

The London School of Economics and Political Science

**Exploring the Transnationality of Gender  
Mainstreaming Discourse in Humanitarian Response  
for Refugees in Mae Sot District, Thailand**

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## Abstract

'Gender Mainstreaming', initiated since 1995, has been incorporated in many fields of development, including humanitarian response, particularly for refugees. This concept has been promoted from donors to aid recipients and from outside to inside conflict zones – such as Mae Sot borderland, where Karen refugees fled from ethnic conflicts in Myanmar – as a strategy to promote gender equality.

However, although many scholars point out that it is failed because of its implementation, mainly analysed in an institutionalist approach, this research aims to argue that gender mainstreaming could alternatively be understood in a politics of meanings beyond a Universalist ideational framework. This research aims to challenge the 'universality' of gender mainstreaming by proposing the transnational meaning of gender mainstreaming, based on the degree of transnationality that four transnational and local NGOs in Mae Sot District differently negotiate with the politics of meaning or the semantic contradiction of the Western vocabulary and notion of 'rights' and the Thai vocabulary and notion of *Sitthi-Manusyachon* as well as the contradiction between 'gender' and *Phetsaphawa*, as both vocabularies – 'rights' and 'gender' – are the two foundational elements of gender mainstreaming discourse.

Instead of portraying a disconnection or separability of the global-local relations between the two meanings of gender mainstreaming, this research proposes the transnational(ised) gender mainstreaming as a consequence of a co-constitutively redefined meaning of gender mainstreaming in the transnationality to overcome a theoretical impasse between Universalists' and cultural relativists' claims on the ontology of gender mainstreaming.

Keywords: Gender Mainstreaming, NGOs, Refugees, Rights, Transnationality

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## Abbreviation

AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
EU	European Union
GAD	Gender and Development
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IOs	International Organisations
IRC	International Rescue Committee
LH	Light House
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PRM	Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
PSEA	Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
RTG	Royal Thai Government
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-based Violence
SF	Suwannimit Foundation
SVA	Shanti Volunteer Association
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNWomen	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WID	Women in Development

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Humanitarian Background

Dissatisfaction within ethnic minorities and the resulting tensions and conflicts have always precluded peace in Burma (Myanmar) since it gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1948<sup>1</sup>. Believing that the Burman<sup>2</sup> government had treated them unfairly in parliamentary politics, ethnic minorities have mounted armed campaigns across the country for decades. Ethnic conflicts have long been the root cause of the humanitarian crisis in the Thailand-Myanmar borderlands.

In 1984, there were about 10,000 refugees, mostly from Kayin State<sup>3</sup>, flowing into Thailand near Tak province following a number of confrontations between the *Tatmadaw* (the Myanmar Armed Forces), and the Karen National Union (or KNU, which is the dominant Christian-based armed group representing the Karen ethnic minority) (TBC 2012, 172). Since then, the Thailand-Myanmar border region has become a space where many humanitarian NGOs were founded to provide basic necessities and support for a total of 99,178 refugees, according to TBC caseload data. They are living in nine refugee camps in five provinces, including Chiang Mai (418 refugees), Mae Hong Son (32,030), Tak (58,080), Kanchanaburi (2,775), and Ratchaburi (5,875) (TBC 2017).

## 1.2 A Brief History of Gender Mainstreaming

Throughout the 1980's and 1990's, policy-makers on the global stage, particularly within the UN, repeatedly tried initiatives utilising diverse mechanisms and agendas on the global scale to respond effectively to the humanitarian needs of people in many crises across the globe.

Addressing gender issues in international development and humanitarian programmes with the aim of promoting gender equality during crises was

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<sup>1</sup> In 1989, the country was renamed by the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) from "Burma" to "Myanmar", which is in Burman pronunciation (Collins 2003, 31).

<sup>2</sup> "Burman" refers to a hegemonic ethnic group in Burma.

<sup>3</sup> In 1989, the name of Karen State was officially re-designated by the government as "Kayin", pronounced in the Burman language (South 2011, 6).

emphasised and progressed on an enormous scale in the 1990s, mostly by liberal feminists (Razavi and Miller 1995). When 'gender mainstreaming' was first launched at the Beijing Conference in 1995 in the form of the 'Beijing Platform for Action' (Moser and Moser 2005; UN 2002). Following that, a series of UN resolutions were passed in the 1990's through to the 2010's to rapidly improve women's lives, particularly in the Third World, with the idea of promoting gender equality.<sup>4</sup> A coalition of development aid donors, humanitarian agencies, and developed countries ratifying the CEDAW played a crucial role in responding to the urging of the UNWomen and was aimed at reshaping the body of development policy and practice in developing countries.

Gender mainstreaming is, however, contentious in terms of its implementation. It is often criticised for its failure to eradicate gender inequality in different contexts across the globe (Perrons 2005; Standing 2007; Parpart 2009). However, this research aims to show that its failure should not be limited solely to its implementation, but the ontological paradigm of gender mainstreaming in a Universalist ideational framework should also be challenged. Massively influenced by Sumi Madhok's 'vernacular rights culture' and her politics of meanings of rights, along with Suchada Thaweessit's and Penny van Esterik's explications of *Phetsaphawa*, and Sylvia Walby's 'transnationality of gender mainstreaming', this research challenges the claimed 'universality' of gender mainstreaming by proposing that the transnational meaning of gender mainstreaming is a result of a co-constitutively redefined meaning of gender mainstreaming in the transnationality but without siding with the cultural relativists, who reject the globality and over-glorify cultural particularism.

### 1.3 Research Questions

- 1) How is the meaning of gender mainstreaming in humanitarian response for refugees discursively universalised in a donor's guidelines?

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<sup>4</sup> For example, MDGs adopted by 189 countries in 2000, and UNSC Resolutions No. 1325, 1820, 1888, 1889 and 1960.



- 2) How do transnational and local NGOs interpret, negotiate, re-define, and re-configure the meaning of gender mainstreaming in humanitarian response for refugees in their practices?
- 3) How could the global-local relations of the meaning-making of gender mainstreaming in humanitarian response for refugees in Mae Sot District be conceptualised?

#### 1.4 Structure

This dissertation is presented in six chapters. Firstly, the introduction provides a brief overview of this research. The second chapter aims to review relevant literature focusing on gender mainstreaming in theoretical debates. The third chapter elucidates the research methodology and the limitations of this research. The fourth chapter focuses on how the meaning of gender mainstreaming from a donor is discursively universalised in guidelines. In the fifth chapter, the data collected through in-depth interviews are discursively analysed to understand the transnationality of gender mainstreaming and argue that the degree of transnationality of each organisation depends on negotiations between the politics of meanings between 'rights' and *Sitthi-Manusyachon* as well as between 'gender' and *Phetsaphawa*. Finally, this research concludes that, instead of portraying a fundamental disconnection or separability of the global-local relations between the two meanings of gender mainstreaming, the global-local interaction of the meaning of gender mainstreaming is 'transnational(ised)', inseparable and co-constituted in a transnationality.

## 2. Literature Review

This chapter focuses on gender mainstreaming, which is the process of promoting gender equality within international development initiatives and humanitarian aid projects, to understand its conceptual framework and theoretical debates around it which make it much more than a mere policy or a niche development practice among feminists, as well as its transnational characteristics, which lead to the main argument of this research.

### 2.1 Gender Mainstreaming: What and Why?

Gender mainstreaming, according to the ECOSOC agreed conclusions 1997/2, is *“the process of assessing the implications for women and men for any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels”* (UN 2002, 1). Practically, it aims to (1) diagnose gender differences in all activities, (2) to be translated from a concept into practice, (3) to broaden women's participation, (4) to be institutionalised in the UN system, (5) to maintain existing women-specific policies, programmes and gender units, and (6) to provide financial resources for achieving gender equality. Gender mainstreaming was supported by the global influence of the CEDAW during the 1970s-2000s, and was widely implemented across the globe in development policies and practices.

