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Lund University Master of Science in
International Development and Management
May 19, 2015

Women's Participation in the Burmese Ethnic and Student Oppositional Movement

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ABSTRACT

The official notion of women in Burma is that they are equal to men but happy with their non-political domestic role in society. This notion undermines the work and struggle done by women in the oppositional movement. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to add to the understanding of how women participate in the Burmese ethnic and student oppositional movement. The study used feminist standpoint theory in the theoretical framework to stress the importance of basing knowledge on women's experiences. Thus, this study aims to tell 'another story' beside the often-used male narrative, to understand what power relations and hierarchies women experience within the movement and within the organisations they belong to. As youth and students have had an important role in the Burmese political history, I have mainly interviewed women active in student and youth organisations. My interpretation of women's experiences in the movement showed that gender hierarchies and conservative notions of gender roles are important factors influencing how women are able to participate in the movement. I also found two intersecting factors which seemed to, together with gender, be especially relevant for women's participation in the ethnic and student oppositional movement; age and ethno-politics.

Key words: Burma, Myanmar, Social Movement, Ethnic and Student Oppositional Movement, Student and Youth Organisation, Feminist Standpoint Theory, Women's Participation.

Word count: 15, 003.



SPONSORSHIP FROM Sida

This study has been carried out within the framework of the Minor Field Study (MFS) Scholarship Programme and the Travel Scholarship funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

The MFS Scholarship Programme gives Swedish university students the opportunity to carry out fieldwork in low- and middle income countries, or more specifically in the countries included on the *DAC List of ODA Recipients*, in relation to their Bachelor's or Master's thesis.

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The Department of Human Geography at Stockholm University, from whom I received this Scholarship, is one of the departments that administer MFS Programme funds.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to take the opportunity to express my deepest gratitude to the women who participated in this study for sharing your insights, time and experiences with me. I admire your work and your struggle. Your courage and strength inspired me in my rough patches of this writing process. My thoughts also go out to those student-activists that have been or are currently detained for their involvement in the protest against the New Education Law in Burma.

I am grateful for the economic support from Sida and would like to thank the Department of Human Geography at Stockholm University for granting me this support. I would also like to give many thanks to my loving and supportive classmates, and my supervisor Catia Gregoratti, for what has been a great supervision group. Finally, my love and gratitude goes to my loved ones and my family, who supported me throughout this process.

အထူးကျေးဇူးတင်ရှိခြင်း

ဤစာတမ်းဖြစ်မြောက်ရန်အတွက် မိမိတို့၏အတွေးအခေါ်၊ အချိန် နှင့် အတွေ့အကြုံဖြတ်သန်းမှုများများအား ဖလှယ်ပေးခြင်းဖြင့် ဝိုင်းဝန်းပါဝင်ကူညီပေးကြသော အမျိုးသမီးများအား အထူးကျေးဇူးတင်ရှိကြောင်း ဤကဏ္ဍတွင် ပြောကြားလိုသည်။ သင်တို့၏ ကြိုးစားအားထုတ်မှုနှင့် ရုန်းကန်မှုများအား ကျွန်ုပ်လေးစားအားကျမိပါသည်။ ကျွန်ုပ်စာတမ်းရေးသည့်ကာလတွင် ကြုံတွေ့ရသည့်အခက်အခဲများအား ဧ ကျပ်လွှားနိုင်ရန် သင်တို့၏ ရဲစွမ်းသတ္တိနှင့်ခွန်အားများက လှုံ့ဆော်ပေးသည်။ မြန်မာနိုင်ငံ၏အမျိုးသားပညာရေးဥပဒေ အပေါ်ကန့်ကွက်ဆန္ဒပြရာ တွင် ပါဝင်သည့်အတွက် ဖမ်းဆီးထိန်းသိမ်းခံခဲ့ရသော၊ ဖမ်းဆီးထိန်းသိမ်းခံရဆဲဖြစ်သော ဧ ကျောင်းသူကျောင်း သားတက်ကြွလှုပ်ရှားသူများကိုလည်း သတိရအောက်မေ့ မိသည်။

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AASYC	All Arakan Students and Youths' Congress
ABFSU	All Burma Federal Students' Union
ABSDF	All Burma Students Democratic Front
AKSYU	All Kachin Students and Youth Union
GONGO	Government Organised Non-Governmental Organisation
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus /Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
KYO	Karen Youth Organization
KNGY	Kayan New Generation Youth
KSDF	Kuki Students Democratic Front
MNCWA	Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs
MYPO	Mon Youth Progressive Organization
NLD	National League for Democracy
PYO	Pa-O Youth Organization
SMO	Social Movement Organisation
SYCB	Students and Youth Congress of Burma
TSYO	Ta'ang Students and Youth Organization
TWO	Ta'ang Women's Organisation
TWU	Tavoyan Youth Organisation
TYO	Tavoyan Youth Organisation
USDP	Union Solidarity and Development Party
USA	United States of America
WLB	Women's League of Burma
ZSYO	Zomi Student and Youth Organisation
8888-uprising	The student uprising in Burma during 1988

1. INTRODUCTION

The current political scene in Burma (also known as Myanmar)¹ is rather confusing. The country has gone from military dictatorship to ‘disciplinary-democracy’, which scholars and activists suggest means more or less that the junta have changed their uniforms into suits (Williams, 2011). Nevertheless, the political changes have created new opportunities for the oppositional movement to slowly move back into Burma after years in exile. At the same time civil war still causes people to flee their homes and student-activists are beaten and arrested when protesting (Petrie and South, 2014; Steinberg, 2012; Taylor, 2013; Thet Ko Ko et al. 2015).

In Burma, the public sphere and the activities within it have not been considered appropriate for women. According to the official narrative in Burma, women and men are equal, a narrative told to present ‘real’ women as secure and content with their domestic role in society. This view undermines the struggle and the sacrifices of many women in the oppositional movement and it also silences women who experience discrimination and marginalisation (Than, 2014:3). Thus, women who demand their rights by participating in the ethnic and student oppositional movement are seen as going against the Burmese women’s tradition (Than, 2014:2-3).

In general, little attention has been given to women’s experiences in social movements, especially women’s participation in mix-gender movements (Einwohner et al. 2000:680; Taylor, 1999). Hedström (2015:15) argues that women were given secondary positions within the ethnic and student oppositional movement in Burma, which made women break out of the movement and form their own women’s movement. But what happened to the women who stayed?

1.1 Research Problem and Research Question

Due to the lack of attention given to women inside of mix-gender movements and with the new political situation in Burma, this study focuses on women’s participation within the ethnic and student oppositional movement. I have chosen to focus this study on student and youth organisations within the ethnic and student oppositional movement, as students and

¹I use only the name Burma instead of Myanmar, as the name of the country, for consistency (unless Myanmar is

youth have had a historically important role in the opposition movement in Burma (Fink, 2001; Hedström, 2015:11).

Empirical research by feminist social scientists suggests that gender hierarchies exist within movement structures, and that monolithic narratives of males do not capture the whole story (Taylor, 1999:9,13). Thus, by building this study on feminist standpoint(s) epistemology and women's experiences I aim to present another story. Using feminist standpoints epistemology strengthens the importance of basing this study on the experience of women (Harding, 2004b; Kuumba, 2002:505).

As participation is a question of power structures and control of power, this study focuses on women's experiences of their participation in the ethnic and student oppositional movement and within the organisations they belong to. By looking at women's participation in the movement and within their organisations, especially focusing on student and youth organisations, I hope to gain an understanding in what ways taking part in the movement can give women opportunities to have their voices heard and take part of decision-making. I also want to gain an understanding of what part gender plays in the division of labour and roles within the movement and the organisations. This leads me to the following two research questions:

- *How do women participate in the Burmese ethnic and student oppositional movement?*
- *What power relations and hierarchies do they experience within the movement and within the organisations they belong to?*

1.2 Thesis Outline

In this study, based on the previous stated research question, I hope to shed light on women's experiences of the ethnic and student oppositional movement. I do so, starting in the upcoming chapter, by setting the scene of the puzzling Burmese political situation, women's position in the Burmese public sphere, and the ethnic and student oppositional movement. In chapter three I move on to the study's theoretical section by looking into social movements as collective spaces, the struggle surrounding women's participation in social movements and finally ending up in a discussion on the importance of women's experiences and differences from the perspective of feminist standpoint theory. This part also presents an analytical model

based on the consumption of these three segments of the theoretical framework. In the fourth chapter I discuss my positionality, and the methodological choices and limitations of this study. In chapter five I discuss my interpretation of the experiences of the interviewed women based on my analytical framework, and in chapter six I conclude my main arguments.

2. SETTING THE SCENE

2.1 The Complex Political Situation in Burma

An authoritarian military junta has ruled Burma since a coup in 1962. After the military junta's rise to power, they have suppressed all political opposition underground, into exile or imprisonment. The ethnic-nationality groups in the country, which together comprise around one third of the country's population, have been deprived of their rights, lands and livelihoods (Steinberg, 2012:220). The suppression and discrimination of ethnic-nationalities² and the total denial of their claim for autonomy have led to on-going civil wars that have stretched over more than half a century. The number of non-state armed forces that have been involved in the conflicts varies, but are often estimated to be around 25-35 groups (Hedström, 2015:6). The conflicts in the ethnic-national areas have forced people to flee their homes, leaving more than half a million people internally displaced, 120 000 living in refugee camps in Thailand, and around 2-3 million people have migrated to Thailand, as they are not able to stay in the country (Brees, 2010:282-286; South and Jollitte, 2015:4).

However, a number of reforms have been visible in the political system during the last years. The military junta has now created a civil rule and invited the oppositional party, National League for Democracy (NLD), into the parliament. The Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), which is the party formed by the junta, has worked according to their so-called 'Seven-step Roadmap to Democracy' starting with the implementation of the heavily contested 2008 constitution, elections in 2010 (boycotted by NLD) and promises of an election at the end of 2015 (Bünthe, 2014:759; Ghoshal, 2013:117; Williams, 2011:1199). Ceasefires have been signed and peace negotiations have been initiated between the national

² When referring to the Burmese ethnic-nationalities such as the Mon, Karen and the Ta'ang the women participating in this study predominantly use the term 'ethnic-nationalities'. Therefore, the term 'ethnic-nationalities' is used as a complement to 'ethnic minority groups'. An important note here is Steinberg's recognition that the Burmese term '*lu-myo*' can refer to race, ethnicity or nationality (2012:235). The term ethnic-nationalities might therefore be used by the groups themselves to differentiate both from the ethnic majority of the Burman, as well as from ethnic groups of external origin, such as Indians and Chinese.

state-army and the ethnic armed groups. The increased freedoms instituted by the new ‘civil’ government and the ceasefires have enabled press, political opposition and parts of the ethnic and student opposition movement to return from years in exile. This has also led to an improvement of international relations and economic opportunities by the lifting and easing of sanctions with increased aid and foreign direct investment from many western countries (de Lang, 2012; Kattelus et al. 2014:1-2; Joseph, 2012:137).

