



**The role of cultural expression, practice, and transmission
among the Rakhine of Southwestern Coastal Bangladesh**

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The research associated with this thesis abides by the international and Australian codes on human and animal experimentation, the guidelines by the Australian Government's Office of the Gene Technology Regulator and the rulings of the Safety, Ethics and Institutional Biosafety Committees of the University. Ethics Approval H0015787.

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Abstract

Central to the discourse surrounding cultural preservation and transmission is the notion that culture provides meaning and identity for groups of people (Taylor, DM & Osborne 2010). However, in developing contexts, the transmission or mediation of culture may be interrupted by subsistence brought about by poverty or trauma in ways that affect and have an impact upon learning, meaning, identity, and resilience (Feuerstein, Feuerstein & Falik 2010, Taylor, 2010 #310). This study explores the significance of cultural practices, such as weaving, food consumption, festivals, language, and religion, for Rakhine communities living in Bangladesh. Specifically, the study considers how these practices can foster empowerment, participation, and resilience in the face of poverty and marginalisation. Immersive field trips in 2016 and 2017 involved collecting data relating to these cultural practices and participant views on their significance. That work included arts-based workshops, semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and photography. Precarity and intersectionality were deployed as conceptual and analytical frameworks by which to understand the effects of poverty and marginalisation for the Rakhine. My analysis establishes that, first, these are useful lenses through which to explore the power dynamics and the limitations of traditional development work assumptions about poverty; second, that cultural preservation and transmission are important to cultural identity, meaning, and resilience; and a third insight relates to the effect of poverty and marginalisation on cultural transmission. For example, as shown by the stories told by participants, weaving is a way to make a living and to interact, share experiences, establish a collective identity, and maintain traditional practices. Other cultural practices such as eating traditional foods, speaking Rakhine, being Buddhist, and participating in cultural festivals serve those involved in similar ways. Together these forms of cultural practices are significant for sustaining empowerment, participation, and resilience for a community of people.

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Preface

In June 2014, I was a research assistant for a project called *Arts as Adaptation?* through which I had the privilege to meet some members of the Rakhine communities and settlements of southwestern coastal Bangladesh. My role involved developing art workshops to answer the question: ‘What are your cultural strengths?’ I used a simple printmaking method where participants carved into thin sheets of Styrofoam using pencils to draw their images. Participants were shown how to print their carved images onto paper using ink and rollers. All participants printed three copies of their images, one to keep, and one to bind into a book we gave back to each community in which we ran workshops. The third copy was exhibited in the resultant art show. It was also part of a publication later reported to the then Faculty of Arts at the University of Tasmania to acquit an Arts and Environment Research Grant supporting the project.

In 2014, our research team trained volunteers to practice participatory methods in order to help us run the workshops in three Rakhine villages in the *upazilas* of Taltali, Kabirez para, and Kala para—these being the second lowest tier of regional administration in Bangladesh. Decisions about which villages to work in were made by my research partner in consultation with local informants. The experience of running workshops in the Rakhine villages laid the foundations for the research reported here. I returned to villages in Taltali and Kala para two years later to complete fieldwork for this doctoral dissertation.

What I learned on that first trip generated questions for me about arts-based community development. The fascination I had with Rakhine culture travelled with me to Canada when I returned home in 2015. Likewise, these ideas and thoughts came with me when I moved to Australia in 2016. One persistent memory is of the first time I saw women weaving in Kabirez para. Certainly, I had heard that weaving was significant to the Rakhine, but I had yet to see it in action or gauge its importance. Then, one afternoon, without either my research partner or translator, I walked out of the community centre in which we were staying to explore the village. I walked through the village, taking in the surroundings. The houses built of wood with rooftops made of what looked like straw were on stilts. All the houses were

built on platforms of hardened mud. The yards were filled with coconut trees and homestead gardens. The village was quiet that morning but resonating throughout was the sound of a shuttle sailing across a cloth's warp followed by the whack of a beater as someone shaped the weft. I followed the sound until I saw two women weaving under a house. One sat at the loom, while the other sat beside her chatting and winding thread onto bobbins. I stopped to watch the women weave.

After weaving for a few moments, the women stopped and gestured me into their home to have Coca-Cola and bananas. One of the women looked at me and asked, 'Rakhine?' I shook my head, no. 'Bangla?' Again, I shook my head, no. Baffled by my appearance in their village and without a word of Rakhine or Bangla they spoke to each other until they came to some reasoning unknown to me. They fell silent then and busied themselves, offering me more to eat and drink. I sat with them for several minutes, quietly finishing what they had given me, thanked them with the little Rakhine I had learned, and gestured that I was leaving. Politely and kindly, they saw me off, waving and watching as I walked down the path back towards the community centre.

This memory stays with me because those women were curious about who I was, where I had come from, and why I was there. They appeared to wonder how a woman with skin colour and facial features similar to their own had arrived with nothing but English and the odd Rakhine or Bangla word. However, I was also curious about them: their ways of life, culture, livelihoods, and stories. That we spent time in each other's presence trying to understand each other, sharing food and drink, seemed significant to me. Although I did not know it then, that moment would inspire me to complete a doctorate working in cooperation with the Rakhine. The balance of this work takes up that journey and maps the contributions to knowledge I seek to make here.

PART 1: INTRODUCTION

Part 1 includes two chapters: an introduction, and an outline of my methodology and conceptual framework. In the introduction of this work (chapter 1), I situate my research in discourses on the significance of cultural preservation and transmission of cultural practices. I discuss how my work is a case study investigating the cultural practices and traditions of the Rakhine in Bangladesh. I outline my research aims and questions and indicate how my inquiry adds significance to knowledge, policy, and practice.

In chapter 2 I explain how this work is an interdisciplinary composite, cross-cultural qualitative case study of a people, the Rakhine, and their lives in two *upazilas*, Taltali and Kala para. It is also a case study of changes I observe in myself. Additionally, I discuss my methods of approach: art-based activities, autoethnography, and ethnography. I outline the philosophical positions, values, and other research approaches I draw from, including culturally sensitive research processes, decolonising methodologies, and community-based participatory research. I indicate my reasoning to discuss my chosen methods in detail later in Part 3.

I also describe and discuss the concepts relevant to this work. Specifically, the conceptual framework, as well as precarity and intersectionality concerns. I situate how these concepts, while contested, provide a useful lens through which I interpret and analyse my research findings. Throughout the balance of the work, I use these lenses repeatedly to make sense of my encounters because a synthetic approach strengthens the findings overall.

Chapter 2 provides a critique of contemporary development strategies, citing scholars and critics who have observed the underpinning neoliberal values that drive development outcomes. Lastly, I refer in detail to particular theorists from whose work I drew in designing my research and comprehensively delineate how I use the terms ‘empowerment,’ ‘participation,’ and ‘resilience’ for this work.

Chapter One: Introduction

This dissertation is an interdisciplinary, composite cross-cultural qualitative case study. The introductory chapter frames my inquiry by situating my research in discourses on the significance of cultural preservation and transmission of cultural practices concerning Bangladesh and the Rakhine. Research aims and questions are outlined and explained in terms of how they informed my research methods. I position these questions in relation to existing discourses and note how my inquiry adds significance to knowledge, policy, and practice. Finally, I outline the content of subsequent chapters and guide the work's structure. I explain why I have combined an autoethnographic voice with an ethnographic one, and also why I have woven the literature throughout the entire work instead of containing the literature review within a single chapter.

Background

The importance of cultural preservation and the transmission of cultural practices to community groups is subject to an ongoing discussion among social and natural scientists (Redner 2004, 2013; Yuisufuwa, Yusupova & Mugtasimova 2017). Acknowledging that the term community is often a contested concept, in this work I borrow from Somerville (2016)'s definition of community, as he suggests that 'community can be understood as a state of being or set of practices in which people are connected or linked in some way' (Somerville 2016, p. 4). Central to discourses surrounding cultural preservation and transmission is the notion that culture gives to groups both meaning and identity (Taylor & Usborne 2010). Redner (2004) claims that traditional, local culture gives communities belonging and purpose that relates to social cohesion, values, and belief systems. Culture can be understood as a culmination of ideas and practices, relational information, and meta-information, all of which serve the human population to adapt to their environment (Kashima 2019).

Inherent to culture are qualities that instil meaning, identity, and adaptation; its preservation and transmission may relate to a community's experience of resilience (Ayunerak et al. 2014). Although cultures may adapt to changing environments, other influences can interrupt their transmission or mediation. In this respect,

Feuerstein, Feuerstein, and Falik (2010) suggest that, in developing contexts, the transmission or mediation of cultures may be interrupted by subsistence brought about by poverty or trauma (Feuerstein, Feuerstein & Falik 2010, Willis 2019). Interruptions within cultures affect learning, meaning, identity, and resilience (Feuerstein, Feuerstein & Falik 2010, Taylor 2010).

Scholars tend to agree that preserving indigenous languages is critical to preserving the world's cultural heritage; some claim that 'declining linguistic diversity also undermines intellectual life, the richness, and complexity of expression, and the scientific study of language' (Forrest 2018, p. 304; see also Nettle & Romaine 2000). However, there is only limited discussion about the importance of intergenerational transmission of cultural skills such as weaving. More specifically, little research deals with whether intergenerational cultural transmission is considered in development strategies and, if not, also fails to ask whether there is a need to preserve traditional culture as part of development strategies that mitigate against poverty and trauma, colonialism and its effects, or related challenges.

On that basis, in this work I raise the importance of cultural practices, traditions, and intergenerational cultural transmission among the Rakhine in southwestern coastal Bangladesh, which is among the world's poorest countries (World Bank 2018; Scott 1979), and which—since its inception as a country in 1971—has been labelled by some as an international basket-case (Yunus 2007). According to (Quibria 2010) there is persistent concern about its long-term economic viability. Widespread poverty in Bangladesh is attended by a longstanding history of foreign aid and international development policies.

The Rakhine live mostly in southern Bangladesh in the hilly districts and low-lying deltaic coastal areas. Among many indigenous communities in the country, the Rakhine are a closed community with ethnic origin and religion different from other Bangladeshis (Chowdhury 1994). 'The word "Rakhine" means *One who maintains & saves his/her culture and tradition from extinction*' (Myenthién 2013, p. 5). Certainly, the Rakhine I first met in 2014 told me that they have a strong commitment to continue their cultural practices, traditions, and values and see that work as imperilled by land grabbing, poverty, marginalisation, and environmental

changes. In short, they face a quandary related to the influence of cultural practice and transmission and a range of internal and external conditions and threats that affect the community's resilience. These experiences of the Rakhine draw attention to the potential utility of thinking about such matters through the lenses of precarity and intersectionality. Such insights inform the questions underpinning this research.

Research aims and questions

In this work, precarity denotes the uncertainty of outcomes in life arising from rapid changes in the geopolitical and socio-economic landscapes (Platt et al. 2017). Specifically, researchers examining precarity often consider the nature of hegemonic Western neoliberal labour markets and ask how such influences perpetuate livelihoods underpinned by vulnerability. Precarity enables researchers to focus on the uncertainties produced by neoliberal geopolitical influences. Intersectionality acknowledges other and multiple intersecting axes of influence such as (but not limited to) gender, social status, education, access to resources, physical location, ethnicity, or religion—those using intersectionality as a lens work to take stock of structural influences as well as individual identities. Furthermore, intersectionality enables them to consider how intersecting axes of influence may contribute to an individual's or community's experiences of both privilege and oppression (Hankivsky & Jordan-Zachery 2019).

When applied to the Rakhine of Bangladesh, ideas about precarity and intersectionality enable scholars to reveal the uncertainty of a range of outcomes related to neoliberal processes and several other intersecting axes of influence—international development, cultural practices, and cultural transmission, not least among them. However, in the face of these shifting pressures, the Rakhine continue to draw from their cultural and place-based resources to maintain their cultural identity and traditions.

Thus, I start this research by acknowledging the rapid changes in society, technology, geopolitics, and the economy as impetuses to change and evolution and ask: What can be learned about the Rakhine of southwestern coastal Bangladesh? This first question begins my inquiry into the lives of the Rakhine, enabling me to

determine what factors play a part in experiences of both privilege and oppression. Further, as I describe the manifold uncertainties and precarity that the Rakhine face, I ask: What types of cultural practices do the Rakhine deem important, how do they preserve these practices, and how do they transmit them intergenerationally? Specifically, I aim to gauge the importance of culture and cultural pursuits such as food, cooking, language, religion, and festivals. Of particular interest is the practice of weaving, which has deep significance to Rakhine culture, and Rakhine women especially, and is among those elements of their lives facing the greatest threat to being lost.

Recognising the precarity and other intersecting axes of influence experienced by the Rakhine, several international non-government organisations (NGOs) have deemed them vulnerable to social, cultural, economic, and environmental change to the extent that there is concern that they will ‘disappear’ as a unique community (Khan et al. 2017). One such NGO, Caritas Internationalis, an international relief development agency, figures more than others in this research because the Rakhine are a target population of an integrated community development project (ICDP-Rakhine) sponsored and facilitated by Caritas Barisal. ICDP-Rakhine offers several programs, educational opportunities, and bursaries to support the Rakhine.

However, not all such interventions may help with the challenge of preserving and transmitting Rakhine cultural practices and traditions. Other labours are needed, and some of those are more self-reflexive and critical. Thus, it is important to avoid assumptions that there is something wrong with groups in need of aid. Likewise, it is crucial to consider how existing systems of development and aid exacerbate precarity. Such self-reflexivity can be activated by engaging with critical consciousness ideologies and praxes attributed to Freire (2009), who has described using education to enable individuals to realise their own oppression and see how they can transform their reality. Self-reflexivity can also be activated by reference to Boal (2002), who exemplified how theatre can be an effective tool by which to apply Freire’s praxis.

Additionally, as proposed above, if intersectionality enables scholars to recognise that the intersecting axes of influence engender both privilege and oppression, then it

also enables us to recognise simultaneous strengths amid vulnerabilities. Arts-based practices are one form of participatory community development. For example, empowerment, participation, and resilience are *already* exercised among the Rakhine. Bringing these threads together by reference to Rakhine cultural practices and cultural transmission, precarity, and intersectionality, empowerment, participation, and resilience, the third question posed in this research is this: By working with the Rakhine using an arts-based approach to research, what is learned about cross-cultural work, precarity, intersectionality, empowerment, participation, and resilience?

These three questions direct my research design, methods, and findings. In the next section, I briefly outline the work's research design and explain how I anticipate the findings will make original contributions to theory and praxis.

Research design and significance

In 2016 and 2017, after engaging with the Rakhine in 2014 as part of the project *Arts as Adaptation?*, I returned to Bangladesh as a higher degree researcher from the University of Tasmania. I implemented arts-based activities and engaged in both autoethnography and ethnography. I sought to learn both about and from the Rakhine, as well as arts-based community development practices. In two trips over the two years, I completed my fieldwork in Taltali and Kala para, to which I returned because I had remained in contact with participants from my visit in 2014. Also, the Caritas field offices are nearby, and Caritas supported both the first independent and subsequent doctoral projects.

During both visits related to the doctorate, I organised and facilitated arts-based activities—two weaving workshops and one photography workshop in each village. The workshops engaged women and youth (ages 12 and up) primarily but did include some children and men. For each workshop, I trained volunteers to help me and worked closely with a Rakhine man, Noen Laine, our interpreter from 2014 (see Preface). I kept a journal documenting personal epiphanies and reflections, conducted semi-structured interviews, spent time in various forms of situational and participant observation, engaged in conversations with Caritas staff and Rakhine

community members to learn more about their perspectives on Rakhine communities, and reviewed relevant literature before and after my field trips to strengthen both initial context-setting work and later analysis and synthesis of my findings.

This project contributes to the scholarship in several original ways. First, studying a culture not my own and being reliant on an interpreter to help gather data are characteristics of this research. My findings related to working cross-culturally with an interpreter contributes to the discourses about cross-cultural research and associated methodologies—culturally sensitive, decolonising, and participatory research practices. These research methodologies are continually reformed and reflected upon in scholarly communities.

Second, implementing an arts-based community development project produced changes in the villages in which I worked, and the exercise of empowerment, participation, and resilience that I observed in my own interactions with participants and their engagements with each other provide a solid precedent for such development and research.

Third, despite the documented shortcomings and limitations of cross-cultural research, the need for it remains (Liamputtong 2010). Migration, immigration, and globalisation warrant ‘the need for culturally competent social and health care [which] requires knowledge of the social and cultural contexts of the people, and this can be obtained by research’ (Liamputtong 2010, p. 4; see also Esposito 2001; Liamputtong 2008, 2009; Papadopoulos & Lees 2002; Smith 2008; Tillman 2006). Specifically, this work seeks to consider whether and how, despite living as a minority in a location they find precarious, the members of one ethnic group maintain their culture, identity, and tradition. Furthermore, I ask whether and how they have found ways to sustain their cultural practices regardless of social, economic, environmental, and geopolitical conditions—sometimes, despite or in spite of a range of development programs meant to improve their situation.

Fourth, living among the Rakhine and reading the literature has prompted self-reflection regarding my own ideologies and practices as a social worker and

community development worker. Specifically, the research process revealed how much Western, neoliberal ideals and values influenced my education and training, and therefore my practice. That process has highlighted how, unknowingly, I perpetuate(d) colonial ways of practice both in social work and research. Doing arts-based activities with the Rakhine also gave me insight into the importance of cultural identity. It shed light on the correlation between continuing one's traditions and cultural practices and the exercise of empowerment, participation, and resilience. These reflections have prompted me to adopt a more critical view of my education, in relation to policies and theories, and how I practice as a social worker. I hope that what I have learned may prompt learning for other practitioners. On that basis and following the tradition of autoethnography where personal epiphanies of the researcher are accounted for, I include my reflections to illustrate how the themes discussed within this research dissertation may prompt a change in the practice of individual social workers, community developers, policymakers, and practitioners.

Chapter synopsis and guidelines for the reader

The thesis is organised in four sections—**Part 1**, **Part 2**, **Part 3**, **Part 4**. I have already referred to the structure and broad content of **Part 1**.

Next, **Part 2** contains chapter 3, Bangladesh. Here I address my first research question by discussing the experiences of the Rakhine through the lenses of precarity and intersectionality. I do this by giving an overview of Bangladesh's geography, history, culture, language, religion, population, and people concerning development aid—with particular reference to Caritas's work. This work situates the reader in the environment and socio-political context of Bangladesh and helps frame how that context affects the Rakhine.

Part 3 contains chapters 4, 5, and 6 which account for my time spent with the Rakhine in 2016 (Trip 1 or T1, 26 October–14 November) and 2017 (Trip 2 or T2, 30 October–8 December). In **Part 3**, I describe the methods used for this research—arts-based activities and practices associated with ethnography and autoethnography. Here, I provide a line of reasoning for each method: situational observation, participant observation, informal conversations, semi-structured interviews, weaving,

critical photography, journaling, and photographs. These methods are introduced separately, described at the start of each of these chapters. In each chapter, describing my methodology sets the stage for discussions of my collected findings.

In chapter 4, I first explain my use of methods associated with ethnography and autoethnography, specifying fieldwork preparation, situational and participant observation, and informal conversations. In this chapter, I continue to analyse the experiences of the Rakhine in terms of precarity and intersectionality. To do this, I refer in detail to Taltali and Kala para and the lifestyles and livelihoods I observed among the Rakhine. I explain the organisation of their villages, both physically and culturally. Then, I begin to address my second research question by illustrating via a series of vignettes which cultural practices the Rakhine deem important and how they plan to preserve them. Last, I list the main challenges experienced by the Rakhine— ethnic marginalisation, climate-related pressures, and land grabbing and how, despite these vulnerabilities, culture plays a vital role in Rakhine identity and social cohesion.

In chapter 5, I provide detail on the use of semi-structured interviews. Recognising that the exercise of empowerment, participation, and resilience exist among the Rakhine, I describe the events I attended and the stories shared with me by certain individuals. These stories further illustrate what cultural practices are deemed important, how they are preserved, transmitted, and what effects these practices have on the Rakhine community. These accounts surface instances where I observed empowerment, participation, and resilience present prior to my later interventions.

In chapter 6, I describe the use of participatory arts-based activities. In this chapter, I address my third research question and explain how these interventions—arts-based workshops and semi-structured interviews—can influence participation as much as whether participants engage in a dialogue about how they can be part of changing and ameliorating their own communities. I also outline observations regarding how empowerment, participation, and resilience *resulted* from the arts-based workshops I conducted.

Part 4 contains chapter 7, which is the discussion and conclusion of my work. Here I summarise why my findings are important to the research aims and questions. I discuss the key findings, provide interpretations of them, and consider their implications. I also critique the methodological choices I made and conceptual frameworks I chose, commenting on how they were useful in my research and analysis, and their limitations. I end by advancing some recommendations for future research.

Throughout this work, I have chosen to write in ways that change between an ethnographer's voice and one of an auto-ethnographer. In other words, there will be sections in this work where I write on my reflections and learnings. Specifically, I outline how these reflections changed my practice within this research process. Although my personal reflections will be woven throughout, they are most prevalently presented in chapters 6 and 7. I also analyse my findings and discuss how they provoked changes in my own thinking and practice as a social worker. The choice to change between an autoethnographic voice and an ethnographic one is an attempt to mitigate what Rosaldo (1993, p. 7) has pointed to: 'if classic ethnography's vice [is] the slippage from the ideal of detachment to actual indifference, [the problem with] present-day reflexivity [autoethnography] is the tendency for the self-absorbed self to lose sight altogether of the culturally different other' (see also Anderson 2006). This interchange and application of both voices is my attempt to use analytical reflexivity by taking what I observed and collected, along with my personal epiphanies, grounding it in literature and empirical data to improve theoretical understandings of broad social phenomena (see Anderson 2006; Denzin 2014; Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2011).

Chapter Two: Methodology and Conceptual Frameworks

Introduction

This chapter is separated into two parts: methodology and conceptual frameworks. I begin by describing the methodology and discussing my philosophical positioning and values in relation to the research design. I then elaborate on what makes this research an interdisciplinary composite cross-cultural case study; explain why interdisciplinary work is relevant and discuss qualitative research benefits in cross-cultural settings. In acknowledging past mistakes made in cross-cultural research, I also outline culturally sensitive research, decolonising methods, and participatory community-based research to inform my research design.

In the second part of the chapter, I introduce concepts, theories, and terms that form the foundation for the balance of the dissertation. I consider the theoretical underpinning of this work—precarity and intersectionality—explain their historical and contemporary relevance, and consider how these concepts will be used in what follows. Next, I refer to arts-based activities for research and social transformation and outline how works by Freire (2009) and Boal (2002) that are associated with critical ideologies inform this work. In deploying these critical ideologies, I infer how the terms empowerment, participation, and resilience have been co-opted to mask neoliberal values. Finally, I define how I intend to use these terms—empowerment, participation, and resilience—for the purposes of this work.

Philosophical positioning

The ontological and epistemological assumptions that underpin this research relate to how I approach knowledge. I have always valued knowledge produced via human experiences and interpretations of them rather than just from data derived from secondary sources (although I acknowledge these are also important). This experiential ontological positioning has influenced how I have spent my life meeting people and getting to know them, because I have also valued learning from others' experiences and considering them in relation to my own. Such positioning has

directed my educational and career pursuits; I chose to be a social worker because I am intellectually stimulated by people's stories and the social issues I try to resolve. Finally, that ontological positioning has also influenced my interest in travelling, living in unfamiliar places, and among people foreign to me to learn and expand my knowledge of reality through experiences within different social contexts.

How I approach knowledge follows constructionist, transformative, and interpretivist approaches. The constructionist position assumes that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors, produced through social interaction and are constantly revived (Al-Saadi 2014). A transformative position assumes that these multiple realities are both historically and socially shaped (Held 2019). An interpretivist position claims that 'knowledge of the world is based on our understanding, which arises from our reflection on events rather than only on lived experience' (Al-Saadi 2014, p. 3, Ormston, 2014).

This research examines the influence of cultural transmission on the resilience of an ethnic minority. It also documents a change in myself from the experiences—my own and those I interacted with—that I gathered while living among the Rakhine. Therefore, the ontological and epistemological assumptions of this work follow a constructivism and interpretivism approach. There are elements in which my work exemplifies a transformative approach—primarily in my axiology. Throughout my research, I have aimed to uphold four values, flexibility, reflexivity, empathy, and reciprocity, so that my work could also be 'a means for social emancipation; solidarity with the oppressed' (Held 2019, p. 5). In the next section, I explain these four research values.

Research values

This work's cross-cultural nature required that I be flexible with many elements of my fieldwork plans. I had to be flexible with time and organisation of arts-based workshops, allowing local knowledge and norms to direct formal implementation of the workshops and interviews. I also had to be flexible with my interview questions. There were times where questions I had initially prepared were difficult to translate or irrelevant to cultural context. Other than challenges relating to interpretation and

translation, it was obvious that sometimes my predetermined questions were not useful in prompting the participant to share information. In other instances, I had to change interview questions as the participants whom I initially intended to reach were not available.

The process of reflexivity contributed to my ability to be flexible. Reflexivity means ‘thinking critically about what you are doing and why, confronting and often challenging your own assumptions, and recognising the extent to which your thoughts, actions, and decisions shape your research and what you see’ (Mason 2006 p. 5). I had to be reflective to recognise the need for flexibility. However, I also had to be reflective to ensure my flexibility was both culturally relevant and in line with research aims and ethics. Reflexivity was also pertinent to practicing culturally sensitive, decolonising, participatory work. I had to acknowledge and mitigate appropriately the power differentials produced by differences in culture, class, *Western* language, and my own positionality (see Anderson 2006; Cormier 2018; Scott & Morrison 2006).

Empathy is a value that I needed to be flexible and reflective. Without empathy, I would not see the need to be flexible towards participants’ needs, nor would any of my reflections create action that held respect and care for the participants and local culture. In fact, Gair (2012) suggests that an important quality all qualitative researchers should have is the ability to listen and show empathy (see also Savvides et al. 2014). It was empathy that enabled me to build rapport with community members, gain access to information, communicate, and collaborate with the local community.

Instilled in the value of reciprocity is one’s expression of gratitude through honouring those who participate in research activities. Showing gratitude is a quality referred to in the literature on decolonising methodologies. As Liamputtong (2010, p. 81) has noted: ‘by giving something in return for receiving information, researchers can reduce the power inequality between themselves and the researched’. The arts-based workshops I conducted as a centrepiece of my research created opportunities for reciprocity as I offered a new skill in return for participation in my research. I also supplied meals or tea and refreshments at the end of each volunteer

or community workshop to thank participants for their time and prepared gifts for community members who worked closely with me as key informants and volunteers.

Cross-cultural qualitative research

I conducted an interdisciplinary composite cross-cultural qualitative case study using arts-based activities and methods from autoethnography and ethnography based on these aforementioned philosophical positioning and values. A full Humans Ethics application was submitted to and approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Tasmania (Appendix A). Ethical considerations relating to cross-cultural work, informed consent, participant selection and recruitment, local collaboration, and reciprocity were considered and outlined. Participant information sheets and consent forms were prepared (Appendix B).

Literature for this work was identified using search engines, scholarly databases, and e-journals collections, as well as following links to books, websites, and ephemera. The literature was read, categorised, and analysed. In the planning phases of the research, a preliminary literature review informed initial thinking about the research design. During the analysis of research findings from the field, another significant period of time was spent considering the literature again. All references were documented in Endnote.

This research is interdisciplinary, which ‘refers to using more than one discipline in pursuing a particular inquiry’ (Klein 1990, p.27). Many practical challenges are inherently interdisciplinary and require insights from different disciplines (Lyll et al. 2011). In this respect, Conway (1995) notes that ‘in an increasingly multicultural world, we need insights derived from across humanities and social sciences that will enable us to live productively and harmoniously in a society where different religions and cultural practices and beliefs are constantly impinging on one another’ (Lyll et al. 2011, p. 10; see also (Conway 1997).

Interdisciplinary study also reflects and accommodates the complexity inherent to many challenges and topics. Thus, such study is also described as a ‘more conscious and explicitly focused integration that creates a holistic view or common

understanding of a complex issue, question or problem’ (Klein 2007, p. 37, 38). In many instances, thorough responses to complex issues are more likely to come from an interdisciplinary approach (Lyall et al. 2011). Those engaged in interdisciplinary study also have the potential to identify connections between previously unconnected disciplines that result in new or newly significant findings. However, Lyall et al. (2011) suggest that it is always important to justify adopting this approach and clearly outline its benefits.

