapter four).

2.4 Gendered assumptions and the ambivalence of stigma

As the examples above suggest, the construction and performative reproduction of

certain notions of culture and gender bear implications for the lives of women and men in

contexts of poverty and displacement— the objects of these discourses and interventions.

Razack's (1995) example of asylum seekers' interactions with interviewers reflects this

impact, as they receive status based on their ability to reflect state actors' gendered and

racialized assumptions. Other scholars point to the way the assumptions of aid workers

influence their decisions about the trustworthiness and need of refugees who rely on

services in camp contexts and urban areas (Harrell-Bond 2002; Voutira and Harrell-Bond 1995; Olivius 2014).

Beyond the material consequences of these belief-sets, it is important to ask how such conceptions impact service users' sense of themselves and of the bureaucracies that allocate assistance. That is, how do the people who are the targets of aid organizations' assistance programs interpret the concepts of gender and culture that are directed at them and that are implicitly or explicitly part of the intervention; concepts that might convey a sense of backwardness and/or victimhood? This question suggests the need to distinguish between the manifest functions of organizations and movements—primary, explicit agendas—and the unintended consequences of their unspoken or subconscious interests, what Merton called latent functions (Crothers 1998; Merton 1936).

The work of scholars on ambivalence and stigma is relevant here as it reflects a focus on the internal conflicts of individuals who see themselves through the eyes of a society that has labeled them as deviant. Stigma refers to the discrepancy between one's self image and a devalued image of oneself projected by social categories (Blaine 2000; Goffman 1963). Stigmatization refers to the construction of categories and their linkage to stereotypes (Link and Phelan 2001). Goffman stressed the extent to which social stigma creates great uncertainty in the lives of individuals who fall within those devalued social categories. This uncertainty or inner conflict relates to Merton and Barber's (1976: 6) concept of ambivalence as a dilemma of "incompatible normative expectations" linked to one's role or status in society. This includes the anomic sense of social values or aspirations up to which one is not living, and the internal conflict imposed by stigma (R Coser 1966).

Within the field of psychology, links have been drawn between stigma and a number of personal and social problems from mental and physical health issues, to high infant mortality rates, to problems accessing housing and jobs (Allison 1998; Clark et al. 1999; Major and O'Brien 2005). This also includes diminished academic performance and notions of individual and collective moral inferiority (Hirschl et al. 2011; Spencer et al. 1999; Steele and Aronson 1995). As Reutter and colleagues (2009) argue, individual interpretations of stigma attributed to them are diverse, multilayered, and subjective. In a sense, these inquiries risk contributing to the focus on bio-welfare over fixed structural realities. This places the onus of change onto the individual who is problematized to, for example, internalize and/or reject the multiple manifestations and effects of inequality. Humanitarian work has an immense power in identifying certain people as stigmatized and not others because this implies, on a certain level, the acceptance and operationalization of static social structures via constructs that adhere to the person.[9]

But at the same time, research on the effects of stigma mirrors the individual mental and physical manifestations or symptoms associated with discrimination and prejudice. Put into the framework of this chapter, I reflect on stigma and ambivalence in terms of how transnational knowledge production and circulation mark individuals living in situated communities. While both are social scientific concepts that historically have underscored the deviance of individuals, they also point to the racialized and gendered ideas and power relations humanitarian intervention reproduces discursively against which individuals and collectivities may struggle. In some ways this argument echoes literature that analyzes the effects of colonialism. Such works, like Fanon's (1967),

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[9] Personal correspondence with MB Lykes (21 January 2015).

consider how the violence of colonial representation, which reifies historically situated

and complex social forms, can result in forms of internalization and psychological trauma

for the subaltern. Others focus on the transnationality of racialized and gendered

hierarchies, which resonate back and forth between multiple locales, influencing local

perception and also dominant narratives (Magubane 2004). Targets of aid, like subjects of

colonialism, defy, resist, appropriate, and adapt the reifying representations constructed

around and about them.

2.5 Grassroots activism and human rights as a tool for structural change

Just as human rights and humanitarian discourses can have a colonizing effect in

the "Global South," they can also serve as important tools for solidarity building,

mobilization, and advocacy for structural change. In this, the potential for human rights

discourse to resist or subvert social violence resonates with the argument of some

scholars, like Hardt and Negri (2000), who identify the potential for struggle within the

technologies of domination. The particular flexibility of human rights language as a

transnational discourse is crucial to consider because its use and attractiveness to

grassroots activists working for structural change can be part of how those in precarious

circumstances assert alternative pathways to wellbeing and justice, and also because of its

universalization and recognition worldwide.

Concerned with how local actors relate to the international women's rights

movement and effect change within this movement, Sally Merry (2006) offers the term

"vernacularization," which describes the process whereby activists, government officials,

and the heads of NGOs are all involved in constantly adapting and translating

transnational ideas into local vernaculars that are relevant to situated concerns, norms,

and relational systems.[10] The work of translation and adaptation is a messy, ad hoc, and complex process that, says Merry, engages local cultural systems. Merry, as well as other anthropologists writing on this topic, remind readers that culture is far too dynamic and multilayered to be regarded restrictively as either the static force of oppression many regard it as or the guardian of local norms (Hodgson 2011a; Levitt and Merry 2011; Merry 2006). Indeed, just as certain actors defend or condemn violent practices against women as part of cultural traditions that need to be preserved or eradicated, there are activists who rely on cultural concepts in their fight for social justice, including women's rights as it can be an effective and resonant social change strategy for building public support (Pittman 2009). The blending of transnational rights' discourse with cultural knowledge systems suggests neither a prompt rejection nor acceptance of either situated norms or the universalist discourse of transnational human rights institutions. Activists in local contexts are "conveyers, converters, adaptors, transformers, and generators," write Rajaram and Zararia (2009: 479), when it comes to the work of turning transnational rights into local vernaculars. This means reframing the language or the principles in a way that speaks to situated priorities, experiences, and values (Goodale 2007; Levitt and Merry 2011; Speed 2007).

Levitt and Merry (2009) cite the concept of "framing" from social movement literature (e.g., Ryan 1991; Tarrow 2011) to explain decisions regarding whether to use human rights language. While in some cases, organizations rely on the discourse of human rights to appeal to "Global North" donors who privilege such narratives, others

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[10] I use the term "movement" in the singular here with reservations because there are multiple disparate intersecting movements circulating globally for women's rights. My reference here to an "international women's rights movement" is specifically in regards to the organizing work that has been done in the relatively top-down policy space of CEDAW and other supra-national legal instruments.

use the language to unite disparate social movements opposed to "global hegemony" (de Sousa Santos and Rodríguez-Garavito 2005). Perelman and White (2011) work with activists who conceive of human rights work as "political practice" that can open up "generative spaces" for new discourse and debate that challenges the effects of neoliberal globalization by strengthening the social welfare structures in their countries. For these activists, the choice to rely on economic and social rights language stems in part from the norms of "inclusion, equality, participation, and security" which pervade the international covenants (Houtzager and White 2011: 175).

Thus, even as I suggest that the dominant narratives of the transnational human rights movement risk leaving the targets of their interventions feeling stigmatized, I emphasize here the widespread trend of claiming ownership over rights' discourse to offer alternative strategies for change. As Levitt and Merry (2011: 100) write, human rights are "themselves cultural repertoires that are open to adaptation and use by people with a wide variety of cultural backgrounds." And, I would add, a wide variety of political aims.

As the subsequent sections of this chapter show, analysis of gender justice discourse on the Thailand-Myanmar border confirms Merry's assertion that the dialogue between a global rights framework and situated mobilization is not a uniform process. For example, it is possible for local activists to challenge dominant narratives that portray Burmese women as victims waiting for the international community to empower them at the same time they circulate and reproduce some of the fundamental underlying hierarchies of the human rights and humanitarian industries. Ultimately domination, resistance, and alterity are intertwined in the collaborative work of women's protection

on the Thailand-Myanmar border. By looking at the interaction between local struggles for gender justice and transnational narratives of hierarchy it becomes possible to explore the intersection between the performative reproduction of power relations and the possibility of alternative modes of social organization. In the next section I turn to the specific context of Mae Sot and the work of select women's rights organizations.

3. Women's rights organizing in Mae Sot: merging the transnational and the local

While feminist organizing around rights and nationalism in Myanmar goes back at least to the early twentieth century,[11] most of the women's rights organizations working in Mae Sot today started only in the mid to late 1990s, around the same time NGOs—both local and international—began to concentrate in Mae Sot. The few "Global North" scholars who have written on women's rights groups on the Thailand-Myanmar border focused on the close connection between local women's organizing and global women's rights activism, framing this as a transformative moment for the Burmese women's rights movement in exile; as the impetus for Burmese women's gender conscientization (Belak 2002; Harriden 2012; Norsworthy and Ouyporn 2004; O'Kane 2006; Snyder 2011). This includes a narrative that displacement is ambivalent for

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[11] Chie Ikeya (2012) provides an in-depth discussion of the role of women in the leftist and nationalist struggles that took place in colonial Burma in the 1920s and 1930s. This includes groups like the Burmese Women's Association, which advocated for the institutional expansion of women's rights. BWA and other groups, such as the Young Women's Buddhist Association and the Wunthanu Konmaryi Athin (Patriotic Women's Association), were heavily involved in student boycotts and other nationalist activities. As Ikeya points out, even as some of these groups offered feminist critiques of the status quo, they also embraced a role as "supporters" and moral guides for the wider movement and not as leaders. Finally, it is also notable that within Burmese women's organizing during this period, there was a complex relationship with the growing "internationalist" feminist movements. Important "South-South" linkages informed Burmese feminist work, while at the same time the support for an imperial notion of Burmese women's "emancipation" through colonial intervention among many European and American women members of international feminist organizations, such as the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship (IAW) and the International Council of Women (ICW) created some tensions.

Burmese women who "faced new challenges as refugees and migrants with limited legal, social, economic and political rights," but who "were also exposed to new ideas about human rights and gender equality through the media and their interaction with international organizations" (Harriden 2012: 271).

The labeling of this moment as ambivalent is important to highlight as a dynamic in the relationship between transnational organizing and the lives of Burmese women because it suggests conflict; that is, conflict between the idea that displacement is a horrible experience and the notion that only due to displacement have certain forms of mobilization and struggle become possible. A diversity of scholars suggest that it is on this level of internal and collective conflict that one finds the dynamics of and potential for social change and transformation (Butler 1997; Coser 1962; Merton and Barber 1976). But, presenting ambivalence between individuals and extant, fixed, social structures (the functionalist Mertonian use) differs from seeing ambivalence in the relationship between subordination and subjectivity as individuals struggle with the privileging of certain aspects of their identity and the suppression of others amidst racialized and gendered relations of power (as Butler conceives of the term). Harriden's presentation of ambivalence above risks making transnational women's rights work the focal point instead of the complex histories of Burmese women that extend far beyond the temporal and spatial parameters of the border and exile. As such it reflects the power to label certain people as stigmatized and ambivalent and not others, a dynamic at the center of this chapter's analysis. Analysis of women's organizing in Mae Sot, then, must be considered as a partial view situated within the discursive power relations between "Global North" and "Global South" movements.

Thus, analysis here is less concerned with establishing some "official" account of feminist organizing in Mae Sot and more interested in teasing forth some of the ways that discourse about and in this movement reflect tension in the circulation and reproduction of implicit hierarchies. Within the civil society bubble of this town's more than 120 local and international NGOs, according to recent lists, there are 15 that work primarily on women's rights and women's protection.[12] There are an additional six groups with broader objectives, but that do, among other activities, provide services to women who have experienced forms of gender-based violence. This section explores four key factors that led to a convergence between global feminist discourses and local women's organizing in the Thailand-Myanmar borderlands. Embedded in the outline of these factors are excerpts from interviews I conducted with two participants from well-known women's rights groups working in Mae Sot: Social Action for Women and the Burmese Women's Union. These narratives help structure this section by providing examples of these individuals' personal development as activists.

First, Burmese women and men activists fleeing the 1988-89 government crackdowns in what was then Rangoon gathered in Mae Sot along with other locations in Thailand, augmenting existing social movements and resistance in exile. This was especially the case after the fall of Manerplaw in 1995, the capital of the Karen National Union's *Kawthoolei* state where many resistance organizations had been based.