Nevertheless, these changes that have been described as a ‘democratisation’ of the country are not as straightforward as they might seem but actually rather ambiguous (Taylor, 2013). A frequently described feeling among the women I interviewed in this study, when discussing the current political situation, is confusion. “The current political situation is now very confusing and people wait for the next 2015 election, but nobody is sure what is going to happen” (Interview 7A). Despite the effort of the installation of a civil parliament, the real power remains solely within the government and the military.

The student demonstrations against the new National Education Law, which reached their climax in the beginning of this year, resulted in a number of arrests of student-activists and police and military assaults of both student and civilians (Aye Win Myint, 2015; Thet Ko Ko et al. 2015) Journalists who write about issues that are sensitive to the government are still at risk of being imprisoned or in worse case subjected to extra-judicial executions. The peace talks are interspersed with attacks against the ethnic armed groups. The conflict between the state-army and the ethnic armed groups are still ongoing in both the north of Shan state, in Kachin state and in Karen state (see map in Appendix 1) (Assawin Pinitwong, 2014; Hume, 2014; Phu Murng, 2014; Taylor, 2013:398).

2.2 Women in The Burmese Public

The ‘civilising project’ and the official Burmese women’s history

Than (2014:1-4) questions the official and often used narrative in Burma, that women and men are considered equal. She argues that this assumption is based on narratives of a few powerful Burman³ women and on notions that originate from texts from British colonial rule. Harriden (2014:135) argues that elites who claim that women enjoy equal rights and high

³*Burman* refers to the ethnic majority people of the country, while *Burmese* refers to the state nationality in which I include all people within the national borders or in exile, regardless of ethnicity.

status ignores evidence of socio-economic inequalities and discrimination against women. Than (2014) also underlines that the social and political situation between men and women is far from equal in Burma.

During the British colonial rule, Burman Buddhist women were described by both colonialists and missionaries as independent, equal to men, and relatively free. Colonialists' records show the Burman women as central in both politics and business. The Karen women, a Christian minority, were described as possessing no agency, and primitive in contrast to Western civilised ways. Both the 'equal' Burman women and the 'primitive' Karen women were subjected to the British colonialists 'civilising project'. The 'civilising project' aim was to feminise and domesticate women, in the spirit of how 'real' (based on Western standards) women should behave. Political as well as social and economic changes were made in order to civilise the women (Lwyn, 1994:61-65).

In the narrative of women's history in Burma, written by Ni Ni Myint, Director General of the government run Universities Historical research centre and the former General Ne Win's wife, the Burmese woman is a powerful agent with equal rights to men. In this narrative, used as the official version of Burmese women's history, women are secure and content with their domestic role in society. Thus, women who demand their rights are going against the Burmese women's tradition and are viewed as 'insecure' (Than, 2014:2-3). This view undermines the struggle and the sacrifices of many women in the oppositional movement who challenge traditional roles and it also silencing women who experience discrimination and marginalisation (Than, 2014:3). A number of women organisations such as the Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs (MNCWA), which is a official body comprised of military wives working as an extension of the military's agenda, has written negatively about women in ethnic-minorities and oppositional groups. Hedström argues that "The discourse of the "culturally appropriate woman" can be understood as the opposite to the inferior "activist woman," used as a political strategy by the wives of generals to justify military rule, and to discredit women involved in opposition activities" (2015:6).

The Burmese political sphere – men only

Regardless of whether or not the view of a women's place as being within the home in Burmese society stems from the coloniser's civilising project or if it was already in place

prior to colonialism, the idea that women have no place in politics or the public sphere is deeply entrenched in the Burmese society. One chief minister made a comment to a female ethnic leader, ““In Buddhist culture, women are not in a [political] leadership position”” (Ja Nan Lahtaw and Nang Raw, 2012:8). Ethnic-nationality based women’s organisations also argue that the traditional beliefs, such as women should not engage in politics, restrict women from taking leading positions and have a negative effect on women’s confidence and participation in political work (Henry, 2013:271).

The decades of military rule and militarisation of all public spheres have restricted the status of women and the opportunities for women to take on leading roles. The social and institutional inequalities have made it hard for women to participate and have disadvantaged women who are in positions to create social and political change (Maber, 2014:141-143). Women are effectively excluded from the peace process with the ethnic armed groups. There are no women representatives on the government’s side and only a handful in the whole process. Women and women’s groups are, at best, invited to listen, but not to participate (Davies et al. 2014; Hedström, 2013; Ja Nan Lahtaw & Nang Raw, 2012). Women hold only 28 out of 653 union assembly seats, and only 4 out of 200 ministerial posts (Harriden, 2014:136). Even though women are excluded from political involvement their bodies are used for political means. The state-army systematically uses rape and abducts ethnic women in the conflict regions to divide and frighten the ethnic communities (WLB, 2014).

The women in opposition

Lwyn argues that the representation of Burmese women in Western literature has shifted from being two forms of savages during the colonial discourse to becoming homogenised and victimised ‘third world women’ in the post-colonial discourse.⁴ This representation is undermining the agency of the women who are fighting against the military rule and reduce them to ‘patiently waiting’ for change (1994:68). Than (2014:3) writes that while numerous studies have been conducted on the topic of the civil war and the military regime after the independence in Burma, few have considered the role of women in this context. The exceptions, which have considered women’s role in the civil war and the oppositional

⁴ I use the term ‘third world women’ for the reason described by Lind: “the term Third World has been reclaimed by feminists and other activists and reappropriated as a way to invoke a positive sense of identity” (2003:240). Mohanty (1988) is an important voice in the discussion on the homogenisation of ‘third world women’. I will return to this discussion, using Mohanty (1988) in the method section of this study.

movement, show that women have been vastly engaged in this struggle. “Myanmar’s women have historically been prominent members of the opposition and protest movements, and are increasingly mobilised and active in civil society” (Maber, 2014:145). Also Petrie and South (2014:90) highlight the prominent role that women-activists have played in civil society, especially in the ethnic-nationality communities.

However, Hedström (2015) argues that the ethnic and student oppositional movement, especially the armed groups, did not give enough space for women’s participation and independent political action. The roles women were given were “limited to fulfilling traditional and conservative notions of femininity by being ‘good mothers, sisters and daughters:’ silent, obedient and supportive,” which made the women form their own women’s movement (Hedström, 2015:15).

2.3 The Ethnic and Student Opposition Movement⁵

It started with the students

The role of student in the Burmese political history has been instrumental ever since the 1920s when students started to oppose British rule. The strikes, protests and boycotts that sparked the fight for independence, which eventually led to independence in 1947, were organised by students. The student organisations’ political significance and that they pose a threat to the regime has been visible throughout the twentieth century. The student union All Burma Federation of Students’ Union (ABFSU) was with all existing political organisations criminalised by the junta in 1962, which led to the death of the civil society, or as David Steinberg puts it, “more accurately, it was murdered” (Fink, 2001:19-10,31; Steinberg, 1999:8).

⁵ There is a range of different names used to describe what this study refers to as the Burmese ‘oppositional movement’ (Henry, 2011, Beatty, 2011, Hedström, 2015). Other names that are often used are: democracy movement (Williams, 2012, Pedersen, 2008) pro-democracy movement (Kyaw Yin Hlaing, 2008), pro-democracy oppositional movement (Min Zin, Joseph 2012:104) and pro-democracy resistance movement (McConnachie, 2012:31). For this study I use the most current, and for the scope of this study, the most accurate term: **‘ethnic and student oppositional movement’** used by Hedström (2015). A tension is often described between the post-1988 predominantly urban-based democracy movement, led by NLD, and the ethno-nationalistic insurgent but also non-armed movement (South, 2008:24, Ghoshal, 2013:125-125, Pedersen, 2008:45-46) However, the student and youth organisations bridge this tension, especially organisations such as the All Burma Students Democratic Front. I therefore see the ‘ethnic and student oppositional movement’ as the most useful term in this study as it puts focus on both the ethnic-nationalistic and the student struggle.

The 8888-uprising,⁶ a key event for the oppositional movement, happened when thousands of students, youth, monks and other civilians took to the streets in 1988, starting in the universities. The students were the main force behind the protests and members of the students groups also formed the main oppositional party, the NLD, with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi as their leader. The uprising was brutally suppressed by the military junta and thousands of students (and other civilians) were killed by the military (Fink, 2001:50-61; Kyaw Yin Hlaing, 2008:127). Many women were visible during the uprising and some female students had leading positions within the movement. Hedström (2015:7) argues that due to the fact that women were targeted equally by the military during the uprising the ownership of the movement became gender-neutral.

After the uprising, which failed to take the power from the military junta, many of the student-activists were imprisoned for their involvement and many also fled the country. Among the students who fled to the border, many saw armed struggle as the only alternative and joined the ethnic armed groups who had for many years been fighting a guerrilla-style war against the state-army along the hillside jungle on the Thai and Chinese border (Fink, 2001:61-62; South, 2009:18-19). The armed groups were exclusively based on their ethnic-nationality affiliation, which made the student form their own armed-group to fight alongside the ethnic armed groups, called the All Burma Students Democratic Front (ABSDF).

The ‘gender-neutrality’ that had coloured the 8888-uprising was lost within the armed struggle and women were downgraded to secondary positions and supportive roles as non-combatants, which often was equal to non-political (Hedström, 2015:7-9). Hedström argues that:

Deep-seated notions of differential gender roles have informed the nationalistic projects of the armed opposition groups, which advocated conservative gender norms... As such, both within the country and in exile, female participation has dominantly been reasoned around notions of traditional domestic confines and, importantly, the return to these once the conflict is over (Hedström, 2015:9).

⁶ The student uprising in 1988 is called the 8888-uprising based on the date of the main event, which occurred on 08-08-1988.

The ethnic armed struggle and the non-violence organisations

The connection and interaction between the non-violent part of the ethnic and student opposition movement such as student and youth organisations and the ethnic armed struggle is strong. Non-violence movements are usually defined with a clear distinction from armed groups (Keane, 2003). However, scholars looking at the case of the Burmese opposition movement (Beatty, 2011; Henry, 2011; McConnachie, 2012; South, 2009; Williams, 2011) do not find the division between the civil organisation and the armed group as clear cut; rather they find strong connections and overlap between the two. The student-army ABSDF is still one of the largest student and youth organisations in the border-lands today and they work with civil projects, and are involved in the armed struggle (Beatty, 2011:128,225).