In order to understand the progress of gender mainstreaming, Moser and Moser (2005) point out that there are three sequential stages that must be recognised, including: adopting the terminology of gender equality and gender mainstreaming, putting a gender mainstreaming policy into place, and implementing gender mainstreaming. However, they criticise that, particularly in the third stage, gender mainstreaming often evaporates due to institutional and operational constraints in the planning and implementation stages (Ibid., 15; see also Wittman 2010, 57-62). Its outcomes and impacts in terms of gender equality are still unknown. Many scholars thus agree to question on its result (Staudt 2003; Moser 2005; Squires 2005; Parpart 2009; True and Parisi 2013).

Diverse aspects of gender mainstreaming are discussed in the literature, including gender mainstreaming in policy diffusion (True and Mintrom 2001; McGauran 2009), in feminist theory (Moser 2005; Bacchi and Eveline 2010a;

Evenline and Bacchi 2010b; Zalewski 2010; McRobie 2012; Cruşmac 2015), in social movement theory (Hafner-Burton and Pollack 2002; Lang 2009; see also Keck and Sikkink 1998), etc. In this research, the principal focus is on gender mainstreaming in feminist theory. While postmodern, postcolonial and transnational feminist theories are principally applied to understand its theoretical basis of the debates on the topic.

According to Walby (2005a), most debates between feminists on gender mainstreaming can be categorised into six major issues as follows.

Firstly, there is the tension between 'gender equality' and 'the mainstream'. Including gender in policy processes could be made possible in two ways: either by resetting the whole political agenda of policies – so-called 'agenda-setting' – or by integrating gender into existing policy mechanisms – so-called 'integrationist approach' (see also Jahan 1995). Secondly, its goals of promoting 'sameness', 'difference' and 'transformation' are highly problematic as they define the goals of gender mainstreaming and defines how an achievement or a result of this policy is determined (see also Rees 2005). Thirdly, there is a contradiction between the vision of gender equality and its strategy (see also Rao and Kelleher 2005). Fourthly, it is contentious whether gender mainstreaming should be replaced with diversity mainstreaming (see also Eveline and Bacchi 2010b). Fifthly, primarily seen in the third stage of gender mainstreaming in Moser and Moser (Ibid.), there is a tension between politicisation (democratisation) and de-politicisation (expertise) of gender equality (see also Beveridge et al. 2000; Rai 2003). Finally, the transnational nature of gender mainstreaming<sup>5</sup>, which is the main focus of this research, arises because of the influences of international regimes and actors at different levels. This is the question of whether gender mainstreaming is transnationally constituted, by whom and by which processes. Also, this debate intertwines with notions of the universal development of human rights and the discourse related to the debate of the Western homogenisation.

On the contrary, Cruşmac (2015) criticises that Walby (Ibid.) overemphasises institutionalist feminists and their interventionist tools while neglecting to investigate the roles of the Third Wave feminists and their contribution at the micro-level, to

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<sup>5</sup> For further understanding of the Universalist claim of gender mainstreaming and gender equality based on the UDHR, please see Törnqvist (2016).

understand how the subjects contribute in shaping the feminist future (103). She also claims that overemphasis of gender mainstreaming would bring about three main critiques, including: (1) Ambiguous meaning of (gender) equality, (2) Rejection of an affirmative action, and (3) Unequal implementation among member states in a multilateral or regional institutions, such as the EU.

Apart from the tensions between institutionalist feminists and the Third Wave feminists, another point to be considered is whether gender mainstreaming is streaming women's focus in development away (Woodford-Berger 2007; Mukhopadhyay 2016). Linked to Cruşmac's (Ibid.) argument in support of affirmative action for disadvantaged women, gender mainstreaming shifts its focus from 'women' to 'gender'. It can thus be seen as a result of feminist efforts in GAD, which aims to go beyond WID tradition (see also Razavi and Miller 1995). On the contrary, it is claimed by contributors to this research, the practice of gender mainstreaming tends to focus more on women than gender. This reduces it to merely a gynocentric praxis.

As gender mainstreaming aims to adjust (gendered) power relations and promote gender equality, based on the conceptualisation of human rights contained in the UDHR, this research shows firstly, that the philosophical basis of gender mainstreaming consists of two main elements, including 'rights' and 'gender' and secondly, that these two foundational elements should be specifically focused on understanding the ontology of gender mainstreaming and how it interacts in the global and local contexts. A transnational framework is thus introduced in this research to explore how these two foundational elements of gender mainstreaming interact within global-local connections and how these interactions play crucial roles in constructing the meaning of gender mainstreaming.

## 2.2 Transnationality of Gender Mainstreaming

In order to take its transnationality into account, the natures of globalisation and cosmopolitanism should also be investigated. According to Kendall et al. (2009), globalisation and cosmopolitanism interlink in two ways. Firstly, most scholars perceive that cosmopolitanism is "*the positive face of globalisation*" (2), and, secondly, it, which means interconnectivity, is an outcome of globalisation (2-3).

However, they critically emphasise that globalisation is not necessarily synonymous with, or even the origin of, cosmopolitanisation as it requires certain types of mobilities, which are ‘transcultural’. According to Bhabha (2001), *“as the rhetoric of globality becomes more vaunting and all-embracing, there emerges an indeterminate, uncertain discourse of community that, nevertheless, provides a moral measure against which transnational cultural claims are measured”* (42). Thus, cosmopolitanisms do not only vertically pervade across the globe in the geographical realm, but also throughout the moral-ethical sphere, but in a top-down manner, fitting into the Universalist paradigm that valorises ‘the global’ over ‘the local’.

The danger of Universalism is often portrayed in many policies in the global scale, such as imperialism and humanitarian intervention (Hardt and Negri 2000; Kennedy 2004; Boron 2005; Lopez et al. 2015), the World Bank’s ‘one-size-fits-all’ economic reform policy (Mkandawire 2009; Hickey 2012; Putzel and Di John 2012), etc. These policies demonstrate that the whole world is, in fact, inevitably not homogenous and unilinear, but dynamically contextual. While this research aims to criticise the Universalist understanding of gender mainstreaming and its Universalist ideational framework<sup>6</sup>, I am, however, aware that it would also be problematic if a cultural relativist paradigms of gender mainstreaming in the form of localised gender mainstreaming, locked in nationalistic frameworks, are used as an absolute solution for at least two reasons.

Firstly, a cultural relativist framework tends to separate the world into a binary opposition of the West vs. the East, or ‘the global’ vs. ‘the local’. Cultural relativists tend to make claims of homogeneity in the East against one in the West. I argue that this argument is very problematic, as it requires one to sustain a stereotype of the East in a form of Orientalism, ignoring heterogeneity of culture (O’Hanlon and Washbrook 1992; Guhin and Wyrzten 2016) and political movements (Pieterse 1998, 363-364) across regions and countries.

Secondly, it tends to over-glorify the locality of the East as a reality utterly distinct to the West. The East is ‘romantically’ redefined and represented as a culturally rich and authentic source of human civilisation, while political movements against the (global) development are much admired by post-development and anti-

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<sup>6</sup> Please see Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2000) for further detail on the Universalist claim of universal standards of human rights.

development thinkers (Escobar 1984; Sachs 1992; Escobar 1995; Escobar 2007). The over-glorification of the East and Orientalism is, in fact, simply the obverse of the West's supposed superiority over the East in two interrelated forms of (1) the East over the West, and (2) 'the local' over 'the global'.