> *In 1988, I fled [Rangoon] and stayed with ABSDF and worked together in the jungle. I served in the area of health, research, and information. I served in the jungle for about 10 years. In those days, I went to ethnic areas such as Shan, Pa-O, Karen and Karenni, Tenasserim Division. There I saw underdeveloped ethnic*

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[12] This includes a list put together in 2009 by the Foundation for Women, a Thai NGO and in 2011 by the International Rescue Committee (list on file with the author). The list does not include refugee camp-based organizations without offices in Mae Sot.

places. I also saw them suffering from civil war. I also saw women and children abused. (AM-SAW)

Among many of those seeking refuge from the 1988 protests in Rangoon (now Yangon) were women activists who were eager to continue the struggle for justice and democracy, but who also saw an opportunity to challenge the relatively patriarchal structure of resistance (O'Kane 2006). O'Kane explains that although many of her respondents recalled a fairly egalitarian student protest movement in the late 1980s in Rangoon, they noted a shift when the same students fled to the highlands to wage armed resistance against the government. Suddenly fellow male cadres expected women who had played leadership roles in various parts of the movement to cook, clean, or work as medics. The role of soldier was not an option for most.

> *For the whole ABSDF, we had two women in leadership roles. Only two women for the whole group. The rest [of the women] were medics and teachers…[or] communication officers.* (BWU)

Second, activists fleeing government persecution in the late 1980s were increasingly joined by those displaced by economic destruction in Myanmar, as discussed in chapter two. This brought a diverse population of Burmese migrants from many parts of Myanmar to and through Mae Sot. From the beginning of their displacement, migrants faced the sorts of violence and exploitation noted in chapter four, creating urgent demand for the organization and mobilization of support networks.

> *When I arrived here [Mae Sot] in 2000 I found that many women were in trouble in this border area. In meeting with Doctor Cynthia,[13] she said many babies were left in her clinic. Women who experience abuse also came to seek help. Unwanted sex workers also came to seek rescue. Doctor Cynthia said she could provide only health services. She asked if [we] could do something?* (SAW)

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[13] Dr. Cynthia Maung to the head of the Mae Tao Clinic, which was founded in 1989 in Mae Sot.

This, along with a drastic rise in abuses faced by those in southeastern Myanmar (as explained in chapter two), led to a number of ad hoc formations among the Burmese population in Mae Sot for worker's rights and solidarity, healthcare, and general protection.

Third, the Burmese refugee crisis became an international issue in 1997-8,[14] although starting in the mid-1980s there were a handful of aid organizations along the Thailand-Myanmar border to provide assistance to the displaced. Aid money flowed into Mae Sot during the early to mid 2000s, much of which was directed toward refugee camps in Thailand which became the best-funded in the world, but also to populations of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in southeastern Myanmar. Most of this money came from the governments of the United States and the European Union (including the UK), and to a lesser extent Japan and Australia. Significant funds and "technical assistance" flowed into Mae Sot starting in 2006 when USAID became the primary donor for projects assisting "Burmese displaced in Thailand."[15] From 2006 through 2014, they have provided approximately 35 million dollars through projects run by international and local NGOs.[16] This source of aid in Mae Sot deserves to be highlighted in particular because this constituted such a major influence in the town's civil society, not only in terms of

[14] This was a product of the Thai government's decision to request the assistance of the international community in registering, monitoring, and supporting the welfare of the growing number of refugees in their territory. In 1998, UNHCR became involved in refugee status determination proceedings and opened field offices. A number of international humanitarian NGOs followed suit.

[15] This pertains to funding to Burmese migrants outside the nine official refugee camps. The camps receive substantially more funding per year than projects targeting migrants received in a decade.

[16] This is an estimate of the allocation of funds for two major projects funded by USAID: "Support to Health, Institution Building, Education and Leadership in Policy Dialogue" (SHIELD) and "Project for Local Empowerment" (PLE). The former project was an approximately 50 million dollar project over nearly six years, while the latter was funded with 40 million dollars for four years. Much of this money was directed towards humanitarian aid for internally displaced people, some toward camp-based assistance, and a substantial amount for projects in Thailand in multiple locations along the border.

funding but also because this large sum of money reflected a source of power to push organizations and projects in certain directions; that is, toward professionalization and partnership with the Thai government. Funding went primarily to groups working on health and education, with additional sums financing projects categorized as advocacy, legal assistance, and women's protection.[17]

Mae Sot is now both a target and a host for its large civil society presence, which divides roughly along the lines of international humanitarian and UN agencies (10%), Thai NGOs and foundations (5 %), and unregistered Burmese organizations (85%). Most of the international agencies work in the camps or with IDPs while Burmese groups are divided by those that operate in Myanmar, those concentrating on migrant issues in Mae Sot, and some that position themselves on both sides of the border. Among the 123 organizations in the town, 70 percent are primarily service groups and 30 percent have primarily an advocacy focus, though there are many organizations that do some of both. Most of the groups engaged in advocacy are working on issues in Myanmar, likely in large part due to the fact that they are mostly unregistered in Thailand. Three of the Thai organizations are advocacy focused.

Finally, the 1990s witnessed the further development of a global women's rights movement, buttressed by action-oriented conferences, such as the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. International laws were also established that helped enshrine women's rights as human rights like the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women in 1993. The 1990s marked a proliferation in women's

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[17] Though this dissertation cannot make this assertion, it is quite possible that this shock to Mae Sot's civil society generated fault lines, especially between those groups who received substantial USAID funds and "technical assistance," expanding their workforce and scope, drastically in some cases, and those who did not—either because they chose not to apply on principle or because USAID did not award them funds.

rights organizing on a global level (Keck and Sikkink 1998). The confluence of activism, attention, and aid has meant that since the 1990s, the growth of Mae Sot's women's rights sector was contemporaneous and interdependent with virtually unceasing waves of involvement from transnational agencies. During this decade and into the 2000s, a Burmese women's rights movement in exile burgeoned in a way that capitalized on these intersecting factors, heavily influenced by multiple discourses linked to transnational feminism, women's rights, resistance, and humanitarianism (O'Kane 2006). Burmese groups formed to both continue the political work of revolution and to order, educate, heal, and protect the thousands of workers gathering in Thailand's border provinces.

The more than 20 groups who run activities on gender justice do work that is familiar to the development and humanitarian sector, including weekly or monthly women's empowerment workshops or dialogues, "capacity building" for relevant Thai government agencies and NGOs on proper care for survivors of abuse, community-wide awareness raising about women's rights, and the management of safe houses and shelters (Freccero and Seelinger 2013). Seven of these groups (including two Thai NGOs) have a strong advocacy focus, though all provide services to women as well. NL from BWU recalls that she attended trainings on empowerment, counseling, gender, women's rights, and domestic violence, eventually becoming a trainer herself. An article by Katherine Norsworthy and Ouyporn Khuankaew (2004) deals with a six-year project run by the International Women's Partnership for Peace and Justice to facilitate workshops for Burmese women on the Thailand-Myanmar border starting in 1997.[18] The authors explain

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[18] This is very likely the same set of trainings mentioned by BWU in that at another point in the interview, NL states, "We had P'Ouayporn who normally teach about gender to come and be a facilitator. Do you know her? P'Ouayporn from IWP."

their workshop's methodological framework as stemming directly from feminist psychology and the Freirian concept of conscientization. The goals of these workshops were to facilitate collaborative analysis, "develop culturally relevant solutions and action plans for social change," and "help participants prepare to take the liberatory workshop methodology back to their home communities" (Norsworthy and Ouyporn 2004: 265-266). Specific strategies in these workshops included highlighting personal strengths, deep listening to one another, and an analysis of gender and violence against Burmese women. Participants determined that such violence results from a "complex web of interconnected systems that work together," including "societal values and belief systems," "religion," "education," "media and business," "legal and law enforcement systems," "government," "Thai system" (i.e., Thai attitudes and behavior towards Burmese women), and "colonialism" (ibid: 273-276).

While most of these groups run their own activities, the border is a relatively small area and it is not uncommon for multiple organizations to conduct projects in the same neighborhoods. These organizations have, over the years, also coordinated in various referral networks, such as an effort in the early 2000s to establish an "Automatic Response Mechanism" (ARM) to respond to the sexual violence of Burmese migrant women, a child protection network, and recently, a GBV referral group, focused on a broader array of violence than the ARM. Some of this networking stems from local organizing efforts, and others are pushed by international NGOs and/or donors. The result is a series of monthly coordination meetings, joint trainings, and flowcharts outlining collaboration. NGO staff must also juggle these efforts with what is often a busy schedule of visitors, including researchers, monitors, and existing or potential donors.

Local organizations vary significantly in size, structure, budget, and the scope of their work. While some groups are made up of only a couple staff members who have other sources of income and who serve primarily as a contact point for their constituencies when they encounter problems, others are top-down organizations with more than a dozen personnel, several hundred-thousand dollar budgets, multiple departments, and thousands of service-users per year. Most Burmese groups, even larger ones, are unregistered. Some rely primarily on international funding, such as private foundations, governments, or individuals (the latter is especially common with shelters and orphanages). Organizations like People's Volunteer Association, mentioned in chapter five, are membership-funded, while some organizations set up certain revenue-producing projects to draw in funding for their political or organizing work. There are also some groups who receive financial support from Thai foundations, though this study did not conduct a formal survey of NGOs' funding streams. Some organizations operate only in Mae Sot, sometimes out of the house of the director, and others are multi-site entities with branches in Mae Sot, refugee camps, other Thai cities, or across the border in Myanmar (in Yangon or towns in or near the country's southeastern highlands). The latter are typically those groups working with the IDP population.

4. Theories of change in Women's NGOs in Mae Sot

Within the crowded civil society space of the border are multiple ideas about how to affect social change. In order to consider the connections between the discourse of some of the activists from local organizations and global messages about gender justice, I analyze "theories of change," a familiar term in the monitoring and evaluation field used to describe organizations' or individuals' conceptual frameworks for how they can

achieve social change (Vogel 2012; for examples or descriptions in the context of gender based violence and women's empowerment, see DFID 2012; Pittman 2014). The emphasis on theory is important here because it illustrates the presence of certain hypotheses, which are in turn based on epistemological and ontological positions, and which underpin the direction of organizational resources (Just Associates 2011).

As chapter three notes, this study includes key informant interviews with representatives from 11 local organizations. Four of these are specifically women's rights organizations, another five are not but have specific women's rights programs or departments, and two groups note that they work on issues related to gender violence from time to time. I review how representatives from these groups whom I interviewed envisage effecting positive change toward gender justice, particularly in terms of reducing violence and empowering women. As the section shows, there is rarely one single theory about change within an organization, especially as, at times, activists voice several goals or visions towards which they work. I try to show the presence of these multilayered and intersectional concepts when they arise in order to illustrate the extent to which activists' narratives interact with broader discourse circulating on the border, especially that of humanitarian intervention, neoliberal governance, and export industries.

Through thematic qualitative analysis of transcripts, I identify 11 strategies to affect change from participants' in-depth interviews reflecting their personal ideas, and sometimes those of their organizations. The interpretive process led me to group these into three categories: (1) Transform problematic institutions; (2) Change norms; and (3) Strengthen/reform the individual (see Table 8 below). In some instances, participants mentioned ideas from two or more of these categories in the same utterance or they

voiced ideas that transgressed the lines of the categories offered. For example, the notion

of engaging with masculinities to prevent gender violence primarily reflects a critique on

societal norms but can also pertain to ways that individuals need to reform themselves

(individual men, in this case). This type of permeability serves as a reminder that these

themes are in no way firm or mutually exclusive, but nevertheless prove useful as

interpretive guides.

Table 8: Theory of change analytical categories

Transforming institutions	Change norms	Strengthen individual
Order making	Dealing with culture	Building confidence
Pursuing strong legal responses	Engaging masculinities	Awareness raising/ knowing rights
Worker solidarity	Change gender roles	Economic independence
Political participation		
Advocate for women's rights		

One of the central features of most writing about theory of change is that the theories are

depicted as linear progressions from a problem to a solution; even in the most complex

analyses this appears to be the case. Different theories may start from the same problem,

take different paths, and then converge on a shared solution. With this in mind, I include

Figure 5 below, in which I extrapolated a pathway from problem to solution, based on

participants' comments. Thus, while the "intervention" line corresponds to specific codes

from the data, all other rows come from my own interpretation. Nevertheless, this

diagram shows how the strategies mentioned in Table 8 are factors of change in this kind

of linear model.