An interdisciplinary approach was determined as useful in this research because of the complexity of cross-cultural development. This was also the reason for choosing qualitative approaches which favour methods that enabled me to collect, interpret, and reflect upon participants’ stories and experiences. Qualitative studies are crucial if the purpose of research is to explore, describe, or explain a social phenomenon; unpack meanings people ascribe to events or material objects; or build a depth of understanding of the social world (Leavy 2017). The characteristics of qualitative research allow time for stories to be told and understanding to be sought, from a ‘variety of empirical materials—case study; personal experience; introspections; life story; interview; artefacts; cultural texts and productions; observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts—that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives’ (Denzin & Lincoln 2005, pp. 3–4). Qualitative approaches additionally allow for a more fluid structure that enables researchers ‘to understand people within the context of their own society’ (Liamputtong 2010, p. 11).

The ability to better understand people within their own socio-cultural settings was important to me, hence the choice to conduct fieldwork in Bangladesh. Doing research in a locale and amongst members of a culture different from my own required that I consider this work’s cross-cultural characteristics. Researchers have engaged with cultures and geographic locations different from their own to ‘interpret what is on the “inside”, through the voices of informants’ (Adler 2004, p. 107). Thus, qualitative research is regarded as important for those seeking to explore social interactions that are part of cross-cultural issues; it is, in a sense, a ‘sociological vanguard’ (Morris 2007, p. 410). It invites us to ask questions about the nature of phenomena and show patience when trying to understand those phenomena and their

settings. Due to researchers' learned capacities to create space to convey sensitivity and to mitigate and reduce distrust, this approach has been shown to give voice to Indigenous groups traditionally silenced, absented, or marginalised by the oppressive effects of colonisation (Davies et al. 2009). This method of inquiry can be particularly useful for examining race, culture, and ethnicity because it includes processes by which researchers may closely follow social trends and norms as they appear and change (Liamputtong 2010; Morris 2007). Also, since culture 'is not fixed or linear; rather it represents one facet of the totality of one's human experience' (Tillman 2006, p. 266), qualitative methodologies allow for the fluidity of information.

Qualitative research is, of course, implicated in colonisation; ethnographers, for example, regularly enjoy the hospitality proffered by native peoples, collecting information in biased ways, and using data in ways that may harm those they have studied (see also (Denzin & Lincoln 2005, Smith 1999). So, cultural insensitivity by researchers has contributed to marginalisation of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups at varied scales (Denzin & Lincoln 2005) but, equally and importantly, refinements to qualitative research methods have been an antidote to such effects. Learning from past researchers' mistakes, I considered three research approaches that exemplify anti-oppressive practice in cross-cultural settings: culturally sensitive research, decolonising research methodologies, and community-based participatory research. These approaches have informed my research design and prompted reflection on my processes throughout this dissertation and each is briefly considered below.

Tillman (2002, 2006) positions culture as central to the research process. Her argument for culturally sensitive research builds on an extensive line of scholarship that promulgated the view that a deep understanding of culture and history should inform plans for advancing education among Black people (Tillman 2002). Likewise, she asserts that when research comes from a culturally sensitive perspective, 'the complexity of an ethnic group's culture, as well as its varied historical and contemporary representations, is acknowledged' (Tillman 2006, p. 266). This research approach upholds five components: 'culturally congruent research methods, culturally specific knowledge, cultural resistance to theoretical

dominance, culturally sensitive data interpretations, and culturally informed theory and practice’ (Tillman 2006, p. 269).

Tillman’s focus on culture is congruent with my questions and values. Her five components informed my research design. Briefly, *culturally congruent research* uses methods that allow room to capture ‘holistic contextualized pictures of social, political, economic, and educational factors’ (Tillman 2002, p. 6). I apply culturally congruent research methods by using the concepts of intersectionality and precarity to analyse my data; also, by using culturally relevant methods, which I further detail in the methods section of this chapter. *Culturally specific knowledge* refers to honouring the cultural integrity of members within a community while reflecting on how one’s own cultural knowledge and positioning might affect the research process. This commitment is made explicit in the reflections I share throughout this work. In practicing *cultural resistance to theoretical dominance*, using Tillman’s (2002, p. 6) words, I made the ‘attempt to reveal, understand, and respond to unequal power relations that may minimise, marginalise, subjugate or exclude the multiple realities and knowledge bases’. I sought instantiations of empowerment, participation, and resilience, which I describe in more detail in the later part of this chapter. I also reflected on how my positions of power influenced relationships with the Rakhine. *Culturally sensitive data interpretations* ‘position experiential knowledge as legitimate, appropriate, and necessary’ (Tillman 2002, p. 6). I examine this idea below when I delineate my approaches to data collection. I also discuss the ‘difficult work of grappling with and translating (imperfectly) the place-specific vernaculars for analysing and undoing oppression’ (Nagar & Shirazi 2019, p. 237) in the discussion section of this work. Lastly, I hope to contribute to *culturally informed theory and practice*, discussing and drawing conclusions from the findings in chapter 7.

Thus, in using a decolonising approach to research I recognise the restrictive, oppressive results of colonisation. I seek to reclaim what might have been lost during colonisation and actively reflect on and critique (see Asher & Wainwright 2019) research designs and practice to ensure that they are not new iterations of colonisation. Notably, ‘decolonising research requires that we consider how oppressive structures are produced and iterated in research by investigating the

actions of the oppressors' (Mutua & Swadener 2004, p. 14). It also requires us to consider the intersectionality of sex, race, and ethnicity (Lahiri-Dutt 2017) and how that relates to the power to navigate these oppressive structures. Moreover, we must always observe that 'there are no spaces that are not colonised' (Anderson 2004) and that decolonisation is a long-term process that requires the relocation of power in all areas including bureaucracy, education, language, cultural values, and knowledge production (Smith 2012). Recognising that Eurocentric cultural values and beliefs have been privileged and are dominant, my work seeks to honour Indigenous paradigms and worldviews (Chilisa 2012).

Engaging in decolonising research also means 'creating counterhegemonic intellectual spaces in which new readings of the world can unfold, in ways that lead us towards change, both in theory and practice' (Darder 2015, p. 63). And this is also attained by learning to represent ourselves through constant critique, what Asher & Wainwright (2019, p. 41) suggest is a 'vital element of the struggle for social change'. Applying decolonising research approaches has involved reflecting on my position as 'oppressor' and 'oppressed'. Reflecting on this dual status has required that I be conscientious about my own actions and processes and about how they might perpetuate Western ways of thinking. While conducting this study, I have tried to avoid acts that are oppressive, knowing that this may not be fully possible. Doing decolonising research itself has been a process in which I have learned how I perpetuate(d) and am oppressed by hegemonic Western neoliberal ideals and values. These realisations and reflections contribute to autoethnographic data included in this work.

Decolonising research also involves working collaboratively with participants to co-create research and co-produce knowledge. One practical application of this paradigm applies principles such as community-based participatory research (CBPR). Adherence to these principles means that researchers must involve participants from design to implementation. The goal is to empower local groups to collaborate in research to address complex social, cultural, political, and structural factors affecting them and their communities (Pyett et al. 2010). CBPR also aims to 'enhance cultural understanding, mutual respect, and increase insight into social and physical conditions and policy environments that are impacting the health of the

community' (Springer & Skolarus 2019). Finding its roots in Freire's work, CBPR is about creating knowledge and engaging in participatory education, developing consciousness, and mobilising for liberating forms of action (Liamputtong, 2010). CBPR combines research and social action. It fosters opportunities to discover what is important for a given community and then invites community members to inform development strategies, so that implemented actions can have greater relevance and impact (Springer & Skolarus 2019).

Nevertheless, several challenges arise when involving community members in research and when ensuring methods are participatory. One challenge to CBPR is the time it takes to develop relationships and secure trust between the researcher and community partners (Springer & Skolarus 2019). Other challenges include needing to address the relational dynamics that exist among researchers, participants, interpreters, and research assistants; needing to find answers to questions about who controls, owns, shares, and distributes knowledge; and needing to be clear about the extent to which a project involves working towards social justice outcomes (Groot et al. 2018). In cross-cultural situations, CBPR also often involves making decisions about whether to use innovative methods such as certain arts-based approaches. Park (2006, p. 84) refers to these as 'non-canonical approaches' and they include art, photography, theatre, storytelling, puppets, song, drawing, painting, and educational camps.

My research has an affinity with a CBPR approach. I invited Rakhine participants to engage with me in arts-based workshops through which I also sought to draw out their views on cultural, social, and other forms of precarity and resilience. I saw them as experts and developed a teamwork approach to encourage mutual respect and equitable participation. I provide further detail to the methods I used pertaining to arts-based CBPR approaches and qualitative approaches in Part 3 when I describe my fieldwork and findings associated to my time in Bangladesh. Specifying my research methods with my findings is pertinent to the ethnographic style of this work. From here, I turn to describing the concepts, theories, and terms that form the foundation of this work.

Overarching theoretical lenses

In the introduction, I flagged how I intended to use the concepts of precarity and intersectionality as lenses to analyse and interpret my findings. Here I describe these two concepts in more detail, discussing their history, how they have been used in literature, and elaborating on how I apply them to my work.

Precarity

The concept of precarity should not be confused with the word precarious in common vernacular, although both terms relate to insecurity. The vernacular use of precarious is often for describing situations or objects ‘in a dangerous state because of not being safe or not being held in place firmly’ (CambridgeDictionary 2020). Conversely, precarity often refers to the changing employment conditions underpinned by insecurity and uncertainty characteristic to workers worldwide regardless of class and location (Suliman & Weber 2019).

Historically, the original use of *precarite* was in French analyses of labour implications related to neoliberal development (Munck 2013). However, as a feature of the work by Guy Standing, precarity deals with how conditions in late capitalism have caused the working class to fend for themselves, precipitating the making of *the precariat* (Rosario & Rigg 2019; Standing 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014b). Butler also uses this term, and regards it as a general existential condition of the global community (Butler 2006; Rosario & Rigg 2019).

Among those doing work on precarity, the precarious nature of livelihoods relates to hegemonic neoliberal labour markets and considers how those influence and perpetuate livelihoods underpinned by vulnerability. Although the concept of precarity originally focused primarily on wage labour, class, and employment (Branch & Hanley 2011), the discourse has been applied, inter alia, to migration (Nowicka 2018; Platt et al. 2017), place (Banki 2013) aging (Grenier, Phillipson & Settersten 2020), personal relationships (Gilmartin, Coppari & Phelan 2020), and ethics (Butler 2004, 2009, 2012, 2016).

According to (Vij 2019), considering precarity as understood in work by Standing and Butler also involves considering possible global politics of equality based on the emergent idea of a shared horizon of suffering and insecurity (see also Standing 2013). This view of precarity has been heavily critiqued as ‘precarious lived experiences had already long been the norm for many in the Global South, and this cannot be delinked from colonialism and its legacies’ (Suliman & Weber 2019, p. 527). In Standing’s conceptualisation of precarity, ‘there appears to be an acceptance of inequality as there is no critical commentary on the perverse unequal relations through which development is realised’ (Suliman & Weber 2019, p. 532).

The dominant discourse of precarity favours a Eurocentric conception of development that projects specific experiences as universal. Although some critiques purport the idea that precarity has problematic implications as a framework for analysing inequality, neoliberal influences on development affect labour and livelihoods rooted in vulnerability. Furthermore, these dominant models of development perpetuate these livelihoods of precarity as much as it alleviates some of the inequality it tries to resolve. Although Butler’s (2004) work favours the idea of precarity as a generalised condition, she does stress that experiences of vulnerability can vary and are distributed differently across the globe. Therefore, understanding how neoliberal values and processes affect individuals differently globally can increase a critical view towards neoliberal influences on development.

In early conceptualisations of precarity, Butler (2004) proposes a social ontology that challenges us to consider our global interdependence. Precarity in this view offers a basis of identification that causes ethical indignation—*I oppose injustice done to the other because it can happen to me* (Butler 2004; Ruti 2017). Butler later retracts the universality of her definition of precarity, making the point that even though all of us are defenceless to suffering, some experiences of oppression and suffering are unique and incomparable to others (Ruti 2017). Nonetheless, this basic idea of placing oneself in another’s position because of the realisation that under different conditions, the same/similar injustice could happen to oneself, is in line with my axiology. For research to suggest possible social change and create solidarity with the oppressed, learning about people’s experiences in various areas of the world is paramount.

Harris and Nowicki (2018, p. 387) define precariousness as ‘an inherent state of vulnerability and dependence resulting from the relational structure of society’, and precarity as ‘a political condition that is the consequence of uneven power relations and refers to the exacerbation of the precariousness of some subjects compared to others’ (ibid.). Using the concept of precarity to analyse changing livelihood conditions due to dominant neoliberal processes sheds light on the inequalities perpetuated by these processes. The discourse of precarity is further associated with ‘emerging movements seeking alternative politics to neoliberalism, which encompass inspiration and motivations to live otherwise’ (Suliman & Weber 2019, p. 525). Suliman and Weber (2019) also surmise that precarity has problematic implications as a framework for analysing inequality due to its Euro-centric assumptions. I would also add that it is challenging insofar as it considers mainly systemic influences such as neoliberalism when there are also many other axes of influence that contribute to experiences of oppression. For example, in the case of the Rakhine, it is not only neoliberal processes that sustain poverty but also ethnic marginalisation and environmental changes, among other axes of influence that I examine later in this work. Therefore, in the interest of an integrative analysis, I have chosen to also use intersectionality as a framework to interpret my findings. In the following section, I explain the concept of intersectionality.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is the acknowledgement that oppression is multi-layered and affected by various intersecting influences (Hopkins 2017). For example, to single out race as the root of the oppression experienced by an individual or group is inaccurate. Instead, ‘concrete experiences of oppression, being oppressed, for example, as “a Black person” is always constructed and intermeshed in other social divisions’ (Yuval-Davis 2006). Although intersectionality had also been discussed by other feminists such as Hooks, Yuval-Davis, Anthias, Trin T. Min-ha, Joseph, Collins and Bilge, the term itself is attributed to Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) (Hancock 2019). Crenshaw used the term with the intention ‘to address the fact that the experiences and struggles of women of colour fell between the cracks of both feminist and anti-racist discourse’ (Davis 2008, p. 68).

Despite the support intersectionality has received, it has also been critiqued as vague, and is, as some have argued, in need for a more ‘coherent conceptual framework and methodology’ (Davis 2008, p. 69). Various scholars have tried to create such a framework for intersectional thinking. For example, Helma Lutz (2002) includes 14 different axes in her list of social divisions or lines of difference. These include gender, sexuality, race/skin colour, ethnicity, nation/state, class, culture, ability, age, sedentariness/origin, wealth, North-South location, religion, and social development (Lutz 2002). She recognises that this list is by no means complete because the purpose of intersectionality is the consideration of the full diversity of experiences that link to oppression.

Regardless of the scrutiny on intersectionality, Davis (2008) argues that it is precisely its vagueness and open-endedness that might be the secret to its appeal and salience. Specifically, Davis (2008, p. 77) argues that ‘its lack of clear-cut definition or even specific parameters has enabled it to be drawn upon in nearly any context of inquiry’. Additionally, she claims that intersectionality offers many opportunities for scholars and researchers to find linkages between additional categories, explore varying relations of power, and decide when another question needs answering, or when it’s appropriate to stop and why.

Even so, Harris and Patton (2019) caution that intersectionality may become diluted and used as a buzzword. Usefully, they offer a guiding framework in the application of intersectionality consisting of three main components. First, intersectionality requires the scholar to cite practical and methodological approaches, including referencing its history and offering generalist or specialist definitions. Second, intersectional work and analyses must include an aspect that promotes social justice and change through generating transformative knowledge; for example, ‘by linking research and practice to concrete holistic approaches to the eradication of disparities and to changing social and higher education institutions’ (Thornton-Dill & Zambrana 2009, p. 5). Third, the use of intersectional analyses should advance a social justice agenda.

Following Crenshaw, I first explored gender and race in relation to other intersecting

axes of influence related to the Rakhine. The Rakhine are an ethnic and racial minority in Bangladesh. When I learned of Rakhine women's roles, I noted the repercussions relating to the intersecting influence of being a woman *and* Rakhine in Bangladesh. I also used intersectionality in reflecting on my identity as a Western, Chinese, woman, and how that affected my interactions with participants. For example, being a woman myself, connections made with Rakhine women were easier and more accessible. Therefore, I collected most of my salient data from women I interacted with, got to know, and interviewed as part of the arts-based workshops.

Besides race and gender, intersectional thinking prompts me to consider multiple forms of oppression and marginality ascribed to the Rakhine's cultural identities and social locations through learning about power relations that exist among their society (Bauer 2014; Kassan et al. 2020; Rosenthal 2016). As will be evident in my descriptions of Bangladesh (Chapter 3), Rakhine lifestyles and livelihoods (Chapter 4), and the two chapters focused on my field trips (Chapters 5 and 6), there are many intersecting axes of influence that contribute to felt experiences of opportunity and vulnerability among the Rakhine. More specifically, the stories based on Rakhine individuals I encountered while in Bangladesh make it evident that gender, sexuality, ethnicity, geography, education, age, class, culture, wealth, and other axes all contribute to precarity that the Rakhine experience.

Finding the intersecting axes of influence that characterise the Rakhine as vulnerable reveals how precarity exists in communities thought as 'developing' or 'vulnerable' and shows how these experiences of precarity are different from iterations that exist in Western 'developed' societies. Intersectional thinking can contribute to painting a more exact view of Rakhine experience. This type of analysis will produce a more realistic understanding of what Butler (2004) describes as a shared existential ontological condition related to shifting geo-political and socio-economic realities. Furthermore, intersectionality means acknowledging that these intersecting axes of influence do not solely position an individual in vulnerability, but intersecting axes of influence can privilege and oppress simultaneously (Hankivsky & Jordan-Zachery 2019). This is the situation of many of the Rakhine within this work. Intersectional thinking thus starts a process of discovery and the learning of the complexities in our

world. It compels us to grapple with this complexity in our scholarship (Davis 2008). It is on this basis, and despite critiques about intersectionality providing only a vague conceptual framework, that I will analyse the world of the Rakhine.

In the next section, I discuss the theorists and activists who influenced my choices in designing the arts-based workshops.

Arts-based activities for research and social transformation

The arts are powerful mechanisms via which to create and communicate (Wikstrom 2000) and to reflect on lived experiences (Kassan et al. 2020). Arts-based activities enable me to incorporate decolonising values and practices into my community-based participatory research (Brereton et al. 2014; Flicker et al. 2014); it also enables me to use non-canonical approaches to connect with participants (Kassan et al. 2020; Park 2006). Increasing instances of scholarship support the use of art-based activities for community development (Butterwick & Roy 2020) and research (Goopy & Kassan 2019).

On that understanding, in this section, I briefly discuss the use of art activities as a tool in community development and research and draw on works by Freire (2009) and (Boal 2002), describing how their scholarship and activism inspired my own research design. Specifically, I am interested to establish if and how varied art forms can be used to apply Freire's ideas about bringing individuals towards critical consciousness as effectively as Boal's theatre does. Freire's ideas on critical consciousness also relate to fostering empowerment, participation, and resilience described in the last section of this chapter.

Arts-based community development

Arts-based community development (ABCD) employs arts-based activities as tools to strengthen solidarity and agency (Bhattacharyya 2004; Cleveland 2002; Pittman & Phillips 2014). Solidarity here is defined as 'a shared identity (derived from a place, ideology, or interest) and a code for conduct or norms, both deep enough that a rupture affects the members emotionally and in other ways' (Bhattacharyya 2004, p. 12). Agency, on the other hand, is 'the capacity of people to order their world, the

capacity to create, reproduce, change and live according to their own meaning systems, to have the powers to define themselves as opposed to being defined by others' (Bhattacharyya 2004, p. 12). It also includes the ability to choose when to intervene in the world or refrain from intervention.

An example of arts-based activities achieving solidarity among a group is the sharing of traditional music and storytelling between young and older community members (McGrath & Brennan 2011). Another is found in community mural projects representing the identity of a community through imagery, as evidenced in the mural painting projects in Philadelphia (Moss 2010). Arts-based activities can also enable agency within a community by stimulating community members to envision a common goal and build confidence to achieve it. For example, through symbolic interaction and self-expression, arts-based activities can ease participants through a process that deals with the past, reconstructs the present, and envision a better future (Huss et al. 2016).

Art and creative activities encourage mastery experiences (Smith & Woodworth 2012)—success in a new skill which in turn grows self-efficacy. These mastery experiences can empower individuals to see that they have the ability to make the changes they envision. (Cleveland 2002) advocates for the arts' potential to 'educate and inform, inspire and mobilise, nurture and heal; and build and improve' communities. In each of these categories, Cleveland (2002) outlines how the arts can be used as tools for education and communication (to educate and inform), encouraging civic participation and cultural celebrations (to inspire and mobilise), for therapy and maintenance of community health (to nurture and heal); and as a tool in urban design and revitalisation (to build and improve). Similarly, arts-based activities have the potential to be an effective tool in research.

Arts-based research

Arts-based research originated through a dialogue on the potential of the humanities and social sciences that also sought to cross borders between science and art (Finley 2008). As Finley (2008, p. 79) suggests, arts-based research 'describes an epistemological foundation for human inquiry that utilises artful ways of

understanding and representing the worlds in which research is constructed'. Using aesthetics to tease out feelings and emotions about a certain topic, the aim is to create an expressive form that gives insight into another individual's experiences (Barone & Eisner 2012). Citing Susanne Langer (1957), Barone and Eisner (2012) argue that the arts help reveal what someone can feel about some aspects of life. The use of the arts in research is not new, and arts-based activities have, for some time, been part of research methods such as photo elicitation—using photographs as prompts for interviews. Furthermore, arts-based activities is elemental in much ethnography and autoethnography (Goopy & Kassan 2019).

Given that (Richardson 1992, p.131) points out that among researchers in social sciences, there is a tendency when 'we speak about the people we study, we also [tend to] speak for them', it is necessary to shift from research *about* participants to research *with* participants (Kassan et al. 2020). This shift is absolutely warranted in culturally sensitive research and participatory research, and in decolonising research approaches. In that light, arts-based activities promise to empower researchers to engage participants such that they express their knowledge and experiences of culture. Thus, the use of arts in qualitative research provides alternate opportunities for participants to express themselves, particularly those who might be marginalised, oppressed, or otherwise invisible when implementing mainstream approaches (Connelly 2010; Walsh, Rutherford & Crough 2013). As (Barone & Eisner 2012, p. 9) point out: 'literal language, which is discursive rather than nondiscursive, is not particularly helpful when it comes to matters of feeling and representation'.

Therefore, the arts function as alternate languages and are useful in cross-cultural situations where all kinds of language interpretations are necessary. When researchers engage participants in an arts-based activities, the artwork produced becomes a firsthand expression of lived experiences. By using multipurpose items such as diaries, postcards, stationery, maps, drawing paper, painting supplies, cameras, and smartphones, participants are prompted to express their experiences in creative ways (Kassan et al. 2020). Pairing arts-based activities with interviews reveals other layers of information oriented around specific research questions.

Influences from works by Freire and Boal

The Brazilian educator and philosopher, Paulo Freire, is often referred to in participatory strategies and research that seek social transformation (Kemmis, McTaggart & Nixon 2013). Freire is best known for his revolutionary educational philosophy, through which he sought change by encouraging community members to participate in dialectical conversations as detailed in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2009). By calling into question exploitative authority and naming the root causes of problems (problematisation), dialectical conversation processes aimed to bring participants to conscientisation. According to Freire, conscientisation, is the process by which human beings become knowing subjects, achieving a deepening awareness of the socio-cultural realities that shape their lives and of their capacity to transform those realities (Freire 2009; Mithra 2014).

According to (Kee & Carr-Chellman 2019, p. 91), central to Freire's philosophy was 'an assumption that the ontological vocation of men and women was to become more fully human by liberating themselves from oppressive states of dehumanisation'. This process of liberation, Freire believed, occurred when individuals realised that they could transform their reality. Embedded in education whose purpose was to promote critical consciousness, Freire promulgated a pedagogy to unveil the world of oppression on the one hand, and on the other, possibilities to transform that same world. He taught a praxis by which reflection would incite those who had entered the process of critical consciousness to actively address problems with a view to transforming them to new, positive states.

Complementing Freire's works are those by Augusto Boal, Freire's contemporary, colleague, and friend. Boal was a Brazilian activist and playwright who, inspired by Freire's pedagogy, developed *Theatre of the Oppressed* (Boal 2002). Boal's approach was to show how Freire's ideas could be applied in theatre games and activities. According to Babbage (2004, p. 5), the Theatre of the Oppressed is based on 'simultaneous dramaturgy, where the audience have the power to propose developments away from a given script that the actors then concretise ... Theatre of the Oppressed emphasises that that which is prescribed—literally, already written—is always open to interrogation'.

Boal used theatre and theatre games to develop critical thinking and reflection. He took 'theatre out of traditional spaces and transformed the "passive" spectators into active spect-actors, the true directors and protagonists of their own dramas' (Taylor 2009). Changing theatre from being merely representational, Boal's work invited participants into dialogue and reflection by creating a theatre experience simultaneously inside and outside a situation. For example, Boal's method of Forum Theatre encourages participants to try out different strategies and, through acting, engage in processes of dialogue and reflection that enable participants to reimagine and rethink options and possibilities. In Boal's hands, theatre became an activist activity, an instrument of legislative change, a pedagogical tool, a rehearsal for revolution, and a lot of fun (Taylor 2009). Boal's work exemplifies how Freire's ideas can be translated into creative and artistic forms.

Neither Freire nor Boal claimed that what they were offering could ensure imminent change in the dominant and oppressive system in which they lived. Instead, they believed that the beginning of change came from questioning dominant ideologies, however large or small. Intrigued by Freire's philosophy and inspired by Boal's work, I am interested to know if other arts can be used to apply their ideas in other contexts, including where I will have to rely on interpretation as part of an agenda to decolonise ways of knowing and being.

Empowerment, participation, and resilience

Work by Freire and Boal also tended to foster empowerment, participation, and resilience among those with whom they worked (see Glass 2001), not least those engaged in the philosophy. Often within the discourse of international and community development, among other fields, these three terms have been deployed to denote a wide array of strategies and programs, sometimes describing programs with differing socio-political and economic ideologies. For example, empowerment, participation, and resilience are associated with Freire and Boal's works, which ascribe to more critical and liberation ideologies. The three terms are also used in contemporary international and community development programs and hold many meanings, some of which are heavily influenced by neoliberal ideologies (see

(Cornwall 2007). Furthermore, these terms have sometimes and unhelpfully been conflated (Cornwall 2007). To clarify my definitions of these terms, below I briefly explain how these terms have been used in relation to international and community development before situating how I intend to observe them in the context of the Rakhine.

In any discussion of international and community development, it is important to distinguish between the prescriptive literature that purports such descriptions to be a vehicle in achieving transformation that is inclusive and fair, and critical literature that critiques methods used as vehicles to furthering colonialist gains or neoliberal hegemony. In fact, scholars have argued that development is a contested concept (Adelman 2018; Hettne 2009). They have suggested that ‘one of the major criticisms levelled against the concept is that it has seldom been “owned” by those subjected to it and too often been imposed on populations through violent forms of neo-colonialism and imperialism that repeatedly resulted in chronic socio-political, economic and environment crisis’ (Adelman 2018, p.18). Some have also argued that the metaphor of development has given global hegemony to a Western way of life, robbing cultures of the chance to live out and define their way of life (Adelman 2018).

Either way, the emergence of neoliberalism in the 1980s further entrenched development outcomes to reflect economic growth as its primary goal. ‘Neoclassical (especially neoliberal) economists view economic growth as essential and inevitable’ (Adelman 2018, p.19); well-being is correlated to economic activity. Neoliberal ideology encourages deregulation from state control, enabling individuals to have more freedom through market involvement. Several authors have declared that neoliberalism is the dominant ideology influencing policy-making and development in our world today (see Adelman 2018). It has also been critiqued by many as the spread of global capitalism and consumerism; and, with its focus on the market economy, the deterioration of the welfare state.

Despite persistent critique and contributions from scholars such as Dutta (2014), Sen (2000), and Chambers (1997), development strategies produced under the auspices of the World Bank (WB), International Monetary Fund (IMF), and World Trade

Organisation (WTO) are influenced by neoliberal ideologies. Development programs are administered and called participatory, empowering, and for resilience but economic growth for dominant regimes remains either or both a central goal and clear outcome (Adelman 2018; Sen 2000).