As a result of these two factors, the locality should not be romanticised. Therefore, instead of proposing a disconnection or separability of the global-local relations, this research shows that the meaning of gender mainstreaming is, in fact, 'glocally' – a portmanteau of globally and locally – co-constitutive in a transnationality. The global-local interaction and construction of the meaning of gender mainstreaming are thus inseparable in this sense, as Grewal and Kaplan (1994) argue that; *"how one separates the local from the global is difficult to decide when each thoroughly infiltrates the other"* (11). Therefore, apart from Universalism and cultural relativism, the third possibility for understanding gender mainstreaming, which is 'transnationalism', should be used to problematise 'pure' locality in the global-local relationship and the effect of global homogenisation from the West (Ibid., 13).

Transnationalism, according to Kearney (1999), is a process of cutting across more than one nation-state, both anchoring and transcending simultaneously (548), as he claims that it can be reflected through either the concept of 'diaspora' (a nation outside one's own state) or 'de-territorialisation' (a state of being *"anywhere in the world and still not live outside the state"*) (Basch et al. 1994, 269 quoted in Ibid.). Contrarily, Yeoh et al. (2003) argues that a transnational subject is not limited by location but is flexibly constructed. It negates both nationalistic frameworks and structuralist notions of globalisation and also the trend of global homogenisation (2-3). The transnationality is thus conceived as a (re-)construction of 'locality' (Vertovec 1999, 455-456), constitutive of and constituted by *"transnational subjects and their material-discursive practices"* (Shephard 2014, 66). Cosmopolitan homogenisation, as mentioned above, is possibly localised, while local particularisms can be cosmopolitanised as a result of transnationalism. They are both *glocalised* and vernacularised in this sense.

Most of the literature concerning transnationalism as a concept derived from globalisation and diasporic movements and communities (Basch et al. 1994; Kearney 1995; Vertovec 1999; Yeoh et al. 2003; Shephard 2014; Fauser and

Nijenhuis 2016). There is less literature focusing on transnationalism, dissociated from micro-scaled diasporic and migratory cultures, which applies transnationalism to gender mainstreaming policy and discourse. Most of the literature focusing on gender mainstreaming is state-centric and tends to conceptualise gender mainstreaming as a solely state level mechanism (Beveridge et al. 2000; Rai 2003; Daly 2005; Kusakabe 2005) or the (state-led) cooperation in international institutions and norms (True and Mintrom 2001; True 2003; Kelly 2005; Silfver 2010; Debusscher 2011; Debusscher 2012; Holvoet and Inberg 2012). Considering both main dimensions, the discursive and the institutional ones, claimed by Caglar (2013), this research pursues the discursive one (Wodak 2005; Lombardo, Meier, and Verloo 2009; Lee 2016), instead of pursuing a traditional approach, which is an institutionalist one, or a 'Bacchi-influenced' discursive-institutionalist approach (Mäki 2014; Payne 2014; see also Bacchi 2009), to understand the discursive aspect of gender mainstreaming. However, this research also aims to supplement the areas in which most research on the discursive element are lacking, which are investigating the foundational elements of gender mainstreaming, not only 'rights' (as Walby (Ibid.) refers) but also 'gender' (which is often neglected to be discursively analysed by most literature as Zalweski (2010) suggests), analysed in a transnational framework in order to fundamentally understand the transnationality of gender mainstreaming.

### 3. Methodology

This research applies a qualitative and critical approach to address research questions, analysing the semantic contradiction between the Western nomenclature and notion of 'rights' and its incompatibility with the Thai vocabulary and notion of *Sitthi-Manusyachon*, as well as between 'gender' and *Phetsaphawa*.

As the meaning of gender mainstreaming is differently (re-)constructed and understood within the global institutions (including the UN and the government-based donors), and local implementers (including transnational and local NGOs), the three objectives of this research are: firstly, to elucidate the meaning of gender mainstreaming in humanitarian responses for refugees in donors' views and how it is used by donors in the donor-implementer relationship; secondly, to explore how each organisation interprets, negotiates, re-defines, and re-configures the meaning of 'transnational(ised)' gender mainstreaming in their practices; finally, to propose the co-constitutively redefined meaning of gender mainstreaming and the inseparability of the two in a transnationality formed as a result of interactions between the global and the local.

#### 3.1 Data Collection

This research is conducted in Mae Sot District, Tak Province, Thailand, where there are many transnational and local NGOs working in humanitarian response efforts for refugees from the border region. This research is conducted during 7 July – 3 August 2017 through in-depth interview research with a protection coordinator at IRC, a project manager at SVA, an advocacy coordinator at SF and a legal officer at LH.<sup>7</sup> The interviews with IRC, SVA, and SF were face-to-face, while LH was interviewed via a telephone call.

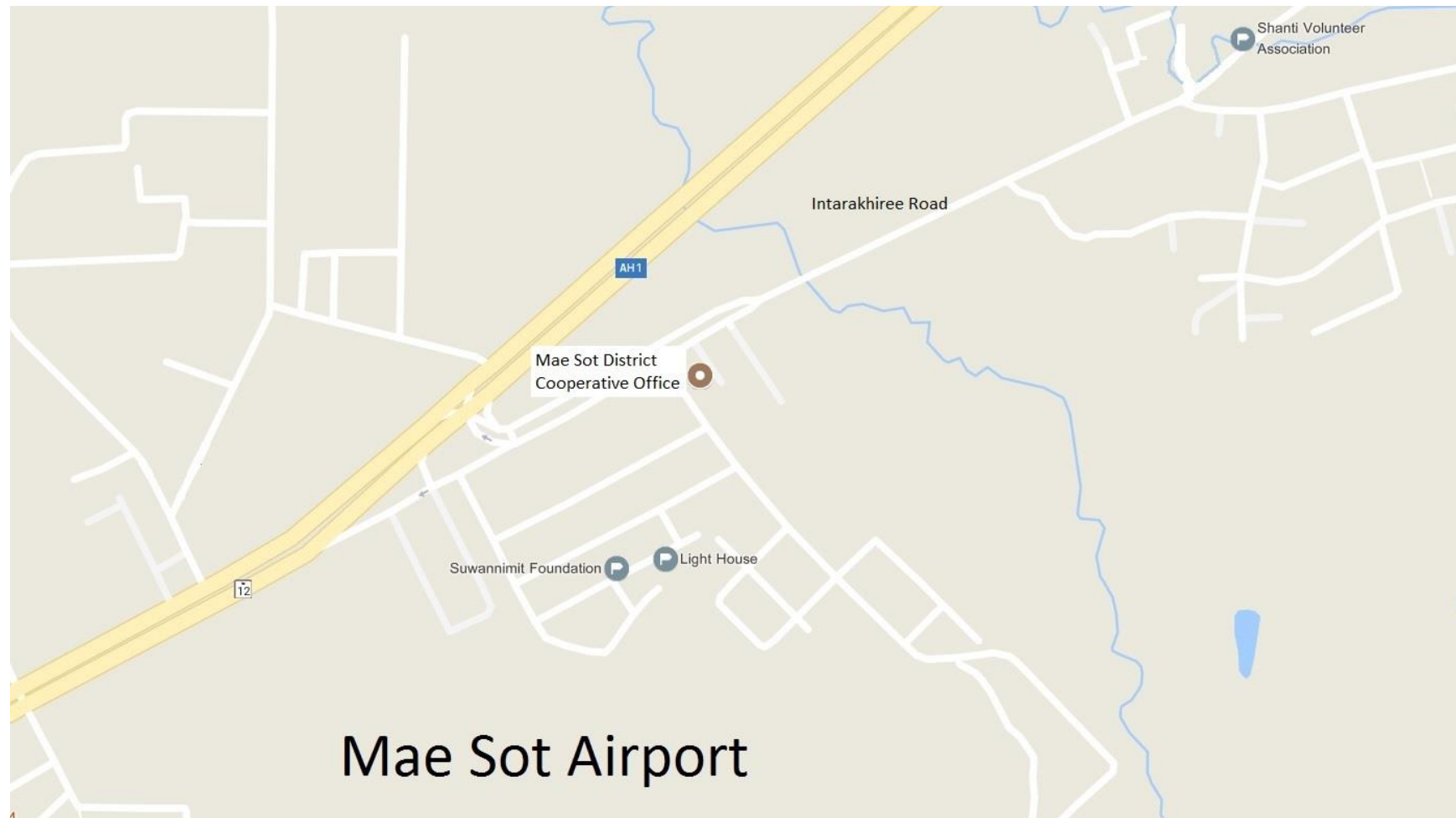
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<sup>7</sup> Locations of each organisation can be found in Figure 3.1 and Figure 3.2