However, as this and the next section show, much is left out by focusing on

change in this way. I argue that haunting these notions of change are a variety of

Figure 5: Pathways of change for gender justice

Elimination of All forms of Discrimination and Violence against Women

Outcomes

- Transform institutional level
  - Accountability
  - Change to power relations
  - End to gender-based discrimination (institutional)

- Changes to social norms
  - VAW is no longer accepted
  - End to gender-based discrimination (social/structural)

- Empowered women
  - Access to education
  - Knowledge of rights
  - Gender solidarity
  - Equitable control over resources
  - Confidence

Interventions

- Order making
- Strengthen rule of law
- Address inequality
- Political participation
- Advocacy for women's rights

- Deal with culture
- Engage masculinities
- Change gender roles

- Building confidence
- Awareness raising/knowing rights
- Economic independence

Barriers

- Institutional obstacles
  - Unequal/discriminatory policies
  - Underrepresented w/in public & private sector
  - Migrant women in "zone of exception"

- "Cultural" problems
  - "Traditional" gender roles
  - Beliefs and social norms

- Unequal control over resources
  - Economically dependent
  - Denied education opportunities
  - Social capital deficit

Problem

Multiple forms of gender violence
(Control over resources, domestic violence, emotional violence, physical & sexual abuse)

Adapted from DFID

narratives that lie in the margins—factors that cannot be quantified—but which nonetheless have an influence on social relations (Gordon 2008). These did not always emerge in key informant interviews, but sometimes only in migrants' perceptions of humanitarian intervention. The level of analysis focusing on theories of change helped me to tease out some of these spectral narratives and assumptions that inform the direction and the impact of humanitarian intervention in Mae Sot.

4.1 Reforming oppressive structures

All but two participants' among the 11 NGO representatives cited the need for broader institutional change in some form or another as a way to achieve gender justice. Though quite a general category, this largely refers to emphasis on reforms to governance and the implementation of policy in ways that would eliminate discrimination and violence against women and create space for their equal participation. During interviews, such messages were directed both at Burmese and Thai society. For some activists, their idea of change was more about achieving gender equality through greater inclusion of women at higher levels of the government and civil society. Others viewed gender justice for migrants as bound up in political, civil, or worker's rights. Together, these ideas suggest a view of gender justice as part of a broader struggle for social change.

4.1.1 Rule of Law

One of the most common ways activists framed the need for structural change was in their call for greater rule of law when it comes to the protection of migrants. As the founder of a women's rights group focused on health explained,

> The husbands are not afraid and they keep treating women badly. If the law protected women more it would be better. If the law that protects the women is similar to the human trafficking law, it will be good. In the community, although they are advocating about "don't harm the woman," but the men are still doing it. The effort is not working well. I think the only one way that women can be protected is the law. (F)

Critical of NGO activities that only raise awareness, F places emphasis on a strengthened rule of law as the way to make change. Speaking to Thailand's Anti-Human Trafficking Act and perhaps the less-often enforced Domestic Violence Act, her words suggest that greater enforcement of these laws would make a significant impact among the migrant households where she works. Implicit here is her analysis of the problem, which, in part,

attributes high rates of gender violence to the extra-legal space in which Burmese migrants find themselves on the border. Several other women's rights activists echoed this statement and called for the full weight of the law to punish perpetrators of gender violence instead of having to rely on the informal mediation tactics mentioned in chapter five. Working toward the same goal, a Burmese lawyer explains how his organization's strategy to achieve reform is to strive for test cases that create legal precedent for guaranteeing rights for migrant women; "If one case is successful, the rest of the cases will be easy," he explained, optimistically.

4.1.2 Order making

There were also a number of activists who focused on the importance of order-making, whether legal or informal (such as the technologies of governance discussed in chapter five). The sense here is that more order among migrants in labor camps and urban neighborhoods would result in a decrease in violence. However, with so many negative encounters with Thai law enforcement (as well as the Burmese government), some activists placed more emphasis on informal networks or the ability of civil society to help make and maintain order. This took a variety of forms, including advocacy for "network[s] with other village or other communit[ies] or maybe a higher level," which would enable greater coordination for better responses to gender violence (NO). This also referred to "making the existing community system more organized. Like Htone Taung which has both Thai and Burmese leaders, having rules set for the people. Giving support to the weaker people. Doing things according to the law" (MM). Thus, even when advocating for informal order-making tactics that are essentially outside the law, as discussed in earlier chapters, the purpose of these is to ensure a law-abiding space, though as chapter five shows these regimes of discipline are not necessarily characterized

by gender equality. A significant aspect of this set of ideas is an expansion of civil society. If NGOs and their services are pervasive, then when "cases occur, the community leader reports to us or sends us a message" (AM) and they know "SAW is here, please contact us, SAW can provide these services" (MM). This perspective resonates with the discussion in previous chapters, in which discourse about technologies of governance reflects some of the ways migrants manage to negotiate a context of displacement defined by exceptional legal space in which they are susceptible to multiple overlapping forms of structural violence.

4.1.3 International human rights

Activists also framed their calls for change in the language of international rights. For the most part, this was in order to advocate for the protection and empowerment of women migrants. For organizations that had a labor rights focus, their staff tended to offer more of an intersectional perspective in which women's rights and worker's rights were linked. Two activists working together explained their method of teaching labor rights, human rights, and gender during a three-day training for men and women factory and farm workers. The gender module dealt with the social construction of gender as a category embedded in cultural and normative beliefs. The longer-term goal for this training, as one of them put it, is, "to establish a worker's organization;" a unified movement of laborers with the strength of a union to contest their exploitation. When I pushed them to explain the specific objectives of the part of their training that dealt with gender, they answered, "not to have gender discrimination…so to let them know that women's rights are also human rights…[and] for workers to be able to demand their full rights from work" (SH & CM). It is clear that this group emphasizes greater knowledge about rights and gender as core to their broader goal of mobilizing a labor movement

among migrant workers, though notably absent is a focus on transforming gender relations and/or sexualities.

On fewer occasions, references to rights meant advocating for institutional changes in Myanmar that would bring the country's laws in line with the principles of international political, civil, social, and economic covenants. For example, one head of a women's rights organization explained how she looked at case studies around the world:

> Myanmar will have to try hard…When I attended the workshop on Human Rights and Constitutions, I saw a lot of things that I want to copy from constitutions to advocate for women's rights. We can see that in other countries, especially European countries such as Norway and Denmark, women are prioritized. Women can enjoy their rights. Women who deliver babies, they have rights to take leave and even if she wants to work, the husband is allowed to get paternity [leave]. Those rights are written in the constitution of other countries. In Myanmar on the other hand, people do not even enjoy basic human rights (AM).

From this excerpt, AM is unambiguously calling for constitutional changes that can bring Myanmar more in line with "Western" countries, particularly those European states with substantial social welfare systems in place. Also included in this type of framework are calls for the greater involvement of women in Myanmar's civil society and opposition political movements:

> For us, we see that women must participate in leadership roles. Must obtain decision-making positions. We work so that women's voices can be heard. So women's voices cannot be left out any longer, because whether they recognized WLB or not, they must invite them for any high-level meeting. Because this women's group [WLB] is founded by all revolutionary women's organizations. So we tried to push for this, when the organizations have meetings or whatever, they must have WLB's participation. They cannot leave us out. (NL)

Though NL appears to speak in a way that universalizes the category of "Burmese women,"[19] this is a significant part of the advocacy platform for groups like BWU and all

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[19] WLB is a coalition of 13 women's organizations, including a number of ethnic groups, but it is noteworthy that there are no Muslim women's groups in this coalition. One cannot assume a universal

the other members of WLB. They regularly refer to UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1889, which relate to women's representation in peace building and the resolution of armed conflict. Focusing on this view of change, common activities include population mobilization (through demonstrations, rallies, and protests), legal advocacy, network building with other organizations, and efforts to supervise or guide informal Burmese community leaders in their handling of gender violence cases.

Despite the fact that some groups seem more interested in institutional change in Myanmar and others in Thailand regarding the rights of women migrants, the common thread in these pathways to gender justice is their targeting of problematic social and political institutions. This type of focus is more likely to include an intersectional perspective and does not make frequent reference to the role of individuals, either as perpetrators or as victims. When excerpts do mention individuals, they are neither the cause nor the solution to the violence. Rather, they are social actors governed by broader forces. Though none of the excerpts above explicitly root their approach in transnational discourse, one can clearly see links to the international women's rights movement in participants' framing of their goals in language that mentions UN Security Council Resolutions or the constitutions of other countries. One also sees parallels to some of the modules in Norsworthy and Ouyporn's trainings (2004) which consider the links between violence, government, and the rule of law, among other factors. This contrasts with excerpts that appear more rooted in immediate needs, such as order or service provision.

women's platform, as evidenced in this case by the currently polarized social environment in Myanmar in which the Muslim population finds itself targeted and discriminated against on multiple levels. This is not to say there can be no advocacy for women's rights as a category, but rather that the differences and hierarchies among the female population of Myanmar according to race, religion, and class must be part of those advocacy discussions.

4.2 Changing norms

Moving to the second column in Figure 5, many activists made reference to the need to change the social and behavioral norms they see as linked to gender-based violence. Like much of the transnational discourse centered on the individual as a cause and solution to violence, participants discussed work that encourages migrants to see themselves and their relationships differently. This included a push for men and women to reframe their ideas of masculinity, femininity, marriage, fatherhood, and motherhood. The theory of change behind this notion is that if migrants can change their conceptions of traditional gender roles and identities, there will be a significant decrease in intimate partner violence in their households. Yet as the analysis shows, participants define and deploy culture and tradition in different ways.

This theory of change is behind many of the NGO programs in Mae Sot and elsewhere along the border, especially those targeting not only women, but men as well. One of the objectives for workshops is to engage men with the aim of breaking down the power and control endemic in dominant notions of masculinity. While there are different training methods to accomplish this goal, a common strategy is to bring men and women together and discuss the difference between sex and gender, discrimination, and the importance of an equitable division of labor in the family and workplace. No participant discussed a more in-depth approach than this, or follow-up, though one organization has organized men's groups for these types of workshops. One activist expounded, "Men must do more. We must encourage men who have the will to work for women's rights…Only when men understand, men can control each other" (AM). Another activist expressed the need for ongoing work "to educate or work together with men to change

their behavior in many different ways so that way maybe a few years later, they might

not—like [may]be the conflict between the family [members] can be decreased" (NO).

Activists point out that the topic of sex and gender is extremely contentious every time

they try to include men in the training. "They can never accept it," one activist said, "Any

training on domestic violence or gender—some men are very masculine" (NL). Despite

few gauging this approach as successful, those working with local NGOs on the border—

men and women alike—tend to agree that they need to keep pushing men to change their

behavior.

Many NGO activities in and around Mae Sot also seek to model good behavior to

migrants. This includes projects with names like "Happy Families" (Sim et al. 2014),

which consist of a series of workshops, trainings, dramatizations, and other collective

activities to convey good parenting and relationship skills. In the case of the Happy

Families project, these activities come with multiple rounds of interviews to monitor

participants' progress and evaluate the project's impact. As one staff member from a

worker's rights association put it, "We have to show a lot of good examples. Then they

will say 'aww…they are doing this and living like this and so they are happy.' We give

them the knowledge this way" (ZMT).

The assumption here is that normative gender roles for Burmese people are

oppressive to women and these roles are fundamentally static, unmoving. One activist

explained that in Myanmar, a "traditional" gender dynamic does not lead to violence.

However, when migrant women and men are displaced, new pressures create tension in

this tradition "because men and women are working equally," as he put it. MM continues:

> In Burma, men are working so men are powerful. Here, on the other hand, when
> men come back from work and ask their wife to cook rice, the wife says, "I also

just got back from work. We both work, so let's cook together." Because of that, violence happens. Knowledge is different there. Violence against women happens more often here as we mostly see that men get back from work and drink alcohol while women get back from work and do cooking.

A view of culture as an obstacle to women's rights and gender justice is implicit here in this comment that also illustrates the challenges and pressures migration and precarious work places on families. Some activists described the need to persuade women not to accept a subordinate role in their marital life. As one activist said, "It was because she had a belief according to our culture that these are women's jobs" that she refused to let her husband help her (NL). At this moment during the interview, the participant and another woman sitting next to her began to list some of the sayings that have been used at different times in Myanmar to assert unequal gender roles (such as those found in the *Lokanīti*, mentioned in chapter five), including "*tha ko th'kin, lin ko p'ya*" (treat your son as your master and treat your husband as your god).[20]

To one staff member of a larger international NGO, problematic cultural dynamics called for the repetition of their message: "I think if we can do the prevention activity a lot and continuously until they can like kind of understand and absorb that, so I think they can control their desire and their feeling, so they can respect to each other" (NO). Echoing this, an activist with a local NGO used a metaphor to make her point:

> For example, there is a curry pot. If we cook curry in it a few times, the pot will get stained. We will have to clean it until all the stains are gone. If this pot has been used for a long time, we will now need a new technique to clean this pot. Same is true [for migrants]. The traditional belief comes along with them such as their own country's law or their own culture and norms and they are practicing this in their daily life. (ZMT)

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[20] Translated by Sweet, April 2014.

ZMT's message here is that patterns and norms which lead to and support discrimination and violence against women are deeply embedded and require not only repeated "scrubbing," but some new technique to push people to shift their behavior and their beliefs.