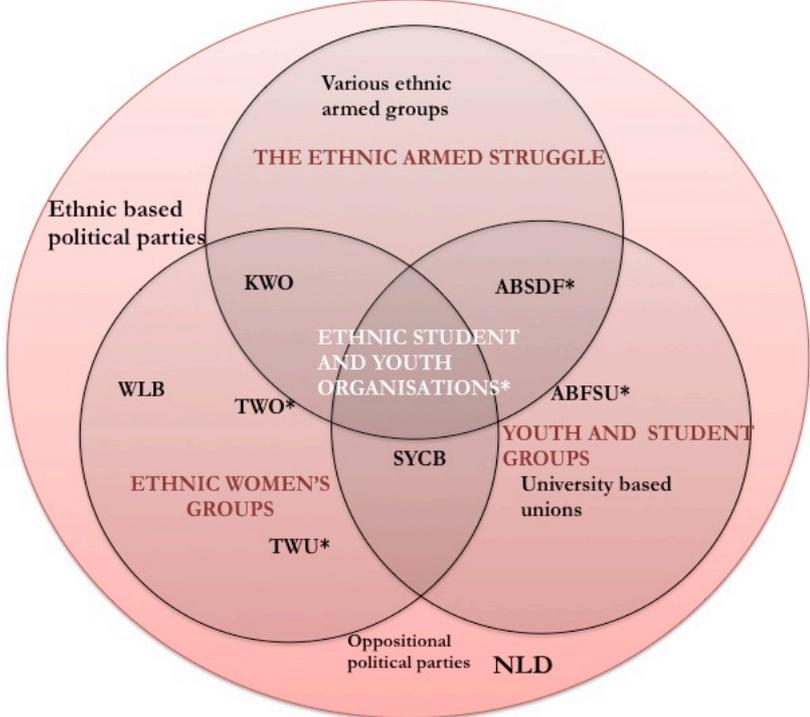
The structure of many of the non-military organisations in civil society emerged with characteristics of a top-down system and heavily controlled by the ethnic-military organisations (Petrie and South, 2014:90). Though, during the beginning of the 1990s, the influence of armed groups declined and opened up for a more participatory civil society, especially in the border areas. Different women's and student and youth organisations started organising in the border areas, especially along the Thai/Burma border (Petrie and South, 2014:90; South, 2009:20). According to South, these groups represented "new models of organisation, [and] these networks constituted a dynamic aspect of the otherwise bleak political scene" (2009:20). Even if the hierarchical structure of the organisations and the control by the armed groups decreased, the Burmese ethno-nationalistic discourse, which identified the Burman military government as the focus of criticism and demands for reform and different levels of autonomy, remained strong within the non-armed part of the ethnic and student oppositional movement (Hedström, 2015:11).

The youth in the movement

The students and youth have always been a central part of the oppositional movement in Burma. Just as their armed counterparts, many non-armed youth groups are based on ethnic identity and base their struggle for democracy on the demands for ethnic rights and autonomy within a federal system for the ethnic groups (Henry, 2013). Some of these groups are youth wings of ethnic armed groups and ethnic division has an impact on the organisation of political action (Brown, 2012:138-140). Thus, there are organisations that strive to unite the different ethnic struggles, such as the student armed-group ABSDF and the Students and

Youth Congress of Burma, which is an umbrella organisation for student and youth organisations from different ethnic-nationalities⁷ (Brown, 2012:139; SYCB, 2013). The ethnic-based student and youth organisations work both to raise awareness among youth and students from the ethnic areas as well as mobilise them in the work toward democracy. The following *figure 1* shows the ethnic and student oppositional movement from the perspective of youth and student groups.

Figure 1: The movement from a youth perspective



ABFSU*	All Burma Federal Students' Union
ABSDF*	All Burma Students Democratic Front
KWO	Karen Youth Organisation
NLD	National League for Democracy
SYCB	Students and Youth Congress of Burma
TWO*	Ta'ang Women's Organisation
TWU*	Tavoyan Youth Organisation
WLB	Women's League of Burma
Ethnic Student and Youth Organisations*	Mon Youth Progressive Organization (MYPO), Pa-O Youth Organization (PYO), Ta'ang Students and Youth Organization (TSYO), Tavoyan Youth Organisation (TYO), Zomi Student and Youth Organisation (ZSYO).
*	These organisations are part of this study.

(Author's construct)

Prior to 2012, ethnic and student organisations mainly worked from exile in the neighbouring countries, especially along the Thai-Burma border, with only 'underground' staff and offices

⁷The following are the 11 member-organisations of SYCB: All Arakan Students and Youths' Congress (AASYC), All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF), All Kachin Students and Youth Union (AKSYU), Karen Youth Organization (KYO), Kayan New Generation Youth (KNGY), Kuki Students Democratic Front (KSDF), Mon Youth Progressive Organization (MYPO), Pa-O Youth Organization (PYO), Ta'ang Students and Youth Organization (TSYO), Tavoyan Youth Organisation (TYO), Zomi Student and Youth Organisation (ZSYO).

inside Burma. Many groups who worked inside have had their members imprisoned or killed for their political activism (Brown, 2012:140). Thus, since the ‘democratisation,’ the space for civil society organisations and the opportunity for political activism have opened up and organisations are now able to work more openly inside of the country. In the urban areas, the umbrella organisation for university unions, the student union ABFSU, is still one of the main actors in the democratic struggle and is the core organiser of the student demonstrations which have been ongoing during 2014 and 2015, against the New Education Law (Thet Ko Ko et al. 2015). However, safety is still a concern both in urban and ethnic areas, thus many organisations still hide their identity (based on information from the interviews conducted in this study).

As most social services, especially education, are lacking in remote areas, the student and youth organisations work to provide education both in form of primary education and in the form of workshops and education programmes, often in ethnic minority languages. Many organisations also raise awareness of questions such as HIV/AIDS and narcotic use (Brown, 2012:140; information from the interviews conducted in this study). These organisations are vital for their communities. Petrie and South write that “though maybe invisible to Western observers, this indigenous civil society constitutes the heart of the communities in question, being a great reservoir of ‘human capital’ and strategic capacity for change” (2014:91).

3. THEORY

The theoretical discussion in this thesis is divided into three main sections. The first section discusses social movement as collective space and participation within this space. In the second section, women’s participation in movements and the division of labour within SMOs (Social Movement Organisations) is discussed. I finish by exploring feminist standpoint theory through discussing the use of women’s experiences as a base for knowledge production.

3.1 Participation in the Space of Social Movements

Social movements as space, and the power relation of everydayness

Classifying and determining what defines a social movement has been proven to be difficult, and a range of different definitions exist. Often when analysing what constitutes a social movement, a typology of three main points are used. First, social movements are involved in conflicting relationships with clearly identified opponents. Secondly, informal networks link

together social movements, and finally, the individuals within a movement share a collective identity (della Porta and Diani, 2006:20). Tarrow defines the term social movement as “sequences of contentious politics based on underlying social networks, on resonant collective action frames, and on the capacity to maintain sustained challenges against powerful opponents” (2011:7).

An increased interest, among scholars researching social movements, has been given to the internal aspects of movements (Haug, 2013:706). Often social movement theorists have focused on the ‘front stage’ of a movement, aiming to explain why people choose to participate in social movements to be able to identify the key factors to why social movements emerge and how they develop (Klandermans and Oegema, 1987; Tarrow, 2011). This focus has generated an image of social movements as homogenous actors with given goals and strategies. If instead one looks at the ‘backstage’ of a movement, it would show movements as a context and a collective space for activists rather than a mobilising actor (Haug, 2013:706). Haug argues that the importance of understanding movements as space reflects both on the weight of individual activists’ contributions to internal structures and on the growing recognition of cultural dimensions of social movements (2013:706).

What collective spaces are we actually talking about within the movements? There is an existing dispute among scholars on whether or not SMOs should be focal units of analysis within studies of social movements. Haug argues that the space within SMOs does not constitute the collective space of a movement; instead he argues that it is the meeting spaces created when SMOs, other groups and networks meet, which constitute the spaces of the movement (2013:708-709). On the other hand, according to Snow et al. (2003:na), the inter-organisational meetings and the relations between organisations are organised activities. They therefore argue that, even if they vary, organisations associated with the movement need to be included as a focal unit when conceptualising social movements. The internal structures and cultural dimensions of movements are embodied by the persons within the movement and articulated by the messy aspects of everyday life within the space of SMOs, which therefore also appear as a relevant unit for understanding social movements (Routledge, 2015:5).

If social movements are spaces rather than actors, then this space and the everyday activities within this space are based on power relations. Because space is not an impartial existing vacuum, “space is a social product [...] it is not simply ‘there’, a neutral container waiting to

be filled, but is a dynamic, humanly constructed means of control, and hence of domination, of power” (Lefebvre 1991: 24). Gaventa (2006) argues that power relations help to shape boundaries of participatory spaces based on who may be within them and what they may do and say there (Gaventa, 2006:26). Then what does participation in these spaces essentially mean?

Participation – a question of power

The concept of participation has become a buzzword within a development context, which means that it can mean almost anything (Cornwall, 2008:269). In many cases, the concept of participation has been depoliticised and used to maintain consensus around the interests of the dominant power structure than to create social transformation (Leal, 2010:94-95). White (1996) argues that simply ‘attending’ does not ensure that a person actually has a say: “Sharing through participation does not necessarily mean sharing in power” (White, 1996:6). In line with Leal’s argumentation that participation does not naturally lead to a division of control, White (1996) argues that inclusion can be a form of exercising of power, as inclusion rather than exclusion creates control (White, 1996:7). Farrington and Bebbington (1993) present the level of participation according to depth and breadth, and argue that the participant has to be engaged in all parts, from identification to decision-making, for it to be called a deep participatory process. Cornwall adds to this by stating that depth is not enough if the range is narrow, instead this can lead to exclusion. If something claims to be participatory, but turns out to only include the elite, older, richer, or male members, then depth does not prevent groups from being excluded (Cornwall, 2008:276). Cornwall speaks of participation as creating space where people are able to exercise their voices and gain more choices (2003:1325). Cornwall further argues that “Being involved in a process is not equivalent to having a voice. Voice needs to be nurtured. People need to feel able to express themselves without fear of reprisals or the expectation of not being listened to or taken seriously” (Cornwall, 2008:278).

3.2 Women in Social Movements

Gender hierarchies in movements

Women have always been part of social movements, such as civil rights movements and environmental movements, because women are never only women. They are also parts of communities based on ethnicity, class, nationality and have interests in seeking inclusion and recognition for themselves and their causes (West and Blumberg, 1990). A number of

empirical studies⁸ from around the world show a large variety of challenges but also opportunities which women in social movements experience.

Empirical research by feminist social scientists suggests that gender hierarchies exist within movement structures, despite a movement's claim to be gender inclusive. Gender is constructed in movements that do not explicitly evoke the language of a gender conflict. Thus, these structures affect all parts of the movement, everything from mobilisation and ideology, to course and outcomes of the movement are gendered (Taylor, 1999:9,13). However, due to gender hierarchies, women's experiences within mix-gender movements are rarely included in the 'master narrative' of the movement (Kuumba, 2002:505). Social movement research mainly focuses on the male experiences in a movement and do not use a gendered approach, which then ignores the influence of gender in social movements (Taylor, 1999). Experiences from women who have participated in social movements reveal that women often are excluded from decision-making positions and that male counterparts uphold gender hierarchies within the movement.