(Figure 3.1: Locations of NGOs in Mae Sot Villa)



(Figure 3.2: Locations of NGOs near Mae Sot Airport)

### 3.2 Data Analysis

This research aims to show gender mainstreaming as developmentalism. According to Madhok (2013), studying developmentalism should not be limited to policy or institutional mechanisms. It needs to be extended to “*an analysis of the normative underpinnings of these initiatives*” (120). In this research, I claim that gender mainstreaming is a form of developmentalism – or a state in which development’s ontology, discourses, practices and institutions are technically, politically, ethically, and intellectually valorised (Ibid., 2) – it should not only be seen as a development policy or practice but goes beyond an institutional framework.

Moreover, the debate over the derivation as well as conceptual underpinnings and practical schisms between these two terms have previously always been limited to ‘the politics of origin’. However, in order to understand how the terms ‘rights’ and ‘gender’ are both altered in translation from concept to (development) practices across the globe. Moving beyond the politics of origin, this research focuses on the politics of meanings, focusing on “*the meanings, subjectivities, ideational and political energies, and cultures that come into being as a result of rights.*” (Madhok 2015, 96). Research data collected by in-depth interviews will be discursively analysed to explore how ‘rights’ and ‘gender’ interact with local realities, embedded in their translated vocabularies in the Thai language, to reflect power relations between vocabularies and realities in the transnationality.

Following the seven building tasks of language (significance, practices, identities, relationships, politics, connections and sign systems and knowledge), proposed by Gee (2011, 17-20), discourse analysis applied in this research focuses on relationships, politics, and connections between the language of ‘rights’ and ‘gender’ in gender mainstreaming discourse in a transnational framework.

### 3.3 Ethical Consideration

This research does not directly involve refugees but focuses exclusively on officers from transnational and local NGOs working in Mae Sot district. Data collected from interviews and documents are strictly confidential and anonymised.

### 3.4 Research Limitations

This research is limited in three ways. Firstly, the data collection for this research was time limited to under one month as the researcher is constrained by the criteria of sponsorship of the study, the Chevening Scholarship, and the constraint of the researcher's budget.

Secondly, due to the fact that all the data held by most organisations situated in Mae Sot district are strictly reserved and confidential, there are only four organisations, after having contacted seven organisations in March 2017, I focused on these in this research.

Finally, although transnationalism contains the 'nation' in its etymology, declaring the importance of the nation-state existence in its concept, and the nation-state is a main actor in the humanitarian space and should not be neglected, the local administration of Thai state functioning in Mae Sot District, representing the state sovereignty in the local, will not be focused on in this research as the institutionalist approach is not applicable and is mainly criticised in this research. The nation-state, however, in this research, will be seen as an imaginary space demarcating the 'global' from the 'local', enfolded in a nationalistic framework. Even though the Thai state is not mentioned in this work, it will be represented by local realities reflected through informants' perception of the local.

## 4. Donors, Power, Universality of Gender Mainstreaming?

This chapter criticises how the gender mainstreaming has been used by a donor to gain power and the way it is used to shape the monotypic meaning of 'rights' and 'gender' in gender mainstreaming discourse.

### 4.1 Donors and Gender Mainstreaming

Donors are increasingly lauded for taking a crucial role in promoting gender equality in many ways (Koester et al. 2016). The USAID, as one of the most powerful donors relating to the four transnational and local NGOs in the following chapter, is mainly focused in this section to understand how they promote gender equality on the global scale. The USAID, as the world's leading donor, illustrates how gender mainstreaming is central to global development efforts. In 1974, it established the Women in Development (WID) Office and subsequently produced a 'Women in Development' Policy Paper in 1982 which declared their agenda and their focus on women in development (USAID 2012, 4). Transitioning from WID to GAD, in 1996, a Gender Plan for Action (GPA) was created, calling for the integration of 'gender' (instead of women alone) in policy, personnel, procurement and M&E (Ibid.).

As it notes in its Guidelines for Proposals, gender mainstreaming has been mandatory in proposals since 2010 (USAID/OFDA 2017, 61). Gender analysis, including project design, implementation, and M&E, should address four main strands including:

*“(1) The general characteristics of the relationships among men, women, girls, and boys along with roles and responsibilities of each of these gender groups in the targeted area. For example, describe the levels of inequality in resource allocation and control or the presence or absence of gender-based discrimination; (2) How the proposed disaster assistance or DDR activities may affect or be affected by the different roles and statuses of women, men, boys, and girls within the community, political sphere, workplace, and household; (3) How the anticipated results of the activities may affect women, men, boys, and girls differently and could help to reduce existing inequalities and avoid creating new inequalities; and (4) How the activities can be undertaken in order to*

*create an environment conducive to improve gender and equitable access to basic rights, services, and resources.” (Ibid.)*

In terms of spending, according to OECD (2016), in 2014, the US government spent \$1,830 million on activities with gender equality stated as a primary objective, and \$3,881 million on activities with gender equality listed as an important, but secondary, objective. All activities have been 100% screened against the gender marker, which was introduced by the IASC in 2009 and has been implemented since 2012 to assess how successfully humanitarian projects are ensuring gender equality (CARE International UK 2013, 3). Applying the gender marker to assess donors, the CARE International UK (2013) study demonstrates that, in 412 projects across the globe, funded with a \$1,543,238,382 donation from USAID. 57% are projects that include gender mainstreaming in their design, only 3% of the projects are interventions specifically targeted at altering gender dynamics and only 7% of all projects under the USAID umbrella are gender-blind (3-7).

Along with gender mainstreaming, the USAID also requires protection mainstreaming in all submitted proposals to minimise risks by mainstreaming protection into all programmes and maintaining a stand-alone protection programme (USAID n.d.). As a concrete result of mainstreaming of gender and protection, the PSEA in particular is highly emphasised in proposals submitted to the USAID to demonstrate its focus on SGBV in humanitarian responses for refugees.

#### 4.2 Donors' Power and Control

The way in which USAID promotes gender mainstreaming with a top-down approach demonstrates how powerful it is in the donor-implementer relationship as it monopolises power and control over aid recipients and implementers. According to Reith (2010), as NGOs compete with each other to earn money for their survival, money plays a crucial role and is the central element in this relationship (452). This shows that NGOs' interests in this relationship *“will be shaped, often unintentionally, by material incentives”* (Cooley and Ron 2002, 13). Thus, they have no other choice to survive but to rely on donors' money and become enthralled to donors. The so-called 'donor-NGO partnership' is, in fact, a relationship based on patronage and control (Stirrat and Henkel 1997, 72).