A challenge of my research is to situate arts-based community development and associated research in their wider political settings. I cannot take at face value many of the claims made by protagonists who advocate neoliberal ideas by using community development language. Instead, echoing critical scholars, I seek to remain alert to whether and how emancipatory language and action in Bangladesh and in relation to the Rakhine has been appropriated to legitimise capitalist development (see Batliwala 2007; Khan & Milne 2018). Regardless, I seek to look for expressions of empowerment, participation, and resilience among them and as a result of the arts-based engagements I implement.

Empowerment

According to Malhotra et al. (2002), the term ‘empowerment’ has been used to represent a wide range of concepts and describe a proliferation of outcomes. Most often it is used to advocate for certain types of policies and intervention strategies (Manuh 2006) to give heightened agency to those who are marginal and/or vulnerable (Manuh 2006; Townsend et al. 1999). Either way, the vernacular use of the word *empower* denotes an act to give (someone) the authority or power to do something (Cambridge Dictionary 2020).

Contemporary development strategies focused on empowerment tend to emphasise *economic* empowerment (Kabeer 1999). Empowerment strategies are often directed at women and many assume that women are more likely to invest in family welfare and direct their earnings first to children and household necessities (Rahman 1999). Not surprisingly, Pereznieto and Taylor (2014) define empowerment as a process whereby women and girls experience transformation in power, agency, and in particular economic advancement (Hossain, Asadullah & Kambhampati 2019; Pereznieto & Taylor 2014). Common are initiatives by which women are lent money as a starting point for their empowerment—and this applies to the most vulnerable

women in particular (Yunus 1994). Micro-credit strategies such as the Grameen Bank and Caritas' Cooperative Credit Unions (CCUs), among others, work on such understanding, although the effects of some cooperative arrangements are possibly problematic (Dohmworth & Hanisch 2017). Either way, women are primary clients for micro-credit loans; for example, 60 per cent of the membership of any CCU saving circle must be women (Chanda 2016, pers. comm., 2 November).

Nevertheless, some such empowerment strategies impose a deficit model on communities on the presumption that they fall short and lack the necessary capabilities to exert effective agency (Alexander, Bolzendahl & Jalalzai 2016). The premise underpinning this model is that 'there is a logical association between poverty and disempowerment [and] because an insufficiency of the means for meeting one's basic needs often rules out the ability to exercise meaningful choice' (Kabeer 1999, p. 437). At the same time, and more generally, measures of women's empowerment must be sufficiently broad-based to account for contexts beyond economic circumstance, among them individual capacities and opportunities, community participation, and political involvement—including in women's advocacy and lobby groups (Alexander, Bolzendahl & Jalalzai 2016; Malhotra 2006). Those measures must be alert to environmental, religious, ethnic, and other influences on women's lives and to their specific cultural—including artisanal—practices.

Drawing on work done in 1991 by the Canadian Council for International Development on gender and development, and upon Foucault's (1982) ideas about power networks and relations, Rowlands (1997) defines *power-over* as controlling power that can be responded to by compliance, resistance, or manipulation (see also Scott 1987). Rowlands (1997, p. 13) also expands this focus on power-over to include three other forms of power that affect individuals' decision-making capabilities:

- Power over: controlling power, which may be responded to with compliance, resistance (which weakens processes of victimisation), or manipulation.

- Power to: generative or productive power (sometimes incorporating or manifesting as forms of resistance or manipulation), which creates new possibilities and actions without domination.
- Power with: ‘a sense of the whole being greater than the sum of the individuals, especially when a group tackles problems together’.
- Power from within: ‘the spiritual strength and uniqueness that resides in each of us and makes us truly human. Its basis is self-acceptance and self-respect which extend, in turn, to respect for and acceptance of others as equals’.

According to work predating this categorisation, Rowlands (1995) proposed that, at micro-, meso-, and macro-scales, processes of empowerment occur in three domains. First, in the personal sphere there is the ability to develop agency, confidence, and capacity. Second, in close relationships there is the ability to negotiate in relationships. Third, in collectives there is the ability to work together for social, physical, and economic changes (see Hossain 2019; Ibrahim & Alkire 2007).

Using Rowlands’ categorisations allows me to consider how the Rakhine experience and exercise empowerment. In exploring empowerment among them, in chapter 6 in particular, I borrow from Rowlands’ categorisations to analyse the varying kinds of power exercised. In chapter 7, I show how arts-based activities fostered empowerment among the Rakhine. I note that ideas about empowerment—for example, in education, counselling, and social work—are broadly similar to Freire’s (2009) concept of *conscientizacao* or consciousness-raising. In those critical approaches to developing empowerment, individuals reflect upon their plight and, by participating in dialectical conversation and civic life, find ways to negotiate them. In the arts-based workshops I conducted among the Rakhine, I sought to create such opportunities.

Participation

Responding to Freire's ideas, Rowlands (1995, 1997) argues that empowerment work involves people who gather and galvanise groups, and in practice, require them to facilitate reflexive group processes. In short, gathering individuals into groups requires that they have power to participate.

It is widely understood that advocacy and policy intended to address poverty must also involve those experiencing it. For example, as a core aim in participatory action research, the intent is to achieve relevant change (Baum, MacDougall & Smith 2006). Once rooted in top-down processes, in which development strategies were planned and implemented by development practitioners, now there is a paradigm shift to include participation from local knowledge and community members. Resulting participatory methodologies and strategies are 'approaches that directly involve local people in the design and delivery of development initiatives: projects, programs, and partnerships' (Eversole 2015, p. 50). Note that 'popular participation' became mainstream in the 1960s and 1970s and was practised in civil rights, women's liberation, various liberation movements, and seen in the applications of Freire's and Boal's works. The assumption was that lay citizens could be seen as 'active shapers of a shared environment, linked by ties of public responsibility that are not God-given or inherent in nature, but which emerge from the process of social organisation and collective action' (Dzur & Hendricks 2018, p. 337; see also (Kretzmann & McKnight 1996; Levine 2013).

These efforts were not spatially 'neutral'. As Eversole (2015) notes, in the 1980s, for example, Cohen and Uphoff observed a widespread trend of increased participation in rural development projects and in 1983, Robert Chambers argued for increasing local, rural knowledge in development. By the end of the 1980s, 'a generalised consensus had taken root that saw participation in development projects as necessary and desirable to ensure their efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability' (Eversole 2015, p. 51). However, Dutta (2014, p. 2) surmises that:

the new buzzword for communication [participation] has played an integral role in establishing the global hegemony of neoliberalism [...] through the

hegemonic role of experts in producing knowledge and in developing programs [...] simultaneously deploying participatory tools to secure community buy-in into top-down programs of social change serving the agendas of transnational capitalism.

The emphasis on participation theoretically holds much promise for social inclusion and empowerment. However, in practice, examples have proved much less participatory than claimed (White 1996), and some tend to advance neoliberal values. Often, too, what comes as a surprise and a great frustration for practitioners is the reality of complexity in social relationships. Again, as Eversole (2015, p. 61) observes, ‘participatory development approaches do not pay enough attention to the larger social contexts in which the participants live and work. [Many times] political manipulation, power relations, and conflict can characterise social relationships within and beyond local communities affecting who participates and why’. For example, as Cornwall (2003, p. 1338) notes in relation to addressing gender and participation, ‘rather than the “add women and stir” approach, what is needed [are] strategies and tactics that take account of the power effects of difference, combining advocacy to level open spaces for voice with processes that enable people to recognise and use their agency’. Additionally, as Gallagher (2008) surmises, power and the ability to participate are inextricably linked and therefore thinking about power can contribute to understanding participation.

Although I recognise that participatory methodologies have their limitations—not least in terms of effective participation—they do work from an intention to start *with* the community and involve participants in their deliberations. For instance, participatory development approaches support the notion that development is not done *to* communities or *for* communities, but rather *with* them (Eversole, 2015). In considering how to encourage participation, in this study I have attempted a research design that included participation, consulting with translator and assistant Noen, implementing a volunteer workshop before the community arts-based workshops to train and consult locals, and working closely with a small group of local friends. In all of these actions, on which I elaborate in describing the research design and methods below, I considered how power differentials and the exertion of power

influenced how individuals participated. What I learned and observed about participation is documented more fully in chapters 6 and 7.

Resilience

The term resilience has its origins in physics and has been used to describe a material system's capacity to return to equilibrium after a displacement. In that discipline, 'a resilient material ... bends and bounces back, rather than breaks, when stressed. [It] is not a matter of how large the initial displacement is ... but is more precisely the speed with which homeostasis is achieved' (Norris et al. 2008, p. 127). On that understanding, there is also the view about the existence of an ideal state or a 'steady-state point of equilibrium' (Cretney 2014, p. 628). Versions of this definition and the use of the word resilience have since been applied to ecology, biology, psychology, sociology, social ecology, and policy.

Like participation and empowerment, resilience has become popularised in social and development policies and scholarship, and, 'can be highly politicised and often mean very different things to different people' (Porter, Steele & Stone 2018). As Cretney (2014) notes about resilience, 'there is nothing inherently negative or positive about resilience, as it is entirely contingent on who is wielding it, and for what political purposes' (DeVerteuil & Golubchikov 2016, p. 144). For example, the definition of resilience in the realm of physics assumes that the stable-state equilibrium is the ultimate goal. However, in socio-ecological terms, systems are seen to be constantly changing and adapting, even without external shocks or triggers. In this line of thinking, 'it is not so much the bounce-backability [sic] of a system returning to "normal" that is the focus, but a philosophy that sees systems as always complex and always in various states of change and transformation' (Porter, Steele & Stone 2018). The focus of such a line of thinking is the ability of complex systems to transform and adapt. Even so, in some cases, the term resilience has been used as a charge against individuals or groups deemed by others as not resilient enough (Porter, Steele & Stone 2018, see also {Jacobs, 2018 #346}). In such light, (Joseph 2013) critiques the use of resilience in government policies, suggesting that the manipulation of the term enables governments to frame their actions as measured and responsible. Likewise, Jacobs and Malpas (2018, p. 406) suggest that 'the

language of resilience acts both to palliate anxiety, and so to encourage the belief that radical change is unnecessary, and to obscure the largely regressive and essentially conservative effects of current managerial and governmental practice’.

Various scholars have stressed the importance of moving from simplistic ideas of resilience to something more adaptive. (Hillier 2015) summarises resilience as a spectrum that ranges from resilience as persistence—emphasising protecting, maintaining, and/or conforming to the status quo; as adaptation—focusing on adjusting to dynamic contingencies; and as transformation—steering away from undesirable options and creatively changing. When resilience is understood as a spectrum, approaching community development or social policy may need to start by determining the types of resilience present or absent, enabled or constrained among a group or community. Among the Rakhine, for example, cultural practices correlated to resilience as persistence, adaptation, and transformation that are documented in more detail in chapters 5 and 6 below.

Summary

In this chapter, I have described the methodology and conceptual frameworks that scaffold my research questions. I noted my philosophical positioning and research values—flexibility, reflexivity, empathy, and reciprocity. Because the aim of this research has been to explore the significance of cultural practice and transmission in a setting different from my own, therefore culturally sensitive, decolonising, and community participatory qualitative research approaches have been deemed appropriate for the empirical aspects of the research design, which are described in chapter 5 where they are immediately relevant.

In this second chapter, I have also considered concepts, theories, and terms that underpin this work. I have noted that the lens of precarity is necessary but insufficient, and have described how intersectionality is a useful additional discourse that provides an integrated understanding of Rakhine cultural practices. Intersectionality requires that we acknowledge the multiple intersecting axes of influence that create and maintain disparities, taking stock of structural influences and individual identities. Thus, I outlined how I use intersectionality to consider the

multiple axes of influence that can privilege and oppress the Rakhine simultaneously. Intersectional thinking also allows me to investigate the complexity of influences and the relationships of power that relate to the felt experiences of the Rakhine.

After clarifying how I intend to use precarity and intersectionality, I described arts-based activities as a tool for community development and research. I noted how arts-based activities are employed to strengthen solidarity and agency among communities. I explained how arts-based activities give expression to values from decolonising and participatory research approaches and create opportunities for reciprocity and rapport-building. I referred to my debt to Freire (2009) and Boal (2002), attributing the design of my arts-based workshops to their ideas to call into question exploitative authority and to name problems using creative methods.

Finally, I referred to empowerment, participation, and resilience. I discussed how these terms are contested and have been used in many contexts with varying meanings. I delineated Rowlands' (1997) four categories—power-over, power-to, power-with, and power-from within—acknowledged the influence of power, and used intersectional thinking to pinpoint what might prevent participation (in my case, in arts-based community development and research). I referred to Hillier's (2015) spectrum of resilience as persistence, adaptation, or transformation.

Having discussed my methodology and formed a base of theories from which my dissertation builds, I now move to consider the grounded context in which the empirical elements of the research took place. I touch lightly on several interviews with participants because those help to contextualise the project, but I do reserve most of the findings from interviews to Part 3.

PART 2- CONTEXT

Part 2 consists solely of chapter 3. In this section I consider my first research question: Using precarity and intersectionality as conceptual lenses, what can be learned about the Rakhine of southwestern coastal Bangladesh? In order to address this question, I describe Bangladesh and Caritas Bangladesh, and introduce the Rakhine, with a focus on precarity and intersectionality in considering the context in which the research is set.

Chapter Three: Context

Introduction

Precarity refers to a lifestyle that is underpinned by vulnerability, at risk of exploitation resulting from shifting economic and work security in a neoliberal system. Standing's conceptualisation of precarity (2011, 2012, 2014) has been critiqued by (Suliman & Weber 2019, p.533) for being 'silent on the global context of exploitation and impoverishment through which such political possibilities have been and continue to be realised'. Further, Suliman and Weber (2019, p. 527) purport that critical precarity thinking must include an 'understanding of how economic and social insecurities and inequalities have been (re)produced through the history of the politics of development, globally'. Although I do not here provide a critical and historical political analysis of global development, I begin discussing the Rakhine and their livelihoods by accounting for the influences both structural and individual that affect their experiences of precarity.

Intersectionality can bolster this exploration of exploitation since its theoretical bases include a study of the production and reproduction of inequalities, dominance, and oppression (Shields 2008). To start such an examination, a comparison is needed of group differences and similarities based on structural, historical, and contextual factors. Therefore, in the first section of this chapter, I consider the geographic, environmental, historic, socio-political, and cultural influences of life in Bangladesh. These descriptions of the conditions and characteristics help produce a contingent understanding of the larger structural context that affects the Rakhine.

Following this summary overview of Bangladesh, I examine how neoliberal processes influence experiences of precarity related to international development. I give a brief summary of the history of international development and dominant models to illustrate the prevalent ideologies that influence its community interventions. Bangladesh has historically been a recipient of international development interventions, specifically as a result of work by non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Although aspects of these interventions are crucial for the support of (impoverished) locals, many aspects of international development

perpetuate neoliberal values that influence and affect local and traditional livelihoods. Without entering into an in-depth critique of international development interventions and policy, I turn to focus primarily on the work of Caritas Bangladesh because that organisation provides focused support to the Rakhine in relation to climate-related disasters, indigenous rights, and micro-lending empowerment programs. The description of Caritas' programs is analogous with others that exist to support marginalised groups in Bangladesh and shows how these programs effect local and traditional livelihoods.

I then consider the Rakhine people—an indigenous group with ethnic origins from Arakan. I provide a detailed description of the Rakhine discussing their racial roots, history, gender roles, cultural practices, and religion, acknowledging the intersecting axes of influence that contribute to their experiences of precarity. Also, these descriptions encapsulate the Rakhine as an ethnic group different from the majority Bengali culture. By understanding Bangladesh's topography, its cultural compositions, political history, international development, and the role Caritas plays among other influences I acknowledge how these larger geopolitical and sociocultural factors influence individual and collective experiences.

Bangladesh—an overview

Precarity describes 'the condition of being vulnerable to exploitation because of a lack of security' associated with the potential of exploitation related to neoliberal processes (Banki 2013, p.1). I deploy this idea in tandem with intersectionality which requires identity categories to be studied in relation to one other—looking at the individual, interpersonal, and structural levels—and, at the same time considering specific historical and contextual factors (Shields 2008). The experience of lack of security as I describe in the following passages arises from geographic, environmental, historic, and cultural influences alongside neoliberal development processes.

Situated in Southeast Asia, Bangladesh is a country encircled by India. At its south-eastern tip, it shares a border with Myanmar (Burma)¹ (figure 1). The rest of the southern part of Bangladesh reaches the Bay of Bengal. Located in the delta of the Ganges and Brahmaputra rivers, the landscape is a complex network of waterways. Apart from mountainous terrain in the Chittagong Hill tracts, Bangladesh's landscape consists of low-lying alluvial soils. The country's elevation is less than 30 feet or nine metres above sea level (Husain & Tinker 2018). A country rich with natural resources, it is the home to the UNESCO-protected Sundarbans National Park, which is the largest mangrove forest globally.

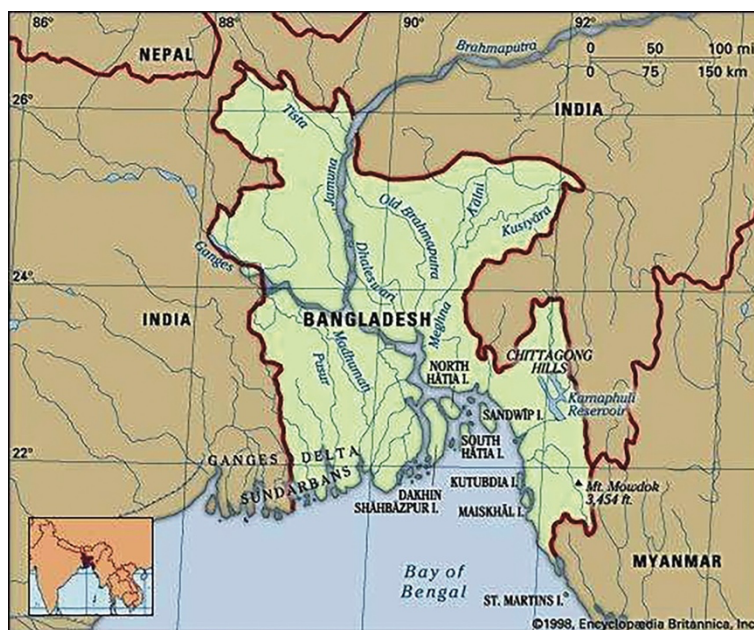


Figure 1. Map of Bangladesh. Source: Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc. 1998

Due to its topography, Bangladesh is susceptible to climate-related disasters. Major natural hazards include floods, tropical cyclones, storm surges, tornados, riverbank erosion, drought, earthquake, arsenic-contaminated water, fire, and landslides. Furthermore, many of these natural disasters happen annually. There are two main

¹ Myanmar, also called Burma had its country's official name changed from Union of Burma to Union of Myanmar in 1989 (Aung 2021). However, nations and news organisations differ in what they call the country (BBCnews 2011). In respect of the country and its diverse ethnic groups but also to contend with various references to this country, I have referred to Myanmar as Myanmar (Burma) in this thesis.

seasons when cyclones generally strike Bangladesh, March–July and September–December, with the highest likelihood of storms arriving in May and October (BDUSEmbassy 2019). Some of the larger cyclones (Cyclones [1970 1988, & 1991], Cyclones Sidr [2007], Aila [2009], and Roanu [2016]) accumulatively caused thousands of casualties, widespread famine, and extensive devastation to villages and agriculture (see Mannan, n.d.). Furthermore, over the last 30 years, Bangladesh has lost 10,000 hectares of land annually due to riverbank erosion; this has displaced approximately 68,000 people each time (Mannan n.d.).

The potential for environmental disasters aside, seasonal floods are both a blessing and a curse to Bangladesh's residents, particularly those in agriculture, which makes up nearly half the population (Husain & Tinker 2018). The volatile environmental changes influence crop growth and harvest, altering choices in employment, and sustaining livelihoods cemented in poverty. Workers in Bangladesh experience circumstances similar to those Standing's (2011, 2012, 2013, 2014) *precariat*: freelance workers in the 'gig economy' (Jayakumar & Goh 2017). Living by flexible working hours and short-term contracts, in an increasingly digitalised society, this hyper-mobile working class is one that is permanently on stand-by status, ready to compete in an economic environment that is in constant flux (Rosario & Rigg 2019). Standing therefore assumes that the *precariat* exist because of insecure work conditions, which are related to a neoliberal economic system. For residents in Bangladesh, experiences of precarity are longstanding and related to more than just neoliberal processes. For many in the Global South, precarity has always been a feature of people's lives (Suliman & Weber 2019).

Bangladesh has a population of approximately 165 million (World Population Review, 2020), averaging more than 2500 persons per square mile (1,000 per square kilometre) (Husain & Tinker 2018; Tinker 2020). The capital city of Dhaka is most populous, with a lower population densities in the hills of Chittagong. Rural areas can be so thickly settled that it is difficult to distinguish between villages (Husain & Tinker 2018). Such a large population is also, by definition, diverse; at the core of intersectional work is analysing how gender, race, and ethnicity influence individual experiences (Knapp 2005). Therefore, it is important to consider that in terms of ethnicity, Bangladeshis have cultural origins stemming from Indian, Mediterranean,

Arabian, Persian, Southeast Asian, and Turkish territories. The majority of the population is Bengali, which is a term that describes an ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic group (Husain & Tinker 2018). Bengalis are primarily Muslim. Non-Bengalis account for just 2 per cent of the population and comprise many smaller indigenous groups (World Population Review 2018). According to the Indigenous Work group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), Bangladesh has more than 54 indigenous groups whose members speak over 35 different languages (IWGIA 2019). Indigenous people in Bangladesh make up approximately 1.8 per cent of the total population (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics 2011). Some of these groups relate to Myanmar (Burma) where many follow Buddhism, some are Hindu, and a smaller number, Christian.

Before independence, Bangladesh was part of the province of Bengal in British India. The People's Republic of Bangladesh was formed in 1971, following the messiness of decolonisation, and first etched as the eastern reaches of Pakistan following partition from India in 1947. Having sought to establish a secular state, nationalists fought for independence and a capital at Dhaka. Among their stated aims for this newly formed country was to 'promote the cultural knowledge of the people and democratic education through the Bengali language, in other words ... to build a culturally homogeneous state based on Bengali identity' (Barua 2007, p. 64).

The independence of Bangladesh brought forth a new sense of nationalism and the desire to foster a strong national identity and national language, Bangla, which belongs to the Indo-Aryan group of languages related to Sanskrit (Husain & Tinker 2018). These developments tended to marginalise those residents who did not identify as Bengali; specifically, 'those with different ethnic, linguistic, and religious backgrounds have been turned into minorities' (Mohsin 2001, p. 18). English is spoken in urban centres and among educated groups. However, indigenous minority groups continue to maintain their own languages and dialects, but fluency in Bangla is essential to navigate life in Bangladesh. Not surprisingly, Bengali culture and cultural practices are privileged, and there is not recognition, time off, or government funds to cultivate, protect, and maintain minority religions, languages, festivals, cultural practices, and events.

Even so, Bangladeshi culture does not stymie diverse historic origins or their expressions in diverse food, different examples of popular culture, varied religious practices and festivals, and dress. Bangladesh is known for its variety of fish and curried pulse dishes, rice, street foods, and sweets. Although many of the spices used bear similarity to those in Indian dishes, many recipes feature south-eastern Asian flavours (Husain & Tinker 2018). The south-eastern Asian flavours found in dried shrimp paste, dried fish, coconut, and sweet and sour tastes prevail in the Chittagong Hill tracts region and are associated with some of the indigenous groups residing there.

Recognising that ‘people can experience privilege and oppression simultaneously’ (Hankivsky & Jordan-Zachery 2019, p. 7), it is important to note that indigenous groups in Bangladesh are marginalised and unable to access certain resources and rights because of their ethnicities and cultures. Yet they are also nationally recognised and some of their cultural festivals and foods are known and valued in mainstream Bangladeshi culture. Hybridities are common; among the Bengali and Rakhine youth that I met, Indian pop culture, fashion, music, and movies are mainstream and accessible to even the poorest in remote areas thanks to mobile telephones and the convenience of top-up data plans.

Bengali traditional dress is also significant in defining national culture and identity. According to Rahman (2014), clothing is an ethnic and cultural marker of identity. This is, therefore, an important variable to study when learning about different cultures and their social norms. Bangladeshi dress can distinguish a Bengali from a non-Bengali. Women in Bangladesh wear saris but more commonly don the shalwar kameez, a combination of calf-length shirt and baggy silk or cotton trousers gathered at the ankles. ‘A Muslim woman is expected to wear any dress that covers all over the body and should not reveal her figure’ (Fatema & Islam 2014, p. 717). This expectation is a cultural norm and is imposed on Muslims and non-Muslims alike; for example, in preparation to travel to Bangladesh, I was informed that *all* women are expected to wear clothing that covers their genital areas twice. An orna (scarf) covers their breasts; and tops are always long enough to cover their posterior. This is considered a sign of modesty. Choosing not to follow this norm would bring on unsolicited and sometimes negative attention. Men in less wealthy sections of urban

settlements or the countryside wear lungi (a length of cloth wrapped around the lower half of the body) topless or with t-shirts, vests, or dress shirts. In urban areas or those more educated and affluent, men wear cotton trousers and knee-length shirts known as Panjabi (Tinker 2020). However, it is most common to see men in slacks and dress shirts or jeans and t-shirts.

Industrial development and the promise of job security have prompted migration to cities, thus changing the livelihoods of those who were primarily agrarian. Still, Bangladesh has remained largely agricultural. Predominantly, agricultural products such as rice, jute, and tea make up the majority of the nation's agricultural produce. Other major products include wheat, pulses, oilseeds, spices, sugarcane, tobacco, fruits such as bananas, mangoes, pineapples, and goat milk/meat (Husain & Tinker 2018). The network of rivers allows for ease in breeding, raising fish, and catching fish as an industry. Many of these agricultural goods are exported, however the country is one of the world's leading suppliers of raw jute and a leading producer of goat milk and meat (Tinker 2020).

Other than exporting agricultural products, the fabric and cottage industries are both important to Bangladesh's economy. By the 21st century, the export value of garments, hosiery, and knitwear has far surpassed that of jute manufactures, with a majority of its exports being woven garments and knitwear (Tinker 2020).

Bangladesh provides the labour for a considerable amount of the world's demand for textiles. The country is well known for some of the world's largest textile factories, employing hundreds of people, primarily women. The demand for affordable textile goods matched with the high propensity to find cheap labour increase precarious work for those in Bangladesh. Rosario & Rigg (2019) associate precarity and precarious work to the end of Fordism and the certainties and securities that came with that kind of work. However, for Bangladeshi workers, these Fordist-like jobs do not come with certainties and securities, instead, wages are low and work conditions are in many cases deplorable.

The culmination of geographic, environmental, historic, cultural, and neoliberal influences affects political and social insecurity. From 2014–2018, each time I prepared to travel to Bangladesh, the Canadian travel advice rated Bangladesh as

‘Avoid Non-essential Travel’; likewise, Smarttraveller.gov.au in this same time period encouraged travellers to Bangladesh to ‘Reconsider your need to travel’. Over these four years, warnings for my travel related to violence and protests surrounding federal elections (2014), violent extremist acts against foreigners (see Allchin 2016; BBC News 2016), Cyclone warnings (2016 and 2017), and the Rohingya refugee crisis (Ellis-Petersen 2019). Among these main issues, other listed warnings include hartals (general strikes), political protests, robberies, criminal activity, and terrorist activity.

This brief overview of Bangladesh illustrates the influences that contribute to precarity in one country of the Global South. These aforementioned axes of influence affect the livelihoods of those who live in Bangladesh. In the next section, I continue to examine how neoliberal processes impact international development and how these impacts relate to experiences of precarity.

International development in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, international development came primarily from post-industrial Europe, where community development efforts to improve burgeoning slum areas within cities became a priority. The movement of community development across borders appeared after the Second World War and was a consequence of the need to rebuild war-torn countries (see Williams 2013). Success in redeveloping these countries then spread to focusing on former colonial countries, as well as on raising economic activities and living standards through various development approaches (see Adelman 2018). International development became a widespread practice during the Cold War as aid became an extension of foreign policy. ‘As Westernisation, it was designed to incorporate developing countries into the global capitalist framework’ (Adelman 2018, p. 17). As such, international development and aid became ‘an important instrument for achieving international objectives including cultivating political allies, opening markets, fighting terrorism, and constructing regimes of global governance’ (Williams 2013, p. 233).