The everyday-day life in SMOs

Systems of gender hierarchies are visible in the interactions and behaviours of everyday life: in the division of work both in organisations and in family and cultural practices (Taylor, 1999:11). Thus, when exploring power hierarchies and gender biases within social movements, it is of highest importance to look at the division of labour and organising within SMOs. In a mixed-gender movement, expectations of gender roles in society also determine the basis for participation in the SMOs. Women tend to take on the same gender role within an organisation as the one expected of them outside the movement, including domestic needs such as cleaning, serving coffee, and cooking for meetings, but also office tasks such as taking minutes notes, accounting and running errands (Cable, 1992:38-39). Gordon (2002:107) notes the following about the building of the student movement in the early 1960s "[...] women were virtually invisible to the public. They were there, of course, as they were in the older civil rights organizations, typing, mimeographing, cleaning, cooking, even writing speeches but not giving them". This kind of 'household' work is important and it is what makes the organisations run. However, a stereotypical gender division of these tasks hinders women from taking other more prominent decision-making roles within the SMOs. Thus,

⁸ Brown and Ferguson, 1995; Cable, 1992; Einwohner et al. 2000; Gordon, 2008; Hedström, 2015; Irons, 1998; Kuumba, 2002; Robnett 1997; Shriver et al. 2013; Taylor, 1999; Viterna, 2006.

Robnett's (1997) research shows that women often take on important informal decision-making roles and responsibilities 'backstage', but no attention is paid to this informal leadership within the movement.

Young women's three transgressions

As gender hierarchies are embedded in the structure of society, they also exist in social movements, which affect the way women are able to participate in movements. One of the main structures which makes involvement in a social movement more problematic for women than for men is that a woman is not only transgressing the rules of the public political life (which the movement in itself is doing), she is also transgressing her role in society by being active in the public sphere (Roth and Horan, 2001). Kuumba argues that "...women's and men's opportunities for engagement in political movements often differ based on their relative positioning within the larger social structure, economy and political system" (2002:519). Mouffe (1992) argues that the sphere of the public is masculine (in the image of a white male) and leaves everyone who does not fit into this image relegated to the mute sphere of the private. The activities regarded as characteristic of citizens, such as working for wage and taking part of the political life, have historically been categorised as masculine. And as all these activities have been carried out in the public, this social space is also categorised as masculine (Jagger, 2005:4). Even if women have access to different aspect of civil society, this arena is based on the structure of patriarchal power where women are valued less than men (Pateman, 1989:14).

Young women do not only transgress twice but rather three times, taking into consideration the axis of age. The question of age becomes important in my study as many of the women engaging in the ethnic and student oppositional movement, especially with student and youth based organisations, are young⁹. Gordon (2008) argues that young people have spatial constraints that differ from adults, and that parents and other caretakers play an important role in youths' political-activities. However, as the youth movement narrative is based on young men's and boys' experiences, gender is neglected in the parent-child relationship and its effect on spatial mobility (Gordon, 2008:34). Ethnicity, class, gender and age all play part in parents' worry and control over their children's activities. Despite the inclusion of these other

⁹ Based on my personal observations, the interviewed women and talking to other members that I met from the student and youth organisations, I would say that most of their members are around 18-30 years old. A few members are older and some might also be younger.

axes, young men seem to have greater freedoms than young women, and Gordon argues “that this overarching disparity between boys’ and girls’ mobility and independence compromises girls’ ability to become public, social movement actors” (2008:35). This can be considered as another transgression which young women make, which can be added to the double transgression that women in social movements make.

3.3 Feminist Standpoint(s) Theory

The two previous sections have both demonstrated that to be able to understand women’s participation in social movements, we have to look at power relations, which are embedded in the space of the movement and within SMOs. To do so, we need to understand the internal structure and ‘everydayness’ of the movement through the experiences of women. Can women’s experiences be regarded as a valuable source of knowledge? I turn to feminist standpoint theory to further discuss this question.

An answer to positivist science and knowledge production

Standpoint theory is a feminist critical theory¹⁰ about the relations between the production of knowledge and the practices of power. The evolution of standpoint theory during the 1970s and the 1980s has to be understood in the context of the then dominating, positivistic, Western male-centred understanding of knowledge and science. Feminist standpoint theory has deeply influenced feminist research by criticising the positivist’s historic denial of women’s subjectivity and agency. The theory emerged from the feminist movement, which disrupted the established assumption that politics damages the scientific production of knowledge rather than constructs and improves it (Harding, 2004a:1-2).

The main argument of standpoint theory is that certain social standings and women’s own experiences offer more comprehensive resources for understanding the social and political processes that affect women’s lives than the standpoints and interests representing the dominant ruling groups (Harding, 2004a:1-2; O’Shaughnessy and Krogman, 2012:494-498). Standpoint theory establishes the idea that women’s experiences can provide alternative

¹⁰ Feminist standpoint theory has been heavily debated and criticised, but also cherished by feminist scholars. Standpoint theorists such as Dorothy E. Smith (1974), Nancy Hartsock (1983), Donna Haraway (2004), Sandra Harding (2004b; 2008) and Patricia Hill Collins (1990) have over time taken different positions and re-modified their claims, not to mention that the ideas around standpoint(s) was diverse among the scholars from the start. The original text from Haraway (2004) was published in 1987, but in this study I refer to a republished version in a reader edited by Harding. The original text from Harding (2004b) was published in 1991.

knowledge claims, which take into account multiplicity, diversity and experience (Kokushkin, 2014:11).

Controversies and critic of standpoint theory

Most standpoint theorists claim that women's knowledge has a privileged point of departure. However, the argument that women's experiences better reveal the truth of human conditions rely on the same dichotomy that upholds the idea that positivistic male knowledge is the one 'true' knowledge. Hekman argues, "... if the differences among women are taken seriously and we accept the conclusion that women occupy many different standpoints and thus inhabit many realities, this thesis [the privileged knowledge claim] must be reexamined" (2004:227). In this lies one of the main controversies in the debate of feminist standpoint theory; that standpoint theory would rely on the shared identity of women, which often favours Western, white, and middle class feminism without taking into account the differences among women such as class, race, ethnicity, sexuality and age.

The second main controversy within the standpoint discussion lies within the postmodern criticism of the idea of existing realities. Postmodernist theorists oppose the idea that women's experiences provide the basis for a privileged understanding of the material reality. Thus for postmodernists the life-world is discursively constructed and there is not one truth, but there are many truths, all within different discourses (Letherby, 2003:52; O'Shaughnessy and Krogman, 2012:50). How can this critique be answered? Must standpoint theory and postmodernity be seen as opposites or can an interaction be possible and potentially fruitful?

Multiple standpoint(s) and situated knowledge

Harding argues that standpoint theory is based on a 'feminist standpoint', and not a 'woman standpoint'. This acknowledges that a standpoint is not automatically ascribed due to a position, but rather, a standpoint is achieved through both political and scientific struggle (Harding, 2004a:8). Many scholars emphasize that there are multiple feminist standpoints and not one single feminist standpoint. This is especially relevant in Hirschmann's (2004:318) argument that standpoint theory can deal with differences among women. Hirschmann argues "the pluralisation of feminist standpoints recognizes differences among material experiences of women across history, race, class, and culture" (Hirschmann, 2004:320). Standpoints should therefore be seen as multiple in incorporating differences among women.

The different standpoints do not provide a ‘truth,’ but they help to achieve clarity by adding crucial pieces to the everlasting puzzle of social life. Haraway argues that: “there is no single feminist standpoint because our maps require too many dimensions for that metaphor to ground our vision” (Haraway, 2004:93). Haraway’s concept of situated knowledge, first introduced in 1988, is a valuable contribution to this discussion. Haraway’s viewpoint does not seek the truth or the reality but rather looks for another story (Hekman, 2004:235). In the discussion of a subaltern privileged account of knowledge, Haraway argues that there are “good reasons to believe” that the vision is better from below than from the powerful top position (2004:88). However, Haraway continues by arguing that seeing from below is neither easy nor unproblematic. For Haraway, critical knowledge is situated and bound to location, embodiment and partial perspective and cannot be floating around as a bodiless, all-seeing eye disconnected from location and position. This kind of situated knowledge gives privilege to a web of connections, which can transform the system of knowledge through “shared conversations in epistemology” (Haraway, 2004:89).

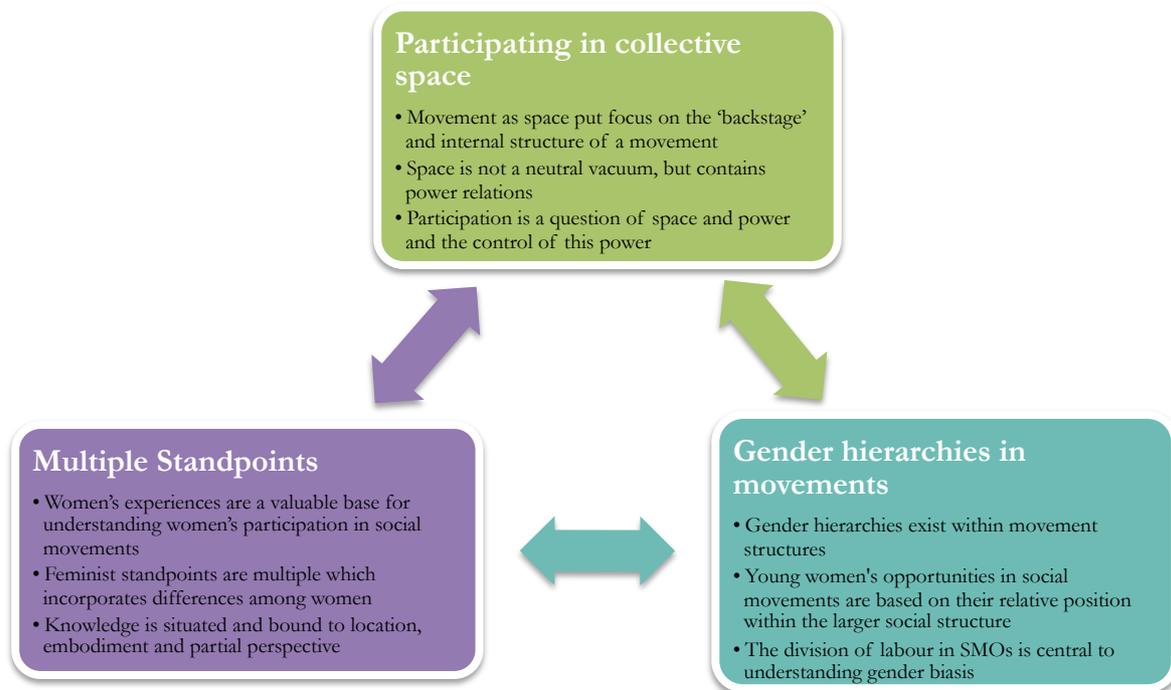
O’Shaughnessy and Krogman state that many of the more recent studies which they look at use a hybrid of standpoint and postmodern epistemology: “In more recent debates and discussions, the blending of multiple feminist epistemological approaches is advocated as a means of engaging with the wider issues addressed by feminist scholars” (2012:501-502, 512). This understanding of standpoints as multiple, combined with Haraway’s situated knowledge, provides an opportunity for an innovative use of standpoint theory.

3.4 An Analytic Model: Participation, Gender Hierarchies and Standpoint(s)

I have identified three main theoretical sections within my theoretical framework, which are most central to this study: 1) participation in social movements as a question of power and space, 2) Gender hierarchies within movements, and 3) feminist standpoints as multiple. These three sections interact with and support each other, creating an analytical model (see *Figure 4*) of vital concepts that guides the discussion in chapter five. The sections are not determined by a specific order and the priority of the concepts can be higher or lower based on their relevance to women’s experiences of participating in the movement. In my interpretations I use the concepts to structure the discussion, give explanatory strength to the

overall discussion and to create a theoretical base for understanding certain aspects of the experiences shared with me in the interviews.