While material incentives are vital to NGOs for their survival, I argue that, for donors' survival, both material and ideological incentives are essential to sustain their superiority and control over NGOs. They need to develop a set of knowledge, a particular language, strategies, practices, and institutions, used as governing techniques, to secure their position of power, maintain their cosmopolitan connections, and nurture their own patronage and control.

Gender mainstreaming is used as a technology of power to control over NGOs' conduct by introducing a set of problems and a set of techniques as solutions within the discourse of gender expertise (Prügl 2011, 76-79). The way in which USAID promotes the top-down gender mainstreaming could demonstrate governmentality on the global scale, or 'transnational governmentality' (Ferguson and Gupta 2002, 989). This term, 'governmentality' (Foucault 1991), or 'a mentality to govern' (Rose and Miller 1992), is about the 'conduct of conduct', with connotations of an activity of directing (*conduire*) and another meaning of comportment (*se conduire*) (Foucault 2007, 193). It aims to "*shape conduct by working through the desires, aspirations interests and beliefs of various actors*" (Dean 2010, 18). Beyond this mere governmentality, the transnational model also applies both new disciplining strategies (e. g. development knowledge, practices, planning, trainings, M&E, etc.) – the so-called 'professionalisation of development' in Escobar's account – and transnational alliances (e. g. international organisations, volunteer associations, governmental organisations, etc.) – the so-called 'institutionalisation of development' (Escobar 1988, 430-431) – to generate power for donors. NGOs' conducts are, thus, governmentalised, directed, and under the control of donors.

Gender mainstreaming is also a de-politicisation as it is degraded through 'bureaucratic institutionalisation' and "*brief, replicable, and often, de-politicised gender trainings*" (Pittman 2014, 12). It masquerades as a de-politicised tool, empowered by expert discourses, and specific knowledge and technical skills, (re-)produced and mostly implemented exclusively by 'gender experts'. For fear that feminist contributions would make gender training and the practice of gender mainstreaming contentious, the politics of gender mainstreaming between feminists and gender practitioners, as noted in section 2.2, is thus evaporated. Gender mainstreaming discourse is, therefore, an anti-politics machine in this sense.

Related to Walby's (2005a) arguments on the (de-)politicisation of gender equality and the emphasis on gender difference, another interesting point here is that, while gender meaning "*has essentially been sanitised, homogenised and stripped of its political power*" (Ibid., 13), gender mainstreaming aims to emphasise gender differences. Moreover, this emphasis has regularly been (re-)produced as an unquestionable truth by gender experts and moulded practitioners via a number of gender trainings as the absolute way to achieve gender equality globally (Prügl 2011, 80-82). Therefore, paradoxically, gender mainstreaming is a tool of homogenisation (of the meaning of gender) and differentiation (of gender characteristics between male and female) at the same time.

However, instead of claiming that gender mainstreaming discourse is uncontrollable and unchallengeable, this research argues that there is, at least, a possibility for NGOs (as aid recipients and/ or implementers) to challenge the hegemony of gender mainstreaming, particularly its meaning and ontology, by highlighting local realities, contexts and local(ised) meaning of gender mainstreaming. As the monotypic meaning of gender mainstreaming cannot be universally homogenised but must be contextualised, this governmentality is, at least, challengeable as NGOs' conducts in interpreting, negotiating, re-defining, and re-configuring gender mainstreaming in their practices demonstrate 'counter-conducts' (Davidson 2011; see also Foucault 2007), or the possibility of resisting the donor's governmentality.

#### 4.3 Contesting Donors' Power and Universality of Gender Mainstreaming

Even gender mainstreaming can be seen as a development discourse, produced by the UN, national governments, and other donors in the 1990s to generate power for themselves, it has been criticised for failing to eradicate gender inequality across the globe for two decades. Its failure has always been limitedly explained in the way that, its implementation is the only cause of failure without questioning its ontology, which has always been locked in a Universalist ideational framework. As gender mainstreaming has always been presented as a process of universalisation of development, while the conception of 'gender' are homogenously



assumed, local realities and contexts related to the meaning of 'rights' and 'gender' have often been excluded when considering its failures.

As claimed by USAID (2012), "*gender equality and female empowerment are now universally recognised as core development objectives, fundamental for the realisation of human rights, and key to effective and sustainable development outcomes*" (3). This statement demonstrates how the two jargons in alternative development become mainstreamed and associated with both universalism and the universality of human rights.

The universality of human rights, particularly women's rights, and gender equality have often been criticised by postcolonial and transnational scholars for their assumption of global homogeneity. For example, Grewal (2005) argues that human rights, particularly women's rights and gender equality, function as a mode of governmentality, which aims to represent women outside the West as "*objects of charity and care by the West*" (130), while constituting the Western experience as a centrality. Similarly, Mohanty (1984) argues that "*it is in this process of homogenisation and systematisation of the oppression of women in the third world that power is exercised in much of recent Western feminist discourse...*" (335). The universalisation of women across the globe demonstrates how women in the Third world is ahistorically and universally similar, based on a generalised notion of subordination of women (344).

Considering the way USAID requires aid recipients to incorporate the general characteristics of the gender relationships in each context in their proposals, it is clear to claim that, in fact, the USAID's gender mainstreaming is neither universal(ised) nor local(ised), but transnational(ised), as it also aims to agglomerate local realities, contexts and meanings within its own philosophical framework. This shows that, even gender mainstreaming policy derived top-down from donors to aid recipients and implementers in the humanitarian space, gender mainstreaming discourse has different characteristics as its foundational elements, including 'rights' and 'gender', which are not derived from above but are co-constitutively redefined by both the global and the local. Finally, ignoring its transnationality, failures of gender mainstreaming might not be able to be fully understood.

## 5. Gender Mainstreaming in Practice

This chapter focuses on fieldwork-based results of conducting in-depth interviews, analysed by applying a discursive approach to understand the politics of meanings of gender mainstreaming, based on staff's perception of rights/ *Sitthi-Manusyachon* and gender/ *Phetsaphawa*.

### 5.1 Politics of Meanings: Rights and *Sitthi-Manusyachon*

In terms of a politics of origin, rights can be alternatively studied beyond three main revolutions in the West, including the American, the British, and the French. Rights, according to Madhok (2015), can be internally discovered as it intrinsically derived from within a local context. However, rights from another source always carry characteristics and essences different from the one deriving from the top-down. According to Madhok (2009), the locally derived 'rights' in India, so-called *Haq*, is an Urdu/ Arabic literal term widely used in South Asia. However, *Haq* historically interacted with the Western influence in the nineteenth century when missionaries involved in institutionalising and re-constructing changed meanings of *Haq* in dictionaries (15). This reflects that *Haq* was constructed by both local realities and the Western influence as it was politically re-defined, negotiated and reproduced by various actors, shaped in forms of cultural and linguistic interactions throughout history.

Similarly, in Thailand's socio-political context, the derivation of 'rights' can be alternatively discovered from its own local reality. This kind of 'rights', so-called *Sitthi-Manusyachon*, plays crucial roles in Thailand's politics of rights. As this research aims to look at 'rights' beyond its politics of origin, the politics of meanings of rights could bring about an alternative way of understanding how rights play a crucial role in Thai socio-political context.

This portmanteau originally derived from two Sanskrit words<sup>8</sup>, including *Sitthi* and *Manusyachon*. The former means 'authority or success', while the latter refers to 'human or humanity' (Thanes 2006, 12). This neologism, according to Thanés (2006), firstly appeared around the late-1940s as the Thai Royal Institute held a

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<sup>8</sup> For further detail on how Sanskrit language is vernacularised in Asian context, please see Pollack (1998).

number of conferences, discussing on the etymological and semantic essence of *Sitthi* and agreeing on its original influence from a concept of 'authority' on the Ram Khamhaeng Stele since Sukhothai Era (1238-1438) (12-13).