In general terms, community development focuses on a specific geographic location containing a community of people to create or increase solidarity and agency

(Bhattacharyya 2004; Hustedde 2015). Usually instituting a process towards an outcome within a geographically defined area, community development is strongly linked to economic development and capacity building. It is the ‘on-the-ground’ expression of ideologies associated with international foreign aid policy. As community development crossed borders, the term *international development* became ‘associated with actions designed for, and research relating to, poor countries, including foreign aid’ (Horner 2019, p. 417). Most simply understood, international development is the provision of aid to developing countries. Adelman (2018, p. 17) surmises, ‘in principle, development is a process of social change designed to improve the well-being of people. In practice, it has regularly manifested itself as underdevelopment or maldevelopment so that its scope and rationale have been vigorously contested’.

This discrepancy between principle and practice has prompted critiques of many international development programs and policies, such as those related to modernisation theory, dependency theory, and neoliberalism. Briefly, modernisation theory focuses on the importance of investment to increase industry and economic growth through the instalment of democracy and modern cultural practices (Brohman 1995). Dependency theory emphasises the unequal power relations between the rich and poor, and critiques modernisation policies for often perpetuating results that favour the powerful (Adelman, 2018). Neoliberalism favours the free market, ‘legitimising the pursuit of the free market as the best model of global governance’ (Dutta 2016, p. 214). Regardless of their differing viewpoints, these three models promote industrialisation, modernisation, and integration into global politics; often at the expense of the environment and vulnerable communities that development was supposed to ‘help’ (see Adelman 2018). Influenced by these theories of development, many initiatives have appeared in Bangladesh, the majority of which aim to empower local communities, increase participation, and foster resilience through community development programs. However, ‘in an empirical sense, development outcomes have long been recognised as influenced by wider systems, most notably processes of capitalism and colonialism’ (Horner 2019, p. 419; see also Ghosh 2019).

In more specific terms, since its inception, Bangladesh has been listed in the UN's Least Developed Country (LDC) category, enabling its government to be a recipient of aid grants and loans from countries such as Australia, Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, Russia, and the Netherlands (Rahman 2019). For example, according to the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, in 2019–2020, the total Australian Official Development Assistance (ODA) was estimated to be \$70.1 million (AustralianGovernment 2020). Moreover, many of the private agencies or non-governmental agencies present in Bangladesh are related to international aid organisations and international non-government organisations.

The presence and influence of NGOs are far-reaching in Bangladesh. According to (Davis 2006), the presence of international NGOs is in the thousands, featuring World Vision, Caritas, BRAC, CARE international to name a few. Fernando and Devine (2003) suggest that the number of NGOs present in Bangladesh reaches over ten thousand when including local and international NGOs. Such organisations contribute to disaster relief, medical care, education, social welfare, sustainable agricultural practices, climate-related aid, micro-credit, or micro-credit like empowerment programs. Although international aid, interventions, and policy have provided support to residents of Bangladesh, their collective history is considerably lengthy, complex, and rife with controversy.

For the purposes of this study, I focus primarily on briefly summarising some aid efforts put forward through Caritas in the areas of disaster relief, women's empowerment, and indigenous rights. For the entirety of my fieldwork (2016 and 2017), I worked closely with Caritas as they provided their resources to facilitate my work with the Rakhine and ensure my personal safety while travelling in regional Bangladesh. For example, during T1, and because of apparent hostility towards foreigners in Taltali, Caritas hired a police escort to accompany me while in Taltali.

Caritas Bangladesh

Caritas Internationalis is a faith-based NGO providing aid internationally. Specifically, Caritas shares the mission of the Catholic Church to serve the poor and to promote charity and justice throughout the world (Caritas 2019b). As such, they have a presence in many countries. The organisation in Bangladesh (referred to as Caritas Bangladesh) has its central office in Dhaka, with eight regional offices in Barisal, Chattogram, Dhaka, Dinajpur, Khulna, Mymensingh, Rajshahi, and Sylhet.

Caritas Bangladesh's funding relies on Caritas Internationalis. '[T]he Caritas Internationalis General Secretariat (GS) provides coordination and support to the confederation. Contributions from member organisations and through private donations fund the confederation' (Caritas 2019a). Although Caritas' funds are not associated with any particular government, its governance is through the Catholic Church. Furthermore, the Caritas Internationalis General Secretariat is situated in Vatican City. Its vision and mission reflect Christian theology and ethics (Caritas 2019b). Despite its religious orientation, Caritas does not expect those who access its programs to be Christians. Nor does it exclusively employ Christians. This was evident in the compositions of the team I met in Dhaka, Barisal, Taltali, and Kala para; several Caritas employees were Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist. Regardless of its mission to serve the most vulnerable and marginalised, Caritas as an organisation operates according with a neoliberal ideology and a predominantly Western worldview.

Sampson (2017) uses the term 'entanglement' to describe NGOs' struggle for resources to sustain their moral legitimacy. Specifically:

NGOs are entangled with other actors and institutions: with the state apparatuses under which they operate, with the international or local donors who fund them, with the consultants and evaluators who train and monitor them, with the market for their services and the competing NGOs, all fighting for donors' funds or lucrative state contract, with social movements and civil society, who consider NGOs less authentic or less representative, with the

target group whom they are supporting, and with the individual, career projects of NGO members and staff. (Sampson 2017, p. 9)

These entanglements directly affect how NGO services and programs are designed, run, and reported. As described by Sampson (2017), two entanglements of relevance are the state and donors that may be influenced by wider social, political, and economic contexts. States fulfill a variety of roles for NGOs, resulting in a push to implement neoliberalism. Likewise, donors, who are often foreign, give money, offer expertise, and help expand networks, however, they also constrain—much of NGO work includes performing for donors—writing reports, composing budgets, and tabulating success statistics (Sampson 2017).

In the midst of its own entanglements, Caritas Bangladesh operates programming servicing vulnerable communities in Bangladesh. In the following, I outline its programs, but I do not provide a critique on the effectiveness of their programs, nor do I critique its intentions. This is for two main reasons; first, my research does not focus on Caritas' programming; and second, in ways that parallel Bernal's (2017) findings, it is often difficult to observe how NGOs operate. My observations about entanglements are made only to identify that Caritas' programs and services are entangled by larger social, economic, political influences, donor involvement, and funding obligations. Nonetheless, Caritas provides services based on its six goals: Social Welfare and Community Development, Quality Education, Health Care and Education, Disaster Management, Ecological Conservation and Development, and Development of Indigenous Peoples (Bangladesh 2016). All regional offices do community development work (which are referred to as integrated community development projects) in 205 *upazilas* within the eight regions. In the next few paragraphs, I highlight Caritas's role in disaster management, development of indigenous peoples, and social welfare and community development. I also discuss Caritas's work relating to the Rakhine to illustrate the programs that the Rakhine have access to.

Disaster relief

As described above, disaster relief is necessary due to the topography of Bangladesh, geographic location, and climate. Upholding its goal of disaster management to strengthening disaster response and community resilience (goal 4), Caritas Bangladesh is operational throughout Bangladesh in the event of natural disasters. For example, in preparing for and during Cyclone Fani in May 2019, Caritas deployed its resources to support government interventions on emergency preparation and relief. Cyclone Fani was anticipated to hit 14 coastal districts with storm surges of four to five feet (one to two metres) above normal astronomical tide and wind speeds up to 90-110 kph along with heavy rain (Caritas 2019c). In preparation for this cyclone warning, Caritas communicated with its Cyclone Shelter Management Committees, ensuring that 254 constructed cyclone shelters nationwide were prepared to house and accommodate locals upon evacuation. They also communicated with local vendors to supply emergency food, fresh water, candles, matches, mosquito cream, and other essential supplies.

In its final report after Cyclone Fani, the organisation reported more than 33,500 people were sheltered in 66 of Caritas cyclone shelters (CaritasBangladesh 2019). It was also reported that roughly 8,000 Caritas staff and volunteers worked to respond to the evacuation of vulnerable people and manage disaster relief during this national emergency. When not used for disaster relief, the shelters periodically hold training programs, are rented out for the use of other programs in collaboration with other agencies or NGOs, and function as offices for Caritas field staff. It was the Caritas shelters in which I resided which I used to host the arts-based workshops I conducted while in Bangladesh.

Indigenous groups and rights

Other than disaster management and relief, Caritas aims to work for marginalised ethnic groups. Sometimes referred to as *tribal people*, indigenous groups in Bangladesh have been recognised as such by the Bangladeshi government's eyes. However, only cultural aspects are mentioned, but their economic, political, and land rights remain ignored (IWGIA 2019). The term *tribal* entails the contrast between the civilised Bengali versus the primitive tribals and refers to diverse groups of

people in Bangladesh who are not regarded (and who do not see themselves as) Bengali or Muslim (Bal 2000; Tun 2015; Van Schendel 1992). Groups identified as *tribal* ‘have rejected this term and replaced it with terms such as Indigenous and *Adivasi* (the original inhabitant)’ (Tun 2015, p. 13).

Naming themselves as *Adivasi*, these diverse groups have not gained indigenous status from the UN’s Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Under this declaration, indigenous rights for the preservation of culture and land, and the right to self-govern are recognised by the state and the UN. This declaration enforces the protection of indigenous culture, land, livelihood. Article 8.2.a. of the declaration notes that, ‘states shall provide effective mechanisms for prevention of, and redress for: any action which has the aim or effect of depriving them of their integrity as distinct peoples, or of their cultural values or ethnic identities’ (United Nations 2008). Article 8 of the declaration also outlines the role the state plays in protecting indigenous lands, resources, and the prevention of any form of forced assimilation or propaganda designed to promote racial discrimination directed against indigenous people groups (United Nations 2008). Gaining the UN’s Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples status is significant to marginalised ethnic groups as land-grabbing is common and disrupts their livelihoods.

In response to Bangladesh’s inadequate policies for their indigenous groups, Caritas runs programs to alleviate the marginalisation of indigenous groups. Under its goal related to the development of Indigenous Peoples, Caritas organises projects as part of its integrated community development program (ICDP) according to the needs in each of the *upazilas* in which they have a presence. Although the integrated ICDP focuses on working with indigenous groups, the program extends to support Bangladeshis who are the most marginalised and poor in the same areas. ICDP projects are in line with another Caritas goal (1) related to social welfare and community development, which includes improving the quality of life for the extremely poor and vulnerable (Bangladesh 2016). Caritas places value on strengthening relationships between the indigenous people groups and Bengali settlers, recognising this as a community development priority (Caritas staff 2016, pers. comm.). The ICDP program prioritises indigenous cultural preservation through supporting indigenous groups with land rights and ownership issues.

Caritas provides support in the protection and reinstatement of land relating to land-grabbing. Incidences of land-grabbing exacerbate land rights and ownership. ‘Land grab’ is a catch-all phrase that refers to the current explosion of (trans)national commercial land transactions mainly revolving around the production and export of food (Borras & Franco 2012). There are two key dimensions of the current land grab: namely, the politics of changes in land use and property relations (Borras & Franco 2012), and incidences of land-grabbing occurring between farmers, between ethnic groups, by the government, and by international corporations. For those who experience social, political, or economic marginalisation and are vulnerable because of limited access to resources, lack of education and legal support, the incidences of land-grabbing deepens vulnerability. The ICDP program has provided many who have had their land stolen with education and legal support to regain their land (person. Comm. Theophil, 2016).

Social Welfare and Community Development: Women’s empowerment programs

Similar to other women’s empowerment strategies in Bangladesh (see (Pitt, Khandker & Cartwright 2006), Caritas runs a version of a micro-credit lending program called Cooperative Credit Unions (CCUs). CCUs are community-focused and different from micro-credit loans organised by the World Bank. One significant difference is that the interest from loans goes back into the pocket of the savings circle members instead of to the bank. Each CCU group has a minimum of 20 people and a maximum of 100. They collectively put their shares and savings together. When one member needs a loan, they apply to borrow from the group. A loan is granted via a collective decision process. Caritas subsidises the CCU program, and each group is given a loan with no interest to start as seed money (F. Bepari 2016. pers. comm.).

The CCU is seen as a women’s empowerment program as it is mandated that a minimum of 60 percent of the membership of any CCU saving circle must be female (Chanda 2016, pers. comm., 2 Nov.). In many microlending strategies, ‘women are considered better clients of microcredit providers, compared to men, because women’s access to microcredit has more appropriate improvement outcomes since

women have tend to spend more money on fundamental needs compared to men’ (Debnath et al. 2019, p. 2).

Paired with the CCU program are leadership training and skills training opportunities (M. Promila 2016, pers. comm.). Caritas recognises that the CCU program will be more effective and sustainable if capital is available for participants and training on managerial skills and financial literacy is offered. Caritas acknowledges the need for social advocacy and education on rights as an important factor in the CCU program’s success. In addition, under the social welfare and community development goal, Caritas also offers bursaries for education, new businesses, and medical support.

Caritas and the Rakhine

Upholding its goal to improve the quality of life for the most marginalised (goal 1) and raise living standards for indigenous groups (goal 6), Caritas Barisal runs an ICDP program that concentrates on supporting the Rakhine (ICDP-Rakhine). Its main objectives are to ‘strengthen social protection of Rakhine community people and ultra-poor marginalised households, and facilitate employment/self-employment creation in different works, at community level’ (Bangladesh 2018).

The Rakhine are known as a ‘tribal’ community in Bangladesh. The tribal categorisation gives them some political leverage. However, the Bangladeshi government has not given them indigenous status according to the Declaration of Indigenous Rights as set out by the United Nations. Attaining indigenous status in the eyes of the Bangladeshi government is of utmost priority to Rakhine activists and other ethnic minorities in the country.

In addition to desiring recognition of their cultural practices, knowledge, language, and way of life, the protection of their land is a motivation to advocate for indigenous rights. The Rakhine experience of land grabs, whether, on corporate or government levels, exacerbates tension between them and their Bengali neighbours. Furthermore, being unfamiliar with Bangla positions, some Rakhine are more at risk to land-grabs. For example, several incidences were reported to me by Rakhine community members about losing their land because of a misunderstanding of

language and Bangladeshi laws. One incident involved a Rakhine man's rental agreement with Bengali workers. The Rakhine man, who was illiterate in Bangla thought it was a rental agreement; however, when he signed the documents he had signed a change of ownership on his land title and sold his land to the renters (Noen 2016, pers. comm.). Stories such as this abound, and the processes to rectify these wrongs are long and arduous, often spanning many years.

Having land taken from them, the Rakhine face several pressures: first, the rising ethnic tensions between them and their Bengali neighbours due to lack of trust and fear; second, distrust in government, a suspicion of official documentation and government-related processes and policies; third, increased poverty as for many generations the Rakhine who owned land lived off that land. Whether they cultivated the land and harvested from it themselves or hired people to work off their land, land loss affects their livelihood. It shifts what they do for a living.

The ICDP-Rakhine program's main activities involve offering legal support to Rakhine in regaining land they have lost due to various incidences of land-grabbing, the operation of CCUs, and skills training. ICDP-Rakhine also provides stipends and scholarships for study, medical treatment, and medications, as well as supporting local business owners with start-up materials. The president of the Kalachin para CCU told me, for example, how Caritas would help stock up new Rakhine market stalls or buy weaving supplies to support new business owners. Both he and the Caritas's CCU field director mentioned that Caritas offers many ongoing training sessions on financial literacy, leadership, and health through the CCU program.

Either way, the marginalisation of ethnic groups has resulted in a perception among the Rakhine of Bangladesh as a country of Bengali Muslims (Tun 2015). This belief affects Rakhine and Bengali relations and is worsened by incidents of maltreatment by the police, other government institutions, differing religious and cultural practices, the Rohingya situation, and by land-grabbing. Theophil, Director of the Community Development Institute at Caritas Dhaka, brought up an interesting point to consider when I interviewed him in 2016. He observed that, regardless of the support and resources that may exist for the marginalised and poor within areas all around Bangladesh, access to existing support can be limited due to ethnic

marginalisation. Theophil names one response to marginalisation ‘ethnic pressure’. He describes ethnic pressure as the discomfort in accessing available services and aid due to a distrust in the service provider because they are a person from different culture, religion, ethnicity, and language.

This distrust stems from various sources; some of it is due to a language barrier as some tribal people do not speak Bangla well, while other reasons include distrusting Bengali people because of unfamiliar cultural and religious values, past trespasses, an understanding of the corrupt nature of Bengali organisations, or general unfamiliarity with the Bengali system. This fear and distrust of the other prevents many tribal people (the Rakhine included) from accessing available aid and services. Theophil describes this ethnic pressure to include a growing pressure from being visibly different, which increases feelings of isolation, powerlessness, and pressure to conform and disappear from their own ethnic identities. The incidence of ‘ethnic pressure’ is important to note concerning the programs and services Caritas provides. There might be the availability of support through ICDP-Rakhine, such as the CCU saving group, other subsidies, and training opportunities; however, community members may not access services even if they exist.

Nonetheless, Caritas acknowledges the precarity that influences the Rakhine. As described above, the organisation offers many interventions to address the experience of precarity and provides support to their livelihoods. However, support provided by Caritas does not account for livelihood practices that are inextricably linked with cultural practices—those who no longer produce the same means as in the past to provide for necessities. Weaving could be seen as one such example. Although Caritas sometimes supports existing weavers through buying them supplies, there are no specific ongoing funds or priorities for supporting the preservation and transmission of cultural practices such as weaving. Neither are there funds allocated for cultural events that do not generate a monetary outcome such as cultural and religious festivals.

The Rakhine

Thus far, I have attempted to apply the lenses of precarity and intersectionality in identifying historical and structural factors that influence the livelihoods and culture of the Rakhine. Next, I describe their ethnic, racial, and cultural origins and consider how they differ from mainstream Bengali culture. These descriptions of the Rakhine further describe the axes of influence that reveal their simultaneous privilege and oppression.

I also seek to explore how the Rakhine experience precarity. According to Shields (2008, p.303), ‘a fundamental assumption in every influential theoretical formulation of intersectionality is that intersectional identities are defined in relation to one another’ (see also Anthias & Yuval-Davis 1983; Collins 1990). To define intersectional identities in relation to one another, I consider what these identities are. In the following, I briefly discuss Rakhine history, religion, racial origins and dress, gender roles and expectations, governing and organisation, and connections with Myanmar (Burma) to understand their precarity.

The ancestral roots of the Rakhine lie in the once-sovereign state of Arakan—the western coastal belt of Myanmar (Burma) (Kirkby, Poon & Stratford 2014). A genocide of the Rakhine led by Burmese colonisers in 1784 triggered a mass migration of the Rakhine from the Arakan. Finding refuge in the uninhabited land of Rangabali, the Rakhine forged a new life, clearing forest to cultivate land. This area was under British occupation due to the East India company’s operations, but the British encouraged the Rakhine to stay and settle (Kirkby, Poon & Stratford 2014; Tun 2015). Over time, the Rakhine became considered as the indigenous peoples of the land.

The exodus to Rangabali was not without its challenges. The Rakhine ‘suffered significant hardship due to a lack of fresh water, high incidence of disease, attacks from wild animals, crop failure, and recurrent cyclones and tidal bores—powerful waves travelling up rivers and against their currents’ (Kirkby, Poon & Stratford 2014, p. 4). However, the Rakhine persevered and, once setting up settlements, continued their way of life, cultural practices, and traditions (Kirkby, Poon &

Stratford 2014). In present-day Bangladesh, the Rakhine reside primarily in the Barguna, Chittagong, Cox's Bazar, Comilla, and Patuakhali districts (Rahman 2014; Tun 2015). Note that these districts make up the southwestern coastal areas of Bangladesh (figure 2) and surround the Bay of Bengal².



Figure 2. Districts of Bangladesh. Source: Maps of the World 2016

Residing in the southwestern areas of Bangladesh, the Rakhine way of life, cultural practices, and traditions are different from mainstream Bengali culture. They are predominantly Theravada Buddhists. The Rakhine practice Buddhism through daily prayer, visits to the *Kyang* (temple), and religious festivals. Many of the major Buddhist holidays are linked to the full moon. On full moon festivals, Buddha is worshipped with food, fruits, flowers, incense, and the lighting of candles. The important full moons are kason (in Baisakh or April), waso (in Ashad or June),

² Note that Barisal, Barguna, and Patuakhali were the districts in which I visited during my fieldwork in 2016 and 2017.

thadingyut (in Ashwin or September) and tabodwe (in Magh or January) (Khan et al. 2017). Along with observing Buddhism as their main religion, the Rakhine also believe in superstition, magic, and supernatural powers (Hasan & Baten).

Each village has a local *Kyang* occupied by a local Buddhist monk. The monk is there for consultation with spiritual matters and moral decision-making. Mudbars (village leader), village elders, and villagers approach the monk if they need advice. Both monks I interviewed claimed they did not have much to do with village life or decision-making for the villages. However, they were the ones who dictated when religious gatherings and events happened. They guide community members through religious teaching and identity formation. Traditionally, monks are responsible for educating community members (Charney 1999; Tun 2015) and the monks I interviewed organise religious classes and Rakhine language classes for children.

Other than religion, the Rakhine are identifiably different from Bengalis and have Mongoloid racial origins (Majid 2007). The facial features, skin colour, and stature of the Rakhine are different from Bengalis. Their brown skin tends to be lighter than Bengalis. They have black hair, round faces, with rounder, shorter noses, and have almond-shaped eyes (Majid 2007). Rahman (2014) suggests clothing is related to a specific ethnic or cultural groups who share the same heritage, background, and beliefs; their dress is a symbolic message to others distinguishing themselves as a unique cultural group (see also Eicher & Sumberg 1992). Therefore, Rakhine traditional dress is also different from clothing worn in the mainstream Bengali culture.

Rakhine women wear 'htamees' (Tun 2015, p. XV) (which is a full-length cloth wrapped around their waist) with matching tops, short and fitted blouses, or t-shirts. Rakhine women will wear their traditional dress within their villages. Figure 3 below shows a Rakhine woman with her baby in traditional dress. When leaving their villages, they either add an orna (scarf worn in Bengali dress) or wear shalwar kameez. The dress code is more relaxed within the village with some girls wearing pants, jeans, and t-shirts. Rakhine men wear kadongs similar to the lungi but tied differently from how Bengali men tie the lungi (Khan et al. 2017). Kadongs are worn with t-shirts, topless, or with dress shirts. Figure 4 shows a Rakhine man in a

kadong. Rakhine men tend to wear slacks and shirts or jeans and a t-shirt unless they are relaxing at home or attending a religious festival. In those instances, they will wear a kadong.



Figure 3. Rakhine woman and her baby in traditional dress. Source: Kirkby 2014



Figure 4. Figure 4. Rakhine man in traditional dress. Source: Kirkby 2014

All Rakhine boys undergo ordination within Buddhism (Noen 2016 pers. comm.; Shaton para monk 2017, pers. comm.). Ordination involves spending time living a monastic life. Ordination usually happens before adulthood and is only for the males in Rakhine culture. In fact, only men are monks in the Theravada Buddhist tradition. Other than being religious leaders, men take on public leadership roles within Rakhine villages. Only men are Mudbars, and it is usually men who are consulted as ‘elders’ of the village (C.T. Maung 2017, pers. comm.). Besides being leaders in the religious and the public realm, men are farmers, labourers, hunters, foragers, tailors, fishermen, own businesses, shopkeepers, workers in NGOs, and owners of land. Rakhine men’s physical mobility is less restricted than that of Rakhine women. Men can travel outside of the village, into the market, from village to village, on their own. Rakhine men may experience class differences based on economic wealth,

race, literacy in Bangla, and religion outside of their village, but they do not feel the same sense of restriction based on expectation and concerns for physical safety that Rakhine women experience.

When asked, some Rakhine themselves speak about gender equality within their culture (Chanda, Matenaye & T. Nant 2016, pers. comm.). However, according to others, women's mobility both socially (education, work, leadership) and physically (where they can physically go alone) is limited (C.M. Shoe 2016, pers. comm.; T.N. Cime 2017, pers. comm.). Rakhine women can move freely within their village but must be accompanied by someone if leaving the village. I was told by several that it is not safe for women to travel alone in Bangladesh. Indeed, it was rare to see women in public. If they were in public, they were often accompanied by someone. However, it was reported that women's roles are especially important in Rakhine culture and that men and women have the same priorities (T. Nant 2016, pers. comm.).

Women tend to take on domestic roles, including caregiving, rearing children, and caring for extended family members such as (and not exclusively) ageing in-laws. Preparing food and ensuring their families are well fed is part of women's roles. This is particularly true during religious practice and festivals. Other than daily prayer, women prepare food for the monastery and festivals. As food is central to a lot of Rakhine festivals, women work together within a village to prepare the various dishes of curries, fried fish, meats, vegetables, rice, and rice desserts. They are foragers, gatherers, business owners, shop keepers, landowners, mid-wives, tailors, medics, and workers in NGOs. Women take care of their homes, the homestead gardens, and livestock. Women also weave, which traditionally has brought income to the family, and clothed; and protected the family with their woven goods. It is primarily only women who weave in the Rakhine culture (confirmed by participants in T1 during interviews after a weaving workshop with me—see chapter 6).

Each Rakhine village has a Mudbar (leader). The Mudbar is either voted in or appointed based on familial descent. For example, in the village of Taltli, the Mudbar had volunteered his interest in taking leadership, and then the village voted him in. In Kalachin para, the Mudbar was appointed based on family lineage. The

Mudbar runs village meetings for issues to do with community development and security. Women can attend village committee meetings, but the Mudbar and other village elders usually make decisions. Village elders consist of men who are older in age and/or affluent.

Many Rakhine in Bangladesh keep their ethnic connections in Myanmar (Burma) through continuing their cultural practices, importing goods such as beauty products, clothing, and spices, staying connected to relatives in Burma, and travelling to visit family. Historically, the Rakhine state in Myanmar (Burma) has had a strong drive for independence from the 1700s to the 1900s. However, because of various socio-political conditions, they have not had success with this aim. The struggle for independence, as mentioned formerly in 1784, contributed to the Rakhine migration to Bangladesh. Several interview respondents reported that many Rakhine in Barguna and Patuakhali districts moved back to Myanmar (Burma) after the devastation caused by Cyclone Sidr in 2007 (Noen and M.M.Thein 2017, pers. comm.). The collective concern by interview respondents was that this migration contributes to lessening numbers in their villages, which directly affects the ability to practice cultural traditions such as religious events and festivals.

The choice to migrate back to Myanmar (Burma) is not one that alleviates challenges experienced in Bangladesh. The Rakhine in Myanmar (Burma) have had a longstanding history of strife with the Rohingya. The Rohingya refugee crisis has been a contentious issue between Bangladesh and Myanmar (Burma) since the 1970s (Parnini, Othman & Ghazali 2013). The Rohingya are an ethnic group with Arab Muslim origins. Regarded as stateless and non-citizens within Myanmar (Burma), this group has sustained discrimination, violence, and suffering. Many have fled to Bangladesh and other surrounding countries; however, many continue to stay in the Rakhine state in Myanmar (Burma). Considered foreigners in the Myanmarese (Burmese) government's eyes, and at various times throughout history, with incidences of persecution rising, the Rohingya have sought refuge from the Bangladeshi government.

The Rohingya issue resurfaced as an eminent national concern in 2017. When tensions in 2017 between the Rohingya and the Rakhine in Myanmar (Burma) rose

again, the result was another flux of Rohingya refugees arriving in Cox's Bazaar and the Chittagong areas of Bangladesh. The rise of global and national attention to the Rohingya refugee crisis in 2017 brought uncertainty and insecurity to the Rakhine. The Rohingya had fled Myanmar (Burma) because of hostility in the Rakhine state, and their presence in the deplorable refugee camps evoked two main reactions from Bengali neighbours.

The first reaction was an assumption that the Rakhine in Bangladesh stood in solidarity with the Rakhine in Myanmar (Burma). This brought on hostility towards the Rakhine in Bangladesh, with incidences of accusatory comments or violent actions. As a result, during the peak of the Rohingya refugee crisis, Rakhine villages (Taltli, in particular) increased security and championed for local police support in securing their living areas. During my visit in 2017, individuals who were not of Rakhine ethnicity were not allowed to enter the villages after dark unless a Rakhine family personally invited them.

The Bengali's second reaction related to having to share the country's resources with yet another people group. This reaction resulted in comments in the market where Bengali community members would approach anyone who was not of Bengali origin and call them 'Rohingya'. In naming them, they were effectively saying, 'you do not belong here; go back to where you came from'. These experiences of othering further contributed to the marginalisation and lack of security felt by the Rakhine in Bangladesh.