Figure 4: The analytical model



(Author’s construct)

Participation in collective space

Understanding a movement as a space rather than an actor provides opportunities to further analyse the ‘backstage’ of a movement, which is embodied by the persons within the movement and articulated by the messy aspects of everyday life (Routledge, 2015:5). As space is never power neutral, this understanding also reveals that there are power relationships within a movement, which need to be considered when trying to understand participation in collective space (Gaventa, 2006:26; Haug, 2013:706). Participation is a question of space and power and the control of this power. In order to talk about participation, space not only needs to be shared, but control of power needs to be shared as well. Participation can then be a social transformation, which challenges dominating power structures (White, 1996:6-7).

Gender hierarchies in movements

Feminist research suggests that the patriarchal structures and gender hierarchies existing within the public sphere are also embedded within movement structures. Gender is constructed in all movements, including the ones that do not explicitly evoke language of a

gender conflict (Jagger, 2005:4; Kuumba, 2002:519; Taylor, 1999:9,13). Gender hierarchies within mixed-gender movements are upheld by traditional assumption of women's assigned roles in society (Hedström, 2015:2; Tarrow, 2011:222). Systems of gender hierarchies are visible in the interactions and behaviours of everyday life, and are therefore most visible within the SMOs (Taylor, 1999:11).

Feminist standpoints as multiple

Women's experiences are a valuable base for understanding women's participation in social movements. They convey another story and as Haraway (2004:88) puts it, there are "good reasons to believe" that the vision is better from below. To understand feminist standpoints as multiple opens standpoints to incorporate the differences among women's material experiences. This enables an analysis which recognises different systems of inequality and oppression and how they interact with each other (Hirschmann, 2004:320; Kuumba 2002:505). To understand women's experiences, we have to see knowledge as situated and bound to location, partial perspective and embodiment of different material experiences of women (Haraway, 2004:89).

4. METHOD

4.1 Differences, Positionality, and Self-Reflectivity

In my theoretical section I have a fairly comprehensive discussion on standpoint theory, and as standpoint is not only a theory, but also an epistemology, my epistemological stand has been discussed rather extensively in the theoretical section of this study. From the perspective of methodological choices in this study, the most significant contribution of standpoint epistemology is that it strengthens the importance of basing studies on the experience of women in social movements. Women's experiences present another story than the overrepresented master narrative of men, thus this study is based on women's experiences (Harding, 2004b; Kuumba, 2002:505).

However, O'Shaughnessy and Krogman (2012:510-511) find in their study that many feminist scholars tended to exclude a discussion on research's epistemological position. To state the importance of epistemological discussions, I therefore see it as relevant to return to the epistemological discussion of women's differences, this time with a focus on my own position as a researcher and upon the ethics of research in an international setting.

Reflexivity and dealing with my position

Basing my study on women's experiences opens it to the question of whether or not feminism, or rather what has been called 'first world' feminism (often referring to white, rich, middle class feminists from predominantly Western countries), is equipped to deal with the problems encountered by women in once colonised countries, so-called 'third world women' (McLeod, 2000:173). Mohanty claims, as Western feminism cannot escape global inequalities, they are likely to replicate unequal power relations within their research. This replication leads to a homogenisation of third world women, reducing them to a coherent group with identical interests (1988:62). Spivak (1988:66-90) argues that in first world feminists' attempts to speak for the historically muted third world, they are uncritically gluing this constructed homogenous voice into history. However, this is not to be interpreted as though third world women do not have voices, or do not speak, but rather as others do not have the knowledge how to listen. Can I, as a feminist researcher from a Western country, speak about Burmese women's experiences? How do I deal with the question of representation, privilege and differences among women?

When conducting fieldwork in a context in which I am an international outsider, I have to be aware of colonial and historical power dimensions, which affects my research. I have to reflect upon these power dimensions that come with my position, and work to avoid replicating them to prevent my research from becoming exploitive (Sultana, 2007:375). Sultana (2007:375) argues that ethical research in an international field can be conducted if the researcher practises self-reflexivity and is critical in analysing issues such as positionality, power relations and negotiations of space. I therefore have to be clear about the power dimensions and their affects on the interaction in the interviews and how the women are interpreted and understood through my experiences. I cannot speak for these women and pretend that I am an invisible vessel caring their voices. In doing so, I would be stealing their agency and sovereign subjectivity (Spivak, 1988:66-90).

Looking to the standpoint theorist answer to the question of differences, emphasis is placed on the multiple natures of feminist standpoint(s). Feminism does not have one standpoint in which everyone need to fit in, but several standpoints that recognise differences among the experiences of women across time, class, ethnicity, race, age and culture (Harding, 2004a:8;

Hirschmann, 2004:320). My personal, historical, and cultural experiences shape the research that I conduct and influence how I interpret the answers given to me. Researchers cannot be seen as objective filters of information: the interaction between two people and the power dynamics in place at this interaction also shape the nature of the information that the informants choose to share (Creswell, 2009:8). I cannot try to fit the interviewed women into one shaped standpoint. I have to bring awareness to multiple standpoints.

4.2 Methodological Choices

Standpoint and semi-structured interviews

Fieldwork using a feminist methodology based on standpoint theory has traditionally been conducted using either institutional ethnography or participatory action research. Participatory methods are often used to overcome separation and create non-hierarchical relationships between researcher and the interviewed (Cotterill: 1992:593; Rose 2001:27). However, it has been criticised for not considering differences among women and hierarchies based on other factors than gender, as well as for requiring friendships to be built between interviewer and the interviewed (O'Shaughnessy and Krogman, 2012:496). However, the participatory research approach does have some valid points of departure. For example, by creating research data in more open settings, the informants can contribute significantly to the description and analyse of the social issue that is of importance for them (Rose, 2001:27-31).

For this study, neither institutional ethnography nor participatory action research was an option, due to time limitations in the field, as these methods are rather time consuming. However, to not use a participatory method has been an active choice due to its limitations. O'Shaughnessy and Krogman's study on feminist methodology show that a range of different qualitative methods are used in conjunction with standpoint theory, which show that there are a variety of methodological choices available (2012:505,209). As I am interested in understanding the experience of women and their participation in the ethnic and student oppositional movement, doing semi-structured interviews with women in the movement appear as the most rewarding data collection method (Ragin and Amoroso, 2010:26). I see this design as a way to incorporate the valuable participatory component of an open setting, which let the informant talk about what she finds most relevant. When using this method I have let the conversation steer the direction of the interview using only an interview guide of

topics and supportive questions to keep the interview in line with the direction of my study (Silverman and Marvasti, 2008:68-70).

Situated knowledge bound to location: a case study

This research is situated in a specific context and is bound to location and the experiences of the interviewed women and their partial perspective. The study is determined by and bound to the uncertain political circumstances in Burma, the organisations' (which the women belong to) position in the oppositional movement, and movements in the country's political history. The research is also determined and limited by my time-bound interaction with the interviewed women and on their unique perception of their surrounding and participation. This context makes it suitable to treat the research as an idiographic case study (Creswell, 2009:13). The case is an object of interest in its own right and the findings of the observations are not generalizable to other cases (Bryman, 2008:53-58). This is also done to prevent replication of the idea of the monolithic 'third world woman', and to avoid generalising the experiences of the women in this study for all women in Burma or for all 'third world women'. I treat my data as an actively constructed narrative, which is formed by the interaction and power relation in our interview (Silverman and Marvasti 2008:65-70). My data therefore represent the narrative created in our interaction, a partial perspective, which represents only one of many meanings of the interviewed women's life.

4.3 Sampling and Interviewing

I have used the Student and Youth Congress of Burma, SYCB, which I have worked with for three months during the later half of 2014 as a gatekeeper to find informants for this study among student and youth organisations. I have followed a snowball effect sampling using the network of the organisations I met, and additionally interviewing some of their partners (Ritchie and Lewis 2003:78,94). SYCB is an umbrella organisation for eleven ethnic student and youth organisations¹¹ and I have had the chance to meet women from six of these organisations and from three other organisations, which are not members of SYCB. In four of the nine organisations, I met with two or three women from each, summing up to a total of fourteen interviews (see appendix 2 and 3 for details on the interviews). I did not have the chance to meet all the member organisations of SYCB due to limited time and access, as a

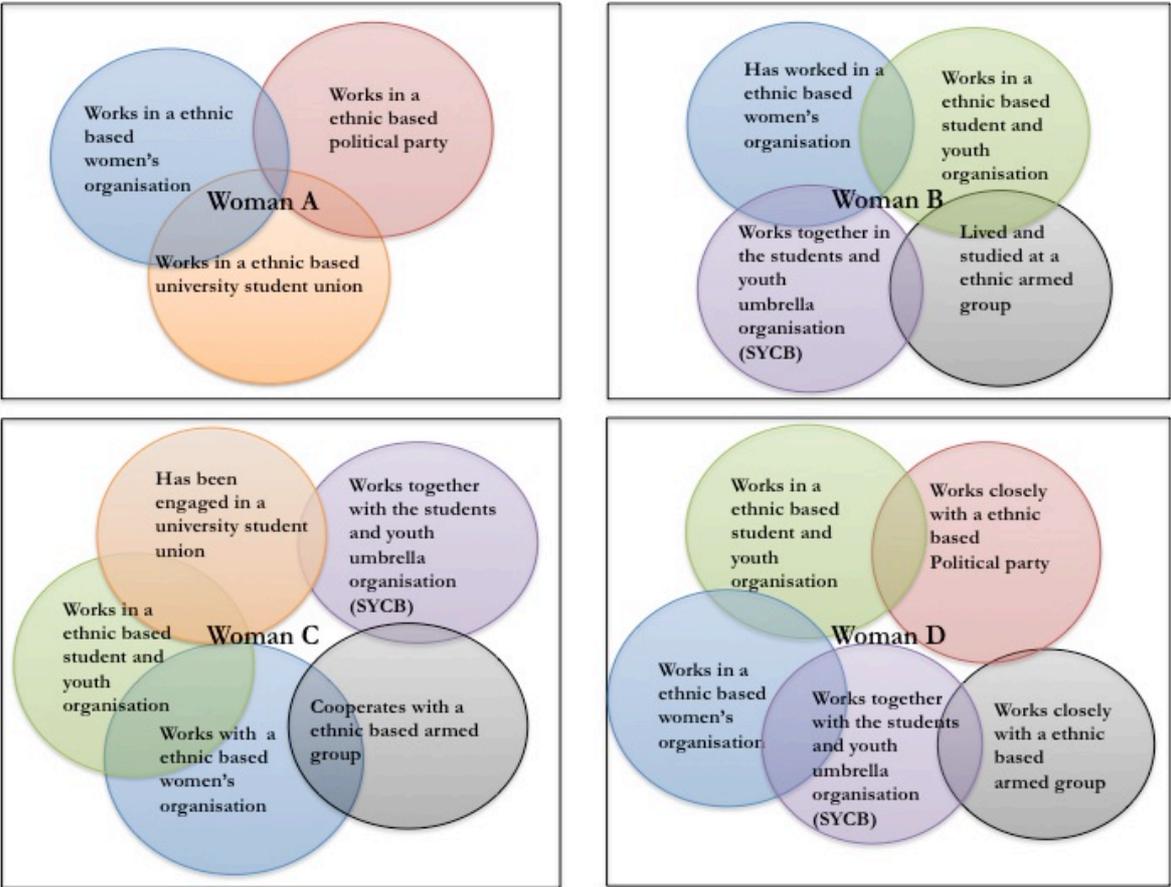
¹¹ The student army, All Burma Student Democratic Force ABSDF, is one of these organisations.

number of areas in the ethnic nationality states are restricted or very difficult to travel to due to conflict.