However, recently before that, the Western concept and notion of 'rights' had firstly appeared in Thailand's political history in 1932, along with a term 'democracy' – *Prachathippatai* – during the Siamese Revolution when the governmental system has changed from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy. Since then, continuous etymological and semantic frictions between these two discrepant vocabularies through history until nowadays, portrayed in a conflict between the Westernised/ Universalised rights and democracy and the *Baeb-Thai-Thai* (Thai-style) *Sitthi* and *Prachathippatai*, can often be discovered in the current politics of rights in Thailand.<sup>9</sup>

While the essence of (Western) human rights consist of 'a state of being free from something' – negative freedom – and 'a state of being free to do something' – positive freedom – according to Berlin (1958), the essence of *Sitthi* is discrepantly and complexly constituted. It is not a state of being free but 'an innately unequal authority to achieve something'. *Sitthi* is a submission to the predestined cycle of life and the natural stratification in the vernacular(ised) Theravada Buddhist belief in Thailand, mixed with animists' superstition (Thanes 2006, 12-14). *Sitthi*, therefore, refers to 'a duty' or 'a responsibility' of a human being who needs to be strictly responsible for their actions based on their well-stratified social background. As it was innately predestined, the level of possession of *Sitthi* of each people group depends on the social stratification based on their social, economic and cultural capitals and merit accumulation.

Contesting with each other, and, at the same time, reciprocally hybridising with each other through all the politico-historical context of Siam/ Thailand, 'rights' and *Sitthi-Manusyachon* has gradually been agglomerated and transformed. Rights became the absolute vocabulary, overshadowing another's existence. The etymological and semantic essence of rights were taken for granted as if this word used in Thai shared the same etymology and semantics of the Western one.

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<sup>9</sup> Please find Surin (2007), Hewison (2009), and Hewison and Kengkij (2010) for further detail on a debate about Thai-Style Democracy.

Due to this, this research argues that this presenting word is, in fact, a result of negotiation and agglomeration of two inseparable vocabularies and notions of the one from the West and another from the Thai socio-political context.

Referred to the politics of *Haq*, Dunford and Madhok (2015) develop this into 'vernacular rights cultures', derived from cosmo-politics and vernacular cosmopolitanisms. The concept and notion of 'rights' can be understood in a non-Western framework agglomerating the discontinuity of semantics and etymology of rights, influenced by both cosmo-political impacts and distinct cultural localities while being politically defined, negotiated and reproduced by various actors in a society. The concept and notion of 'rights' are thus transnational(ised) in this sense. Supporting this claim, similarly to the so-called 'vernacularisation' in Levitt and Merry's (2009) account, Zwingel (2012) proposes three constellations of norm translation, including (1) global discourse translation, (2) impact translation, and (3) distorted translation. Particularly the second one, the degree of norm translation mainly relies on various actors in a local context.

## 5.2 Politics of Meanings: Gender and Phetsaphawa

As many feminists question the universality of theories and concepts, a foundational one – gender – is also questioned for its universal application in the Western intellectual tradition as it has been used since the 1970s-1980s as a theoretical panacea for explaining gender inequality (Rubin 1975; Edholm et al. 1977; Moore 1988). The Western-centric derivation and representation were brought into discussion as Spelman (1990) criticises the Western feminists for taking *“the experiences of white middle-class women to be representative of, indeed normative for, the experiences of all women”* (ix), while gender variations between male and female resulting in increased recognition of masculinities and femininities were more cherished (Wharton 2005, 5).

Tanesini (1996) criticises the ontological status of gender by firstly questioning whether there are some intrinsic characteristics of women to later understand differences between the two sexes before transcending those differences into the socio-culturally constructed realm and understand them as gender differences. Quoting Spelman (1990), who pursues the postmodern criticisms, to support her de-

essentialist claim on the meaning of woman, for her, being a woman is “*something that is constructed by societies and differs from one society to another*” (136 in *Ibid.*, 212). The meaning of ‘gender’, in this sense, is not fixed<sup>10</sup> and contains no intrinsic characteristic in itself, but it needs to rely on social conditions in a particular context.

Similarly to ‘rights’, the sociological derivation of ‘gender’ from the South is more promoted to shift the hegemonic construction of the meaning of gender from the West alone (Connell 2014). This research also aims to this point by criticising there is more than one origin of gender, often claimed as homogeneously derived from the West. Similarly to the semantic contradiction between ‘rights’ and *Sitthi-Manusyachon*, the politics of meanings of gender should also be investigated to understand how the term ‘gender’ is semantically transnational(ised) in gender mainstreaming.

In Thai socio-cultural context, Van Esterik (2000) claims that it would be much problematic to fully apply the Western theory of gender in Thailand without understanding its complex systems and structures of gender, the so-called *Phetsaphawa*, which is closely associated with *Kalatesa*, or the contextual sensitivity, functioning as a mechanism behind the process of construction of gender normativity among male and female.<sup>11</sup> She also identifies that, different from the Western notion of gender, historically derived from feminist attempts in the First and the Second Waves, *Phetsaphawa* derives from three main historical origins, including (1) its indigenous Southeast Asia pre-existing gender system based on gender complementarity (Hanks and Hanks 1963 quoted in *Ibid.*), (2) the Hindu-Buddhist patriarchal influence based on Indian culture, and (3) the Western influences of gender system. Focusing only the current use of gender in the Thai language in this research, the politics of meanings of gender is contentiously posited in a cultural binary opposition between the Western influence and Thai exceptionalism.

Nowadays, it is still controversial to translate the term ‘gender’ in Thai language, used in Thai academia and development community. This term is often

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<sup>10</sup> For further understanding of how the way of thinking of a person is affected by language that carries no meaning, as claimed in poststructuralism, please see Burr (1995).

<sup>11</sup> Similarly to the Yoruba context, Oyěwùmí (1997) interestingly points out how the Western notion of gender does not fit the context.

translated as *Phetsaphawa* and *Phetsaphap*. However, according to Suchada (2004), referred to the Thai Royal Institute Dictionary in 1999 (2542 BE), the two suffixes, *-Saphawa* and *-Saphap*, carry a different connotation. The former refers to 'a condition occurring by nature', while the latter implicitly refers to 'a state of occurring, having, and appearing'. She supports the latter version of translated gender, *Phetshaphawa*, because it broadly opens for possibilities of alternative interpretations, compared to *Phetsaphap*, and it helps people differentiate what is made by nature and what is socially invented or culturally assigned (Ibid., 6). Therefore, *Phetsaphawa* is more fashionably used by Thai academia and development community to possibly capture the whole meaning of gender.<sup>12</sup>

It should be noted that, between gender and *Phetsaphawa*, there is a connotational gap or untranslatability. However, this claim does not simply mean that this untranslatability would verify the claim on separability of the world between the West and the East, but this untranslatability is rather much emphasised to see how the West and the East interconnect to each other, as these two terms – gender and *Phetsaphawa* – discursively interact with each other in terms of their etymology and semantics in a vernacular language of development. Due to this, I agree with Davidson (2002) that untranslatability can be overcome by taking triangulation into consideration. According to Davidson (2002), the foundational basis of triangulation lies in a basic situation that “*involves two or more creatures simultaneously in interaction with each other and with the world they share...*” (128 quoted in Goldberg 2009, 263). In the interpretative situation, in particular, triangulation requires a correlated truth for the mentioned objects and a number of interactions between a speaker and an interpreter to construct the intersubjective interpretation. Interestingly, after communicating with each other, there would be no clear cut between a speaker and an interpreter (Ibid., 267-268). Once *Phetsaphawa* is triangulated, the untranslatability of its meanings between the West (often portrayed as a speaker or an influencer) and Thai (often seen as a receiver) as well as the portrayal of the one-way derivation of the term 'gender' will be overcome. Therefore, untranslatability does not separate the global-local relations, as a cultural relativist aims to do, but it emphasises the inseparability and co-constitutiveness of

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<sup>12</sup> Bussakorn (2011) interestingly collects a number of vocabularistic varieties of gender used in Thai feminist literature.

transnationality of gender mainstreaming as a result of the global-local interaction and construction of 'transnational(ised)' meaning in this sense.