Summary

In this chapter, I have established the context of this research and have outlined the Rakhine experiences of precarity and intersectionality. Specifically, I noted how Standing's conceptions of precarity are silent on the Global South's experiences, where precarity has always been part of life. I considered Suliman's (2019) suggestion that precarity needed to include an understanding of the ways socioeconomic insecurities and inequalities have been (re)produced throughout the history of global development politics. To seek a deeper understanding, I used intersectionality because its theoretical bases includes studying the production and

reproduction of inequalities, dominance, and oppression (Shields 2008). I started thinking intersectionally by inspecting identity categories that could be studied compared to one another to provide a more accurate understanding of the Rakhine people's experiences of privilege and oppression.

The identification of various identity categories began with an overview of Bangladesh—its location, topography, history, language, cultural identity, population, and industry. In this overview, I acknowledged the larger geopolitical and social environmental structures that contribute to possible axes of influence. After describing the conditions and characteristics of Bangladesh, I discussed the presence of international development and aid in Bangladesh. The brief history of international development that I provided depicted another way socioeconomic insecurities and inequalities have been (re)produced. I noted the theories—modernisation theory, dependency theory, and neoliberalism—that have influenced how development and aid have been distributed. Identification was made of how aid has historically been the extension of foreign policy—a way for Western countries to propagate Westernisation and capitalism as much as it was a path to socialism for the Soviet model. I also explained how governmental and NGO community development programs are the 'on-the-ground' expressions of international development policy and aid.

Next, I discussed the role of NGOs in Bangladesh. Specifically, I gave further detail to Caritas's role in Bangladesh. I noted their Western and neoliberal influences, highlighting the 'entanglements' inherent in NGO work (Sampson 2017). I then explained Caritas's role in disaster relief, indigenous rights, and women's empowerment programs. In particular, I described ICDP-Rakhine and the support it provides to the Rakhine. This was all to illustrate the programs available to address precarity experienced by the Rakhine. I also noted that though these programs intend to help marginalised ethnic groups continue their culture, there are no specific ongoing funds for maintaining cultural practices and traditions such as weaving and cultural festivals.

In the last part of this chapter, I described Rakhine history, location in Bangladesh, religion, racial and ethnic origins, and cultural characteristics—gender expectations,

governing of their villages, and connection to Myanmar (Burma). I also explained how the ongoing Rohingya refugee crisis between Bangladesh and Myanmar (Burma) directly influences the precarity experienced by the Rakhine living in Bangladesh. These descriptions contribute to a deeper understanding of the multiple axes of influence that relate to experiences of privilege and oppression. They also set the stage for comparisons in later chapters where I identify what axes of influence affect the Rakhine because of their unique culture and what axes of influence relate to the larger geopolitical and sociocultural influences that are part of Bangladesh.

This chapter concludes Part 2 and begins addressing my first research question. The purpose of this chapter has been to create an understanding of the larger processes at work that influence the Rakhine. To learn about the Rakhine—how the Rakhine preserve and transmit their cultural practice in the face of uncertainties, and how the Rakhine exercise empowerment, participation, and resilience—I first needed to understand factors that contribute to these uncertainties they face. This chapter addressed the uncertainties and lack of security the Rakhine experience, identifying various axes of influence that contribute to experiences of precarity.

PART 3- MAIN FINDINGS

Part 3 contains chapters 4, 5, and 6 which address all three of the research questions empirically, providing details on my ethnographic and autoethnographic research methods: situational and participant observation, informal conversations, participatory arts-based workshops, semi-structured interviews, and journaling.

Instead of a chapter devoted to discussing research methods, each method is described when empirical findings are presented. In chapter 4, my work is reported using ethnographic and autoethnographic methods of approach. In chapter 5, I draw on interviews and continue with an ethnographic voice. In chapter 6, I focus on findings from arts-based workshops and ethnographic modes of understanding. In each of those chapters, I begin with an exposition of these methods and then turn to the findings.

There are, however, several points that span all three chapters that are worth elucidating here at the start of this substantial part of the dissertation.

First, interview transcripts and notes were discussed with research assistant, Noen to ensure they were captured accurately. As for interviews with Caritas staff members, village elders and leaders, monks, and other participants, I summarised information collected from these interviews by theme, which provides context, such as ‘Caritas’, ‘Rakhine history’ so on.

Second, I also crossed referenced with Noen and UTAS language tutor Sabrina Martin about any cultural practices or social norms I was unclear about, making sure that observations I noted were accurately interpreted and understood.

Third, once back from my fieldwork, all written and physical data such as observation notes, interview notes, documents, consent forms, participant contact lists, workshop responses, collected artefacts, journal entries, and reflections were scanned and photocopied. I also collated my personal reflections into a single document. Then I filed the original and photocopied documents chronologically and stored them in a locked filing cabinet on university premises. All digital data,

including the scanned copies of physical data and photographs, audio and video recordings, interviews, and email correspondences, are saved and backed up on my laptop hard drive. Audio recordings were interpreted, then transcribed, and saved on my laptop. I began analysing my field notes and collating all my observations into one document. I did the same thing with interviews after the weaving and critical photography workshops, separating weaving workshop interviews, T1 and T2, and the critical photography interviews, each in its own document. Noen also played an integral part in capturing photographs of artwork produced from the arts-based workshops, and other photographs that documented my fieldwork. All of this preparatory work was necessary to make sense of what I had collected. As (Mason 2006, p.148) indicates, ‘once the data are sorted and ordered, the researcher will start to make some interpretive sense of them and build their explanations and arguments’.

Fourth, therefore, I analysed my data thematically and reflexively. Common themes that emerged across my observations, interview notes, and reflections were grouped and catalogued in an excel chart. Interview responses were summarised once again to reveal reoccurring themes and responses. The summarised charts and tables enabled me to interpret my data and see what I had learned about my research questions. I analysed my interviews in a co-constitutive way because they were collected with Noen’s translational help and by reference to notes on body language, gestures, and facial expressions. Analysis of artwork and photographs is also co-constitutive and reflexive: interpreted with reference to Noen’s and my own perspectives. This developmental process is evident in how I draw on the concepts of precarity and intersectionality throughout this work, moving between data I collected and literature to form theories, concepts, and meaning to address my research questions. The culmination of all this work is presented in these three chapters. Finally, when I refer to ‘the Rakhine’ from here on forward, note that I refer just to those I met and engaged with.

Chapter Four: Rakhine lifestyle and livelihoods

Introduction

In Part 2, I introduced the Rakhine and delineate how they comprise a unique racial and ethnic minority in Bangladesh. I also outlined structural influences—geographic, environmental, historic, cultural, socio-economic, and political—that contribute towards experiences of precarity. In this chapter, I continue to use the themes of precarity and intersectionality to describe what I learned about the Rakhine. Specifically, the axes I identify here concern the meso level structure of society. (During 2015) postulates that the definition of precarity also includes ‘those with unstable, or no, access to the institutions and communities best able to provide legitimacy, recognition, and solidarity’. The meso level refers to movements, associations, groups, formal organisations and social institutions, and systemic interdependence (Sallum Jr. 2005). Therefore since a meso level analysis focuses on the group and its processes, it is critical to perceiving social life and order and can further what I learn about the Rakhine (Fine 2012).

By providing detailed descriptions of the Rakhine villages I visited, I seek to analyse any groups, associations, social institutions that influence Rakhine lifestyle and livelihoods. Ultimately, through these descriptions, I illustrate aspects of their daily lifestyles and livelihoods that have been affected by precarity. Learning about Rakhine lifestyle and livelihoods also sheds light on what cultural practices they deem important and how they preserve and transmit these practices.

Before engaging with the beginning of my empirical work documented in this chapter, I will outline some of my research methods. I describe how I use practices associated with ethnography and autoethnography and provide details on fieldwork preparation, situational and participant observation, and informal conversations. I then document the physical features of the *upazilas* of Taltali and Kala para in the districts of Barguna and Patuakhali, including the villages of Tatli, Shaton para, Amkhola para, and Kalachin para, places I visited both in T1 and T2. Among my descriptions of these places are stories from residents I met and events in which I

participated. I end this chapter by discussing the loss of cultural identity and practices and what that means for the Rakhine.

Ethnographic and Autoethnographic methods

Inspired by the qualities and values espoused by methodological approaches in chapter 2, I use methods from ethnographic and autoethnographic traditions. In the following section, I provide detail on some of these methods. Partaking in fieldwork is a customary practice in ethnography and autoethnography. I took two immersive field trips to Bangladesh—trip 1 (T1) 26 October–14 November 2016 and trip 2 (T2) 30 October–8 December 2017.

However, prior to going to Bangladesh, I engaged in extensive fieldwork preparation to ensure the work I did while in the field would be meaningful and culturally respectful. As well as compiling a preliminary literature review and preparing a mandated field trip risk assessment and itinerary, I organised a self-directed study into weaving practices and techniques. I connected with the Tasmanian Handweavers, Spinners, and Dyers Guild, joining their membership to access instructional courses and materials to learn how to weave. Understanding the basics of weaving enabled me to more quickly learn the Rakhine way of weaving. It also gave me the language with which to describe the process. Anticipating that my weaving lessons in the field would be mostly observational, a prior understanding of weaving ensured accuracy in recording what I learned while in the field.

Besides learning about weaving, I needed to learn how to navigate Bengali culture and language to learn about Rakhine culture. The Rakhine are not Bengali, but they live in Bangladesh. Therefore, I designed a tutor-supported, self-directed study on Bengali culture and language to prepare for cross-cultural work. Cormier (2012, 2018) suggests that knowing participants' language is useful for understanding the data collection process and for interpreting and synthesising data later. Having a basic grasp of Bangla and prior knowledge of Bangladesh's social customs enabled me to be culturally aware and sensitive to Bengali cultural norms. For language and cultural lessons, I met with Bengali doctoral candidate enrolled at the University of Tasmania, Sabrina Matin, for fourteen weeks. Over the course of our weekly

meetings, she tutored me in learning basic Bangla and informed me about cultural norms in Bangladesh.

Another part of preparation involved organising details associated with the field trip. Coordinating field trips to Bangladesh were possible because of my earlier work and connection with Myentthein Promila (Promila) and Caritas in 2014. At the time of my first field trip, Promila was the ICDP-Rakhine regional officer at Caritas Barisal and helped me shape relevant lines of communication to organise my fieldwork. Because of my connection with her, Caritas supported my visit by providing logistics around safety, informing local police of my presence, research intentions, and trip itinerary. It also provided free infrastructure to use, for example, its office space for the workshops. For most of my accommodation throughout both trips, I stayed in the Caritas guest houses and had food arranged by its guest house staff. Due to fraught socio-political situations in Bangladesh during T1, Caritas also paid for 24-hour police surveillance throughout my stay.

Promila aided me in setting up contact with Caritas but was not involved in fieldwork. Rather, her brother Noen became a paid ‘culture broker’ (Eide & Allen, 2005, p.6)—local informant, interpreter, translator, travel assistant, and research assistant. Noen and I had worked together on the trip prior to my doctoral studies in 2014 and then reconnected for the two doctoral trips in 2016 and 2017. He was an active participant in the research and went with me on all my travels. Given that the travel advice from smartraveller.gov.au was ‘reconsider your need to travel’ during both trips, travelling alone as a female Westerner was untenable. For trip 2 preparation in 2017, Noen was also my first point of contact.

Over the whole period Noen was in his mid-twenties. As a student and later a recent graduate with a degree in business, he had yet to secure a full-time job, enabling him to be available to help me. He came highly recommended by Caritas and, in the past, had assisted other researchers (two of whom I met) and interpreted for many Caritas international volunteers and donors. Noen is Rakhine, but due to his darker complexion and ability to grow facial hair means he is sometimes seen as being of Bengali origin. He did not grow up in a Rakhine village but moved to Barisal from

Kala para at a formative age to pursue his studies. Regardless of his upbringing away from Rakhine village lifestyle, Noen is dedicated to Rakhine culture, tradition, and religion.

Noen helped me navigate Bengali and Rakhine cultures, interpreting conversations and social norms, and translating relevant documents. In this respect, Cormier (2018, p. 332) handily notes the difference between an interpreter and a translator, defining the first as one who ‘conveys a message or statement verbally between individuals who do not speak the same language [and the second as one who] makes a written transfer of a message or statement’. Noen has the facility to move fluidly between Bengali and Rakhine cultures and speak both languages. The ability to speak English also adds to his skill of navigating various cultures. His facility with language and culture was prized highly amongst his community, peers, and other NGO officials. Noen is also familiar with and supportive of artistic practice. His father was an art teacher, his sister (other than working at Caritas) trained as a theatre artist and is a self-taught tailor and he himself is a photographer. Noen showed interest in learning the art projects in each of the workshops, taking the time to master the skills. He was enthusiastic about joining in with cultural practices that I was a participant observer. For example, he did not hesitate to learn how to weave. Due to all these qualities, Noen was a suitable candidate as a research assistant and interpreter, we worked easily and well together which contributed to a practice of ‘radical vulnerability’ (Nagar 2019) stepping out of our self-enclosed boundaries and recognising the ways in which we are interconnected as opposed to different.

Practicing radical vulnerability, I consulted with Noen about research questions, intentions, plans, and activities, as well as my thoughts and interpretations on situations and events we encountered. My trip and workshops were all designed with his input and feedback. Liamputtong (2010, p. 143) suggests that training is required for translators as researchers depend on their translators ‘not just for words but to a certain extent for perspective’ (see also Bramberg and Dahlberg 2013; Temple 1997; Valero-Garces 2018). I worked closely with Noen for the entirety of my time in the field, in every role I played (interviewer, observer, and workshop facilitator), as well as for fieldwork preparation.

Due to my complete reliance on Noen in so many aspects of the research, I prepared an orientation, training, and evaluation process that we completed before, during, and after each field trip. Training included reviewing research goals for each of the activities planned. I also familiarised him with research ethics, such as informed consent, data storage, and confidentiality. With each participant in this research, Noen explained the research purposes, my role, and who I am. Therefore, he needed to have a strong understanding of all that information himself. He also co-facilitated the volunteer and community workshops so we underwent training on facilitating and creating purposeful workshops. We also prepared for interviews and debriefed after each day as the opportunity for us to discuss the interviews and the data collected were ‘vital for the interpretation of findings’ (Liamputtong, 2010, p. 147). Although I attempted to mitigate challenges of working cross-culturally with interpretation by building rapport with Noen and having conversations on my research objectives, aims, and plans, I acknowledge the impossibility of complete and accurate translation. We are partial beings, therefore this work is influenced by my and Noen’s interpretations and experiences (see Nagar 2019).

Working with Noen also enabled me to travel with ease to the Rakhine villages described in this chapter and access Rakhine community members. When Noen and I arrived in each of the villages, we would spend time walking around the village, reconnecting with villagers that either Noen knew or by T2, participants I had formed relationships with. While walking around the villages, I would take note of its surroundings, the architecture, the layout, and what villagers were doing, which prompted other methods used in my research, namely situational and participant observation and informal conversations. Mason (2006, p. 89) suggests that although ‘the purpose of observation is to witness or experience what is going on in a setting, it is difficult sometimes to work out what to observe and what to be interested in’. She warns against unfocused observation that can be time-consuming and unproductive and suggests the use of other data-generating methods. To mitigate ‘simply hanging around’ (Mason 2006, p. 90), I chose to use semi-structured interviews (discussed in chapter 5) and arts-based activities (discussed in chapter 6).

However, when not engaged in interviews and arts-based activities, I paid particular attention to events and phenomena that related to my research questions. For

example, over the duration of time spent in Taltali and Kala para, I observed daily life—cooking, household chores, weaving, gardening, fishing, other agricultural practices and leisure time—visited with villagers over tea and snacks, such as biscuits or street food, was invited over for meals at several homes, and participated in religious festivals. These observations were guided by research questions 1 and 2 through which I have sought to learn about the Rakhine and their cultural practices.

During T2, with the aid of a local informant's suggestion and connections, I arranged a two-day weaving lesson on a handloom with one of the weavers in Taltali. The weaver showed Noen and I the process of weaving a traditional shawl on a handloom. She started the lesson by having us wind threads onto a bobbin, and then she showed us how to warp on warping sticks that she had hammered into the ground. Next, she showed us how to weave using the shuttle. On the second day, she demonstrated how to (re)-thread the handloom for the next woven project. With each step, the weaver showed us the skill and then allowed us to try each step. In Kala para, the same local informant helped me arrange a one-day weaving lesson on a frame loom with a volunteer from T1. Weaving on a frame loom is another method employed by the Rakhine to make traditional shawls. The final product features a different weave and pattern from shawls woven on a handloom. Below are images of the handloom and frame loom (see figures 5 & 6).



Figure 5. Weave from Traditional handloom, Rakhine weaving. Source: Poon 2016



Figure 6. Weave from a traditional frame loom, Rakhine weaving. Source: Poon 2016

As I engaged in situational and participant observation, I had many conversations with those I encountered and with Noen in particular. Conversations with him framed a lot of my empirical work because he provided the background and context to what I observed or answered my questions about Rakhine culture. To document the situational and participant observations as well as meaningful informal conversations, I took time each day to journal about what I saw, what I did, who I met, conversations I had, and what I learned. Some of these observations were photographed, some were videoed and or audio recorded for reference during the writing process of this work.

The journal I kept also allowed me to adopt practices from autoethnographic traditions which favour the inclusion of personal reflections and epiphanies. Paraphrasing Jones, Adams and Ellis (2013), autoethnography is the use of personal experience and personal writing to (1) purposefully comment on/critique cultural practices; (2) make contributions to existing research; (3) embrace vulnerability with purpose; and (4) create a reciprocal relationship with audiences to compel a response. This method concentrates on producing meaningful, evocative, and accessible research, grounded in the researcher's personal experience and reflection.

With the goal to ‘sensitise readers to issues of identity politics, to experiences shrouded in silence, and to forms of representation that deepen our capacity to empathise with people who are different from us’ (Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2011, p. 274) and to reach a wider more diverse audience, autoethnography is also an efficacious way of reflecting on one’s own research and practice (Bossle, Molina & Molina 2014; McClellan 2012; Willis 2019). Although this thesis is not written completely in an autoethnographic manner, reflections from my fieldwork journal undergirds this entire thesis. Additionally, situational and participant observations as well as meaningful informal conversations collected and documented while in the field inform the many of the descriptions in this chapter.

The lifestyles and livelihoods of the Rakhine

I sought to learn about Rakhine lifestyle and livelihood by observing village life. The stories of the residents I interacted with and the events I attended highlighted what cultural practices are deemed significant, and how the Rakhine preserve and transmit these practices. The descriptions in the following pages contextualise my research and provide more details about the people I encountered.

Between the early 1980s and 1990s, in efforts to decentralise power, Bangladesh was divided into eight divisions (Tinker 2020). These divisions are subdivided into more than 60 districts (called *zilas*) that are further parcelled into smaller units of more than 500 *upazila* (formerly known/also known as *thana*) (Tinker 2020). Villages are considered the smallest unit of government and are numbered in the tens of thousands, grouped into unions under an *upazila* (Husain & Tinker 2018). My fieldwork was primarily situated in the southwestern coastal regions of Bangladesh in the districts of Barguna and Patuakhali. These two districts are home to many Rakhine villages. The two *upazilas* I visited in T1 and T2 were those of Taltali and Kala para. Within these *upazilas* I spent most of my time in the Rakhine villages of Taltli³, and Amkhola para; with short visits to Shaton para and Kalachin para.

³ Note that Taltli is a Rakhine village in the upazila of Taltali, spelling is similar, but one is the village and the other is the upazila

Travel within Bangladesh can be quite inefficient because of transport problems (figure 7), seasons (whether there are floods/drought), road conditions/availability, and traffic. These conditions exacerbate the remoteness of certain areas. Although some places may not be far from urban areas or areas with more resources, difficulty with travel contributes to isolation and disconnection. It also contributes to uncertainty while travelling as modes of transport can be unreliable.



Figure 7. Travel by motorbike. Source: Kirkby 2014

My own travel to and within the *upazilas* of Taltali and Kala para illustrate the arduousness associated with travel in Bangladesh. For example, the *upazila* of Taltali is accessible from Dhaka using various forms of transportation. For each of my trips in 2016 and 2017, I flew from Australia to meet Noen in Dhaka and after staying a day or two connecting with Caritas Dhaka staff, the two of us took an overnight launch (ferry) from Dhaka to arrive at Barisal. Barisal is one of the port cities in Barguna district. It is also where Caritas Barisal is situated, where the director of the ICDP-Rakhine program works. From Barisal, we took a four-hour bus ride to Amtoli to then a motorbike with a driver to arrive in Taltali. The motorbike travels over dirt roads through Amtoli, through several other small villages, past tropical

forests, and fields of rice paddies before reaching Taltali. It took us two days to arrive in Taltali from Dhaka despite the distance between Dhaka and Taltali 304 km.

The first buildings one sees upon entering the *upazila* of Taltali are the compounds run by Caritas and BRAC (another prominent NGO in Bangladesh). Taltali is home to several Bengali villages, a large market, a medical diagnostic centre, primary, secondary, tertiary schools, and two Rakhine villages—Taltli and Shaton para.

Taltli is one of the largest and better-established Rakhine villages in the Barguna and Patuakhali districts, with sixty houses. Local government in rural and urban areas are in the hands of elected councils, a commissioner heads each division, and executives on the *upazila* levels are assisted by professionals appointed by the national government (Tinker 2020). Taltli is located close to the *upazila*'s executives' offices. Furthermore, good relations between Taltli's village leader and local government officials enable an amicable coexistence between the Rakhine here and their Bengali neighbours. The location of Taltli, its proximity to NGOs, government offices, and its larger population of Rakhine result in access to development resources for their village. For example, Taltli, compared to other villages I describe has access to electricity and private toilets/bathing quarters. Though there are still public latrines, many of the households have their own toilets and bathing areas.

Despite the concentration of houses in Taltli, the village is quiet and sheltered from the usual traffic and bustle, sounds that are characteristic of Bangladesh. Taltli is accessible through either a main or a side/back thoroughfare. There are no fences or walls to mark the village boundaries, instead, the village is encircled by trees and ponds that provide shelter, resources, and separation from surrounding Bengali influence. These demarcations that separate their village from the market or other Bengali villages give Rakhine villagers a sense of safety and belonging. They also foster a sense of freedom to live out their cultural life without feelings of marginalisation.

The village's main entrance is an archway built out of brick and cement and leads to the outskirts of the *upazila*'s market. Market stalls selling Bangladeshi street food, cell phones, data recharge cards, and other convenience items are located near this

entrance. Market stalls with specialised services such as tailors, printers, pharmacists, and the stalls that sell fresh fruit, vegetables, fish, and meat are situated further into the centre of the market, a fifteen-minute walk from the main entrance. The proximity to the *upazila*'s marketplace, government offices, and NGOs provides ease of access to goods and services. It also enables the resident Rakhine the chance to study and work in industries other than agriculture without having to move away from their village. However, this is not true for everyone in the villages and several students, particularly those in university, have moved to Barisal or Dhaka for better education and more opportunities.

The other entrance into Taltli is by a large pond. The pond is for drinking water, cooking water, and sometimes bathing. Increasingly, the village residents bathe in their homes or use the various communal tube well pumps around the village. During T2, a new Rakhine convenience store opened by this entrance to supply residents with things such as oil, rice, snacks, and some household items. Many residents commented on how this made it even more convenient to access supplies alleviating them from having to make a trip to the market.

From either one of the entrances, it is a few minutes' walk to any of the houses, most of which are surrounded by trees and tend to have small fences or concrete walls, separating the property or protecting their courtyard gardens and livestock. Many households have chickens, some have cows, and it is a specialty to have pigs. Since pork is not part of a Muslim's diet, pork is not readily available in Bangladesh. Therefore, owning pigs and having pork is considered special due to its rarity. It is common to see chickens, dogs, and cats wandering around the village. Another line of demarcation between properties is rubbish. Villagers tend to dispose of their rubbish at the boundaries of their properties. Therefore, it is common to see litter such as plastics, food wrappings, and paper on the outskirts of some of the properties. Narrow brick footpaths connect the village from one end to the other (figure 8) and limit the noise and bustle of Bangladeshi traffic to the outskirts. For example, even auto-rickshaws, which look like five-seat golf carts pulled by motorbikes, and other forms of transport cannot access the villages because the brick pathways are not wide enough, but some motorbike services will drop off passengers inside the village.



Figure 8. Brick laid pathway. Source: Poon 2016

Sheltering the inner parts of the village are many coconut trees and other tropical fruit trees that supply shade, refuge, and food for the villagers. Walking through the village I felt senses of solitude and refuge, feelings, I think, that are shared by villagers, especially by the women, who can roam freely without feeling unsafe or harassed (Chanda 2016, pers. comm.). They can also wear their traditional dress without getting unwanted looks and stares from surrounding Bangladeshis. I too felt reprieve from unwanted attention, which is common for a foreigner in public places in other parts of Bangladesh. In Taltli, it is common to see women weaving, cooking, doing household maintenance such as sweeping, or having tea and chatting with their friends on their stoops in public.

The style of houses in Taltli is different from surrounding villages in the *upazila* of Taltali. Traditional Rakhine buildings from the southwestern coastal area of

Bangladesh are constructed of wood, *golpata*—the leaves of a small tree used for making sheds (Majid 2007), mud, cement, and corrugated iron sheet metal (figures 9 and 10). Most of the Rakhine homes I saw had sheet metal and wooden roofs instead of *golpata* roofs. The houses are built on a densely packed mud base or among the more affluent in the community, on a concrete base. Some Bengali houses are constructed with similar material but differ in design. In Taltli, houses are designed with influence from both Rakhine and Bengali architecture. To the local eye (more relevant in villages like Kalachin para where the demarcations between Rakhine villages and Bengali villages are less obvious), house style is can signify if its occupants are Rakhine or Bengali and is a way to preserve Rakhine cultural identity. Rakhine houses are also usually two-storeyed with the first floor open—‘houses on high platforms’ (Majid, 2005, p.71; see also Tun 2015). In other words, Rakhine build their houses on stilts. Their open cooking area, toilet and bathing area, looms, and livestock are below the enclosed upper storey where bedrooms and living and dining areas are located.



Figure 9. Rakhine house 1 exterior. Source: Poon 2016



Figure 10. Rakhine house 2 exterior. Source: Poon 2016

Living quarters in Rakhine homes consist of a clean wooden floor space that can convert into a lounging, dining, or sleeping area (figure 11). A jute mat covers the sleeping area. Thin mattresses and sheets are placed at the end of the mat. When it is time for sleep, the mattresses and sheets can easily be set out. Most houses will have one wardrobe or cupboard for storage. Some homes have a television set. Clothing is hung on the rafters of the house or along the sides of the wall. Storage for larger items such as kitchenware and looms is usually on the ground floor. The dining area may have small low tables if their homes are designed in the traditional style. Residents will sit on the floor around their table for meals. In houses that have more Bengali influence, the dining room will have a table and chairs.



Figure 11. Rakhine house interior. Source: Poon 2017

A traditional Rakhine kitchen has one or two clay fire pits along with large metal pots and pans. Food is cooked over the fire, so food preparation is done on the ground or at a bench then brought over to the fire pits. It is common for women to cook together or have the help of hired hands. Sometimes, a group of families may each cook a large portion of one dish and exchange amongst themselves to diversify dishes and save on cooking too much variety. Modern styled Rakhine homes have gas stoves as opposed to the clay fire pits. This kitchen style is built similar to a western kitchen with the gas stoves installed on tables and a preparation area around the stove (figures 12 and 13).



Figure 12. Traditional kitchen. Source: Poon 2017



Figure 13. Modern-styled kitchen. Source: Poon 2017

Some traditional dishes are best prepared in a traditional Rakhine kitchen. For example, dried shark, a traditional delicacy, is roasted over the fire in the clay pit before serving. Heating the dried shark in a clay fire pit instead of over a gas stove affects the flavour and texture of the dish.

Traditional Rakhine livelihoods rest primarily on subsistence farming and agriculture. The villages provide most of what the residents need, and they grow their own vegetables and farm their own livestock. Even the trees that protect their villages provide fruit such as papaya and coconuts. However, this type of lifestyle and its associated livelihoods are rapidly changing. It is helpful here to note that (Suliman & Weber 2019) define precarity as changing employment conditions underpinned by insecurity and uncertainty characteristic to workers worldwide regardless of class and location. Further, Standing (2011) relates these insecurities and uncertainties with neoliberalism. One way in which neoliberalism has affected social and economic life is exemplified in Harris and Scully's (2015, p. 416) observation that, 'social and economic life became increasingly commodified throughout the Global South and North during the neoliberal era. Processes of commodification eroded various forms of social protection that previously existed in the mid-twentieth century, such as the welfare state, secure formal employment, and access to non-market sources of livelihood'.