Two of the interviews were done in Burmese with an English interpreter, the rest were conducted in English. All interviews were done face to face, with the exception of one interview, which was done on Skype with extra material sent on e-mail. The interviews were done individually, however due to accessibility and time limitations one of the interviews was conducted as a small group interview together with two women from the same organisation. Most of the women that I met work inside of the Burma, although four currently work at their organisation's office at the border area in Thailand (see appendix 3). With the written consent of the informants, I have tape-recorded the interviews. The exact identity of the women interviewed has been kept anonymous for their safety.

In the meetings with the organisations and in my conversations with the women, I understood that the organisations often were not the limits of the women's work and involvement in the movement. The women participated in the collective space of the movement, which stretched beyond the boundaries of the organisation they belonged to, through various involvements in protests, organisations, networks, alliances, and partnerships. Hedström (2015:14) mentions the close link between women's groups and the ethnic and student-based community as well as their connection to the ethnic armed struggle. To illustrate this further the following figure shows four of the interviewed women's engagement outside of their respective organisation by presenting the number of organisations and networks within the movement, to which they are connected.

Figure 5: Examples of women’s participation across organisational boundaries



(Author’s construct)

The flexibility of the women’s work led me to include interviews with women outside of ethnic student and youth organisations in this study. I interviewed one woman from the student union ABFSU and had interviews with three women from two different ethnic based women’s organisations/unions. All interviews indicated that the work of the women was interlinked, overlapping and closely associated. Silverman and Marvasti state, “in qualitative research, what happens in the field as you attempt to gather your data is itself a source of data rather than just a technical problem in need of solution” (2008:69). I therefore see this part of my data collection and the close interaction of these three different organisations as a first ‘interpretation’ of my data and a step toward understanding the participation of women in the ethnic and student oppositional movement.

4.4 Interpretation, Trustworthiness and Limitations

Transcribing and trustworthiness

I manually transcribed all of the interviews word for word. However, when using quotes in my discussion, I have made the text more adapted to a written setting, which includes taking away repeated words and grammar mistakes, in order to present the experiences of the participants in a respectful and useful way. I see the result of my data as my interpretation of the interviewed women's experiences rather than as 'findings'.

To make the process transparent I outline a rigorous structure, from purpose and epistemology to analytical model and sampling to ensure trustworthiness. I aim to provide depth to the descriptions of the settings to convey my interpretations (Bryman, 2012:390-393). After each interview I wrote a reflection, as the interaction was still fresh in my memory. I have done this both for creating trustworthiness of my data and to kick-start the interpretation by reflecting on the data already in the field (Silverman and Marvasti, 2008:193,219).

Interpretation and coding

Harding clearly emphasises that the experiences of women is a base for an alternative knowledge claim. However, these experiences need to be analysed and categorised. The goal is not to 'act out' women's experiences but to theorise about them critically (Hirschman, 2004:318; Harding, 2004a). To further understand the experiences of the participants in this study, I use the theoretical framework and my analytical model to help me code the interviews in categories relevant to my research questions. Using the analytical model as a frame when coding has made me see the data more holistically and enabled me to compare it across categories and sub-categories to find both patterns and differences (Creswell 2012:183-185). As I see knowledge as situated and location bound, I also use secondary sources and my own observations to contextualise my interpretation of the women's experiences within their specific setting (Haraway, 2004:89).

Limitations

The scope of this study is limited to my interpretations of the created narratives, which only are partial perspectives of the women's experiences of their participation in the movement. These narratives cannot be used to say anything about the organisations, the movement, nor the participants' lives as a whole. What is important in my interpretation and discussion is to try to stay true to the stories that were shared and to the knowledge that the women's

experiences contribute to (Sultana, 2007:378). Even so, I hope that the discussion and conclusions in this study can contribute to stir up thoughts and reflections on women's participation in the ethnic and student movement in Burma, and perhaps on the influence of gender hierarchies in mixed-gender social movements.

5. DISCUSSION

This discussion is divided into three main parts, which are structured around the analytical model presented in the theoretical section of this study; these parts are not separate units but rather interconnected (in similarity to the analytical model, on which they are based). Throughout the discussion I put emphasis on three factors, which I identified as central to women's experiences of their participation in the movement: gender, age and ethno-politics. This is not an ethnographic study, and within the scope of this study I cannot make a deep intersectional discussion on the lives of the individual women. However, buttressed by a discussion of age and ethno-politics within these sections, I hope to shed light on how these axes combined with gender influences how women can participate in the ethnic and student oppositional movement. This is discussed in the third and last section of the discussion.

The first part of the discussion is centred on gender hierarchies within the movement and analyses how gender hierarchies affect the experiences of participation in the movement among the interviewed women. This section draws on the section of the analytical model named 'Gender hierarchies in movements'. The second section of the discussion looks at participating in collective space and focuses on two important aspects of participation: access to decision-making and having voice. In the third section, the question of ethno-politics and age are discussed.

5.1 Gender Hierarchies in The Movement

The strong minded women who are not supposed to be involved in politics

Kuumba argues that "...women's and men's opportunities for engagement in political movements often differ based on their relative positioning within the larger social structure, economy and political system" (2002:519). Women in the ethnic and student oppositional movement are affected by the official notion in Burma: that women are happy and secure in their traditional domestic role and not interested in engaging in politics. This view undermines the struggle and the sacrifices of many women in the oppositional movement (Than 2014:3). All of the women in this study share experiences which suggests that the traditional belief,

that women should not engage in politics, is present in Burmese society and that it plays a role in how women participate in the ethnic and student oppositional movement.

Government based women's organisations, such as MNCWA, uphold the discourse of 'culturally appropriate women' to justify the military rule and to discredit women in the oppositional movement (Hedström, 2015:6). One of the women talks about these women's organisations and how they uphold traditional gender roles by not involving anything political in their activities, but focusing only on topics such as decoration, domestic chores, and how to take care of their husbands and children. She argues that this affects young women's engagement in politics and what kind of roles they are given in their organisations. Moreover, she argues that this stereotypical presentation of women's engagement in society leads to women only getting supportive roles with no authority in the oppositional organisations.

Another participant in the study explains how women throughout life are taught that they are not supposed to engage in perilous activities and how this affects women in the movement. Even though new opportunities are emerging for women, men are the ones who can more easily take the risks needed to be involved in the movement. The women participating in the movement need to be strong minded to go against this norm:

Although there are many doors opening for women, I think most men tend to take the risk more than women. Because we are taught that we are not suppose to take risks, whether we want to or not. In my opinion until even nowadays, even in the democratic movement and in the oppositional organisations, women still need to have a strong mind to take the risk. When I say risk, I mean the risk that we take when we are part of the student and democratic movement and working with organisations (Interview 13).

The role of women in their organisations: are they the movement housewives?

To understand the structures within SMOs, we should look at the people who embody this spaces and the everydayness within them (Routledge, 2015:5). Taylor (1999:11) argues that systems of gender hierarchies are visible in the interactions and behaviours of everyday life and in the division of work in organisations. I therefore look at how the interviewed women perceive everyday life and division of labour and roles within the organisations, in order to further understand their participation in the movement. Most of the women say that men and women are treated equal and have the same roles within their organisations. However, many

also speak of exceptions from this general acknowledgement of sameness. In the interview conducted with two women, they reflected on the division of domestic chores within the organisation, and both of them feel that they have to do double work, working both in the office and taking care of the household. As one of them puts it, they also work as “housekeepers”.

I think men and women are treated in the same way in our organisation. But somehow, as you know, our culture it is different from your culture, like women have to be in the kitchen, or something like that. So there are still some small little things that women still have to do in different way, like in cleaning the kitchen, ‘the women are the best to do that’, that is what they say. But that is not going to be very bad for our work, for our job (Interview 7A).

This quote shows that the double work is seen as something culturally assigned to women, who (just by being women) are better at these kind of domestic tasks. This illustrates the point made by Cable (1992:38-39), that women tend to take on or be assigned the same gender roles within organisations as the ones expected of them outside the movement.

One woman’s experience shows a clear hierarchical structure within her organisation, where young women are assigned to serve coffee at meetings. This closes opportunities for these young women to engage and share experiences with important actors of the movement:

The young women they only participate in attending the meeting and when VIP-guest is coming in our organisation, visit or something like that, they have to bring tea and coffee, they cannot get a chance to sit with them, they only stay in the office and working and then in the office some are just cleaning the office (Interview 12)

The woman I spoke to think that the reason why young women are not trusted is due to old patterns of discrimination. She argues that these norms are so embedded in everyday life that the young women do not question them, but rather accept these secondary roles given to them. Hedström (2015:9) argues that women are given secondary positions in the movement based on conservative gender norms, which are embedded in the nationalistic-project of the oppositional groups, especially in the armed groups. However, a woman from ABSDF, the armed student group, argues that men and women have the same authority, the same freedoms and are equal within her organisation. Nevertheless, she also states, supporting Hedström’s

claim, that women and men do not have the same roles in ABSDF and that women are given supportive roles, roles that they are able to carry out.

One of the women, who also work in a women's organisation, says that their organisation does not get treated as a partner to the male-lead organisations in the movement. The male-lead organisations only use the women's organisations participation in joint activities to show gender balance:

Sometimes they welcome us but sometimes they just want to use us because we are a women's organisation, they just want to show women participation and gender balance. [---] Sometimes they treat us like a daughter, or like a sister, they don't usually treat us like a partner (Interview 6).

Are women in the movement the movement-housewives? Doing domestic chores, as suggested by Cable (1992:38-39) and by Gordon (2002:107), such as cleaning, serving coffee organising and taking meeting notes and typing? I would argue against such a statement, by looking at the prominent roles of many of the women I interviewed. The women in this study express that they are treated equal to men and that they have the same roles, including their access to decision-making, which is seen in the next section of the discussion.

However, as shown in this section, the same women also share experiences that point toward inequalities, strongly embedded in gender hierarchies and conservative notions of gender roles. Even if I would not go so far as claiming that the women seem to only have housewives' roles within the movement, there exist gender structures that affect the roles given to women. It is important to emphasise that all the interviewed women's experiences point toward, in different degrees, existing oppressive gender structures. As Taylor argues, gender is constructed in movements that do not explicitly evoke the language of a gender conflict (Taylor, 1999:9,13).