"We have to change the mindset," as MM put it, "We have to change what they already know so that they will be more humane. Then raise awareness or conduct training so that they do not discriminate between men and women." But, importantly, as he explained this, MM does not suggest throwing out culture as a vestige of something primitive. Rather, he offers a saying to counter phrases like the one above: "*lin ta htan maung ta ywet*" (The husband carries [on his shoulder] and the wife carries [on her head]).

Some NGO representatives looked to Burmese society to find examples when trying to get migrants to reconsider their interpretation of cultural and religious principles. One local NGO head explained a tactic he uses when counseling men:

> Burmese people are saying that women are low, they should not be allowed to get into the Buddhist holy places, get into the temples. If so, in our Myanmar political world, is there any man who is more outstanding than Daw Aung San Suu Kyi? Say it, anyone, say it if you know such a man. After that, I begin to talk about rights.[21]

Others pointed to their context of displacement as a source of change. For NL, whose words elsewhere do suggest she believes strongly in the potential of behavioral change workshops, notes that the experience of dispossession pushes women to confront

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[21] While this does not reflect a formal workshop strategy and more of a one-on-one counseling tactic, it was not uncommon for Aung San Suu Kyi to come up as a symbol for women in power, though such references gloss over the class, ethnicity/race, and religious dimensions of this example; that is, the fact that Aung San Suu Kyi is among the elite. Indeed, one of the main critiques of analyses that assert the "'traditional' high status of Burmese women" is the tendency to rely solely on elite Burman women as a model to extrapolate to the whole diverse female population (Ikeya 2005).

oppressive norms and take leadership positions in acts of resistance:

> Women, whether they are in Yangon or Mae Sot, if they are put together in a big group, we find that they become brave. In the past, demonstrations were led only by men. Now it is not like that. Women are becoming braver. Now we see the uprising of farmers. In Burma, the land is taken away from farmers so farmers are demonstrating and the leaders are women. The reason is that women's lives are directly affected by their land being stolen. So depending on the situation, when women get too much pressure, they are ready to stand. But here, the difference is this is not our country. If individuals are abused for example in the Phop Phra area, [nobody] dares to say anything. They feel they are in other people's country and they do not have documents. Here, they worry more. (NL)

This excerpt reinforces the notion that the experience of displacement is ambivalent when it comes to women's rights and gender violence, in part because of the multiple layers of violence linked to dispossession that these women must navigate. While earlier quotes suggest that the pressures of work in the export processing sector and the living conditions of the border create tensions in households as they disrupt social and cultural norms, NL offers a different perspective. Both, however, point to these norms as problematic.

The emphasis in many of these excerpts on knowledge, control, and change is striking. At the same time this resonates with the strategies of many international NGOs working on gender justice (e.g., de Mel et al. 2013; Fulu 2013), it also evokes an image of deviant men and subjugated women that is important to note, especially because these same men and women are both precarious workers and actors of resistance in the factories and farmlands of the Thailand-Myanmar border. That is, such interventions amount to a level of pressure on individuals to change themselves while these same individuals are so pressed in the precarious conditions in which they live and work. Without being linked to the intersecting levels of oppression and resistance that both men and women experience on the border, behavioral change activities risk reproducing

racialized and colonial discourses. Moreover, as presented here, the approach of "working with men" is less about deconstructing masculinity, or even demonstrating the complex and fluid nature of masculinity, and more about discipline and governance. I continue to follow this theme of norms, knowledge, and governmentality in the section below.

4.3 Strengthening individuals

The third category emphasizes the role of the individual woman as part of a social category and her capacity or agency. Staff of local NGOs stressed that the empowerment of individual women was central to their broader goals of achieving gender justice. For some, this was their primary strategy, while for others, this was a more minor component of a multi-pronged approach. As Table 8 above shows, analysis identified three main dimensions to this strategy: confidence building, awareness raising (about rights, reproductive health, family planning), and economic independence. The first two strategies were more prevalent than the third, and, as I show, continue the theme of placing the responsibility on individuals to end violence.

In terms of confidence building, activists emphasized their role in reshaping women's diminished self-perception. For AM, this was something she learned while a medic with ABSDF inside Myanmar in the 1980s and 1990s. "When I was in the Karenni area," she told me, "I met Karenni girls who had been raped by Burmese soldiers, I talked with them and I tried to heal them psychologically." When I asked how she did this, she explained:

> As I was simply a medic, at first I only gave them medical treatment. At the beginning they did not want to talk about the incident…In order to get their trust, we had to listen to their feelings. Listening to them is the first step, then next think about what they can do. In the beginning as they were emotionally affected, they wanted to commit suicide. So in order to keep them from doing this, I had to

listen to what they talked about and then I told them, "you cannot give up. You can not give up your life for this reason." It took a while, like one month or two months. After she trusted us, she would tell us more about what happened and then we had to help them to feel less pain. At last we persuaded them to come and help us in providing medical service. They were not medical staff but they could be helpers. For example, when we went to dress a wound for a patient who lost his leg we took them with us to help us. That is how we tried to change their minds. We wanted them to feel they were helpful. (SAW)

Here, AM draws attention to more of a service-oriented model for change, as opposed to one focused on political awakening. Given the nature of her experiences, the urgency of the situation, and the level of abuse with which she was dealing, it is hard to imagine any other tactic. Nevertheless, it was not uncommon on the border for activists to underscore their organization's role as non-political and centered on empowerment through service or moral and affective guidance.

For other activists, the work of building individual self-awareness was very much a political activity of awakening to their power, though sometimes more explicitly focused on affect and self-esteem:

Women must see themselves first. To find out what they can do, what they are capable of. First of all recognize and accept themselves. Right? The ability to cook is also work. Right? You may be able to read or not, but as long as you know how to do something such as sewing, you can reap the paddy. This is work. If you are capable to do these things, that is your quality, you have to value it. First of all, they need to have the heart that recognizes its own abilities. That is how we empower them. Only after that, we go forward step by step to get them to reflect on themselves. Some of them graduated from university but don't know how to speak, cannot make a speech in front of people. Feeling shy. That is why we have them practice talking. Then [we] have them value what they can do. We begin doing it that way time over time. One time is not enough so we meet them again and again and practice that with them over and over. From our observation, they begin to have confidence; they dare to speak. They dare to go to the market. In the beginning, they did not even get out of the factory. That kind of thing…Then the factory owner also threatens them. "Do not go out or the police will arrest you." So they did not dare to go out. Now when we do exchanges, they come. They come to borrow books. They begin to have confidence to come and go. When we see them come and go like this, we can tell that they are gaining self-confidence (NL).

In this excerpt, NL highlights a confidence built first and foremost on the recognition of women's own agency as individuals; realizing that without any training or capacity building, women are already empowered with unique abilities and qualities. Importantly, NL roots this power in the concept of work, getting women to recognize that they are productive members of society with strengths and abilities that they can contribute. Her target here is a distinction made between work as productivity and social reproduction as subordinate (tied to nature), an assumption that NL is clearly trying to upend. By getting women to see the productive value in their everyday work as caregivers, NL puts social reproduction and work into the same category, breaking down the barrier between notions of masculine and feminine binary categories. At the same time, by mentioning sewing, NL is referring to women's primary occupation in Mae Sot's garment industry. In striving to get women to see this work as illustrative of their productive capacity and, thus, their power, NL is speaking to both the dilemmas of oppressive gender structures and the exploitative and dehumanizing nature of migrant work in Mae Sot.

In this way, for NL, individual confidence sits at the heart of a notion of empowerment that is political. To her, through confidence building and awareness raising, migrant women gain new "ways of thinking" which, in the end, can help them to change themselves. Thus for NL, who was cited in the previous section, her work is a struggle linking personal transformation and broad-level change; gendered conscientization and high-level advocacy to carve out more space for women in Burmese society and government.

A dominant strategy to achieve the kind of confidence-building NL describes above is the establishment of women's spaces for safe dialogue. A number of

organizations in Mae Sot and Phob Phra have initiated "women talk" or "women's exchange" sessions, which take place on a bi-weekly or monthly basis and which encourage women to share their everyday challenges and struggles, to build confidence about themselves, and to find solidarity in other women in their community or workplace. All the organizations that implement this type of activity also use the dialogue space as an educational forum in which they impart various lessons to the migrant women who attend.

At the center of these educational missions is the principle of "awareness raising," an activity known throughout the world of aid work. It is in this context that most activists interviewed for this study brought up a human rights discourse. As AM indicates, Mae Sot is flooded with the discourse of rights and morals:

> Here [in Mae Sot], they [women] know more about what social welfare they can enjoy. They get more general knowledge here. Four, five years ago, they did not know any of this, but later, workers know about their rights, especially with more trainings and awareness raising [activities] happening. Now, they can access radio awareness raising, Blue FM radio for example, pamphlets, workshops, discussions, educational opportunities are more frequent, so here, they have more knowledge. (AM)

Due to the efforts of local civil society—and often with the funding of international donors—AM suggests that migrants can access messages about their rights pretty much everywhere and pretty much all the time.

While the discussion of rights can be in reference to broader structural change, as noted above, activists also use rights to refer to individual entitlements and responsibilities; that is, as part of a lesson to build ethical citizens. NO illustrates part of this angle as she remarks, "So for empowering women, they really need to understand that...they have—they have equal rights and then they can say no if they don't want,

something like that, you know." NL adds that awareness of rights cannot come alone:

> We are thinking rights and responsibilities must go together…We must know our rights and we must be responsible. "This is my right so I can drink as a man." We are not talking about such things. We want to say we have rights, but at the same time we have the responsibility to maintain our rights. Enjoying our rights at the cost of others is not what we want to be [advocating]. We must have self-discipline and morality. We share this with women, too.

In this sense, there is some burden on women to advocate for themselves and to handle their knowledge of rights responsibly. Within this last excerpt, there is perhaps an underlying reinforcement of an image of women as demure; they should not interpret their new awareness of rights to mean that they can be wild and "drink as a man" even if they have the right to. Thus, together with the pathway of individual empowerment through the construction of rights-based knowledge are suggestions for how women can be ethical citizens of their migrant communities; moral beings within a gender stereotyped framework of morality.[22]

A final component of this theory of change relates to advocacy for women's economic independence. Staff of local NGOs occasionally discussed their mission to help women secure their financial independence from their husbands. This was in reference to "survivors, many women" who "might need the income generation project…to have some kind of work and then [they] are able to take care of the family" after getting out of abusive relationships (NO). Beyond the context of caring for survivors, NL sees economic dependence as one of the key challenges for Burmese women: "Some women have the mentality to depend on others. Some men tell their wives, 'I feed you so just obey me.' Mostly we see cases like that…Women who have many children…have to

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[22] I use "citizen" here not strictly in terms of membership to a nation-state, but referring to group membership, as in "cultural citizenship" (Ong 1996), or the multitude of categories of governance and subject that derive from migrants' experiences in displacement (as noted in chapter five).

depend more…They cannot get themselves out." Her organization and a handful of others have vocational training activities. At least two teach women to sew so they can acquire better jobs in factories; a third organization owns a sewing machine for women to use and sell garments at a piece rate. Another organization has a plot of land outside Mae Sot where women from their shelter go to grow corn and other produce for sale at local markets.

As is often the case with such initiatives, a broader analysis that embeds these types of practices within the dynamics of production that are prevalent on the border might point to ways that securing economic independence for women in oppressive relationships can avoid reproducing the exploitative modes of production that affect so many migrants. In general, there is an ambiguity about the pathway to change discussed here. At times, activists apply an intersectional lens to their approach and link resistance to the unfair treatment of workers with challenges to normative gender frameworks. But at other times, these same activists offer a model for change that, at least in part, asserts a moral gaze onto women migrant bodies, pushing them to govern and care for themselves in a context in which there is virtually no formal social support network in place and something of a fragmented but multitudinous set of informal networks. In addition, the excerpts presented here to illustrate theories of change in Mae Sot offer a particular linear and static concept of norms and change. "Culture," "tradition," and "rights" appear as value-laden terms and I find that they are located on something of a spectrum or a linear chronology which guides us from a past of women's subjugation in Myanmar, to a present of struggle for rights and change, and finally to a future with gender equality and without violence against women. Yet, this, I argue, misses whole chapters of Burmese

history, which describe decades of activism for the rights and welfare of Burmese women (see for example, Ikeya 2012; Ma Ma Lay 1991 [tr. Aung-Thwin]; Maber 2014; Thin Lei Win 2014). Perhaps greater consideration or emphasis of these histories as part of the complex web of what it means to be a Burmese woman and to struggle for Burmese women's rights would enable a more multi-sided view of culture and tradition as potential resources for struggle and not only as the root of oppression.[23] Examples of this include movements to reinstate the Bhikkhuni, the female ordination of Theravada Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka and Thailand (Hindstrom 2014); the literary construction of female monastic communities in Myanmar as a refuge from dominant patriarchy (Ho 2011; Ma Ma Lay 1991 [tr. Aung-Thwin]); and spirit worship in Myanmar as transgressive of "normative scripts of heteropatriarchy and the dominance of abusive centralized authority" (Ho 2009: 277, see also Brac de la Pierre 2007).