Commodification of social and economic life influence the traditional livelihoods among the Rakhine. For example, it contributes to changing the way in which the Rakhine view their traditional forms of work and cultural practices. Particularly those cultural practices that are no longer able to meet livelihood needs. One such example of how commodification has affected social and economic life is characterised in weaving practices. In the following, I describe my visit with one of the weavers in Taltli. This account depicts the intersecting axes of influence that have changed a once reliable source of income and subsistence.

After consulting local contacts about weavers in Taltli, Noen and I visited the home of one of the weavers. Upon knocking on the gate and calling out to see if anyone was home, a short man in his seventies and his wife came to the gate. Through Noen, we explained who we were and the purposes of my research. Then the couple invited

us in and welcomed us with Pepsi and biscuits. The man showed us the room where their woven goods for sale was stored. He told us his family sold shawls, bags, and cloth to the village and filled orders from marketplace tailors. He then introduced us to his daughter who was the primary weaver. Figure 14 shows some of the woven goods from the weaving store.



Figure 14. Weaving store. Source: Poon 2016

The weaver informed us that weaving is a tradition passed on matrilineally. ‘Generation by generation, we are weaving’ (weaver 2016, pers. comm.). She said she enjoyed weaving and would weave seven to eight months a year, every day, from daylight till dark. She would take breaks to eat or when fatigued, but otherwise, she would weave throughout the day. The weaver told us that it would take her approximately three days to make a shawl for a profit of about 400–500 taka (AUD \$6–8). She would usually sell each shawl for 800–900 taka (AUD \$13–14) each at the market. I asked her what kind of income weaving produced, and she said that seasons affected demand. Winter from late October to January is the best season because the weather gets colder.

Rakhine woven shawls are made with the coarser thread of a cotton polyester blend instead of Bengali cloth made of silk or linen. Most Bengali cloth today is machine manufactured so the cloth’s texture is different from handloom-woven Rakhine

cloth. Therefore, Rakhine cloth is more appropriate for the colder months in Bangladesh. Other than different threads that differentiate Rakhine cloth from Bengali cloth, the patterns in Rakhine cloth represents culture and family tradition. Some patterns are from designs passed down through generations (M. Promila 2016, pers. comm.). Even the loom itself and integral parts of it (for example, the heddles or the reed) are passed down from generation to generation. According to this weaver and her family, it is only women in the Rakhine culture who weave. 'I like to weave. Sitting around at home, not doing anything, makes me feel useless. Being able to weave and earn income to help the family makes me proud that I can contribute' (weaver 2016, pers. comm.). However, the profit from weaving is neither consistent, nor secure. Other than the little profit gained from each shawl sold, the man declared 'weaving produces insufficient profit. The amount of time you weave for the amount you profit does not weigh fairly. There are no sales during warmer months, therefore no need to weave as no profit would be made. It is more of a hobby for women' (man 2016, pers. comm.).

As exemplified in the conversation with the weaver and her family, weaving's traditions, craft, skills, and art forms have had to change in the face of lessening/limited demand, higher costs of threads, and the time taken to make the cloth compared with the income it generates. Even so, weaving still appears to hold significance, supplying clothes and income for families and women, providing those who weave with a sense of purpose, warmth in the winter months, and representing the continuation of culture in its patterns and design. Furthermore, Rakhine cloth is still available for the tailoring of warmer clothes in the winter months.

During T2, Noen and I both purchased shirts tailored from the local Rakhine tailors. After we visited with the family of weavers, Noen and I walked to the market. We were told of tailors who ordered cloth from the weavers, and I wanted to buy some traditional Rakhine clothing. I was also curious to find out if any of the market stalls sold Rakhine cloth or goods. We found a couple of market stalls owned by Rakhine. The tailors, husband and wife, owned one of the more established and well-frequented stalls in the market (figure 15). It was not a particularly busy day for the tailors, so they invited us into their shop, gave us chairs to sit in, and a salty cracker mix to snack on.



Figure 15. Rakhine tailors. Source: Poon 2016

The tailors disclosed that they had their business for over twenty years. They tailor and do not weave, making clothing for Rakhine and Bengalis alike, using Bengali cloth and Rakhine cloth. They buy Rakhine cloth from the villages. In the warmer months, they sell men's shirts made of Rakhine cloth woven with a semi-automatic loom. Semi-automatic looms had been introduced to Rakhine villagers by Caritas and other NGOs. In the past, one NGO (that interview respondents could no longer recall the name) had offered workshops on how to use the semi-automatic looms and then sponsored those who wove for a living to keep a loom. The benefit of the semi-automatic loom is that weaving becomes faster as the shuttle is automated, the cloth's weave is also tighter and, therefore, the cloth produced may be made using finer threads.

The tailors told us they bought Rakhine cloth from villages for about 200–300 taka (AUD \$2–5), and they would sell the fabric for 350 taka (AUD \$5.66) with an additional 250–350 taka (AUD \$4–5.66) if cloth was tailored. The cost of renting the

market stall is government-subsidised, so they only have an annual payment of 170 taka (AUD \$2.75). They maintain their business from the profit they make and from loans they have received from the Grameen bank and Caritas CCU. The wife is part of the CCU. She spoke well of being a CCU member, indicating that they have received a lot of support from Caritas via the CCU and ICDP-Rakhine programs. The ICDP-Rakhine program has supported their family each year with study bursaries for school supplies and books for their children (amounting to 1000 taka AUD \$16). That program also provides bursaries for small businesses, oftentimes in the forms of supplies—in their case, for sewing machines. However, they lamented the fact that they did not receive the free sewing machines as part of that particular bursary program. The tailors' story is one example of the support provided by the government, Caritas' ICDP-Rakhine program, and other NGOs to give some level of security in the face of precarity.

As it happened, the tailors said they did not have any ready-made Rakhine clothing in stock and when they learned how short my T1 visit was, they suggested that I visit a Rakhine house in Shaton para that sells ready-made Rakhine clothing. Shaton para is the village next to Taltli and is situated between Taltli and the Caritas compound. Shaton para is smaller and less established than Taltli. However, one of the most prominent things of Shaton para, noticeable even from the main road in Taltali *upazila*, is the *kyang*: Rakhine word for temple.

Most villages have their own *kyang*. However, although Taltli has its own *kyang*, the *kyang* in Shaton para hosts more of the religious and cultural events for both villages. The *kyang* grounds include the main temple where one can pray to the Buddha. The main temple is where the local monk lives and shares the teachings of Buddha. Surrounding the temple is a garden with leafy plants, flowers, and statues of other significant gods. Also, there is a building used for language lessons. The building doubles as a dormitory for visitors (other monks) who may come when there are larger inter-village religious festivals. The *kyang* at each Rakhine village stands as a symbol for the village, signifying their religion and belief system. It is a gathering place for cultural and religious events and festivals enabling Rakhine members to practice and live out their religious beliefs. Other than providing

spiritual guidance, the monk is also in charge of giving Rakhine language lessons to young Rakhine.

Upon arriving at the house recommended to us by the tailors in Shaton para, Noen realised one of his cousins had married into this household. As we conversed with her, we learned that the household ordered and sold ready-made Rakhine women's clothing posted from Myanmar (Burma). This is another example of how the Rakhine in Bangladesh stay connected to their roots in Myanmar (Burma) and express their cultural identity. Myanmarese (Burmese) fashion (specifically Burmese Rakhine fashion) represents Rakhine culture and identity, and offers an alternate means of addressing precarity, i.e., finding different means to secure a livelihood.

After assisting me to choose a Rakhine htamees and selling me the traditional attire, Noen's cousin invited us to stay and join her family for green papaya salad, a southeast Asian dish. I watched as the women and girls of the household prepared the salad. A few of them worked with large iron knives to meticulously cut the papaya into thin slivers. Another couple prepared the chilli sauce that the papaya salad gets tossed in (figure 16).



Figure 16. Making papaya salad. Source: Poon 2016

As I watched, one of the boys in the family asked Noen to help him set up his Facebook account on his new mobile phone. In fact, the entire time the women were making food, as the younger children were playing and the men were standing waiting, chatting, and watching, the boy was busy setting up his account, asking Noen how to do each step. As we were leaving, he walked us out of the village asking Noen how to reset his password. He had already forgotten the original one he set when Noen helped him set up his account an hour before. It struck me as ironic that in a village where running water is not universally accessible and electricity is unreliable, this boy was so adamantly focused on creating a Facebook account.

Later, as I got to know the young Rakhine I met from Taltali and Kala para, it became clear that they are avid users of Facebook. Many would send me friend requests, even those I had not met. When I asked Noen about it, he explained that Facebook was a convenient way in which Rakhine youth and young adults would meet one another across the country to form friendships and, in some cases, romantic relationships. In this light, it is noteworthy that Gilmartin et al. (2020, p. 11) suggest that precarity affects people's personal or 'intimate' spheres. More specifically,

Gilmartin et al. (2020) examine how precarity affects decisions and feelings related to romantic relationships, having children, and the ease of general mobility (see also (Robertson 2015)). In my example, Rakhine youth mitigate the precarity associated with their livelihoods, which is inextricably linked to the survival of their culture and ethnicity by making connections with other Rakhine and staying connected via Facebook.

This adaptation was true of Noen himself. Although he grew up in Kala para, Noen did not live in a Rakhine village and stayed in touch with Rakhine friends and relatives through Facebook. Often, when we ran into his friends during our travels, they would add each other to their Facebook contacts. Noen also admitted that he used Facebook to start his relationship with his Rakhine girlfriend. They had met in a conference but at that time she lived in Cox's Bazaar, so Noen connected with her on Facebook and cultivated the relationship they now have. Noen told me that it was important for Rakhine to marry within their culture to continue its values, practices, and traditions and confided that his brother's choice to marry a Bengali woman has affected their family's dynamic. He did not articulate the details to how this changed his family dynamic, only that they see his brother infrequently, less than before.

During both T1 and T2, Noen and I would spend the first phase of fieldwork in the *upazila* of Taltali and then travel to Kala para. Kala para is in the district of Patuakhali, which is just 24 km west of Barguna. Depending on traffic and mode of transport, travelling from Taltali to Kala para can take from a couple of hours to a full day. In Kala para, we stayed at Caritas field office's guest house which is situated beside the police station at Mahipur thana. Compared with Taltali, the field office is much further away from the Rakhine villages in the area. During T1, I spent most of my time at Mahipur thana, with short visits to Rakhine villages (Amkhola para and Kalachin para) to conduct interviews. During T2, I travelled to Amkhola para often, because I conducted one of the arts-based workshops there. Noen and I also spent a couple of days in Kalachin para conducting interviews and learning to weave on a frame loom.

Widespread challenges related to transport and travel affected research participants I engaged with in Kala para as much as they affected me. During T1, participants for

arts-based workshops found travelling to the Caritas office arduous and many were over an hour late as a result. Hearing that, I consulted with Noen about conducting T1 and T2 interviews in the villages and during T2 ran one of the workshops in Amkhola para. Travelling to Amkhola para and Kalachin para does not take a lot of time depending on your mode of travel. Motorbikes are the most efficient way to travel; however, they cost more than taking an auto-rickshaw or van—a motorised bicycle pulling an open flat-surfaced cart. Spending time in each village, I also learned that villagers think leaving its boundaries to go to Caritas is akin to travelling from one city to another.

To access Amkhola para from the Caritas guest house in Manipur thana, Noen and I would walk or catch a van or auto-rickshaw across the bridge to the bazaar (market). There, we would walk into the bazaar to catch a motorbike, auto-rickshaw, or van that was willing to drive us to Amkhola para. Like Shaton para, the most prominent part of the village is the *kyang*. Visible from the road, it is larger than the one in Shaton para and has a large green space surrounding it (figure 17).



Figure 17. Kyang entrance in Amkhola para. Source: Kirkby 2014

Some of Amkhola para's architecture and homes were decimated during a cyclone. Despite being different ethnically and culturally, the Rakhine experience similar

challenges faced by Bangladeshis more generally. Climate-related changes influence Rakhine livelihood and lifestyle. Other than being at risk and, at times, victim to environmental disasters, climate-related changes also influence the subsistence lifestyle of the Rakhine. Unpredictable changes to climate—any increased flooding or drought—significantly affects agricultural and fishing practices and the overall security of the Rakhine people. This makes it difficult to rely on their own crops and livestock for their livelihoods. Lastly, climate-related changes also affect the food the Rakhine eat. The Rakhine hunt and forage; changes in the environment have seen commensurate changes to animal protection laws, and certain species of animals and plants have become illegal game. Alternatively, they become rarer to find.

Situated on the southwestern coast, the Rakhine are particularly susceptible to climate-related changes and disasters affecting their livelihoods and, in serious cases, their lives. For example, Noen relayed a memory of Cyclone Sidr, which struck the south-west coast of Bangladesh in 2007 and came with winds up to 240 kilometres per hour, tidal waves up to five metres high, and surges up to six metres (Government of Bangladesh 2008). Noen told me about the tragedy it imparted on the Rakhine community; many died, and many lost their family members, friends, homes, and belongings. He recalled standing at one of the windows of the Caritas cyclone shelters looking out towards the storm. A gust of wind came and knocked him off his feet, launching him into the wall behind him. I asked him if he had any similar experiences since Sidr, and he said cyclones were common, but that was the worst he had experienced. There, sustained poverty related to natural disasters and their aftermath stands in contrast to the situation in the Amkhola para *kyang* which has one of the few *kyangs* left in the area and which represents the affluence of past times. After visiting the *kyang*, Noen and I crossed its grounds to enter Amkhola para. Entering the village on the end closest to the *kyang* led us to see first a combination of Rakhine and Bengali houses; at this end of the village they were farther apart from one another. Each of these houses has homestead gardens and trees separating the houses. There are about thirty houses in Amkhola para. The other village entrance is a longer motorbike ride down the dirt road from the entrance where the *kyang* is located. The houses in this later section of Amkhola para are starkly different from the houses closer to the *kyang*. It was this end of the village that the houses were destroyed by a cyclone and were then rebuilt by government

disaster relief funding. Due to this, the architecture reflects Rakhine houses, but the houses are constructed on concrete foundations and sheet metal instead of mud, wood, and *golpata* leaves. The houses are also identical, built side by side like row houses in Western urban areas. This is another example of interventions by local NGOs and government services to help alleviate experiences of precarity.

Throughout Amkhola para are several tube well-water pumps that were installed when the village was rebuilt. However, when I was there many were broken, illustrating that though there is government funding and NGO support available, it may not be directed for the Rakhine. Getting attention from the government or NGOs for resources is challenging. Instead, the village mudbar (leader) bought a large rainwater tank and installed it beside his house. He informed me that it is for emergencies but also to substitute for the non-functioning well pumps. He said that he had raised the broken tube wells as an issue to their local *upazila* executives but have yet seen anyone come to restore them.

The proximity of the homes in Amkhola para's restored area means that the sound and sights of children playing is a common occurrence. Children as young as two years of age are seen wandering through that part of the village, following a group of slightly older children playing tag or playing with sticks and wheels. The proximity of the houses in that part of the village contributes to a concentration of sounds of cooking, villagers talking, and blaring music. There is a sense of bustle in Amkhola para, which differs from the other Rakhine villages I visited. Amkhola para also has a Rakhine music and cultural group that is well known. Led by the village Mudbar, the group performs at various larger Rakhine festivals, at National events, and is sometimes featured on the radio. Figure 18 shows some members of the Rakhine music and cultural group.



Figure 18. Rakhine music and cultural group. Source: Photovoice images, Amkhola para Mudbar 2017

The fourth village I visited while in Kala para was Kalachin para. To access Kalachin para from the Caritas field office in Manipur thana, Noen and I would walk up towards the bridge and then walk through the bazaar. The village is approximately twenty-five minutes away from the office on foot. This village's boundaries are not as clear as those of Amkhola para and Taltali. Kalachin para comprises twenty-eight houses with eighty residents (M.M Thien 2017, pers. comm.). Close to the river, the village intertwines with other Bengali homes, bordering the waterways, making their village boundaries less clear to the unfamiliar eye. According to one Rakhine resident, many Bengalis have settled close to the river because many are fishermen (Uchin 2017, pers. comm.). During T1 I found more weavers in Kalachin para than in the other villages I visited who still wove for a living.

All the weavers I spoke with from the various Rakhine villages referred to getting their threads from a Bengali supplier in Amtoli. Conveniently for this supplier, he is situated equidistant (more or less) from both Taltali and Kala para, making the

Rakhine women of these areas his main clientele. The women told me of his good and bad qualities. They complain about his rising costs, yet they are thankful that he will allow them to pay him back for threads once their woven goods have sold. They also talked to me about their concern that many younger women are not learning how to weave due to being busy with education or work. Many of the weavers were concerned that the skill of weaving would perish. This fear was also echoed by other community members who were anxious that weaving was no longer making the profit, nor meeting the needs it had previously done for their families. This skill, which has traditionally been passed on intergenerationally and has given the Rakhine protection, warmth, livelihood, and identity, might be lost from their culture.

As expressed in conversation with the weaver in the earlier part of this chapter, as well as others in Amkhola para and Kalachin para, weaving as an art form and craft holds literal and metaphorical significance for the Rakhine. Weaving is the process of interlacing one set of threads, the warp, with another set, the weft, inserted at right angles to the warp (Hecht 1990). Its literal significance relates to its ability to clothe, supply warmth, and supply financial sustenance. Metaphorically, weaving as an art form has been an expression of a myriad of Rakhine experiences from culture and tradition to rebellion and protest in its pattern and design (M. Promila 2016, pers. comm.). Cloth is linked to an astonishingly broad range of human experiences—social and political connotations symbolised in properties of cloth, in its embellishment, decoration, status and position (Cochrane 2008). Losing the skill of weaving would be a loss of history and identity to the Rakhine. I asked those I spoke with what they felt were challenges that contributed to their fears regarding the loss of the culture. In the last section of this chapter, I discuss what loss of culture means to the Rakhine.

Cultural preservation and transmission

When I spoke with Rakhine community members about their experiences of precarity, the three main contributors named were ethnic marginalisation, climatic pressures affecting their livelihoods, and land-grabbing. However, of utmost concern was how they affect the Rakhine ability to practice their culture as well as preserve and transmit their cultural practices. In speaking with village elders (also

documented by Majid 2007), the Rakhine of this area were once more self-sufficient and affluent in terms of land and other property. As in the example of the Amkhola para *kyang*, the affluence they experienced was shown in their buildings—large *kyangs*, pagodas, crematoriums. It was also expressed in hand-woven traditional dresses and elaborate cultural festivals. The Rakhine wove colourful cloth into shawls, scarves, bags, men's shirts, kadongs, and htamees. In other words, the affluence the Rakhine once had enabled them to celebrate and express their cultural practices and traditions to a larger degree.

Presently, due to financial constraints, market constraints, and constraints related to shifting values around their livelihood, the Rakhine fear that they may lose their culture and traditions. As I have illustrated, weaving represents one way in which cultural practices have changed. Even Noen shared with me he did not realise people were still weaving, that he thought it was a cultural practice of past times. Today, it is only in the villages that a small number of Rakhine women weave shawls, scarves, bags, and cloth primarily for men's shirts and jackets. They rarely weave cloth for htamees, and they weave mostly only during the winter months responding to demand.

The pressure to urbanise and rely less on subsistence farming has caused notable change to the Rakhine community. Either spouse/parent may live part-time in cities to make money for the family. Young people move away from the villages into the cities for the promise of better education and employment opportunities. Many more individuals find employment as labourers, NGO workers, and other technical employment positions away from their villages. Once leaving their villages, the difficulty in travel prevents villagers from working in more urban areas while continuing to live in their respective villages. Though the distances are not far, the type of transportation as well as the cost of it, the density of traffic, and poor road maintenance (closures due to flooding or the quality of the road) add exponentially to the trip. Furthermore, climate-related changes also affect the ease of travel. For example, seasonal flooding and drought can affect which mode of transport is favourable. Flooding may close certain roads, and drought can prevent safe travel by launch.

While living in cities, the Rakhine experience how city life supplies both opportunity and challenge. They may find more reliable income, however the opportunities to gather as a group of Rakhine and live out their traditional and cultural lifestyles become less likely. Even opportunities to wear their traditional dress (particularly for women) become non-existent as it is norm to wear a shalwar kameez or other Bengali forms of dress. Coined as ‘Bengalization’ (Tun 2015, p. 308), this expression relates to ways of life that the Rakhine have adopted, including eating Bengali food made by a Bengali housekeeper, dressing in Bengali clothing, and in some cases, marrying a Bengali.

Summary

In this chapter, I continued my exploration on the lives of the Rakhine by referring to precarity and intersectionality. I described the locations of the villages that I visited in the *upazilas* of Taltali and Kala para, illustrating how travel contributes to the remoteness of some of these villages. The remoteness isolates the Rakhine from mainstream Bengali culture, which further restricts access to some resources. However, the remote nature of these villages also contributes to providing a safe haven from marginalisation, enabling the Rakhine to freely live out their culture and traditions. The villages also provide and enable the traditional subsistence way of life as villagers grow their own vegetables, care for their own livestock, and receive shelter and food from surrounding trees.

Nestled among descriptions of the villages I visited are stories that illustrate how precarity has affected Rakhine livelihoods. For example, the story about the weaver depicts how the cultural practice of weaving has lost its competitive edge in providing a sustainable income for families. Moreover, it exemplifies how neoliberal and environmental processes have shifted the value of subsistence living for the Rakhine. These processes have contributed to a change in the value of subsistence living which is reflected by Rakhine community members seeking out more secure forms of employment. The story of the tailors shows how NGOs such as Caritas have contributed to alleviating some experiences of precarity. Additionally, the story of the house that sells premade Rakhine clothing represents how the Rakhine attempt to mitigate experiences of precarity by securing different sources of income.

These descriptions and stories also identify which cultural practices the Rakhine deem important. Some examples addressed in this chapter other than weaving were religion and food. Furthermore, this chapter identifies some ways the Rakhine preserve and transmit their culture. This was depicted in wearing their traditional dress, practicing their religion, eating their cultural foods together, and the value of meeting other Rakhine throughout the country with specific emphasis on marrying within their own culture.

In the latter part of this chapter, I outlined what the Rakhine identified as the main challenges to their cultural life—ethnic marginalisation, climate-related pressures affecting their livelihood, and land-grabbing. These challenges influence their experiences of precarity but were also what they perceive to be barriers to continuing their culture and tradition.

Although I have focussed on weaving practices in this work as a metaphor to how the Rakhine experience precarity, I will further describe (in the next two chapters) other aspects of Rakhine cultural and traditional practices, particularly language, festivals, traditional food, and religion. Specifically, in the face of precarity, I observe and document that the Rakhine continue to practice their culture and traditions. I also discuss how the Rakhine exercise empowerment, participation, and resilience in relation to practicing, preserving, and transmitting their cultural practices.

Chapter Five: Empowerment, Participation, and Resilience

Introduction

Within the discourses of precarity and intersectionality, it is generally accepted that the prevailing forces can simultaneously privilege and oppress individuals and communities (Michener, Dilts & Cohen 2012). This acknowledges the complexities involved in these experiences instead of polarising experiences as either privilege or oppression. This stands in contrast to habits of imposing a deficit model on vulnerable communities (see Alexander, Bolzendahl & Jalalzai 2016). Furthermore, in implementing participatory research methods (that I discuss in chapter 6), I consider that ‘participatory praxis provides an approach to negotiating differences between researchers and community members such that the research perspective does not supersede community perspectives or subordinate the community in its intent or its outcomes. These participatory methods take their starting point from the strengths and assets inherent in a community, rather than from a weakness and deficit perspective’ (Sprague et al. 2019, p.1). Therefore, I seek to learn what strengths and assets are inherent in Rakhine community.

In this chapter, I continue to elucidate what the Rakhine deem as important cultural practices and how they preserve and transmit them. I notice that in practicing their culture, the Rakhine display empowerment, participation, and resilience. Specifically, I document various events—Kathin chibor dan, picnic gathering, noodle house, the Rohingya situation response, as well as the stories of individuals I befriended over the course of my both my T1- 2016 and T2- 2017 field trips. Woven into each of these situations are examples of how these individuals express empowerment, participation, and resilience. Initially, however, I outline my use of semi-structured interviews and how this method was appropriate for generating some of the data presented in this chapter.

Interviews

In chapter 3, I discussed the use of research methods associated with ethnography and autoethnography, specifying my choice in using other data-generation methods

with observation and informal conversations; one of which is the interview. There were a range of participants that I engaged; some interviews were generated as part of arts-based activities, while others were with key representatives I thought would give insights on Rakhine history, lifestyle, livelihood, and/or NGO involvement. A number of interviews resulted from the informal conversations I had with participants. For example, over the course of two field trips, there was a small group of locals that I got to know personally; these people became key informants, and, in some instances, co-researchers, informal volunteers, and friends. Through ‘hanging out’ with this group of locals, I learned from some insider stories about their culture, values, lifestyles, livelihood, and traditions. Their stories have contributed my deeper understanding of the Rakhine; some are depicted in this chapter. With several of these individuals I later scheduled formal interviews to seek more understanding on particular experiences or topics.

Noen and I contacted interested participants and arranged to meet with them after the arts-based workshops to engage in interviews. For example, during T1, we arranged to conduct 17 semi-structured interviews on the days after each community workshop; seven were done in Taltali and ten in Kala para. Interviews were intended to deepen conversations started at workshops and lasted 20 to 40 minutes. The interviews following the weaving arts-based workshops in T1 were intended to be used to survey the field, learn about weaving’s prominence in Rakhine culture, and learn about women’s roles. The questions asked of 15 women and the two men who participated continued to explore women’s roles, the role of weaving, and their levels of equality. All questions were conveyed in Rakhine by Noen as the interpreter (see Bramberg & Dahlberg 2013).

During T2, I interviewed 36 participants for the critical photography workshops, 18 in Taltali, and seven in Kala para. For the post-weaving workshop interviews, in Taltali, I interviewed six participants and four in Kala para. In both locations, there was an overlap between participants who had come for the different workshops, though some participants who came for both workshops were not interested in interviewing twice. For those who came for both workshops, I prioritised using the weaving interview questions to engage with those who had come to the weaving workshops in T1. This was for two main reasons: I had already formed a rapport

with those from T1, which might generate deeper conversations, and I was hoping to capture any changes that might have happened for them since 2016. For others who did not come to The T1 workshops, I used the critical photography interview questions. In Kala para, none of the participants from T1 attended the T2 weaving workshops. Participants who attended the T2 weaving workshops were between the ages of 15–25. Therefore, I used this opportunity to inquire about their experiences of growing up in two cultures, Bengali and Rakhine. The interview guide for all the post arts-based workshop interviews is in Appendix C.

I used the post-critical photography workshop interviews as an opportunity to ask participants about the photographs they took during the workshop. I was also interested in learning more about their access to and engagement with technology and media and how they influence their culture. Lastly, I was curious about how they approached community development: Are there processes to making a change? If so, what are they? Who are the major players in eliciting a change?

I also sought out specific community leaders, officials, key informants, and Caritas staff to interview. The purpose of these interviews was to learn about Rakhine history and context. During T1, I interviewed Caritas officials and staff to learn about their organisation, programs, and services. My initial informal conversation with the local Rakhine tailor and weaver resulted in follow up interviews. During T2, I organised interviews with various leaders within both Taltali and Kala para. I spoke with elders (those who were older in age and/or held positions of affluence), Mudbars (village head leader), and monks from various villages in the Taltali and Kala para. T1 and T2 interview guides are in Appendix D.

For all interviews, I chose to use semi-structured interviews (SSI). ‘Conducted conversationally with one respondent at a time, the SSI employs a blend of closed- and open-ended questions, often accompanied by follow-up why or how questions’ (Adams 2015, p. 493). I chose to use SSIs to engage in deeper conversations, learn about individual participants’ experiences, and allow new concepts to emerge (see (Dearnley 2005)). According to Adams (2015), SSIs are useful, as probing, open-ended questions on topics can draw out information that respondents might not be candid about. This was relevant in my research as some of the items I was interested

in learning were considered common knowledge to participants; without the opportunity to probe, I would not have gained the depth of understanding I was after. Adams (2015, p. 494) also suggests that SSIs are useful when ‘examining uncharted territory with unknown but potential momentous issues,’ where maximum latitude to identify leads and pursue them is needed.

In the lead-up to the semi-structured interviews, I prepared several guides that listed planned questions and topics to address (see Appendix C & D). Interview guides were prepared by themes relating to participants. For example, I created different interview guides for Caritas staff, the villages Mudbars/Elders, and the village monks. The use of SSIs allowed me to ask the same set of questions to groups of participants. For example, I used the same interview guide for all the weaving participants. The responses could then be categorised and analysed to look for common themes.