The triple transgression: young women in the movement

As the previous paragraphs in this section of the discussion have shown, women are not only transgressing the rules of the Burmese public political life by being part of the oppositional movement, they are also transgressing their assigned roles in society. By taking part in the

public sphere, women are challenging the traditional notion that women should not be engaged in politics.

In the theoretical section, I suggested that young women in movements make what might be called a third transgression, based on age. Gordon (2008:34-35) argues that gender combined with age compromises young women's ability to become public social movement actors and that parents play an important role in youth-activism. The understanding of appropriate behaviour of daughters and constraints put forward by parents are discussed in a number of interviews.

They don't allow their daughter to come and participate with us [...] she needs to work with the family, and for another family it is due to security, they don't allow the woman to participate with me in the organisation (interview 1).

Many of the participants describe having support from their families for their engagement in the movement. However, many also describe a hesitation to tell their family that the organisations which they are part of work on political issues. Some families have been reluctant before but now are less worried and more supportive, due to the political changes in the country. Some families still remember the way political deviation is treated in Burma:

My family members do not really support me in the political movement, because my relatives and family members they worry, like my father that some police will following me to arrest me [her father was a political activist and he had to go underground to avoid the police], so they don't want me to go to jail. There are a lot of young women and young people in the jail and they are ill and they die in the jail so they don't want that kind of situation to happen to their daughter. So they don't really support me (Interview 1).

Many families do not see demonstrations as a place for their daughters to be. Two of the interviewed women describe experiences when parents to their female friends have come to a demonstration and demanded or forced their daughter to leave:

In student demonstrations most are men, [there are] very few women participating in the demonstrations because some of the parents don't allow their daughters to go in the demonstrations. One of my friends, who I was staying with in the monastery [in order to prevent the students from having to sleep on the streets they sometimes get accommodation from the monks in

monasteries] her mother came and grabbed her from there and forced her not to take part (Interview 5).

The other woman's experience also shows that there is a great difference between how parents view their sons' and daughters' participation, as demonstrations are seen by parents to be more dangerous for young women than for young men. I would suggest that there are indications based on these experiences that point toward a third transgression made by the young women in this movement: a transgression against young women's assigned roles as non-political and obedient daughters.

5.2 Participation in Collective Space

The second section of this discussion is connected to the section of the analytical model called 'participating in collective space'. As participation is a question of control of power within a space, this part aims to understand the power relations within the collective space of the movement (Cornwall, 2008:278; White, 1996:6-7). Thus, this part focuses on two important aspects of participation, having voice and access to decision-making. I understand access to decision-making as part of having control over some aspects of the power and therefore being an important step in participatory processes (Farrington and Bebbington 1993). Cornwall (2003:1325) argues for the importance of having voice without fear of repercussions.

In interpreting the constructed narratives in the interviews, there is a discrepancy between the participants' understanding of women's general lack of opportunities and access to decision-making in the movement, and their personal access to decision-making within their organisations. To better understand this discrepancy I have divided this discussion into two main parts. In the first one I look at the inter-organisational meeting space of the movement¹² and in the second one I look at the space within SMOs.

Access to decision-making and having voice in the inter-organisational meeting space

All the interviewed women perceive women's voices and participation in political issues as important. The following statement is a good illustration of this:

¹² When discussing inter-organisational meeting spaces in the ethnic and student oppositional movement, from a student and youth organisations' perspective, I refer to meetings such as ethnic youth-exchange, ethnicity conferences, joint activities meetings between organisations, network meetings, umbrella-organisations congresses and other similar forums in the movement.

We need to participate in politics for women, without participation in politics we are not part of decision-making in political issues [...] we need to be involved in political issues. We need to speak up our voice (interview 5).

All the women also mention that women in general have fewer opportunities to participate in politics than men, with examples given at a parliamentary level in the peace process, but also within the ethnic and student oppositional movement:

They don't want us to participate in the peace process [...] because in the ceasefire talk they think that only their party, only men can make decisions. They do not consult with you, no youth, no women. They say 'they cannot make decisions' because we are youth, we are women (Interview 2)

They have to give a chance to women to participate, and then for men, I think they should change their mind-set to lead the movement [...] I think there are still differences and not the same opportunities and chances for men and women (Interview 12).

Many of the women remark on the lack of women in the inter-organisational meeting spaces, and because there are fewer women than men, the voices of women often get pushed aside. One of the women argues that men, rather than women, are the ones that are always asked to represent the organisation at these inter-organisational meetings, and the only case when women are invited is when the meetings are particularly about 'women's issues' (as if women were not affected by all issues). Another woman attended one of these meeting where there were 27 men and only 4 women. A third woman argues that the meetings need to be more gender balanced,

If we have the same amount of women and men we would have the same voice. What I mean is that if we have less amount of women and if women are trying to say something about women, then, in the meeting, there are more men so the men are trying to reject it. So yes, if we have more women then we can bring women's problem more strongly, so that they can take that voice to the decision (Interview 7A)

I interpret that many of the women I spoke to feel intimidated by the older male leaders, who are dominating this meeting space. Cornwall argues that having participatory depth is not enough if the range within this depth is narrow. This means that if the movement claims to be

participatory but is dominated by older men it is still excluding women (Cornwall, 2008:276). Some women expressed feelings of having their voices excluded and not taken seriously,

Because if the leaders are old men, we are only young women and young men in the workshop, they did not listen to what you are saying. My voice is not necessary there [---] I feel unconfident to speak up again when they ignore my opinion somewhere [...] sometime I feel like they discriminate me and that they only give a chance to the old leaders to speak (Interview 12).

I would say that the males dominate the group with their same experiences, same age, they dominate the whole meeting, the whole presentation. Yes, they do recognise it [women's experiences] but it is all a matter of priorities (interview 13).

“Voice needs to be nurtured” (Cornwall, 2008:278). However, women's voices do not seem to be nurtured in inter-organisational spaces. Because of this, women's participation is used to a degree where it makes no difference, which maintains consensus around the interest of the dominant power structures rather than create social change (Leal, 2010:94-95).

The access to decision-making and having voice in the organisation

In my interpretation, most of the women feel confident when speaking up within their own organisations, compared to feeling that they do not have a voice in the inter-organisational meeting spaces. When carrying out work with other youth or other women, women seem to feel more comfortable than in spaces dominated by men. This is well exemplified by one woman's experience,

For me it is two different things, the place where I go, if there is just youth, students and women, then I can speak up what I want. But if there is an elder, government body, or very elderly person, very powerful person, then I still have to build my confidence. I still need a little confidence to speak up what I want, because I know that even if I say something my voice will not be strongly in their conversation (interview 7A)

When interpreting the experiences shared by the women, I have the impression that they recognise the voices of women within the movement as listened to only when the men's voices have finished, as if female-members of the movement had secondary positions,

In many of the organisations that I work with, men are in decision-making positions [---] Although women and men have the same education background, [...] or people that have worked in the organisation for many years, they favour men to speak up more than women. In this way it is kind of saying to women to take one step back, men will say things first and then you can do it (Interview 13).

However, despite the feeling that the highest decision-making positions within the organisations generally are given to men, all but one of the interviewed women see themselves as being able to take part of the decision-making within their organisations. Moreover, half of the women have leading positions within their organisations, either as one of the chairpersons, general secretary, or as part of a central working committee or an executive committee.

I interpret this discrepancy between the feelings among the interviewed women that women in general are lacking access to decision-making within the movement and women personally having decision-making position within their organisation are based on two factors. First, the women tend to find that their voices are better heard in the organisation space than in the inter-organisational meeting space. At the same time they have access to decisions within their organisations, they are excluded from decision-making in the inter-organisational meeting space, which might be one reason for the ambiguousness within their experiences of having their voices heard.

Secondly, I interpret that the women feel a lack of access to decision-making because the power relations and control of power within the movement space are gendered, based on Taylor's (1999:9,13) argument that all aspects of movements are influenced by gender. Men in decision-making positions are the norm. When reality differs from the norm and women have decision-making positions, the women are questioned for stepping out of their traditional roles and secondary positions within society. I believe that this underlying assumption resides in the patriarchal power structure, where women in the public sphere are valued less than men (Pateman, 1989:14). Hedström (2015:15) argues that women were given secondary positions within the ethnic and student oppositional movement and their roles were to be silent and supportive to the cause. I would like to illustrate this by the following examples, which show how men in decision-making roles are the norm and how women in decision-making roles are questioned.

In the central working committee of ABFSU, only two out of fourteen members are women. However, at a district and division level of the student unions, there are many female members. The norm is that women are members on a lower level and men occupy most of the higher positions in ABFSU. In one of the student and youth organisations, the situation is different: here women occupy three out of the four highest decision-making positions. Ironically, other organizations question this organisation because of their lack of gender balance. The female chairperson in this organisation feels like men are talking behind her back, and treat her differently because she is a woman. Another interviewed woman also shared this feeling of men trying to degrade women who control power within the organisational space,

No, they say like men and women, because we respect human rights, are equal, even they say equal on action, I think, women did not get the decision-making level. Then if personally, if I am an expert [...] better than the old men, the leader, then they don't want that kind of woman. And they gossip around that woman [...] so that is also the challenge (interview 12).

5.3 Multiple Standpoints

The third and last section in the discussion is based on the section in the analytical model called 'Multiple standpoints', though it also draws on previous sections of the discussion. Hirschmann argues "the pluralisation of feminist standpoints recognizes differences among material experiences of women across history, race, class, and culture" (2004:320). On this account, to further understand how differences among women are influencing women's participation in the ethnic and student oppositional movement, I am looking particularly at ethno-politics and age hierarchies, which emerged in the interviews.

I would also like to be humble as to what kind of conclusions I can make based on this study. Ethno-politics and age are two central aspects in women's participation in the ethnic and student oppositional movement. However, this is not to say that there are no other important intersecting factors, which may also be central for women's participation. This study is showing one interpretation, which is bound to a partial perspective and situated knowledge of those interviewed.

A strong Burmese ethno-nationalistic discourse: fuelled by hate and oppressive experiences

To understand standpoints we have to see knowledge as situated and bound to location and context, and that standpoints are achieved through struggle and not naturally assigned (Harding, 2004a:8). I therefore think it is relevant to return to the context of the political struggle and I understand the political struggle of this movement to be based within what Hedström (2015) calls the ethno-nationalistic discourse. By looking into this discourse through the experience of the women, I hope to gain a better understanding of how ethno-political factors influence their participation in the movement.

The ethno-nationalistic discourse is based on the Burman state military as the enemy and the struggle for autonomy of the ethnic groups, which are two core factors of the work for many of the women in the ethnic and student oppositional movement (Hedström, 2015:11). As most members of the movement live at their organisations together with other members, the values of the movement and this ethnic-nationalistic discourse are woven into the everyday life and identity of the women in the movement.