Nevertheless, it is possible that the ideas mentioned demonstrate activists making calculated decisions about how best to advise migrants to survive in response to the torn social fabric of displacement; the uprooted, stretched, and sometimes damaged networks on which migrants rely; and the social violence of these border economic zones. In this context, maybe a more neoliberal emphasis on moral governmentality is an immediate solution to a violent situation, even as it might, on some level, reaffirm oppressive hierarchies. In addition, this framework appears to be more fundable to "Global North" donors pushing implicitly for neoliberal models; an issue linked to "institutional isomorphism," where organizations strategically replicate the organizational structures,

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[23] A useful question for subsequent research here would be whether the presence or absence of awareness of this history is more linked to the organizers/informant's lived experience, more generally to trace the mechanisms for learning about these issues.

practices, and ideologies of powerful institutions because this sets the standard

(DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Pittman 2009). To the extent that any of this this is the case,

as this section has shown, these activists do not make such strategic choices in a vacuum,

but adopt and translate the transnational discourse of rights to fit their message, a useful

tool—like culture and religion—to convey moral guidance. Moreover, activists do not

deal with global discourses in the same way because, as Salzinger (2003: 163) reminds

us, their notion of struggle for gender justice is a product of their "location within

structures of gender, nation, and corporation, and the perspectives that emerge from that

placement."

But if self-discipline is a logical strategy, how does this added pressure on the

individual intersect with workers' daily personal and collective struggles to make ends

meet? To deepen my analysis of how messages of change in this context—composites of

local ideas and an adapted notion of transnational discourse—have an impact on the

border, it is essential to include an analysis of migrants' interpretations of these various

NGO initiatives.

5. Interpreting intervention: bio-welfare and migrant agency in the shadow of humanitarianism

While the many pathways to change mentioned previous section are aimed at

empowering women and achieving a level of gender justice, it is clear that they also bring

with them implicit or explicit moral assumptions about the subjects of humanitarian

intervention. These less visible ethical and situated discourses constitute power relations

that are, to use Gordon's (2008) phrasing, "ghostly" in nature in that they edge in on

dominant accounts of displacement, violence, and the pathways to end that violence by

attaching to them universalizing constructs that reproduce gendered and racialized

hierarchies. Focusing on discourses that are not typically part of the humanitarian

conversation both reminds us of what is not being said and shows how their "seething"

presence can have an impact on the outcome of interventions. They are part of the array

of power relations that course through the borderlands and that constitute a form of

governance for migrants, albeit one focused on bio-welfare. This section compares the

theories of change, discussed above, with participants' tactics in the four communities to

eliminate violence to explore overlaps, divergences, and the social impacts of global

discourses on individual and collective efforts to navigate displacement.

5.1 Discipline and deviance: interpreting humanitarian and rights-based interventions

Among the more than 150 participants from the sites of data collection in Phob

Phra and Mae Sot, there were, not surprisingly, a wide variety of attitudes regarding the

ongoing interventions of local and international NGOs.[24] In particular, migrants had

distorted reflections of what exactly NGOs were trying to accomplish. While some

participants' narratives replicated specific civil society logics and agendas, migrant

workers also, not surprisingly, put such concepts through their own interpretive filters.

Specifically, participants tended to frame NGO interventions and the violence in their

communities as a security issue or through the prism of deviance and discipline.

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[24] Although co-researchers did not inquire how participants view these organizations, they did ask a set of questions about migrants' ideas for how best to respond to gender violence and secure the well-being of migrants in general, and women in particular. The extent to which migrants included mention of civil society in their responses to such questions, often as a perceived source of protection or positive change, was surprising, even as such answers were multilayered and, at times, included subtle critiques. It should be noted, however, that this may be an indication of some bias in this study to the extent that the assessment in migrant sites was conducted for a consortium of NGOs and co-researchers were themselves staff from local organizations. That said, throughout this entire dissertation, I regard the dozens of narratives I analyze to be situated and partial, reflections of the moment and of relations. Nonetheless, I do negotiate this potential limitation in that I do not draw conclusions from this data about whether interventions in migrant areas are positive or negative. Rather, as this section illustrates, I am more concerned with the underlying meanings embedded in migrants' responses.

5.1.1 Deviance and the discipline of intervention

Migrant participants in all four sites expressed a desire for some form of civil society intervention related to VAW. The most common form of intervention requested had moral and educational components. Residents of both rural and urban areas noted that violence in their communities might be reduced with regular trainings from NGOs focused on a variety of strategies, such as targeting men's beliefs and behaviors. This emphasis echoes the theory of change related to reforming problematic norms mentioned in the previous section. However, as the conversation continued, participants focused increasingly on how trainings could address the faults of community members as individuals. In the words of a community "mobilizer" working with several international NGOs, organizations should come to Htone Taung to train ten migrant families per month "one hour per day after working hours. By doing this, [participants] will understand how to save money and problems between husbands and wives will reduce" (HT CW-1R1). In a women's focus group discussion in Htone Taung, participants dialogued about different strategies to address intimate partner violence:

> I: How can we reduce the problems?
> R: It can't be solved among family members because they may not listen to each other. It would be great if the organization came to conduct the training that focuses on how married couples can take care of each other. If the men attend this kind of training two or three times, they will understand how to live properly in married life.
> R3: This kind of training should be provided regularly. Both sides will understand more if we tell them like that more and more. Women will also speak politely to their husbands. So, the problem will reduce. (HT FGDw-2)

Here, participants suggest that addressing domestic violence needs to come from the outside, in terms of explaining the source of problems and imparting moral lessons for how couples can get along peacefully together. But participants place responsibility onto themselves for actually changing their behavior, and appear to presume that

understanding and education from NGOs is enough to bring about that change. The assumption appears to be that if men can understand these lessons and that if women can, as a result of the training, speak more politely to their partners, there will be less conflict. Other participants, like a migrant woman in KM48, proposed "married life education for the people in this area to reduce the problems that occur between husband and wife" (KM48 F2Fw-1).

This excerpt raises serious questions: Do these residents of Htone Taung actually believe that they do not know how to "live properly in married life" and that they therefore need an outside organization to provide instruction? Furthermore, does this excerpt suggest that these participants attribute the violence in their neighborhood to their own personal failings as spouses and partners? The language these women use to discuss needs for the betterment of their community indicate a level of deviance out of which migrants need to be pulled by NGOs offering trainings. Where do such notions come from? Is it possible that participants are repeating the messages transmitted to them by the many different interventions on the border or just via the assumption among outsiders that they are the solution-makers?

Within this framework, participants look to NGOs as a sort of moral beacon, a source of knowledge, and a safeguard of bio-welfare. In the eyes of some participants, this means meeting "the needs of the community" as they look to NGOs who "provide contraceptive pills, measure blood pressure, check body weight, measure heart rates and…also provide medicines for hypertension and other heart diseases" (KK CW-1R6). Stressing the moral aspect, a community leader in Htone Taung stated a need for "educational meetings for young girls" because "they came here for work and they are

away from their parents so they need to know about prevention" (HT CL-2). In this sense, some see the behavioral change initiatives of NGOs as a substitute for the frayed or stretched kin networks of many migrants on the border, particularly those young men and women away from their sources of moral guidance and discipline. This suggests a similar attitude to that mentioned in the last chapter, which mentions the way some participants consider violence a product of collapsed social mores.

However, with NGOs squarely positioned in this value-laden role, some migrants were occasionally reluctant to get help from certain organizations, perceiving the latter's moral framework as restrictive or even dangerous. This was particularly the case when women wished to get support from organizations to leave their abusive partners. As one participant from Htone Taung recalled, "I did not report to the organization because some of them just try to negotiate between the couple to reunite them." She continued, mentioning a memory of an earlier incident with her husband where she did report to one NGO head "and he referred me to the religious organization. After that, they tried to negotiate…and sent me back home. They always did that when I reported to them so I solved the problem by myself finally" (HT F2Fw-3). Participants in Htone Taung and Kyuwe Kyan were the most likely to encounter this issue, perhaps because these are neighborhoods where NGOs founded on religious principles are more common (or at least NGOs that use religious principles to solve problems, e.g., PVA, mentioned in chapter five).

Within these accounts, the guidance of NGOs to live ethical lives contrasts with the tendencies of Burmese migrants, apparently immoral due to the conditions of displacement. As previous chapters have shown, migrants are aware of the violence

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surrounding them; as a communicative force, it is part of how participants appear to make meaning out of life in the border space. But this dynamic reflects something else; a turning inward to point the finger at weak social mores. Putting this trend into sharp contrast is the fact that at other points during their interviews or discussions, several participants provided analyses of interpersonal violence as a trend linked to the structural inequality of the border context, and not in the personal or collective failings of migrants as a group that sticks out as stigmatized. I noted some of these perceptions in chapter six, but I revisit the issue briefly here. This includes participants who note that when "there is a business problem, the conflict between the married couple happens" or that "if husbands have jobs, there will be no problem, but without jobs for ten or fifteen days" conflict arises (HT F2Fw-1; KM48 CL-2). At such moments, participants identify the intense pressure they are under amidst the challenge to make ends meet as one potential source of violence in families. Even as this is a partial explanation, and one that does not include the myriad other factors linked to war, displacement, and the institutionalized violence migrants face, it still suggests a more complex set of factors than what participants imply as they stress the need for NGOs to act as educators and disciplinarians.

Though I do not have a conclusive answer for this contradiction, I suggest here that this contrast may reveal a process in which migrants are consciously or sub-consciously framing their conception of strategies to address violence and improve wellbeing in ways that mirror the less visible "ideological substance" of humanitarian intervention as an outsider-led set of practices (Lindorfer 2009). These include the emphasis on individual moralities and qualities as opposed to collective entitlements or

structural critiques. As well, it appears migrants are picking up on the reified notions of culture that resonate between the global and local discourses of humanitarian intervention. In participants' calls for NGO activities to discipline and structure their behavior, they express a level of ambivalence between embracing a narrative describing the stigma of deviance responsible for the pattern of violence among migrants on the one hand, and the assertion that they can handle problems themselves, on the other. In this, what effectively amounts to a kind of devaluation, I find one of the unintended consequences of humanitarian intervention. Even if migrants choose to present themselves and their communities this way just when they are talking to NGOs (such as those conducting the assessment), this still illustrates what migrants assume organization staff expect or want to hear (Razack 1995). By maintaining such an unwavering gaze on migrants' bio-welfare and individual morality, perhaps NGOs have unwittingly reproduced some of the most subtle and least visible aspects of the social violence prevalent in this context of displacement.

5.1.2 Security and governance

A second significant theme in participants' responses relates to the role NGOs play in migrants' sense of and need for security. In considering how to best address violence in and around the community, migrants often noted the need for strengthened local level order enforcement mechanisms. For example, a woman interviewed in Kyuwe Kyan said, "We need security guards to handle violence" (KK F2Fw-1). A group of women in Pyaung Gyi Win discussed the need for "a committee that can help us…the kind that can govern and take care of us" (KM42 FGDw-1R1). This reflects a call for local groups to keep order, resolve conflict, and perhaps more. In most cases, these calls for order were requests for NGOs to step in and play an increased role in governance. A

migrant in Kyuwe Kyan felt that NGOs should "select suitable persons as headmen" (KK F2Fw-5). For some, this sentiment was linked to the ideas of discipline expressed above as group leaders would help "tell us about how we should act and live" (KM48 F2Fw-2). For others, the desire for increased governance from NGOs was to ensure women's safety:

> R1: We need a safe place and a committee for everyone to go to when they are facing any kind of trouble. But there is no place like that. People are facing problems everyday here. Like the place you said Pyaung Gyi Win, there are a lot of women working as sex workers. They have no general knowledge about HIV or AIDS and their customers are mostly just workers and some bosses. We need to have a safe place for them and also to educate them. Because for us guys we have places to have fun, such as playing soccer with friends or drinking alcohol in the evening but for women they don't have anywhere to go. That is why I think we need safe places for girls; for counseling, playgrounds, and a safe place to hide from their husbands, at least, for about a week when her husband drove her away. I am just saying what I think. (KM42 CL-1)

Such an idea, which contains overtones of discipline, refers to the need for security for women, but also alludes to the unequal domination of space in this labor camp. Women in Pyaung Gyi Win may feel they do not have a right to the collective space of the camp and, as this group leader suggests, many women may feel that there is nowhere to go when they experience abuse inside or outside the home. A woman in KM48 reiterates this notion, calling for NGOs to "arrange a safe place for women at other places or in other villages" (KM48 F2Fw-11). Similar to this last point, it was not uncommon for participants to share the desire for not only trainings but also for the embedding of an organization in the community itself. In the words of a community worker in Pyaung Gyi Win/Rim Nam:

> I want to suggest one thing. There is a women's affairs organization at 35 km. This organization helps deal with the problems women face with their bosses or by reporting cases to CPPCR [Committee for the Protection and Promotion of Child Rights]. This organization also works together with village leaders in

solving the problems. It is better to have a women's affairs organization in here. So, they can solve the problem with this organization. (KM42 CW-1)

These calls for a greater NGO presence in migrant communities were predominately in Phob Phra sites where, even if organizations have a presence seven kilometers away, the isolation of farm labor camps means such groups might as well not exist. With the types of challenges migrants in Pyaung Gyi Win and KM48 experience on a regular basis—challenges that are compounded for the women there—it is not surprising that migrants call for both greater governance and more regular support for women's safe spaces. Because of the exceptional status these migrants have within the Thai legal system, this need is directed toward NGOs and informal technologies of governance as opposed to official government representatives.