The flexible framework of SSIs gave participants the ability to list their own interpretations of the questions instead of choosing from predetermined categories associated with surveys or the standardised list of questions common in structured interviews. Since preparing predetermined categories and standardised questions rely on researcher’s presuppositions, the options that the researcher may produce can be culturally inappropriate or non-applicable. This was an issue with some of the questions that I had prepared. Some questions were difficult to translate, and at times difficult to interpret. The use of SSIs allowed for the flexibility to mitigate this as ‘the interviewer can modify existing questions and probes in any way and even devise completely new, innovative questions to more accurately rate specific symptoms’ (Segal et al. 2006, p. 122-123). The flexibility to reword and change questions when/if I required gave room to draw out relevant information. For example, during T2 the post-weaving workshops’ interview guide was not relevant in Kala para as I could not generate participation from the same set of participants that attended in T1. In the end, I changed my set of questions to engage the new weaving participants who agreed to participate in interviews.

Information gleaned from interviews with other key community members have contributed to chapters 3 and 4 where I described the context of this work. In this

chapter, I summarise information from interviews with key informants, informal conversations, and observations in order to describe the ways in which the Rakhine exercise empowerment, participation, and resilience.

Examples of empowerment, participation, and resilience

One of the first events I attended where I noted examples of empowerment, participation, and resilience among the Rakhine was Kathin Chibor Dan—which literally means ‘offering of the difficult monk robe’ (see bdnews24 2015). This is an annual Buddhist festival hosted on any convenient date within a month of the Prabarana Purnima (the full moon of the Hindu month of Aswini). This particular festival is significant to Rakhine religious life. It is when the monk comes out of his annual three-month rain retreat and re-enters the villages to be presented new clothing from the villagers as a sign of respect and sacrifice.

According to Tun (2015), festivals can be viewed as entry into a community’s economic, political, and social life (Farber 1983). In this case, my experience at Kathin Chibor Dan gave insight into how the Rakhine exert power within their economic, political, and social lives that can be recognised as empowerment, participation, and resilience. For example, this festival illustrates *resilience as persistence*. It is helpful here to recall Hillier’s (2015, p. 174) spectrum of resilience (chapter 2), where resilience as persistence is evident when ‘a system possesses or develops the capacity to cope with stress and absorb disturbance, maintaining its identity and function without adaptation’. Despite the uncertainties identified in chapters 3 and 4, the Rakhine maintain and protect their culture through this public expression of their religious beliefs. Their culture’s expression and celebration are further expressed in how the women are dressed in their best traditional wear, made of Rakhine cloth embroidered with shiny gold threads. The men also wear their finer traditional wear—kadongs with dress shirts.

Traditionally, devotees would weave a new robe within 24 hours to present to the monk. Today, robes are often bought. In some cases, a smaller piece of cloth is woven as a symbol of past traditions. This change shows *resilience as adaptation*: ‘the capacity of a system to adapt or adjust its structure, function, identity, etc. in

accordance with dynamic contingencies' (Hillier 2015, p.174). The weaving of an entire monk's robe has adapted based on the feasibility of such a weaving project, however; instead of presenting different gifts or not giving anything at all, the presentation of a robe or symbolic cloth is still represented in the festival.

To attend the festival, Noen and I travelled by motorbike from the Caritas guest house. We were not the only ones to do so. Many had come from surrounding Rakhine villages in Barguna and Patuakhali districts. I saw people I knew from Taltli, Shaton para, Amkhola para, and Kalachin para. I recognised festival attendees from my 2014 trip who had come from Kuakata and Kabirez para. It was an opportunity for the Rakhine to celebrate their religious beliefs and to connect with friends and family from different villages. Gathering together for this event signifies what Rowlands (1997, p.12) calls *power-with*, 'which does not involve domination but is generative'. Attendees came to the event of their own accord; it did not happen from coercion or domination.

There were several spaces set up with seats for visitors to catch up throughout the village. There were also a couple of food stands selling tea or *mondi* (rice noodle dish). Seeing all that is required to set up such an event conveys the *power-to* organise such a large event. Rowlands (1997) suggests that one aspect of *power-to* is exemplified when a group sets its own collective agenda. Here the community decided how the festival would be run and who would be responsible for what tasks. For example, the roles of men, women, and children were apparent at the festival. These roles also provided insight into participation. Most of the women were busy preparing and serving food; some were minding young children, meaning that most of the people waiting for the festivities to commence and catching up were men, though there were some men in charge of setting up and announcements. From the roles displayed at the festival, I observed power dynamics and relationships associated with gender and age that influenced how individuals participated. Figure 19 shows the entrance to the *kyang* when we arrived to celebrate Kathin chibor dan.



Figure 19. Entrance to kyang grounds for Kathin Chibor Dan. Source: Poon 2016

At one end of the village was the *kyang*. The *kyang* grounds had been decorated with flags and bunting. Chairs and tables were set up in the courtyard. After we removed our shoes, we walked up into the *kyang* to pay our respects to Buddha. Inside there were many gifts of food, flowers, bits of cloth, and pre-packaged monk robes surrounding the Buddha. Then we waited for the festivities to begin. A procession of monks arrived at the monastery, and then it was announced that a meal would be served. Men and foreigners were served first, then women and children. Seeing the meditative postures of the participants as they arrived in the *kyang* reminded me of ‘power-from-within’, which is the ‘spiritual strength and uniqueness that resides in each one of us’ (Rowlands 1997, p. 13). This was also reinforced when observing the collective listening to monks’ teachings later in the festival. Figure 20 shows the grounds as they were being changed from the seating arrangement during mealtime to seating arrangements for the monks’ teachings.



Figure 20. Changing set up after Kathin Chibor Dan's main meal. Source: Poon 2016

Here I learned first-hand what the participants really do, as opposed to what they say they do (Turner 1970), which complemented what was shared in interviews about their cultural and religious festivals.

Other than festivals, gatherings are a valued part of social life. Picnic (Thamapung) refers to a get-together in Rakhine (Tun 2015). In 2017, one of my local informants (Chanda) suggested we organised a picnic party after the arts-based workshops in honour of my visit. I was curious about what a picnic party entailed, but Chanda also mentioned that it was a good opportunity to organise a positive youth event. Chanda told me that parents were strict with their youth, particularly their daughters. Many families feared that their daughters would go out and end up marrying Bengali men. Because of this fear, many young girls and young women were under close guardianship of their parents. However, parents were less strict when gatherings were organised for a guest visitor.

As a result, at the end of T2 workshops, Chanda galvanised families' approval for a picnic. She also gathered a group of community members who volunteered to put the

event on. Participation in preparing for the picnic was voluntary, but most of those who came to help had either come to the arts-based workshops themselves or their children had attended. Therefore, their involvement and participation related to their relationship with Chanda but also with me. Chanda expressed *power-to* in how she approached organising the picnic; she exhibited the ‘kind of leadership that comes from the wish to see a group achieve what it is capable of’ (Rowlands 1997, p.12), what they collectively agreed upon. The group she gathered would all contribute what they could. Each agreed to pay 30 taka (AUD \$0.50) for the meal, some would help with cooking, others shopping for ingredients, others brought things like speakers, prepared a playlist of music, and so on. This exemplified the groups’ *power-with*. From Chanda’s suggestion, the action was initiated whereby individuals contributed to where and how they could and wanted to.

The Rakhine picnic gathering exhibited cultural practices that are traditionally part of the Rakhine way of life—gathering together as a unique ethnic group, eating together, and listening to some Burmese music. Food consisted of chicken biriyani or kitcheree and chicken curry, salad, and sides of shobjee (sautéed veggies) with ngapee. Ngapee is a chilli fish paste and a staple flavouring in Rakhine cooking (Tun 2015). It turned out to be a Bengali and Rakhine fusion feast! The photo below (Figure 21) shows women preparing shrimp that will be made into ngapee.



Figure 21. Preparing shrimp for ngapee. Source: Kirkby 2014

Just as the food was a fusion, so too the gathering incorporated different (new) cultural practices, such as practicing Bengali dance and listening to Bengali music. Taking in both cultures, the picnic party is a way of cultivating new practices and traditions. After eating, the music would start, and the participants took turns dancing. Most of the music played was Bengali or Hindi. The popular songs had more people dancing, some dancing specific choreography that went with the lyrics to the songs. There were a few Rakhine songs played. The Rakhine youth are influenced by Bengali pop-culture, which is informed a lot by Bollywood. The picnic party is an example of what Hillier (2015, p. 174) refers to as ‘resilience as transformation’: ‘the capacity of a system to steer away from undesirable trajectories by creatively transforming its structure’. In the face of the tension between growing up within two cultures, the Rakhine youth mitigate this by creating their own culture, which is a combination of influences from both Rakhine and Bengali cultures.

Food is central to Rakhine religious festivals and gatherings but also a gesture of hospitality. Each time I visited with Rakhine community members, they always offered me tea and snacks. Sometimes I was invited for meals. In 2016, during his time off from our work, Noen would eat *mondi* at a Rakhine noodle stand in the Taltali market. However, whenever I accompanied him, the stand either ran out of

noodles or had finished serving for the day. In 2017, one of the homes in Taltali started the business venture of making fresh *mondi* for sale. *Mondi* is a Rakhine rice noodle dish which consists of thin rice noodles served with a tamarind sauce, turmeric, and chilli powder in a *ngapee*-based broth. Every Thursday, this house would take orders from villagers and set up a restaurant outside their house. We later found out that the noodle stand in the market had closed on account of the high rental cost and that it was owned by this same family. This family showed ‘resilience as adaptation’, the capacity to adapt according to dynamic contingencies, and ‘resilience as transformation’, the capacity to steer away from undesirable trajectories by creative change (Hillier 2015). They demonstrated these types of resilience in adjusting to unfavourable outcomes of rising rental costs by setting up sales out of their home instead of at the market.

When Noen and I arrived in Taltali in 2017, we went first to visit Ching Tao Maung, the Mudbar (village leader) of Taltli, and his wife Yoyo (Auntie in Rakhine). Upon our arrival, Yoyo sent for an order of *mondi*. As I visited with Ching Tao Maung and his son Thinlen, Yoyo prepared hardboiled eggs and cut fresh coriander from the garden to serve with the *mondi* (figure 22) when it arrived. Yoyo always showed hospitality through food. During each field trip, there were several Rakhine community members that invited us over for lunch or dinner to learn more about what my research was. The expression of hospitality relates to ‘power-to’, which is an expression of generative power; the *power-to* share one’s resources free of domination, welcome another, and show respect and reciprocity.



Figure 22. *Mondi*. Source: Poon 2016

During 2017, the practice of festivals and hospitality was gravely affected by the Rohingya issue. In chapter three I outlined the Rohingya issue as an ongoing crisis affecting Bangladeshi and Burmese relations. In 2017, the tension between the Rohingya and Rakhine in Myanmar (Burma) had once again escalated, resulting in several Rohingya refugees arriving in Bangladesh. Thinlen informed me that his mother might call him weekly, even fortnightly before the Rohingya issue. However, during the height of tension relating to that matter, his mother rang him daily to ensure his safety. I asked him if he felt that the Rohingya issue increased his fear for his personal safety. He told me that he felt fine because his university peers were more educated and understood the issue. What Thinlen describes resembles a sense of ‘power-from-within’: ‘the spiritual strength and uniqueness that resides in each one of us and makes us truly human’ (Rowlands 1997, p. 13). Its basis is self-acceptance and self-respect, which extends to respect and acceptance for others as equals (Rowlands 1997). He shows a sense of power-from-within, knowing that his respect for himself and his peers was reciprocated.

Thinlen confessed that he felt the Rohingya situation made it more insecure for Rakhine women. He said that Rakhine women stand out, that Bengali men stare because the women are beautiful with their fairer skin and different facial features. The Rohingya situation further intensified unwanted attention. Thinlen feared that the security of Rakhine women would be compromised due to the actions of illiterate Bengali men who do not understand the Rohingya situation in its entirety and were acting to protect their country/land (Thinlen 2017, pers. comm.).

At the height of the Rohingya issue in 2017, the Rakhine feared attacks on their village from outsiders. In response, a temporary security squad formed in Taltli and was set up by Mudbar Ching Tao Maung. Ching Tao Maung informed me that they installed night lights throughout the village and organised a surveillance team. The team consisted of male volunteers in the village, young and old, between the ages of 18–50. The surveillance team worked around the clock on rotational shifts. Participation was voluntary, and many took part out of duty to care for their village and protect their women and children.

This surveillance team's organisation expresses 'power-to', a productive power that sometimes manifests as forms of resistance and 'power-with', 'a sense of the whole being greater than the sum of the individuals, especially when a group tackles problems together' (Rowlands 1997, p. 13). For Ching Tao Maung, his leadership (power-to lead the group to achieve a common goal) and good relationship with the *upazilas*' officials and local police (power-with, ability to collaborate) was a factor to being elected as Mudbar of the village. Taltli had been without an official Mudbar for some time. After the implementation of the security measures for their village, the villagers voted for him to take over as Mudbar.

These events and experiences I shared with the Rakhine exhibited ways in which the Rakhine enact empowerment, participation, and resilience. In the next section, I document stories of several participants I befriended over my visits. Their hospitality, openness, and livelihoods showed me how they continue to live out their culture despite changing socio-economic, cultural, and geopolitical factors. Getting to know them also gave me insight into the ways acting out empowerment, participation, and resilience are inherent in their lives. For the rest of this chapter, I

document experiences shared with five women, four of whom I spent time with over both T1 and T2.

I first met Chanda in 2014. At that time, she attended our art workshops as a participant. She was newly married and had moved with her husband to reside in Taltli. Noen had introduced me to Chanda, saying she was very good at speaking English; however, in 2014 Chanda was timid and spoke very little to me. When I met Chanda again in 2016, she had been employed as a full-time contracted field officer at Caritas. Her contract was for one year, and she was partway through her contract. She hoped she would secure her position as a field officer, but it was dependent on funding. She was part of a team of three field officers overseeing the CCU program in the Taltali *upazila*. She was also well known in the villages of Taltli and Shaton para for her success in her studies, graduating at the top of her high school and post-secondary classes. Due to this, most weeknights, students from Taltli and Shaton para would come to her house for tutoring.

Of the three field workers in Caritas Taltali, Chanda was the only Rakhine staff member. The other staff members were Bengali. Chanda became our informant, and later an assistant, connecting us with people to interview, providing her house as a space for interviews and meetings, setting up weaving classes, suggesting who would be helpful as volunteers, and helping us determine the best day to organise the arts-based workshops. She also played a large part in recruiting participants for the workshop. For example, during T1 on the day of the workshops, as we walked from Chanda's house back to Caritas to begin the community workshops, Chanda called out to the houses along our path, inviting and reminding participants to come. Chanda showed the generative and productive 'power-to' in her actions and ability to organise and mobilise people from her community.

During T2, Chanda and I spent a lot of time together chatting and exchanging stories. She told me that she was fortunate because she had a good husband. They had a love relationship (one that was not arranged), and he gave her a lot of freedom. Since his mother had passed away and his father became a monk, Chanda did not have any responsibilities or pressures from her in-laws. She became very involved in my research, integral even, opening up her house to host Noen and me for planning

activities with our volunteers. She also made a list of potential participants that she divided up among the volunteers to contact for the arts-based workshops. The way she worked with everyone showed ‘power-with’, particularly in how she collaborated with the group to work together to make decisions and tackle problems. She also wielded ‘power-over’, a controlling power as she took charge over parts of the arts-based workshops, caring for it as if it was her own project.

Several nights a small group of us would ‘hang out’ at Chanda’s house after Noen and I had finished our day of work. There we would sing songs together with Noen’s ukulele, watch television, and chat about the next day’s events relating to my research work. Chanda’s house became a central hub of activity. One evening, Chanda exclaimed, ‘I understand all that is happening here because I can understand English, Bangla, and Rakhine!’ (Chanda 2017, pers. comm.). Chanda showed ‘power-from-within’: a base of self-acceptance and respect that enabled her to respect and accept others as equals (Rowlands 1997). She was never ashamed to share that she was the top of her class, that she worked hard as a Caritas field officer, that she cares a lot for her culture and spirituality. She was never boastful, but she was proud of what she had achieved. Chanda’s attitude also represents ‘resilience as transformation’: the capacity to steer away from undesirable outcomes by creatively adjusting (Hillier 2015). She was very involved in her community and passionate about continuing their cultural practices and traditions. She shared with me that one of her dreams was to start a Rakhine art and culture centre by the *kyang* in Shaton para.

As aforementioned, Chanda was integral in connecting Noen and I with key community members for interviews and in this case, participant observation. During T1 Chanda had connected us to one of the local weavers for an interview (details of this interaction is in chapter 4). During T2, I wanted to see if that weaver might have time to teach Noen and I how to weave. However, she was away with her family for the duration of my visit. Instead, Chanda put us in touch with Mathin. At the time of T1 Mathin was visiting her children in Dhaka therefore I did not meet her. The following recalls my memory of Mathin in 2017:

‘(d)thi, nie, (d)thi, nie, (d)thi, nie’ 1,2, 1,2,1,2 ... I hear this chanting as Noen and I walk from Chanda’s house towards the brick pathway. It is dark, Chanda is walking us back towards Caritas for the night. In the direction of the voices, I can see the light from a small fire. Noen and Chanda both wander towards it. Stumbling on uneven ground, lighting my way with the flashlight on my iPhone, I follow. I arrive to see a small group of people around a fire. From what I can make out, about four people are sitting around it; two that seem to be watching and hanging out, another two are roasting rice in a large wok-like pan. Two more people are standing over an urn that looks like a giant mortar. They are both holding large wooden rods that look like giant pestles. As I watch, I see the woman who has roasted the rice over the fire pour it into the giant mortar, then the two people holding the giant pestles take turns crushing the rice. ‘1,2,1,2,’ they count as they alternate on thrashing the pestle into the mortar. This is how I first encountered Mathin. (H. Poon 2017, journal)

Mathin is 60 years old. She weaves for a living. She weaves every day all through the year even though the only season that Rakhine woven goods are in demand is in winter. She learned how to weave when she was about 15 or 16 years old and has been selling and marketing her woven goods for as long as she can remember. She enjoys weaving on a handloom. ‘Everything about weaving is hard and challenging’ (Mathin 2017, pers. comm.), but that is what keeps her interested. ‘Sometimes the thread is low quality, and it keeps breaking. When that happens, it is frustrating, and I feel I should quit. Other times the thread is good, and everything flows, and I love it and enjoy it. I get stuck into weaving, lost in it, so much so that it can bother me when people come to talk to me or tell me to go somewhere, do something else’ (Mathin 2017, pers. comm.).

Mathin describes what is known as ‘flow’, a sense that arises from the sheer pleasure of the creative process, one in which a person can be so completely absorbed that time passes without one’s noticing (Csikszentmihalyi 2014). During this flow experience, people experience their skills as matching the task’s challenges and individuals will push themselves to the limits of their capacity, both physically and mentally, to accomplish something difficult (Pollanen 2015; Tzanidaki & Reynolds

2011). Flow experiences increase feelings of mastery and autonomy, which contribute to what Rowland (1997) describes as ‘power-from-with’: a sense of spiritual strength and uniqueness. These experiences enable individuals to sense that they are participating in a valued occupation. According to Smith, Stephenson & Gibson-Satterthwaite (2013, p. 29) ‘participation in valued occupations can enhance social networks, and the restorative effects that are possible when engagement in meaningful occupations are maintained or restored’.

Mathin designs the patterns in her woven goods. She finds inspiration from the clothing she sees. She likes to follow htamee designs from Myanmar (Burma). Here Mathin exhibits resilience as ‘persistence’: the ability to cope with stress and absorb disturbance in how she continues to weave despite lessening demand. This is also demonstrated in how she maintains Rakhine culture by connecting to Burmese patterns and adding her own flare to it. She told us confidently that she would still weave even though it did not make her profit, so that she could make clothing for herself and her family.

Mathin showed ‘power-to’ in how she donated two days of her time to share the process of weaving on her handloom. I thanked her by buying her a gift of aret (local home brew) at her request. She demonstrated ‘power-over’ wielding control over her skill of weaving. She showed us all the steps: how to thread the bobbin to warping thread, threading the loom and weaving the cloth. After each demonstration, she gave us instructions in trying out the skill. Figure 23 shows the warping sticks that Mathin set up for me to wind the warp with.



Figure 23. Warping. Source: Poon 2016

Rakhine shawls are woven on handlooms but also frame looms. The frame-loom woven shawls produce a different weave. Again, through Chanda's recommendation, Noen and I spent a full day with Uchin learning how to weave on a frame loom. Uchin lives in Kalachin para. In 2016 I met Uchin when she volunteered for the arts-based workshops. Noen and I went to Kalachin para to make arrangements for the tutorial. When we arrived at Uchin's house, Uchin was busy preparing a traditional Rakhine delicacy, dried shark. Figure 24 shows Uchin preparing sharks to be dried in the sun and figure 25 shows the shark being hung to dry.



Figure 24. Uchin preparing sharks. Source: Poon 2017



Figure 25. Rakhine delicacy: dried shark. Source: Poon 2017

Dried shark is a dish that requires knowledge and skill to prepare. Small sharks are caught, gutted, cut lengthwise, and then hung out to dry in the sun. When it is time to eat, the long strips are placed in the clay pit fire to BBQ and char. Uchin prepares this shark to sell in her village. Along with a hired hand (a Bengali day worker), she was preparing the sharks to be hung out to dry. As we spoke with her about the details of the frame-loom tutorial, she invited us to have lunch with her on the tutorial day instead of walking back to Caritas in order to maximise the time we would have together.

Other than weaving, preparing food is an important skill that Rakhine women have. Food is an integral part of Rakhine culture. When we were in Amkhola para to conduct the arts-based workshop, I detected a strong smell of chilli and dried crustaceans: so strong that my eyes started to water. I asked Noen what the smell was, and he said that it was the smell of people preparing the spices and ingredients to make ngapee. According to Noen, the smell of ngapee makes him feel instantly at home. It is understood that ‘the food smells and tastes one recognises with joy from one’s childhood are universal sources of pleasure and a feeling of belonging’ (Hanssen & Kuven 2016, p. 872). This is significant because traditional food carries an important part of culture, identity, and heritage linked with particular regions and sensory qualities. In turn, food evokes a sense of ‘this is ours, this is what we grew up with’ and ‘we belong here’ (Hanssen & Kuven 2016). These feelings of identity are important as the Rakhine endeavour to keep their own culture, traditions, and practices alive.

To make ngapee, shrimp is caught, dried in the sun, and then prepared by mashing the dried shrimp with chilli and spices with a mortar and pestle. At the time of my last visit in 2017, a few households in various villages made ngapee in bulk and sold it to other Rakhine villagers. Uchin’s is one of the households. She prepares ngapee in bulk then sells it to villagers. She told us she also sells it to a distributor who brings ngapee to Barisal and Dhaka. Noen said that ngapee from this area is well known throughout Bangladesh. Uchin’s livelihood choices represent ‘resilience as persistence’, maintaining one’s identity and function without adaptation. She demonstrates that in how she makes traditional foods like dried shark and ngapee as well as weaves traditional Rakhine shawls. She sells the shawls she makes at the

Rakhine market stall that she and her husband own in Kuakata. They also sell other Rakhine goods such as clothing and beauty products from Myanmar (Burma). She expresses ‘resilience as transformation’: ‘the capacity to steer away from undesirable trajectories by creatively transforming its structure’ (Hillier 2015, p.174) by how she continues her cultural practices through selling these items and bringing in an income as she promotes her cultural goods.

Spending time with Uchin was inspiring. She showed the productive capacity of ‘power-to’ in conducting her businesses and making cultural items like ngapee, dried shark, and woven goods. She also demonstrated ‘power-with’: the ability to tackle problems together in how she collaborates with her husband in their business. She told us that she taught her husband how to use the semi-automatic loom. Her sense of ‘power-from-within’ is evident in how she conducts herself in this gentle, humble-yet-confident, hard-working manner and in how she related to us. Uchin showed us how to prepare the frame loom. The process of weaving on a frame loom requires threading the threads first at an angle on the loom and then in the opposite angle and finally across lengthwise and then width-wise on the loom. Then knots are tied at the intersections of the threads. We spent the first half of the day threading the loom. Figure 26 shows the process of weaving on a frame loom.



Figure 26. Learning to weave on a frame loom. Source: Poon 2017

For lunch Uchin prepared several curries and salad with rice for us. Among the dishes was also the dried shark and another Rakhine delicacy: pan-fried forest larvae. Noen said that forest larvae were getting rarer as it was harder to retrieve, therefore quite expensive to buy. He also said there were a few other Rakhine foods that were becoming more difficult to come by because of changes in the environment as well as changes in the law concerning gathering or hunting it. Figure 27 shows an example of fried larvae.



Figure 27. Larvae Source: Poon 2017

Though I did not get to learn how to make traditional Rakhine dishes, I enjoyed the culinary delights of Rakhine culture through hospitable invitations from some villagers I met. Noen and I also visited a couple of Rakhine markets with food stalls. At each of the instances where I enjoyed Rakhine cuisine, the food was presented with care and pride. I tried everything from curried turtle, iguana, wild boar, dried shark, larvae, fried fish to foraged wild mushrooms, homemade rice noodles (mondi), rice desserts, and greens planted in homestead gardens. Figure 28 shows an array of dishes I was served when visiting with villagers for dinner.



Figure 28. Rakhine feast. Source: Poon 2017

As shown in this chapter's earlier events and stories, food in Rakhine culture is important for nourishment, enjoyment, cultural expression, and hospitality.

However, sharing food is also one way to consult about important matters and build rapport and trust. This was my experience when inviting Chong Naeu and Aye Win to volunteer with Noen and I during T2. I first met Chong Naeu and Aye Win during the workshops in 2014. I got to know them better through the interviews during T1. They are close in age; both grew up in Taltli and are good friends.

When Noen and I reflected on improving the volunteer workshops for T2, I thought of Chong Naeu and Aye Win. Since both women had attended earlier workshops, they were familiar with the format and understood that the activity would be arts-based. I asked Noen what he thought of approaching them for volunteering for community workshops in Taltali. He agreed they would be good candidates as volunteers.

Prior to approaching Chong Naeu and Aye Win, we consulted with Chanda because she knew Chong Naeu and Aye Win better than we did. Chong Naeu was home from

Barisal, visiting for the school holidays and Aye Win was on school break from her studies at a college nearby. Chanda agreed they would be suitable as volunteers and she went with us to invite them to the volunteer workshops. I enjoyed working with Chong Naeu and Aye Win. Both were enthusiastic and brought their unique skills that helped the community workshops.

When I met her, Chong Naeu was 20-years-old and studying at the University in Barisal. She is confident and independent, showing ‘power-from-within’ in how she approaches her interactions, treating others with respect and equality. She shows ‘power-to’ in her proactivity, easily taking on leadership in the community workshops, generating participant involvement. Aye Win was 19-years-old and studying in Taltali. She was quiet and shy. Aye Win was not as proactive as Chong Naeu, but she emanates ‘power-from-within’: a quiet unyielding strength which takes her a bit of time to get involved, but once convinced is committed.

Upon talking to Noen about preparations for Kala para during T2, we once again discussed how we could improve volunteer involvement for the community workshops in Kala para. In brainstorming how we would find volunteers, I asked Noen what he thought about bringing Chong Naeu and Aye Win with us to Kala para. I felt that we had really cultivated a good relationship among our team. Everyone understood the intent and purpose of the workshops and participated comfortably in their roles. Noen’s response was ‘we can only ask’. We approached Chong Naeu and Aye Win with the idea of them travelling forward with us. Both girls were excited about the opportunity, though Aye Win was tentative. They would both have to ask for their parents’ approval, and Aye Win’s family was strict and protective. Chanda, upon hearing of this opportunity, suggested she would come along to Kala para as well. She insisted that her participation would help with getting approval from the volunteers’ parents.

Chong Naeu’s mother had invited Noen and I for dinner to thank us for the opportunity we gave her daughter in volunteering with us. However, I also sensed it was an opportunity for her to understand who we were and what my research was. Since she had built rapport and trust with Noen and I, she eventually permitted her daughter to travel with us. However, it was more challenging for Aye Win. As a

team, we went to Aye Win's house for afternoon tea to speak with her family, to get permission from Aye Win's grandmother, mother, and elder sister. Noen had prepared me by informing me that the elder sister would be the hardest person to get approval from. We spent the afternoon at the house socialising, drinking tea, and eating pan pouri (a Bengali street food) bought from the market. At last, once we assured the elder sister of Aye Win's safety and emphasised that this would be an opportunity for leadership training, she gave permission. These two things, safety and opportunity for leadership training, were important to the elder sister. This example of getting permission for Chong Naeu and Aye Win characterises the importance of relationships and trust related to participation. It took time to generate trust so that participants would not only be willing to participate, but in relation to existing power dynamics, they were able to do so. Figure 29 is a photograph of Chanda, Aye Win and Chong Naeu.