Another concept, which is 'intersectionality' (Crenshaw 1991; Collins 1998), should also be introduced to criticise the monopolised derivation of the term 'gender' as it neither derived from the West nor naturally created. This concept is a key to criticise the universal(ised) meaning of 'gender' in gender mainstreaming discourse as it problematises an assumption that gender is a separated socially-constructed entity from others (e. g. sexuality, race, ethnicity, religion, class, etc.). Instead, the characteristics and meaning of 'gender' in a particular context are a result of complex relationships, which are constitutive of and constituted by various socially-constructed entities. This use of intersectionality gets along well with a new epistemological turn, so-called 'gender scepticism' or "*a new scepticism about the use of gender as an analytic category*" (Bordo 1990, 135; quoted in Tanesini 1996, 205). This concept advocates the same way as mentioned above that, if gender is used separately from other social dimensions of life, gender will not be useful anymore.

Meanwhile, as Walby (2005b, 461-463) points out that promoting gender equality alone might not be able to fully eradicate social inequalities, this concept is important to de-essentialise gender substance in gender mainstreaming discourse and welcome broader meaning of gender in gender mainstreaming. This concept is used to see how gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, age, class, and so on, help each other constitute certain types of inequalities in a particular context. Taking 'intersectionality' into account is important to understand how gender mainstreaming could be contextualised. Intersectionality is introduced in this research to see how gender is socially constructed based on its interactions with other socially constructed characteristics.

### 5.3 Analysing Transnational NGOs: Gender Mainstreaming in Practice

There are four main informants working in different organisations locating in Mae Sot district. The first is Mr Chakchan, a Protection Coordinator at IRC, a globally well-known humanitarian aid, relief, and development NGO, which is mainly funded by USAID, EU and AusAid. The second informant is Ms Aykik, a Project Manager at

SVA, a Japanese organisation funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Japanese Government. The third is Ms Bussri, an Advocacy Coordinator at SF, a local NGO working under managerial and technical supports of IRC. And, last but not least, Mr Panphu, a Legal Officer at LH, which is a local project operating under SF's responsibility. The first, the third and the fourth organisations are closely linked in the same network of funding, the same web of management, and the same field of humanitarian work, which is protection-based support for refugees and migrants living in both outside and inside refugee camps, while the second is a separated organisation working in a different field of humanitarian response for refugees, which is educational and library supports in refugee camps in the 'Non-Formal Education Project through Community Libraries in Refugee Camps along the Thai-Myanmar Border' project.

The research data collected from in-depth interviews with these four informants is analysed in this section to understand how each organisation interprets, negotiates, re-defines, and re-configures the meaning of gender mainstreaming in humanitarian response for refugees in their practices.<sup>13</sup>

Considering origins and meanings of 'rights' and 'gender' in particular, the transnationality of gender mainstreaming of each organisation could be analysed in four categories, including (1) local NGOs' 'rights', (2) local NGOs' 'gender', (3) transnational NGOs' 'rights', and (4) transnational NGOs' 'gender'.

### Local NGOs' 'Rights'

As Panphu points out that there is a confrontation between rights and *Sitthi-Manusyachon* in his work, the politics of meanings of rights in Thai context can be concretely investigated. He claims that,

*"There is a difference between the status of refugees under Thai state and the status in international standards. Thai legal framework doesn't cover as much as the international one... It seems they are the same interchangeable words. But, in fact, I found that 'Sitthi' is closely associated with a national framework. But, 'rights' contain not only a*

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<sup>13</sup> This research question is highly influenced by George (2007) who studies the interpretation of gender mainstreaming in practice by NGOs in India.



*national framework but also an international one. So, 'Sitthi' is smaller than the realm of 'rights'.*"

Therefore, his claim of 'right' proves that the meaning of 'rights' in the politics of rights in Thailand's context is a result of semantic frictions between the international rights and the Thai *Sitthi-Manusyachon*. His primary mission in his work is to transnationalise the meaning of 'rights' by incorporating the international one in Thai legal frameworks so that the realm of *Sitthi* could be more enlarged.

Meanwhile, Bussri informs that as she works on "*advocacy with CBOs and a community to collect information for the national-level policy advocacy in a bigger picture*", her work aims "*to influence policy-makers to change for something better when it comes to policy advocacy.*" The 'something better', as mentioned, refers to local needs reflected from what Light House collected. In other words, she coordinates with Panphu to transnationalise the meaning of 'rights' by incorporating local needs with international standards in Thai laws.

### Local NGOs' 'Gender'

Apart from 'rights', another foundational element of gender mainstreaming, which is 'gender', should also be taken into account. On the contrary to Van Esterik's (ibid.), Bussri and Panphu agree that the politics of origin of 'gender' is quite different from the politics of origin of 'rights', by claiming that the inclusiveness of gender in their works totally derives from 'outside' of Thai society. As Bussri claims that,

*"[Speaking from my own experience,] when I grew up, I learned more about the world, I know English. I feel like, I become aware that I have been discriminated all along, thanks to the Western knowledge. I don't know if gender concept comes from their idea, but, at least, they are aware of it. They realise it before us."*

Panphu also agrees with Bussri's argument, by claiming that the concept of gender in his work originally derives from outside of the country. He claims that,

*"Gender is recently received. To be precise, when we [LH] receive funding, we are required to include gender in our work and we are also aware that it should be included in our work. So, the inclusiveness of*

*gender in our work and the promotion of gender sensitivity in our work derive from outside.”*

Considering the degree of transnationality of SF and LH, these two local NGOs demonstrate that the derivation of ‘gender’ is from the outside, assumably derived in a universal manner and (re-)produced by the Western knowledge. On the contrary to what Connell (Ibid.) proposes, the statements of both informants show that, without taking a part in the meaning-making process of gender, the meaning of gender that they both are using is free from the agglomeration of local meaning.

However, interestingly, both informants also demonstrate the importance of gender mainstreaming in their work. This point is quite different from what happens to transnational NGOs in the following sub-section. As shown in their statements, gender is the key to their work. The substance of gender is and should be much emphasised.

### Transnational NGOs’ ‘Rights’

Interestingly, as SVA and IRC are both transnational NGOs, the degree of transnationality of both organisations based on the politics of meanings of both ‘rights’ and ‘gender’ should be closely compared. While both are in the same level of management and work in the same type of organisation, both informants are different in the nationality of themselves, of organisations and of their donors. Aykik is a Japanese staff working in a Japanese organisation funded by the Japanese government, while Chakchan is a Thai staff working in an international organisation funded by many donors. As Aykik informs, both ‘rights’ and ‘gender’ in SVA’s meaning of gender mainstreaming fully derive top-down from the universal standards of human rights, as she claims that *“the UNESCO Public Library Manifesto 1994 is like our bible!”* Meanwhile, Chakchan demonstrates that he values human rights as a universal and natural characteristic of human being. He also defines gender based on human rights by claiming that,

*“gender is just another lens to view a human rights situation, based on similarity and difference based on the sex of people. It is similar to when we work on human rights with age (child, adult, elderly) and function of the body (abled and disabled), for example.”*

Reflected through these two informants, the meaning of 'rights' of these two transnational NGOs barely relates to the contradiction and/ or agglomeration of local reality, unlike local NGOs as Panphu and Bussri play their roles in transnationalising 'rights' for refugees.