Considered together with the previous section, migrants offer intersecting interpretations of the humanitarian interventions that take place in their neighborhoods and labor camps. These NGOs are both sources of security and discipline, safety and moral guidance. On the one hand, this is similar to what activist informants explain as the objectives of their work within the broader goal of effecting gender justice. But on the other hand, the individualized focus (as opposed to structural) and the perception and internalization of deviance constitute traces of the racialized neoliberal aspects of some humanitarian discourses. It is in this way that local activists and staff of international NGOs may unwittingly find themselves reproducing a logic of governmentality as they allocate resources, conduct advocacy, "educate" men, and strive to help migrant women realize and capitalize on their agency in a way that tells migrants that the root of and the solution to this challenge lies with them.

5.2 Safety tactics, maintaining peace, and solidarity

If migrants' comments indicate that NGOs appear to reproduce some notion of

bio-welfare and moral discipline in their interventions, an important question to ask is

whether this is a dynamic reproduced on the community level in neighborhoods and labor

camps. That is, by looking at participants' strategies for responding to the conflict and

violence around them—particularly gender violence—I believe that it is possible to

further our understanding of how migrants interpret and react to the forces of discursive,

relational, and institutional power of the border space. In this section, I bring this chapter

to a close with a look at the tactics migrants use to address the issue of intimate partner

violence which take place around them. As I show, these are largely ad hoc tactics, but,

on some level, they contrast with the moral messages of intervention and offer some

indications for how alternative efforts to make change might take place.[25]

I stop short of referring in this section to the notion of "self-protection," a term

which has gained some currency as an analytical framework, especially in the context of

humanitarian intervention, as some scholars emphasize this as a way of studying

grassroots strategies for the safeguarding of collective or individual safety (Baines and

Paddon 2012; Bonwick 2006; KHRG 2010; South et al. 2010). Common moves cited in

these studies include running away, hiding, lying to authorities, or armed defense. While

the term is useful in humanitarian policy dialogue because it directs stakeholders' focus

to the "importance of local knowledge systems and networks" in the development of

plans to keep vulnerable populations safe during conflicts and other crises, it also

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[25] I hesitate to frame these actions as fitting any sort of dichotomy between reproductive (of dominant discursive framing) and resistant because, as I have noted elsewhere in the dissertation, this constitutes the imposition of a deductive rather than an inductive approach to the interpretation of practice. Thus I characterize *alternative* subjectivities and social forms that may be resistant or reproductive, or otherwise particular.

supplants the complexity of experience and practice with a narrow and deductive lens (Baines and Paddon 2012: 232).

One unpublished paper on self-protection in Mae Sot does, however, provide an interesting reference point for this section. On the topic of "personal security strategies," Soe Lin Aung (2011) notes that migrants in the broader Mae Sot area take into consideration their social networks, the placement of checkpoints, the likelihood of police raids, and space-time parameters (e.g., which route to take at night versus the day,). His qualitative research finds that migrants engage in self-protection strategies that include:

> Limiting movement outside one's home or workplace; moving in groups…; choosing carefully when to leave one's home or workplace; moving to fields and forests when authorities raid factories and other workplaces; building and using informal warning systems to protect against crackdowns, raids, and the dangers to migrants' persons that result; use [of] supplemental earnings as a means for limiting dependence on abusive partners; [and] changing jobs or moving locations when a particular employer or working arrangement proves abusive and/or dangerous (Soe Lin Aung 2011: 22).

Participants in this study mention some of the same tactics to guarantee their safety. Migrants describe exchanging knowledge with one another and remaining attentive to where police or other threats might be lurking. As well, some women describe hiding money from abusive husbands or diminishing tension by keeping secret dire financial situations (a temporary strategy, at best). However, rather than framing these as acts of self-protection, I rely on categories that arose inductively from the data. Thematic analysis identified 12 distinct tactics that fall within two categories on which participants rely in Phob Phra and Mae Sot: (1) peace-making and (2) expanding a space of safety and security. An important sub-theme for the second category is the way that migrants' everyday work of making their neighborhood or camp a safe one is an important solidarity-building experience as well.

5.2.1 Peace-making

Several practices that migrants rely on to prevent or respond to violence are aimed at maintaining peace and order. This is not surprising, given the emphasis of the many different technologies of governance discussed in chapter five. In addition to these practices of local and cross-border power-brokers, ordinary individuals living in migrant neighborhoods or labor camps described tactics to resolve disputes, respond to violence, and prevent tension from boiling over into conflict where the primary emphasis was on maintaining order. Emphasis was rarely on achieving justice.

For example, participants described practicing the same type of mediation/conflict resolution tactic mentioned by governance actors. A community volunteer in Kyuwe Kyan recalled, "If there is a conflict between husband and wife, I call both of them and let them sit with me for a moment. If it is needed, I feed them. When they calm down, I help them to get along" (KK CW-1R5).[26] Other participants explained that the best way they can help neighbors suffering violence is to make a referral to one of the many NGOs or informal governance groups on the border, who often, as chapter five showed, carry out some type of conflict management or suppression strategy. Some migrants described the tendency to directly intervene when they become aware of an ongoing conflict. This was even the case with intimate partner violence, though there were also many participants who stressed they did not dare get involved in a dispute between husband and wife. In one interview in Htone Taung, a woman made clear that this was a group practice:

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[26] As noted elsewhere, it was not uncommon to see the expression of hospitality linked to processes of mediating or otherwise handling cases. Local Burmese groups or individuals with little or no source of funds for such work often mentioned providing food, drink, and shelter to those who come to them to solve conflicts.

> **R1**: As we are married women, we have concern for other married women as well. If the women are about to be beaten, we have a sympathetic soul for her and all the women come out and protect her.
> **I1**: How do you help?
> **R1**: We say, "Please stop, if you beat her strongly, she will be injured." Groups of men try to calm down the husband and a group of women try to calm down the wife. (HT F2Fw-2)

Aside from the immediate safety of the parties involved in the fight, this type of practice is also clearly geared toward keeping the neighborhood calm as opposed to seeking retribution or justice for the perpetration of abuse. Nevertheless, at the same time, it also reveals an important moment of solidarity among the group of migrants in this neighborhood in general, and specifically between women who act together and men who play their own role in dealing with the aggressive man.

As a way of preventing conflict, a woman in Pyaung Gyi Win stresses the importance of elders in the camp who "tell the young people not to go out at night when it is not safe outside and this is not our country so we have to be very careful." This participant noted that this message can come from any leader or elder, "not only people from the family, but respectful people also can tell the youth not to go to inappropriate places at inappropriate times. They tell them, 'It is better to protect yourselves in advance before bad things happen'" (KM42 F2Fw-4). This reflects a level of moral guidance in this labor camp, where, even as transient spaces, some migrants make efforts to establish these sorts of norms and structures. In this sense, while such a tactic emphasizes individual morality, the network in place to impart this lesson illustrates a collective support structure pieced together in a context of displacement.

With all of the practices I link here to the maintenance of order, there is an ambiguity with regards to how they might impact migrants' political subjectivity in this

border space. As elsewhere, the undertones of individual morality are strong, even when practices may be primarily about enforcing norms; migrants are guided away from creating conflict or encountering danger, even when the cost might be encouraging their neighbor to remain in an abusive relationship. The tactic leans more toward an idea of struggling toward personal change over justice. Though similar in the emphasis on individual behavior, this approach runs contrary to the rights-based messages of humanitarian organizations, which focus more on rescuing vulnerable women, removing them from violent homes, achieving justice for the abuse they experience, and working toward their self-realization and empowerment. Yet at the same time, the emphasis in the tactics mentioned here is on collective strength and social ties, an asset that is highly valuable for individuals struggling to get by in a context of displacement.

5.2.2 Expanding space of safety and security

As participants in this study explained, staying safe in the dangerous settings of Mae Sot and Phob Phra is an ongoing effort that required innovation, expansive networks, and creativity. Migrants avoid checkpoints, come up with alternative remedies for illness when it is too difficult to access healthcare, hide in fields when word of a raid comes, earn income in different workplaces in case one gets shut down, pay brokers to smuggle them across mountains, and pay fees to informal organizations to help keep order and liaise with the Thai government. For the most part, these types of practices are reactive as migrants find strategies to circumvent obstacles and threats to their safety. At the same time, they are based on years or generations of experience both in Myanmar and in Thailand. Such experience has helped migrants survive via subversion of rules and official practices, which enforce constraints on citizen or migrant bodies.

However, when it comes to maintaining security within the confines of one's

home or one's community—when the potential perpetrator is a fellow migrant struggling with displacement and an exploitative, violent environment—the risk is, in some ways, compounded. This is because the offender comes from within the same group to whom the victim might look to for solidarity in order to survive the hostile context. Thus, migrants' responses seem to indicate an effort to carve a community space that can provide some notion of safety for migrant women in their own neighborhoods and labor camps. Community volunteers often, though not always, play a role in helping to secure this space.

In both Phob Phra and Mae Sot sites, women participants described their efforts to counsel, encourage, and support their fellow women migrants. A community worker in Htone Taung explained her work with women in her neighborhood who have faced abuse: "To feel better," she said, "it is very important that the victims should talk to us frankly or to their close friends from their area about their cases" (HT CW-1R5). A woman in Pyaung Gyi Win shared a story about her friend:

> One of my friends went to Bangkok. She was married with a man. Then, he left her. She was already pregnant. She didn't tell anyone about the pregnancy or that she was married. She disclosed only when she was four to five months pregnant. To be able to comfort her mind we told her "don't commit suicide by drinking all these medicines. There are many women like you, even though we didn't suffer from this exactly. Make your mind to be strong by yourself…It is very usual and this kind of thing happens all around the world." Like that we consoled her. (KM42 F2Fw-4)

When incidents take place within the community or household, women who live nearby describe providing various types of assistance, including these sorts of informal counseling or encouragement. This includes offering a kind of temporary shelter. Participants in three of the four sites mentioned this tactic, including a group of women in KM48:

I1: Are there any temporary shelters for the women who are violated/ abused?
R1: They ask help from their friends and stay with them for a while.
I1: Can you tell a little bit more on that?
R1: They hide the places where the culprits or rapists can't reach.
I1: I mean when the women are abused, are there any places for them to stay for a while?
R1: No… But, we just help her by hiding in our house.
R5: We save her so she doesn't have to go to the other places. (KM48 FGDw-1)

An important point to note here is that these participants mention that allowing women who have experienced abuse to stay with them is a crucial protection tactic because otherwise, these women might endanger themselves by leaving the town or labor camp. In this sense, such a move is suited to the dangers of the border context. Migrants in Phob Phra expressed the need to be especially creative because many of the services, such as shelters or health clinics, are more than 30 kilometers away and on the other side of at least one checkpoint. In such situations, their homes become temporary sources of refuge for those women in their community who need it. It is worth mentioning, however, that this is a complicated tactic in that two participants (one in Kyuwe Kyan and one in Htone Taung) described the potential threat they face from angry husbands when they offer shelter to victims of abuse. One woman in Kyuwe Kyan described incidents when "the owner of a house sends [victims] back home because they don't want to get involved in the problem" (KK F2Fw-5).

Nevertheless, such practices are part of reciprocal networks that form some semblance of security for migrant women. In addition, participants, particularly women, described the importance of relying on each other to travel in groups inside and outside their neighborhood to ensure that no harm comes to them: "If we need to go outside, we bring friends," as one woman in KM48 put it (KM48 FGDw-1). Women in these sites also reported exchanging knowledge with each other about which streets to take at which

times of the day as they encountered experiences with or rumors of thefts and assaults. While these are all quite informal tactics, they may have the effect of increasing a sense of sisterhood or solidarity between these residents, knowing that as difficult as the situation might get, they can still rely on each other for some occasional help.