In all of the interviews, the women speak either about the violence of the Burmese state army or police, the fight for autonomy against the state, or the fight against discrimination of the their ethnic group. These aspects are central in the creation of a context in which the movement works. The hatred against the government and the state army and the experiences of their oppression are central for understanding the women's participation in the ethnic and student oppositional movement. The following quotes illustrate a strong attachment to the ethno-nationalistic discourse and the hatred against the government and the army,

The government is really tricky, as there was a recent attack on the organisation where many people were killed, it is really oppressive for the people [...] I feel really heartbroken, I was really close working to some of them, at the same time the government is having a ceasefire talk with the armed group... if they are having a real ceasefire talk in the peace process there should be no offensive against the armed group [...] the attack makes the people in the revolution to have more hate towards the government (Interview 3).

The ethnic nationalities they like to have a federal system [...] all is forced by the government and more terrorism and torture against the ethnic nationalities. That is why the ethnic armed groups like to get a federal system (Interview 2).

I was arrested in 2007 for organising [the name of the organisation] [---] they surrounded and arrested me at home [---] they hit me and I could not sleep, they did not allow me to sleep [---] My sentence was 9 years and 6 months [...] Trial was not fair! But I really stayed [in jail] 4 years and 6 months (Interview 8).

I think it is one of their strategies to rape ethnic women [...] One of the people from the army in [the name of the location] said to me: ‘if you can rape ethnic women, you can get a position’ [referring to a higher position within the military] (interview 11).

The Burmese ethno-nationalistic discourse within the movement is upholding conservative gender norms within the movement, which are based on the nationalistic project that says women are the caring mother or daughter and supportive to the cause and ready to take on their domestic and reproductive roles when the conflict is over according to Hedström (2015:9). Looking further into the relation between the nationalistic project and the continuation of oppressive gender hierarchies is outside the scope of this study. However, as the experiences of the women show signs of conservative gender roles, they also underline the relevance of ethno-nationalism in the movement. Enabling ways to look deeper into this relation appears fruitful to further understand women’s participation in the movement.

With this being said, it is important to also shed light on the fact that the interviewed women come from different ethnic groups. Even if the oppression from the state and military directed at ethnic women in Burma shares similarities, there are also differences. The individual voices in this study are not speaking for every woman in the movement or every woman from their ethnic group. Many of the interviewed women also talk about differences between the ethnicities as well as a need for trust building between the ethnic groups.

The hierarchy of age and experience

Through out this discussion, age has been an important aspect in the experiences of the interviewed women when looking at participation and the level of inclusion and exclusion in the movement. To what extent do the women see age as an influential factor in their engagement in the movement?

In the women's stories, age is directly linked to experience and with this experience comes knowledge and power. First of all, women's experiences seem to be valued less than men's. Secondly, as experience is attached to age, the young women's experiences are regarded as more or less non-existent (which is light-years away from the rich experiences that were shared with me in the interviews). Respect is gained with age and masculinity, which makes it hard for the younger women. This hierarchy is apparent in organisations of the movement, which claim to be for students and youth,

They always say that youth is very important, the youth are the leaders of the future, but when we give a suggestion to them about something they don't want to listen, this is our voice (Interview 7B).

And usually in the organisation, young women, not only in organisations but also in the tradition, young people should follow older people and young people must work for the older people. It is the same thing in organisations that young people have to follow the old ones. [---] When it comes to age, they see that with the age comes experience that is why (Interview 13).

One of the women that I met was the oldest in her youth organisation, which she thought was a reason for her high level of respect within both the community and the organisation,

I feel for my village and for my organisation that it is the same in this [getting respected], I don't know for other person, but for me, I feel the same. Maybe because in my organisation I am the oldest person and no one is older than me in [her organisation], and I am also the first woman in [her organisation], to come and participate (Interview 4).

One of the women in the youth organisations feel that this discrimination is not just by older men but also by women, especially older women in women's organisations. In her experience, she gets treated like a child when collaborating with the women's organisations.

I feel like I am discriminated when I am involved like for example in the women's movement, they see me, I am a girl right, but when I try to involve in the women's movement, just with women, they see me as a youth but not as a woman. [---] I feel like sometime I am isolated from the women's issues. That is one thing and the other thing is that I am young and they don't like to listen to the young people's voices. [---] I feel like I am discriminated in two

ways, one is that because I am working in the youth organisation other women do not want to listen to me, because I am young (Interview 7A).

This quote shows what an important factor age is and how it affects how young women are viewed within the movement. However, some of the women in this study also see their age as an advantage and based on the students historical importance in Burmese political development, being a student and/or young has clear advantages:

You know there are two parts, if I am young some older senior people or from the outside, especially male, they look down on us: 'we are very young and we don't know that much about politics', they don't like to recognise us, that we are activists. But one point is good, that because I am young then I can show what I can do... I have so much energy and I get more chances to study than the old generation (interview 6)

I think the students are changing the politics, yes because 1920, 1936, Burma had so many [student boycotts, and demonstrations] 1974, 1988, 2007

[---] I think that the government is afraid of the students. So every time the government listens to my student voice... the government cannot destroy the student demonstration (Interview 8).

6. CONCLUSION

In this concluding chapter I take the opportunity to summarise some of the central aspects of the discussion in this study, drawing particularly on my two research questions. How do women participate in the Burmese ethnic and student oppositional movement? What power relations and hierarchies do they experience within the movement and within the organisations they belong to? I also suggest thoughts for further research on SMOs and gender in Burma.

6.1 Summary

My interpretation of women's experiences and perceptions of their participation in the movement show that gender hierarchies are an important factor influencing how women are able to participate in the movement. Everydayness and the division of labour within the organisations to which the women belong illustrates an important piece of the puzzle to understand women's participation in the movement. The experiences shared by women in this

study indicate that inequality is strongly embedded in gender hierarchies, as well as conservative ideas of gender roles. The official notion that women in Burma are equal to men and also content with their domestic role in society and that women should not be involved in politics influence what roles women get in the ethnic and student oppositional movement. Women are to some extent expected to do the same domestic roles in the movement as are expected of them in society.

I describe women's participation in the oppositional movement and the risk taking associated with it as two forms of transgressions. First, women transgress the rules of political life in Burma and second, by working within political issues in the public sphere, they also transgress the private sphere that women in society are typically assigned to. Experiences in this study indicate what I have chosen to interpret as a third transgression, made by young women in the movement against their roles as non-political and obedient daughters. This suggests that family and parent-relations play an important role in the participation of women in the movement.

The women in this study all speak of women's lack of access to decision-making in the movement and how women's voices are often suppressed. This is especially visible in the discussion on older men's domination of the inter-organisational meeting spaces. Thus, I have interpreted a discrepancy between women's personal access to decision-making positions (which amongst the women was rather high) and how they generally saw women as lacking decision-making power. I believe this discrepancy is based on two main aspects. First, women express that they have access to decision-making within their organisation, but not when it comes to the inter-organisational meeting spaces. Secondly, based on patriarchal power structures where women are valued less than men within the public sphere, men in decision-making positions are the norm, which creates doubts and women in these positions often have their status as decision-makers questioned.

6.2 Suggestions for Further Research

Based on my interpretation in this study, I would suggest that more attention needs to be paid to gender hierarchies within movements, even if they are not explicitly evoking the language of a gender conflict. I therefore believe that an important contribution to understanding women's (and also men's) participation in the oppositional movement in Burma can be made

if further research uses an analysis of gender. Drawing on feminist standpoint epistemology I also believe that there is a further need to show ‘another story’ based on women’s experiences, in order to understand internal structures of SMOs and spaces within this movement.

In this study, I also found two intersecting factors which, along with gender, seemed to be especially relevant for women’s participation in the ethnic and student oppositional movement: age and ethno-politics. Hierarchies based on age seem to have an important role to play in women’s participation even within organisations that are supposed to carry the voices of youths and students. Examples of the role age plays is seen both in the third transgression done by young women, in how older men tended to dominate the inter-organisational meeting spaces, and in how experiences and respect within the movement is gained with age and masculinity. I therefore suggest that age is a relevant factor to include in further research on power relations in the ethnic and student oppositional movement in Burma.

Looking into the relation between the nationalistic project and the maintenance of oppressive gender hierarchies has been outside the scope of this study. However, the experiences of the women in this study emphasise the importance of ethno-nationalism in the movement, as well as signs of conservative gender roles. Therefore, I believe that looking deeper into this relation appears as a fruitful venue vein of inquiry to further understand women’s participation in the movement.

In this study, I have shed light on the importance of looking at gender hierarchies and power relations in order to understand women’s participation in the ethnic student and oppositional movement in Burma. I hope that this study, together with the suggestions for further research, can add to the general knowledge of important actors, particularly women, within the oppositional movement in Burma.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Administrative Map of Burma



(Map found in: Kramer, 2011:53)

Appendix 2. Interview Table¹³

INTERVIEW TABLE	
NAME	DATE
Interview 1	19-11-2014
Interview 2	19-11-2014
Interview 3	22-11-2014
Interview 4	28-11-2014
Interview 5	05-12-2014
Interview 6	05-12-2014
Interview 7A*	10-12-2014
Interview 7B*	10-12-2014
Interview 8	12-12-2014
Interview 9	15-12-2014
Interview 10	16-12-2014
Interview 11	18-12-2014
Interview 12	27-12-2014
Interview 13**	27-02-2015
Total number of interviewed women: 14	
* Interview 7 was done with two women, and in quotations these participants are referred to as 7A and 7B.	
** This interview was done on Skype with extra material sent on e-mail.	

¹³ Interview guide can be made available upon request to the author.

Appendix 3. Organisations and Locations

INTERVIEWS		
THE ORGANISATIONS PART OF THIS STUDY	NO. OF WOMEN INTERVIEWED	THE INTERVIEWED WOMEN'S WORKING LOCATIONS
ETHNIC STUDENT AND YOUTH ORGANISATIONS		
Mon Youth Progressive Organization (MYPO)*	3	Two of them work in Mawlamyine, Mon state, Burma, and one in Sangkhlaburi, Thai/Burma border.
Pa-O Youth Organization (PYO)*	1	She works in Tanggiy, south Shan State, Burma.
Ta'ang Students and Youth Organization (TSYO)*	2	One works in Lashio, Shan state, Burma, and the other in Mae Sot, Thai/Burma border.
Tavoyan Youth Organisation (TYO)*	1	She works in Mae Sot, Thai/Burma border.
Zomi Student and Youth Organisation (ZSYO)*	2	One works in Mae Sot, Thai/Burma border, and the other inside Kalay, Sagaye division, Burma.
ARMED STUDENT GROUP		
All Burma Students Democratic Front (ABSDF)*	1	She works in Laiza, Kachin State, Burma.
UMBRELLA ORGANISATION FOR STUDENT UNION		
All Burma Federal Students' Union (ABFSU)	1	She works in Yangon, Burma.
WOMEN'S ORGANISATION/UNION		
Ta'ang Women's Organisation (TWO)	1	She works in Lashio, Shan state, Burma.
Tavoyan Youth Organisation (TWU)	2	Both work in Dawei, Tavoyan township, Burma.
NUMBER OF ORGANISATIONS: 9	TOTAL NO OF PARTICIPANTS: 14	INSIDE BURMA: 10 THAI/BURMA BORDER: 4
*Members of Students and Youth Congress of Burma (SYCB)		