### Transnational NGOs' 'Gender'

On the contrary to local NGOs, as informed by Bussri and Panphu, these two transnational NGOs agree that gender mainstreaming should not be prioritised as much as the non-discriminatory principle. Linked this to Walby's (Ibid.) theoretical debate between gender mainstreaming and diversity mainstreaming, Chakchan and Aykik agree on the same basis that gender should not be overemphasised than other socially-constructed characteristics, gender mainstreaming is less required than diversity mainstreaming based on the non-discriminatory principle. Chakchan expresses that,

*"At IRC, gender is not monitored and evaluated separately, it was monitored and evaluated within the mechanism of each project... For me, gender as a cross-cutting area is much realistic than being a stand-alone issue. Once gender is the only one thing to focus, we might unconsciously discriminate against any other issues by ignoring them."*

In accordance with Chakchan, Aykik emphasises the non-discrimination by prioritising it over gender mainstreaming, as she claims that,

*"In our regulation, we mention about the non-discrimination based on sex, age, ethnicity, etc... A library is for all regardless of gender, age, and ethnicity. So we try to make sure that a book will be reached to everyone... Our organisation does not only focus on gender matters, but we believe that providing supports to anyone without any discriminations is quite important."*

The re-defined meaning of gender in their perception is actually reflected through their perception on the inseparability of other socially-constructed characteristics within a term 'gender'. The re-defined meaning of gender thus contains local realities and reflects intersectionality in this sense.

Taking local contexts and conditions into account, the substance of gender in the top-down gender mainstreaming is contestable. According to Chakchan, IRC's Gender Equality Team develops a universal tool for promoting gender equality but it also includes local contexts in its analysis. He informs that,

*“The Gender Equality Team thus needs to develop implementing tools for addressing gender issues in each country to see whether gender situation in each country is positive or negative for their development. Thailand is much significant to the team as it is a pilot-testing country on the process of developing tools for gender equality.”*

Agreeing with Chakchan, Aykik emphasises the importance of local contexts by proposing that

*“I think when we implement a project, it's quite important to understand the social background and contexts. Otherwise, we cannot implement a project properly, and their needs cannot be fulfilled.”*

In conclusion, four transnational and local NGOs share the same result as they all incorporate the Western concept and notions of 'rights' and 'gender' in their practice. Interestingly, this research argues in two main points.

Firstly, there is a pattern of the transnationality of gender mainstreaming. The meaning of 'rights' of the two transnational NGOs, IRC and SVA, fully derives from the global notion and concept of rights without friction. Compared to the two local NGOs, SF and LH, their meanings of 'rights' are a result of confrontation and negotiation between rights, based on international standards, and *Sitthi*, based on Thai legal frameworks. Meanwhile, the meaning of 'gender' of both types of organisation is vice-versa. As a result of cosmopolitanism, 'gender', in SF's and LH's accounts, universally derives from the Western globalisation in a form of donors' requirement based on the Universal human rights standard, while IRC and SVA enthusiastically take intersectionality into account to reshape the gender substance and re-define 'gender' in gender mainstreaming. The transnationality of local NGOs' gender mainstreaming is based on 'rights', while the transnational NGOs' one is based on 'gender'. The top-down gender mainstreaming as well as its universal(ised) meaning are differently interpreted, negotiated, re-defined, and re-configured in their practice.

Secondly, the degree of incorporation depends on their closeness to donors, on the one hand, and the staff's familiarity with local realities, including Thai socio-cultural context outside a camp and context inside a camp too, on the other. Therefore, the transnationality of gender mainstreaming of each organisation depends on the degree to which each organisation bargains to two schisms, including the semantic contradiction between the Western vocabulary and notion of rights and Thai vocabulary and notion of *Sitthi-Manusyachon* as well as another semantic contradiction between gender and *Phetsaphawa*.

The claim on the universality of gender mainstreaming, as noted in section 4.3, is thus falsified as the rigidity of the monotypic meaning of gender mainstreaming derived from donors is contested by the agglomeration of two sets of semantic contradiction – rights vs. *Sitthi-Manusyachon* and gender vs. *Phetsaphawa*, which exists in a foundational level of gender mainstreaming, as a result of a contradictory interrelatedness between the global and the local. As a result of interpreting, negotiating, and redefining meanings of rights and gender in gender mainstreaming discourse, transnational and local NGOs re-configure the transnational(ised) meaning of gender mainstreaming in this sense.

## 6. Transnationalising Gender Mainstreaming

In conclusion, this research proposes an alternative framework that goes beyond the institutionalist approach by arguing that the study of gender mainstreaming should be fundamentally and discursively investigated, and introducing the politics of meanings as an alternative tool to understand how it is ontologically perceived and how it shapes our understanding of gender mainstreaming in practice.

This research demonstrates that the cause of the failure of gender mainstreaming lies not only in its implementation but its ontological grounding in a Universalist ideational framework, the so-called 'universality', should also be challenged to understand that the meaning of gender mainstreaming is not top-down but bottom-up constituted. That is to say, even if most of the donors require implementers to include it in their works, gender mainstreaming, which denies the local meaning of gender, is not a universal panacea or a 'one-size-fits-all' policy because of its 'unfit-for-all' characteristics. Thus, not only social factors in the local context should be included, the local meanings should also be closely examined.

As gender mainstreaming is often used by donors as a technology of power to generate power over aid recipients and implements. There is, however, a possible emergence of counter-conducts and negotiation in this space. The propagation of a monotypic meaning of gender mainstreaming, its implementation, and its implication are thus all contestable.

Gender mainstreaming should, therefore, seen as a transnational discourse, constructed by a *mélange* of a loosely structured global form of development and the local context/ reality. The different levels of transnationality of each organisation depends on the degree to which each organisation interprets, negotiates, and re-defines rights and gender as a result of politics of the meanings of rights and politics of meanings of gender. As both local NGOs – SF and LH – demonstrate, their meaning of 'rights' derive from the confrontation and agglomeration of the international 'rights' and the Thai *Sittthi*, while the meaning of 'gender' is a conceptual inheritance from the universal standard. On the contrary, both transnational NGOs – IRC and SVA – prove that, while they fully inherit the meaning of 'rights' from the universali(sed) international standard, they agglomerate local realities and contexts

in reshaping and re-defining the meaning of 'gender'. In other words, the semantic contradiction of rights and *Sitthi Manusyachon*, as well as the semantic contradiction of gender and *Phetsaphawa*, are both vital parts of re-configuring the transnational(ised) meaning of gender mainstreaming.

However, instead of rejecting the Universalists' framework by simply adopting cultural relativists' antithetical stance against globalisation and any development efforts from 'outside', demarcating local realities within a nationalistic framework, and portraying discordance or separability of the global-local relations, this research aims to claim there is an inseparability and co-constitutiveness of transnationality of gender mainstreaming as a result of global-local interactions and construction of meaning of transnational(ised) 'rights' and 'gender', which are foundational elements of gender mainstreaming, in the politics of meanings.

Finally, thanks to the conceptual contribution of transnationalism, a theoretical impasse between a Universalist model and an antithetical cultural relativist one of the ontology of gender mainstreaming could be overcome. Investigating the main causes of failures in gender mainstreaming can thus be possible.

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