Some of these tactics resemble the activities of NGOs mentioned in section four of this chapter. In particular they resonate with the work of encouragement and solidarity-building; helping women who have experienced abuse to feel they are not alone, that they have support, and that they can reclaim agency that their abuser attempted to deny them. However, they do not reflect the moralization or stigmatization of victims and perpetrators noted elsewhere. Nor do they reflect dependence on the outsider as helper/savior, which Lindorfer (2009) asserts has a disempowering effect on local struggles.

So, do the practices outlined in this section bear more or less potential than the interventions of civil society to secure the wellbeing of Burmese migrants on the border? It may or may not be the case that the tactics briefly outlined here offer the possibility of significant change in the lives of migrants or in the dynamics of production. That is not for this dissertation to conclude. Nor can we answer whether the work of NGOs and the circulation of humanitarian and human rights discourses are making progress for gender justice on the ground in the everyday lives of migrant men and women. But what is clear is that the moral undertones of such interventions resonate with the moral needs of many participants. And yet, at the same time, the practices that appear most welcome or common are not those that isolate the individual as a moral being detached from structural determinants but, like the examples provided above, those that divert the

individuating influence of the production systems on the border by asserting a kind of subaltern solidarity, albeit one that is not always liberatory. By individuating influence here, I mean the combination of factors associated with farm and factory work that eliminate free time through long working hours, emphasize competition and individual welfare, and instill uncertainty which leads to high rates of turnover and thus transient, unfamiliar, and detached, communities. On this level, the maneuvers to promote collective safety and solidarity constitute tactics as Michel de Certeau used the term, referring to those practices that manipulate relations of domination for alternative purposes. As such, they do not offer revolution, but a far subtler power. They bear potential to disrupt the performative and iterative reproduction of discursive and practical constraints on migrants' lives and identities and to offer something born of these conditions, but alternative.

6. Conclusion

In a dissertation concerned with the agency of migrants and their production of alterative political subjectivities in structurally violent border economic zones, this chapter has identified the ambiguous role of humanitarian and human rights NGOs. On the one hand, with migrants denied basic rights to health, security, and life, these organizations work tirelessly to meet tremendous needs on many levels. On the other hand, these same groups constitute an additional layer of governance regulating Burmese migrants. Supplementing the influence of local law enforcement, employers, community leaders, and cross-border political networks are humanitarian NGOs that intentionally work to order migrants in ways they think will improve their lives. As I have shown in this chapter, evaluating whether these groups effect positive change is not easy because it

is necessary to look on multiple levels, some less detectable than others. My effort here has been to look beneath the more obvious relationship between transnational humanitarian intervention and local lives, less to point the finger at NGOs and more to understand how analyzing their work can contribute to responding to this dissertation's questions about subjectivity and border spaces.

I have attempted to make visible some relations of social violence that often remain hidden. Through an analysis that is centered on three levels of discourse, I suggest here that it is possible to identify the paths of suppressed knowledge circulating and mutating between disparate locations. These three levels—international human rights and humanitarian discourses, local NGOs operating on the Thailand-Myanmar border, and Burmese migrants who are the target of these NGOs' activities—are interconnected via circuits of information, logics/agendas, and money. As such, there is no question that influence and knowledge resonate among these levels; indeed, it is the explicit goal of the first level to affect the second and the goal of both the first and the second to affect the third. As well, local social movements strive to change transnational positions and discourses through a variety of forums. But, concrete objectives aside, just how invisible messages transmit across borders and languages—how they refract amidst the multitude of other force relations that constitute a social field is a different matter. I have suggested here that a study on the level of what Avery Gordon (2008) calls the "ghostly nature" of "haunting" can help to begin to untangle this complex set of discursive relationships in a way that might render greater understanding of material realities.

Applying this type of discursive and inductive analysis to the qualitative data of this study underscores the many ways in which contemporary humanitarian interventions

and transnational organizing for women's rights are often entangled with gendered and racialized representations redolent of imperial linkages and certain neoliberal ideologies. With a particular focus on gender and gender justice, I have drawn attention to the slant within the human rights and humanitarian industries away from broad feminist critiques and toward an individualized and moralized narrative of bio-welfare. And I offer the notion of stigmatization and ambivalence as a way to frame the directionality and some of the effects of those gendered and racialized representations.

Through this multi-layered analysis, I have shown that narratives of individual morality and responsibility—goals of ethical citizenship—resonate within local NGOs' conceptualization of gender justice and change, and among the population of Burmese migrants. But this resonance is not "clean" or linear. It is messy and complex in that migrants and migrant activists on the border encounter many disparate but intersecting forms of discursive and material power that assert certain knowledges, hierarchies, and technologies of governance while subverting others. It is rarely clear that participants are "speaking" to one set of logics or another, or to any at all. Nevertheless, it is not possible to ignore the constant seething presence of certain constellations of gendered ethics, which seem to lurk just under the surface or beyond detection. To the extent these ethical frameworks materialize in migrants' perceptions or daily practices, it is crucial to surface these ghostly relations and discourses and to determine how those groups wishing to do well can confront their own perpetuation of socially violent representations.

Chapter 8—Conclusion

1. Erasure

When I started this dissertation research, there were 86 homes and over 400 residents in the Kyuwe Kyan settlement. As I conclude, only ten houses remain. During the June 2014 raids on undocumented migrants throughout Thailand (mentioned in chapter four), the Thai landlord of Kyuwe Kyan, reacting to pressure from local authorities, gave his residents 24 hours to get off his property. Despite an intervention by the Thai-Muslim council of Mae Sot to stay their removal, on June 12th at 4:30 am, Tak immigration officials and soldiers from the Thai army swept into the settlement and picked up dozens of people while the rest fled into nearby fields. This was not the first time Mae Sot authorities had raided the settlement. Only a year before, Thai security forces arrested a number of residents, threatening to deport them all. But while the authorities in the previous raid relented and allowed migrants to return home, albeit in a state of uncertainty, in June 2014 the new military government was eager to show a firm response to illegal migration. People in Kyuwe Kyan were made to disassemble their homes, clearing the lot. Of the 89 migrants arrested, immigration officials separated families according to those with children in school and those without. They allowed 12 adults and their 34 school-going children to remain, but deported 43 people, including those kids not in school the same day (MRPWG 2014). Precluded from rebuilding, the rest of the population who had fled during the raid —about 300 people—found themselves homeless.

Today the fields behind the buffalo enclosure look empty save for a few dispersed houses. With each disassembly and re-assembly the homes look less stable, more hastily

put together, as if residents know that they need not bother constructing something that will last. It is just as possible that the place will remain nearly empty as it is that eventually more people will rebuild or that newcomers will arrive in the way that Kyuwe Kyan and other informal settlements fluctuate and shift between people's movements and the actions of security officials and landlords. But regardless, it is a place scarred by erasure; a place and a people that represented a "threat" for authorities, and even for many other Burmese in Mae Sot. Looking at Kyuwe Kyan now, one cannot tell that it was full of homes a few months ago aside from the scattering of materials and household objects in the grass. Perhaps it will easily fade from the town's collective memory. Even if it gets rebuilt, the ease with which Kyuwe Kyan disappeared and with which it is possible to forget about the people who lived there, the social ties that might have made this a community to some, and the experiences they faced together, all reflect the violence of this erasure.

Incidents like the raid are reminders of not only the instability of houses that are easy to take apart, but also the precarity of the social relations that helped people get through their daily lives together, resolve conflicts, and maintain some level of peace and order. However, like homes unbuilt and rebuilt and people who have separated into other sites, it is likely the elements of social networks and social ties discussed in the preceding pages have not totally disappeared but have adapted and shifted again, under the duress of repeated displacement. This is part of what makes the subjectivities discussed in this dissertation unique to dispossession and borderlands.

The erasure also places the village clean-up and my observations described at the beginning of this dissertation into stark relief with the reality of people's lives. In some

ways, like much of what this dissertation discusses, such events demand affective reactions like outrage, compassion, or solidarity before an academic response can be formulated. Nevertheless, reflection pushes me to ask what the imperatives of a written work are when so many of its subjects continue to face abuse and when the space they inhabited during the course of this research has been eradicated. In one sense, the violence of the act speaks to the urgency of work on migration and displacement in places like Mae Sot and the Thailand-Myanmar border. But it also raises an uncomfortable question with which I must reconcile: What does the work we do mean in the face of a raid that wiped out an entire community? What can NGOs like the one conducting the clean-up learn from this violence and from what might suggest a kind of futility to their work? Relating to this work, as I bring this dissertation to a close, the dispossession of Kyuwe Kyan's residents places the intellectual exercise of writing into perspective and pushes me to ask reflexively what the implications of this work's findings might be. I divide this last chapter into four brief sections that discuss what this study's findings can tell us about migrants' lives and state and market practices in Southeast Asia at a time of change as well as research in borderlands and contexts of displacement.

2. Migration in a changing context: territory and borders

As this dissertation is concerned with the multiplication of borders through the performative reproduction of migrant precarity, it is important to consider some of the ways that these hierarchies might relate to social and political change on a broader level in Thailand and Myanmar. As noted throughout, while I regard the lines of difference and homogeneity imposed on migrants to be, in many ways, a product of the Thailand-

Myanmar borderlands and its history of socio-spatial hierarchization, I also find that the articulations of boundaries are increasingly enacted on migrant bodies in ways that correspond to the demands of industry. This means that the structural violence discussed in this dissertation is not limited to territory of the Thailand-Myanmar boundary; the dynamics of migrant disposability are reproduced every time migrants encounter social actors who see them as alien "others" for whom inhumane treatment or conditions are normal, appropriate, or inevitable. In this sense, migrants carry borderland spaces of exception on their backs wherever they happen to be in Thailand, whether inside or outside specially designated spaces such as Export Processing Zones (EPZs) or refugee camps.

However, part of what this dissertation's findings suggest is that the multiplication of borders involves a set of practices that is intertwined with but also beyond market and state regimes of discipline. If gendered migrant subjectivities involve the biopower and violence of state actors and factory managers, they are also made up of transnational and situated political and social networks, which assert their own ordering practices and discourses, as this study shows through its analysis of the resolution of social conflict and intimate partner violence. The rise of informal leaders, their tactics for handling disputes between Burmese workers, and the narratives of home, tradition, custom, and gender that arise from these processes play a significant role, both to help migrants make meaning of their experiences and as a form of governance. One of the significant findings of this dissertation is that there is no single technology of discipline in spaces of exception, or for exceptional populations. Rather, collective and individual life that has been rendered precarious finds order in a diversity of fractured, partial, or

mutated sources, some of which support the aims of production networks and some of which assert alternative modes of social organization; that is, some of which can be attributed to the state or the market, and some of which come from elsewhere—whether it be a retired neighborhood police officer or a group affiliated with an ethno-nationalistic insurgent group.

Yet, as this dissertation shows, it does a disservice—or worse—to call these alternative forms signs of resistance and stop there. This is because while such situated mechanisms for maintaining social order can foster a kind of solidarity in the face of pressure to individualize and accept unjust conditions, they also often appear to reproduce their own kind of biopolitical management of workers. The gendered discourse of such disciplinary practices often affirms dominant ideas of femininity and masculinity that displace the challenges and pressures of life in precarious conditions to the roles of men and women in migrant worker households. Explanations for the violence of everyday life, both structural and interpersonal, link to ideas about how men and women should be behaving. And the strategies to manage conflicts, including intimate partner violence, often seem to involve an invocation of "traditional" and "customary" gender identities to avoid trouble and combat the ways precarious life corrodes social mores. Even the memories of conflict resolution in Myanmar tell us something about how gender, violence, governance, and culture are contested concepts integral in various ways to surviving displacement. The ways in which these practices and discourses produce gender show us the complexity of what one might otherwise call "resistance," by reminding us to ask, "resistance for whom and to what?"

With this in mind, subsequent research might ask how the parallel structures of

discourse and identity-making manifest themselves beyond the territorial borderlands. Do all migrant spaces have a similarly lawless reputation—that is, are they considered beyond the law to the extent that people there rely on parallel mechanisms of order-making? Is there a similar heterogeneity in ordering regimes? Do transnational networks of power extend everywhere in Thailand where migrants work and live? And even if they do not, can one still argue that gendered subjectivities of flexible laborers are always just as contingent on a laborer's agency as it is on state and market biopolitical forces?

These questions are highly pertinent in considering how the relationship between migrants' lived experiences and the reproduction of their subordination is likely to play a role in the future of labor practices in Southeast Asia. In fact, as noted at the end of chapter 2, migrants and the low-cost labor-intensive work they do are central to the development plans of the region. However, besides the potential of building Mae Sot into a node on a regional transportation and production network, investors around the world are interested in Burmese workers in Thailand as they regard Myanmar as a potential gold mine in terms of both "untapped" or underutilized labor resources and consumer markets (Boot 2014; Fujimatsu and Moodie 2015). Billions of dollars of foreign direct investment have poured into Myanmar in the last three years. The country has received increasing amounts since first initiating political changes in 2011, and expects to receive over five billion dollars in 2015 (World Bank n.d.; Mooney 2014). Part of the inflow of funds has gone toward infrastructural development and the construction of SEZs (Special Economic Zones), including extremely ambitious projects in Thiwala and Dawei, which include thousands of acres designated for industry, highway construction, and a deep-sea port. Investment in infrastructure to establish these zones throughout Myanmar is based

on the assumption that the millions of young Burmese in that country and the millions of migrant workers in Thailand and elsewhere will be eager to fill up factories closer to home. This has Thai industries nervous about the potential impending labor shortage; one source of motivation for the government to make it easier for migrants to stay longer.

The question seems to be which economy will get to benefit from low-cost Burmese labor. In this sense, the value placed on a migrant identity in Thailand is not moored to sites of production in Thailand, but seems to adhere to the population itself. Thus, as Southeast Asia increasingly takes on a powerful regional economic identity, embodied in the single-market ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), the Asian Development Bank's economic corridor schemes, and the Free Trade Area of the Asia Pacific, I would argue that it is not only the territory that will appear variegated in its manifestation of sovereignty and market disciplines, but rather whole populations who are considered in terms of their labor-value, maybe more than their nationality, with some as low-wage, others as middle class consumers, and others as technical experts. As Aihwa Ong suggests (2006), this is a dynamic already playing out on some level in Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia. This arrangement is central to what will grow the AEC—home to ten percent of the world's population—at a rate set to outpace the economies of the US, EU, and Japan by 2020 (Hodal 2015).

With investors skeptical that these sites may not draw sufficient labor to be profitable, and with Thai firms anxious about their supply of cheap labor, it is clear that the disciplinary regimes of exceptional spaces are key to the region's development agendas. What technologies of governance are we likely to see as centers of production shift? What role will migrant's social and political networks play in furthering or

inhibiting efforts to make these spaces profitable? And what kind of gendered subjectivities will these forces combine to produce and reproduce? Such questions point the way for future research on migration, borders, and labor in Southeast Asia.

3. Subjectivities on the move

In addition to thinking about how these broader-level shifts relate to the dynamics of migrant spaces and collectivities, this dissertation raises a number of questions about how violence and precarity interact with agency in the lives of migrants navigating displacement. I show that in migrants' narratives about violent life outside and inside the home are gendered ideas about why abuse takes place and how women and men should live their lives. While scholars have looked at the way perpetrators can use acts of sexual violence to strip individuals of their humanity, I show that for those participants in this study who are surrounded by but may not always directly experience such acts, the result is not an erasure of their humanity but rather its gendered reconstitution in a space of dispossession. The narratives are useful mechanisms for migrants to help explain the nature of life in Mae Sot and Phob Phra. Precarious life is violent and there are specific ways men and women can look to their masculinity and femininity to avoid trouble. That is, precarity, violence, and gender are mutually constitutive. This suggests that the particular gendered subjectivities with which migrants grapple in spaces of dispossession can constitute resources for navigating its visible and invisible brutality, even as they sometimes also signify sources of restriction. On a more general level, this set of findings calls for a scholarship on displacement and migration that conceives of movement as contingent not only on tangible costs and benefits, but on more nuanced calculations based on gendered perceptions of how to get by.

This is not to say that gendered strategies for explaining violence and making order are necessarily forms of constraint on men and women. They can also manifest themselves as tactics for security as well as the organization of collective efforts and the expression of certain solidarities. I illustrate this point in two different places. First, in co-researchers' recollections of how they developed as activists in Mae Sot or elsewhere on the border, one sees how individuals' particular responses to the violence they experienced and/or witnessed in the process of being uprooted from home in Myanmar, or amidst the conditions of life in displacement, led to particular social change agendas and particular efforts to organize people around them in the name of social and gender justice. And second, the tactics of migrants to respond to gender violence in their labor camps and settlements that involve forms of neighborly reciprocity, as opposed to authoritative leadership, are important moments for the articulation of agency and the formation of social ties, including in ways that are sometimes subversive of extant power structures. I show, however, that at the same time, these sites for the articulation of relationships and identities that embody expressions of resistance must also be considered for the way they may privilege certain knowledges over others and reproduce power-laden sets of ethics.

By pointing to the double-edged nature of these border subjectivities, I show reflexively the ambiguity in the "critical border thinking" that helps surface discourses, affect, gestures, and practices which appropriate and redefine the terms of dispossession. Continuing from here, further research is needed to consider what these kinds of gendered exertions of agency in spaces of dispossession could mean for women's rights organizing in Thailand as well as in Myanmar. Rather than assuming that gender justice

work on the Thailand-Myanmar border offers a more global struggle for women's rights than the movements taking place now and in the past in Myanmar, subsequent studies might look to the way that the particular solidarities and networks formed in Mae Sot, which often extend across religious and ethnic lines, bear potential to bring ethnic and ideological diversity to struggles in Myanmar, a place in the process of fracturing under the strain of religious and ethnic tensions.

With acts of violence occurring all over Myanmar as mobs identifying as Buddhist nationalists attack Burmese Muslims, there has been a rise in religiously and socially conservative activism. This includes the 969 anti-Islam movement that calls for boycotts of Muslim businesses, and that is believed to be behind the incitement of riots that led to the destruction of Muslim properties and homes (Marshall 2013). As was the case in certain nationalist movements in colonial Burma, this religiously conservative and racialized discourse contains a gendered dimension as well in that it places responsibility on women to embody religious and racial purity (Ikeya 2012). Such moves are contemporaneous with broader political changes that include some increased openness for civil society, such as advocacy for greater inclusion of women in peace talks between the government of Myanmar and ethnic armed groups, as well as a campaign under way to add national legislation to specifically address domestic violence, and violence against women more broadly (Thin Lei Win 2014). All this indicates a crucial moment for gender justice activism in Myanmar (Maber 2014). With this dissertation's findings in mind, it would be useful for subsequent research to ask how the modes of social organization and personal perceptions of gender and gender justice in Mae Sot might intersect with and influence these various movements in Myanmar. Will the salience of

conservative narratives of religion, culture, and gender that are prominent in Mae Sot as forms of order-making fuel Myanmar's divisive politics? And how will the critique of culture by many women's rights activists in Mae Sot relate to gender justice campaigns in Myanmar that rely on cultural symbols and metaphors as part of activist framing? Furthermore, perhaps, the experience of learning how to protect one another in a space where individuals cannot rely on the rule of law for support—both during experiences with internal displacement in Myanmar as well as on the Thai side of the border—will prove useful as parts of Myanmar continue to struggle with governance in ways that leave men and women vulnerable to violence. Such questions would be important in considering how border subjectivities interact with broader political and social forces in migrants' places of origin.

4. Turning analysis into action

Although this dissertation is rooted in a collaborative action research project that resulted in a series of activities and networks that continue to operate in Mae Sot and Phob Phra, the urgency of the context and the sense of insufficiency that comes in the aftermath of incidents of mass violence such as the raid mentioned above engender reflection of what else can be done. On the one hand, findings from this study do reflect that migrants' everyday lives could be improved with certain changes to Thai policy, such as the establishment of a more permanent and stable legal status for migrants, obtainable more easily at no expense (or a reasonable expense) by migrants (as opposed to their employers); the extension of social protections to migrants in a way that improves access to healthcare and education; and stricter enforcement of pay and labor conditions; to name a few.

But on the other hand, with this dissertation's focus on the more nuanced level of discourse, gendered subjectivation, and knowledge production, results underscore the importance of subtler and more localized changes as well. As the social actors in the context with the explicit aim of bettering migrants' lives through concepts of "empowerment," "participation," and improving their access to basic human rights, I look to humanitarian and human rights agencies—both local and international—as responsible for certain reforms. Though it will not stop raids and deportations, this study's findings suggest a number of practices among NGOs and CBOs that could help make their work more supportive of the struggles in migrant collectivities for a safer and more just existence. This includes agencies being more in tune with the multiple lines of difference that intersect labor camps and impose hierarchies that are not invisible. Outsiders looking to effect positive change might strive for greater awareness of ongoing practices in migrant spaces that enhance security and solidarity. It is crucial to distinguish between these, which are often less visible, and those initiatives that work more to maintain order by imposing other hierarchies. There may be ways for outsiders to support the subtle forms of solidarity-making and care in migrant sites, or perhaps the greater need is to understand when *not* to get involved in recognition of the fact that situated tactics to subvert or circumvent unjust systems sometimes need to be left alone rather than professionalized.

In regards to the work of many humanitarian organizations striving to empower women, this dissertation stresses the importance of a broader gender analysis that takes into consideration not only family dynamics, but also the nature of life in displacement, and the political and economic structures of power that are built on gender injustice. This

broader analysis would include the ways in which people tend to project the dilemmas of

displacement onto social and cultural forms in ways that reflect and affirm patriarchal

structures. It would also relate to the fluidity of culture and gender categories; that is,

how, rather than adhering to static structures, migrants are, in fact, engaged in the work

of producing and reproducing cultural forms and gendered subjectivities as they find

ways to navigate the violence of displacement. Among humanitarian agencies, a dynamic

and constructivist perspective like this could help ensure that project goals are in more

solidarity with participants and not overly concerned with upholding neoliberal gender

values.

Finally, this study's findings point to the importance of interrogating the diverse

and sometimes invisible hierarchies that are pervasive in humanitarian and development

work. This implies the need for greater reflexivity in the work of NGOs who could go

beyond the analysis of whether or not they are "harming" their service users to examine

how the power and privilege of their institution and staff influence the production of

knowledge and hierarchies, even during efforts to ensure "empowerment" and

"participation." Though these comments essentially call for humanitarian agencies to

slow down their work, embrace a more nuanced analysis of the context, and localize their

goals in order to fit situated needs over donor demands, such recommendations are not all

that new and echo some of the critiques to which humanitarian actors have been

attempting to respond for some time.

5. Knowledge production and the imperatives of research in contexts of displacement

As the previous section makes clear, I consider as crucial reflexivity and praxis in

research on displacement and violence. At the core of my analysis of migrants' practice and discourse in Mae Sot and Phob Phra is the question of how discourse translates into material realities and consequences. This includes asking how the knowledges and agendas of the collaborative action research project that informed this dissertation circulate as a form of power that interacts alongside other relations to reproduce and/or challenge inequalities. My analysis, and that of the co-researcher group, was part of the construction of knowledge about migrants' lives, which not only risked essentialization, but in fact led to tangible projects and interventions designed to affect people's lives. The contours of such activities were informed by our collaborative assessment of the particular dimensions of need. A reflexive approach has helped to point me in the direction of the subtle or not so subtle ways that the knowledge and privilege that directly and indirectly informed the research might have seeped into participants' daily lives and self-conceptions. As noted elsewhere, contexts of dispossession are often sites of not only flexible labor and precarity, but also biopolitical interest, whether in terms of humanitarian intervention, the focus of researchers, government agencies, or other sources of neoliberal and bureaucratic authority. If this dissertation makes a methodological contribution, it is to insist that a reflexive approach is key to research on displacement because it enables an analysis of contingent social forces that resonate between the local and global and that, in some cases, operate in subtle ways.

This means that praxis is necessary, not only when focusing primarily on the impacts research or the institutions supporting research have, but on any work in sites of dispossession and violence. This approach signifies an insistence on focusing on difference, the production of hierarchy, and the perspectives that come from the

interstices between what appear to be seamless categories. To do this is to interrogate scholarly approaches; to assess the extent to which they overlook particular voices or knowledges in the way inquiry and analysis are structured. This is important not only because it may provide for a more nuanced study of process, discourse, and practice. It also offers researchers from the "Global North" a way to engage the power they bring to the context, interrogate it for the way it contributes to the production and reproduction of certain hierarchies, and identify how it reflects the broader flow of discourse between global and local spaces. Such a perspective enables researchers to be more mindful of their relationship to the social violence inflicted upon dispossessed peoples.

But a call for reflexivity in researching displacement is about more than trying not to further inflict forms of invisible violence onto participants. It is also a way to navigate a course of what Lykes (2013: 776) calls "informed empathy and passionate solidarity." Emphasis on thinking *with* and not just *about* participants relates to this, and is what enables one to more fully be an activist-scholar that "accompanies" participants' journeys as they find their way amidst the immense violence of dispossession and precarity.

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