Figure 29. Chanda, Aye Win, Chong Naeu. Source: Poon 2017

Summary

In this chapter, I have addressed which cultural practices the Rakhine deem as important, how they preserve these practices and how they transmit them. I also noted the ways the Rakhine enact empowerment, participation, and resilience when continuing their cultural practices. In the introduction to this chapter, I noted that within the discourse of precarity and intersectionality is the acknowledgement that experiences of privilege and oppression can be simultaneous. Therefore, I did not want to approach my research with any assumptions one way or the other. I did not want to presume that the Rakhine are disadvantaged and vulnerable, without ability to exert power.

To examine how power is used, I borrowed from Rowlands' (1997) categorisations of power and Hillier's (2015) spectrum of resilience. Using these frameworks, I explored various experiences I shared with the Rakhine and documented what I interpreted as the ways power was enacted to express empowerment, participation, and resilience. Intersectionality guided how I observed ways in which individuals are encouraged or limited to participate. I noted how gender, age, and the sense of duty influence participation. I also noticed how relationships with participants and their families influenced their participation. Participation was more likely to happen if participants had a relationship with an event organiser, Chanda or myself. Further, having time to cultivate trust often determined if and how someone could participate.

The events I discussed that illustrate examples of empowerment, participation and resilience were Kathin Chibor Dan, the picnic gathering, noodle house, and the Rohingya situation. In each of the events, I described what they entailed, who was involved, and what ways these events exemplified an exercise of empowerment, participation, and resilience. Then I shared stories of five individuals: Chanda, Mathin, Uchin, Chong Naeu, and Aye Win. I described my interactions with each of these individuals and discussed the ways their actions showed empowerment, participation, and resilience. In summary, from observations and interviews documented in this chapter, the Rakhine experience precarity and are vulnerable to exploitation and oppression. However, despite all this, they enact power in different spheres that enable them to participate and maintain resilience.

In the next chapter, I provide detail of my interventions, the arts-based workshops, and further observations regarding empowerment, participation, and resilience.

Chapter Six: Participatory Arts-Based Workshops

Introduction

This chapter documents the arts-based activities I implemented over the course of the two field trips. These activities were used as a tool for data generation and to test if they could generate opportunities for the Rakhine to identify and change areas of their lives relating to empowerment, participation, and resilience. Here I also address one of my primary research questions: What might be learned through the implementation of an arts-based community development project? In the following chapter, I document the data collected from the arts-based workshops and semi-structured interviews. However, I first discuss participatory arts-based workshops, how I designed them, and what they were meant to achieve. Additionally, I provide a brief literature review on the use of weaving and photography as the art-forms used in arts-based workshops.

Participatory Arts-based workshops

There were several ways in which arts-based workshops fulfilled various needs within my research project. It was a non-threatening way to build rapport with the community. It was a way to show reciprocity, to offer something that could benefit participants, giving them a new skill. It also helped to engage interview participants in a deeper conversation about their daily lives, traditions, roles, values, and lifestyles, bridging some of the language barriers through collective artmaking. Also, inspired by the work of Freire (2009) and Boal (2002) (discussed in chapter 2), I planned and designed the arts-based workshops intending to enquire about and to foster levels of empowerment (see Rowlands), ‘relations of power’ (see Foucault 1984; Gemignani & Hernandez-Albujar 2019) and resilience that exist among participants. Furthermore, I had previously been trained by artists practicing Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed and was curious if other art-forms might generate similar conversations and realisations. The art mediums chosen for these workshops were weaving and photography.

In designing the workshops, I considered tenets of community-based participatory research, where the aim is to involve participants at every level of the research

project, from design to implementation. To ensure participation at every stage, I consulted Noen over Facebook Messenger for each of the workshops—when I was designing, planning, and preparing for each field trip. Once in Bangladesh, Noen and I would meet to go over the field trip and workshop plans, making relevant adjustments where necessary. By the end of T1, Chanda was included in the discussions regarding workshop preparation and implementation.

I created two versions of each workshop—first a volunteer one and then a community workshop. The volunteer workshop was intended to support those who had agreed to help with the larger community workshop. Volunteer workshops were condensed versions of community workshops and important for gauging the appropriateness of the planned approach for community workshops. The volunteer workshops were also to honour the principles of participatory research, especially as it relates to indigenous communities and women (Coombes, Johnson & Howitt 2014; Lahiri-Dutt 2017).



Figure 30. Volunteer workshop in Kala para 2016. Source: Poon 2016

Participants for the volunteer workshops during T1 were selected through Caritas staff recommendations in both Taltali and Kala para. During T2, after consulting Noen, I approached two participants from T1 to invite them to volunteer for both

locations. Throughout the volunteer workshop, volunteers were encouraged to add to, change, and give their opinion on the arts-based activity and workshop structure. For example, during T1, I was shown alternative methods to thread needles, and thread the paper looms to make production more efficient and the medallions more robust. Overall, the volunteers from both T1 and T2 agreed that the plans for the community workshop would be culturally relevant and appropriate for their communities. To show my gratitude for their participation and involvement, lunch was organised for each of the volunteer workshops and served after its completion.

Specifically, over the course of both my field trips, I prepared and facilitated a total of three volunteer workshops and six community workshops. All workshops began with formal introductions. Through Noen, I introduced myself, my research intentions, and the purpose of the workshops. Participants were informed that they could choose to opt out and leave at any point over the workshops. However, they were invited to participate in the workshops even if they did not want to be interviewed or continue as a volunteer.

The community workshops were open to all village members and held in the Caritas field offices the day after the volunteer workshops. This invitation, sent out through phone calls by Caritas staff and then propagated by word-of-mouth through volunteers, was made in the knowledge that attendance would be subject to the availability of art materials, participant interest, and ability to attend given other commitments. The weaving workshops drew the interest and participation of women and youth, while the photography workshops drew men, women, and youth.

During all of the community workshops, questions were initially prepared to generate conversation and critical-thinking discussions (see Appendix E). However, I found that writing down answers or using photography to answer questions in place of a group discussion was more culturally sensitive for this research. It mitigated the language barrier and resulted in a more efficient and accurate way of collecting data. Therefore, the workshop discussion questions were written down and circulated among the group of participants instead of being used to prompt open discussion. The workshop questions were points of connection that could be elaborated upon during the post-workshop semi-structured interviews. Workshop questions were

tailored to relate specifically to the each art-form. The following provides detail on how weaving and photography were used in these workshops.

Weaving workshops

Weaving is complex, time-consuming, intricate, process-oriented, and challenging. Traditionally women would have to take fibre from plants and or animals to spin into thread and from that thread weave into cloth. Today, although threads are purchased, the process of weaving still requires hours, if not days, for a product to be completed. Therefore, if an individual knows how to weave, it would show in the dexterity of handling the thread and following the basic weaving pattern. I was told in 2014 that weaving on a handloom has been a skill passed down generationally through the matrilineal lineage in Rakhine culture (M. Promila 2014, pers. comm.). I was interested in learning if weaving remained significant in Rakhine culture and to what extent it was still practised.

The frequency to which weaving was still practised could give some insight into the ways Rakhine culture is maintained and transmitted. The act of craft-making is in itself a continuation of tradition. For some, ‘crafting meant the transmission of cultural and intra-family traditions and skills as well as values and memories’ (Pollanen 2015, p. 67). In their study, Tzanidaki and Reynolds reported that some women felt joy, pride, and personal continuity in being able to pass down traditional craft skills and textile work to grandchildren (Tzanidaki & Reynolds 2011). Due to the complexity of weaving, I hypothesised that the ease to which participants took on this weaving application might indicate its continuing prevalence. On this basis, weaving was chosen to be one of the arts-based activities.

The weaving activity in both T1 and T2 were weaving techniques not used in Rakhine weaving. However, the basic principles are similar to their traditional weaving principles. The following photograph shows T1’s project on a paper plate loom.



Figure 31. Weaving medallions using a plate loom. Source: Poon 2016

In advance, and based on prior research on culturally relevant arts-based activities, I had developed a three-hour program of activities that would provide opportunities for participants to weave small floral medallions (T1) and braided/woven tassels, which is another method of finishing off the loose ends of woven shawls and bags (T2) (figures 32 & 33). Several factors informed the choice to produce the medallions and braided/woven tassel:

- the ease with which equipment and materials could be transported between villages by motorcycle
- the aesthetic possibilities they both had as accessories on dresses for women or shirts for men, or on hats or bags
- their potential as saleable items in local markets.

The following are images of the woven projects from both field trips.



Figure 32. Woven medallions, Rakhine workshop, trip one. Source: Poon 2016



Figure 33. Woven pendants, Rakhine workshop trip two. Source: Poon 2017

I was also told that the practice of weaving was not as prevalent as times past (person. comm., Promila, 2014). To generate critical dialogue on why this was, I prepared group discussion questions as part of the workshops. The T1 workshop questions were also intended to help assess what levels of choice and power women have in their daily lives, village(s), and culture. By acknowledging and discussing what roles women assume, I could learn about the ways they might already exert empowerment, how they participate, and how they exhibit resilience. Further, I hoped the discussion might reveal ways the women could be enabled to enact empowerment, participation, and resilience in areas where they felt limited.

For T2, I once again planned and organised a set of weaving workshops. This time, I sought to reengage the same participants from T1 in order to engage in deeper conversations on the basis that rapport and trust would have been built from my interactions with them in T1. Also, learning from T1's workshops, the questions I prepared were written on paper instead of used as group discussion questions.

Further, these questions related to their participation during T1 and if they had since implemented the project from T1 to their work/regular weaving practices.

For all of the weaving workshops, volunteers taught participants how to weave (see Figure 34 below as example), offering help where needed and, in the last half-hour, circulated the workshop questions (Appendix E). T2 volunteers recorded participants' answers in writing, and these were later translated into English by Noen. Participants who attended the community workshops were compensated for their time with tea and snacks. They were also invited to participate in post-workshop interviews after the workshop.



Figure 34. Volunteer-led community workshop in Kala para 2017. Source: Poon 2017

Critical photography

In 2017, upon reflecting on the effectiveness of arts-based workshops in fostering empowerment, participation, and resilience through critical dialogue, I wondered if using a different art-form might produce different results. Photography has an extensive history in qualitative research, and has been central to anthropology from the outset: photographs were used to show and record information found in the field (Collier & Collier 1986). However, despite the use of photography in anthropology, it was not until the 1950s when photography was used as ‘interview stimuli’

(Wagner 1978). The use of photographs to help elicit interview responses became known as photo-elicitation in a paper published by John Collier in 1957 (Harper 2002).

Along with the growing support for the use of Creative Analytic Practices (CAP) within qualitative research, the use of photographs to elicit information became more commonly practised within sociology and other social sciences (Wakefield & Watt 2014). 'Creative Analytic Practice draws on a variety of creative techniques, such as poetry and dance, to explore and gather data of participant lived experience; an experience which is socially and culturally situated' (Wakefield & Watt 2014, p. 145; see also Parry & Johnson 2007; Richardson 2000). Simply put, photo-elicitation is the insertion/inclusion of a photograph as a prompt during an interview. The inclusion of a photograph or series of photographs can help trigger memories, elicit emotions, and facilitate reflection (Reavey 2011; Rose 2012; Wakefield & Watt 2012, 2014).

The use of photo-elicitation in qualitative interviews has evolved into various research methods. For example, photo essays and photovoice are other forms or methods of photo-elicitation. I am particularly interested in photovoice. Developed by Caroline Wang and Mary Ann Burris in 1994, photovoice has a specific socio-political agenda. It aims to record and reflect personal and community strengths and concerns, as well as create critical dialogue and knowledge about personal and community issues through discussion. Born out of three distinct theoretical frameworks, photovoice is a participatory action research method that upholds values from critical consciousness empowerment theories, feminist theories, and documentary photography.

According to (Abma & Schrijver 2019) (see also Carlson, Engebretson & Chamberlain 2006; Wang & Burris 1997), critical consciousness empowerment theories are based on Freire's ideology that individual and community involvement are necessary for advancing social equity. Through critical group dialogue, an understanding and an action plan can be achieved (Freire 2009). Enabling community members by gathering them together, teaching camera skills, and then using their photographs as subjects for discussion, the photovoice method aims to

foster critical consciousness among participants (Farley, Brooks & Pope 2017). Similarly, feminist theory is grounded in the assumption that knowledge is experiential and seeks to develop a political consciousness in the face of unequal gendered relationships (Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002). Lastly, documentary photographers attempt to capture a specific group's everyday life to produce an emotional testimony of their experiences (Wu & Guoqiang 2007).

Furthermore, since its development in 1994, the photovoice method has been applied in over 30 research studies, reporting information on various health-related issues ranging from improving quality of life to living with disabilities to assessing the effects of war, to name a few (Hergenrather et al. 2009). Used as a tool to conduct needs assessments, for asset mapping and as an evaluative tool, photovoice is favoured for its flexibility. The method is useful in cross-cultural situations as it does not rely on literacy or necessarily speaking the same language. It is valued for its ability to be adapted to research on several topics. For example, photovoice has been used to explore meaning after suicide loss (Delgado & Wester 2020), to document opinions on climate-related issues (Russo et al. 2020), and health issues (Watchman et al. 2020). The underpinnings of this method align with my work's philosophical and conceptual basis as I explained in chapter 2.

However, photovoice does have limitations. Primarily, it can be very time-consuming and costly (Harley et al. 2015). For example, photovoice follows a nine-step process that includes several meetings and a series of workshops that can last months. The number of meetings, compensation, cost of rental space, and the purchase of cameras, can build up the cost of this research method. Also, photovoice begins with finding a group of policy makers before selecting the group of participants; and finishes by sharing the collected photographs and community reflections with that group of policymakers. Therefore, photovoice has a predetermined political agenda, usually formulated by the researcher(s). As such, Lacson (2014) has critiqued the use of photovoice for 'unknowingly supporting the neoliberal empowerment rhetoric of the day' (Shankar 2016) and not being participant-driven. This is to say that the photovoice process is underpinned by a power dynamic that can be disempowering to participants. Thus, the researcher needs to become educated about the political climate of the place they intend to use

photovoice. As some places have more political restrictions, and any explicit purpose of changing policy could result in grave consequences (Sutton-Brown 2014).

Given the strengths and weaknesses of photovoice and photo-elicitation methods in qualitative research, I decided to implement a version of photo-elicitation. My version incorporates elements of photovoice, but I have applied it in a manner that is culturally appropriate and is sensitive of the time and financial constraints of my research project. To avoid confusing my method with that of photovoice, I will call what I have implemented *critical photography*. Using the name *critical* is my way of paying homage to the work of Freire, who believed that critical consciousness or conscientisation is the process by which human beings become knowing subjects, achieving a deepening awareness that leads to action in transforming that given reality (Freire 2009). In critical photography, the emphasis is not on policy change but the process of critical consciousness. I was interested in how the combination of learning to use the digital camera and using photography as a method to answer practical questions might invigorate new thinking and action.

The set of critical photography workshops I conducted in 2017 had two main goals. The first was to tease out whether arts-based community projects could illuminate differences and similarities in the needs of various Rakhine villages. The second was to test if a different art-form could give voice to participants and reframe situations inducing participants to see themselves as possible solutions to what they identified as ‘problems’. There was also a third goal I wanted to fulfil, which was less related to the effectiveness of arts-based activities and aimed more towards empowerment and participation. Noen is a photographer. As I had been the guest artist and facilitator in the weaving workshops, I felt that by asking Noen to be the guest artist and facilitator for the critical photography workshops, I was passing the baton of leadership in arts-based community development back to him (i.e., back to a person from the Rakhine community).

Instead of the volunteers explaining the workshop, Noen took the lead in facilitation of the workshop. Once formal introductions were completed, Noen gave a brief talk on how to compose a photograph, what makes a good shot, and how to capture light. He also demonstrated how to use the available digital cameras I had ordered from the

United States. We then split the group into teams of three to four people to go around their village to take photographs based on our prompt questions (Appendix E). The volunteers helped ensure that participants understood their objectives and acted as technical support.

Once all the groups had reconvened, I uploaded the photos onto my laptop, and the group gathered around to watch a slide show of their photographs. Upon completion of the critical photography workshops, we put some of the cameras out as a prize from a draw to thank participants for their involvement in the workshops. The next sections of this chapter document the data generated from the arts-based workshops and interviews from T1 and T2.

Findings from T1:2016

In 2016, there were 30 participants in the arts-based (weaving) workshops: 20 were in Taltali and ten in Kala para; children were present at both, and two men attended the Kala para workshop.

Arts-based activities in Taltali

Based on Chanda's recommendation, we organised the Taltali weaving workshop to run on a Friday. Fridays and Saturdays are the weekends in Bangladesh, but many people work on Saturdays. Chanda suggested that Friday would draw in the most people as students would be out of school and most adults would have the day off. She also suggested running the workshop in the afternoon as women generally spend the mornings cooking and doing housework, freeing them up in the afternoons. We followed Chanda's recommendation, picking Friday as the day for the community workshop and Thursday as the day for the volunteer workshop.

The three volunteers that Chanda recommended were students aged 14, 15, and 17 whom she regularly tutored—one boy and two girls. The boy stayed for half of the workshop but left saying he had to do work his family. He did not return to complete the volunteer workshop, nor did he return to help out with the community workshops. The two girls (aged 14 and 17) stayed the volunteer workshop's entirety and attended the community workshops. Despite their young age, they were

prepared, mastered the art activity, and showed good leadership skills. They spoke clearly and at an audible volume when teaching the weaving activity, welcomed new participants as they arrived, and took the initiative to help participants who struggled.

Before noon on the day of the community workshops in Taltali, Noen and I walked from the Caritas guest house to Chanda's house. It was a religious holiday, and she had invited us for lunch to celebrate before the scheduled workshop. While we were walking, Noen stopped and stared intently at the sky. I mentioned to him that the atmosphere felt really oppressive. It was muggy, and the air felt thick. The sky was a yellowy grey and looked like city smog, which I had not seen before in this area. Noen said to me, 'I think a cyclone is coming. The sky looked like this before Cyclone Sidr' (Noen 2016, pers. comm.). 'What happens if a cyclone comes?' I asked Noen. 'Well, we will see, but it might mean we cannot travel to Kala para,' he answered (Noen 2016, pers. comm.).

The rain came later that afternoon, but only lightly as we walked back to Caritas after lunch to prepare for the community workshop. Despite the rain, we had 19 participants. There were a few who brought small children with them. The room was bustling once everyone arrived. The women appeared to enjoy the activity, working industriously on their floral medallions, scanning the table of materials for bits of yarn, wool, and cloth they wanted to use to make their unique medallion. Most participants exhibited familiarity with weaving and textile arts, but some struggled and took a longer time to learn the technique. Those who struggled with the activity were supported by the volunteers and their friends sitting next to them.

Workshop questions were prepared initially as discussion questions. However, during the implementation of T1's community weaving workshops, it was evident that my intention to discuss the significance of weaving and women's roles while learning a new output of weaving was not feasible. One of the main reasons was that participants arrived at separate times; a large proportion came later than the advertised starting time. Further, many trickled in throughout the rest of our workshop time, which made it difficult to conduct a group discussion with interpretation—new arrivals had to be caught up with what had already been said.

As a result, the discussion questions were written in Bangla on paper and circulated the room while participants worked on their woven medallions. The questions were written in Bangla because most of the participants, including the volunteers, Noen and Chanda, did not write in Rakhine. Those who were illiterate in Bangla were supported by Chanda and Noen to help document their answers. Chanda had volunteered to oversee participants answering the questions because she felt the task would be too complicated for the volunteers to worry about on top of teaching the weaving activity.

Writing down the answers for the questions instead of engaging in a group discussion greatly affected the ability to create a space for critical dialogue. The challenges of working cross-culturally, not speaking Rakhine, and having people arrive at varying times also made it difficult to discuss problems and enter dialectical conversations indebted to Freire's praxis. Nonetheless, I was able to see that most of the participants still possessed a familiarity with weaving skills, learn about Rakhine women's daily lives, and hear what they felt about weaving. I asked the women four questions during the workshop; the following paragraphs summarise their responses.

The first question was: What are some daily tasks women do? Participants listed that women collect water, work at shops, look after livestock, work for NGOs, do manual labour jobs, tailor, are responsible for household chores, care for their husbands, children, and in-laws, weave, study, cook, and pray.

To inquire about how women in Rakhine culture exert power, I asked two questions on women's decision-making. The first: What are some decisions women make at home? The answers revealed that women make decisions on how clean their house is kept, on the nutrition of themselves and their families, on family business affairs, child-rearing, their children's education, and budgeting. The second question: What are some decisions women make in the village? revealed that women make decisions on the food brought to the *kyang*, on what crops should be planted in their homestead gardens, on wedding festivities, on how to improve the village, on festivals planning, and on CCU related affairs.

The last question I asked pertained to weaving. Responses to: Why is weaving important? showed that weaving is important because it gives a sense of self-sufficiency; it provides clothing and protection; it expresses cultural identity and tradition and is a source of income.

Once the community workshop was completed, Noen and I collected mobile numbers and consent for interviews from participants. We invited those who were available after the workshop to stay and others to come back the next day. About five participants stayed to be interviewed, and the rest of the participants verbally agreed they would see us the next day. As I interviewed the first woman, the rain picked up, and the rest of the women started becoming anxious about getting back to their homes. They suggested they would come back the next day should the rain clear up.

The next day, the sky was dark, and the rain was heavy. We waited in the Caritas building, but no one came. Noen informed me that the government had issued a cyclone warning. I asked him what the warning meant for our safety, for the chances of our interviews to happen, and for our travel to Kala para. Noen said that at the level of warning that was issued, we were quite safe. In the event of the warning level increasing, we would be safe because we were staying in the Caritas guest house, which was conveniently also the local cyclone shelter! He said that it was likely that our interview appointments would not be kept because people would probably not come out into the rain. As for our trip to Kala para, he said we would have to wait and see.

In light of our situation, Noen and I discussed some options. I asked him if it was safe for us to go to the villages to find the participants and interview them there. He said it was likely fine as long as I did not mind getting wet. He phoned Chanda to deliberate. Chanda offered to let us use her house to host the interviews. She suggested that using her home would increase success in having participants attend interviews as they would not feel burdened to prepare their house for my visit. She also said that her house was very central to most of the people we wanted to interview.

I was grateful to Chanda for her offering. When we arrived at her house, Chanda notified us that the cyclone warning had risen from level three to five. She asked me if I was scared. I told her I wasn't sure how to feel because I was not familiar with cyclones. I asked her how she felt about the warnings, if she was scared, and she laughed and said no. 'There are often cyclone warnings this time of year. We are quite far from the coast, so we are safer. I will not worry until I have to run from my house!' (Chanda 2017, pers. comm.). Thanks to Chanda, we conducted seven interviews in Taltali. Those who participated weathered the heavy rain to join us at Chanda's house. Findings from interviews are summarised in a later section after my descriptions of the arts-based workshops in Kala para.

Arts-based activities in Kala para

The cyclone warnings and rains subsided and Noen and I could travel to Kala para (albeit a day later than planned). There, our local informant was the Caritas field director who is Rakhine. Before our arrival, upon speaking with the head office in Barisal, the field director took the initiative and invited four volunteers from cooperative credit union groups to join our volunteer team. In advance, he had also arranged the date and time for the volunteer workshop. Noen and I were grateful for his organised manner; however, despite his attempts to be organised, the volunteers did not arrive for the workshop until an hour after the planned start time. Nonetheless, Noen and I met with the volunteers to go through our planned volunteer workshop.

The Caritas field officer also scheduled the community workshop. He organised it to be held the day after the volunteer workshops. On the day of the workshop, many arrived late. Noen and participants who had arrived earlier insisted on waiting for everyone else to arrive. In the end, we started the community workshop around 75 minutes later than the planned time. There were ten participants in total. Two others arrived after we had commenced the workshop. Unfortunately, during the community workshop, Noen and I found the volunteers to be not very helpful. Several of them arrived after the participants, and instead of taking leadership in explaining the art activity, questioned the process of the workshop. One volunteer asked why the community workshop was the same as the volunteer workshop.

Others needed to be redirected many times to remind them of what I had thought was the prior agreed upon role we had discussed in the volunteer workshop. As the workshop questions were passed around, one of the volunteers exclaimed, 'If you want to know what we do as women, why don't you come to our village and see?' (Madu 2016, pers. comm.). She had a point; but she had also missed the point of the community workshop.

I found it really challenging to impart Freire's praxis when I felt so frustrated with the apparent confusion among the volunteers and the late start of the workshops. Again, translation and interpretation made it challenging to create dialectical conversation and problem-probing dialogue. It was apparent that Noen and I were confused about what happened and baffled at the difference from the Taltali community workshops. I thought we had been explicit about the purpose of the volunteer workshop and the volunteer's role in the community workshop. We had consulted the volunteers during their workshop regarding the community workshop's activities, the start time for the community workshops, workshop questions, and structure and they had all confirmed that what was organised would be appropriate.

According to Noen, they had shown understanding when he had checked in with them about their role as volunteers. Noen later told me that he thought it was related to what the Caritas field director had communicated to them before the workshop. Contact with the Kala para field director was much less collaborative than our interaction with Chanda. He had received notice from Caritas Barisal that a researcher would be coming, and there would be two workshops. I do not think he understood our objective. He was busy and after informing us that he had organised the volunteers and the two workshop dates, I did not see him much for the rest of my stay. However, this experience resulted in important learning for me in relation to fieldwork preparation and volunteer selection/training for T2.

Despite confusion with the volunteers, Noen and I could still facilitate the weaving workshop and ask participants on their thoughts about women's roles and weaving. Responses to: What are some daily tasks women do? were that women participate in religious programs, pray, send children to school, weave, and cook. Regarding how power is exerted among Kala para participants, some decisions women make at

home include decisions on their weaving, on their garden, on children's education, on nutrition, on taking care of livestock, and on the maintenance of the household. Decisions women make in the village included making food for festivals and festival planning. Lastly, responses to: Why is weaving important? revealed that weaving gives weavers a sense of purpose, source of income, and is a way to continue tradition.

Noen contacted participants the following two days after the community workshops, and we arranged to travel to meet them for interviews. Travelling for the interviews, allowed me to visit and see their villages. We visited Kalachin para and Amkhola para and spent most of our time interviewing and walking around these two villages. There were, however, three participants—a volunteer, a mother, and her daughter—from Nayori para. Not much time was spent in Nayori para itself, we went only to the volunteer's home and conducted interviews there. Since we went to each of the villages, Noen and I managed to interview all ten participants from the community arts-based workshops.

Taltali and Kala para's workshop responses gave me an idea of what women did in their daily lives. My observations reinforced some of these responses during the time I spent in the villages. I did notice one main difference between the villages in Kala para to Taltali: more women in Kala para were still weaving as a form of income and livelihood than in Taltali. This was further confirmed during interviews with participants after community arts-based workshops.

Findings from T1 interviews

From these interviews in Taltali and Kala para I learned about each participants' daily life, including their paid work. Understanding their daily lives gave insight into the role women play in Rakhine culture. The participants I interviewed ranged from ages 12 to 60, representing a range of life experiences. Interview participants' accounts gave context and elaborated on findings collected from the questionnaire during the arts-based workshop. The interview questions were meant to dig deeper into how the Rakhine enact empowerment, participation, and resilience through looking at each participant's experience of the workshop, their roles in their

community/women's roles in their community, their thoughts on women's roles, the work they do, the work for which they are monetarily compensated, and their free time. Questions about weaving provided insight on its practice, frequency, and significance.

The interviews revealed the ways Rakhine women enact 'power-over' (defined by Rowlands [1997, p. 13] as 'controlling power, which may be responded to with compliance') their households in terms of cooking, cleaning, and gardening, caring for livestock, and child-rearing. They enact 'power-to' (productive power) to do paid work as NGO workers, landowners, midwives, tailors, and weavers. They also demonstrate 'power-to' study in university, care for in-laws, collect water, participate and organise religious festivals, organise wedding festivities, and contribute to their villages' development. They practice 'power-with' in terms of how they cook together to put on festivals and share and exchange food with one another's families. One participant's comment, 'Women work together with their husbands,' is another example of 'power-with'.

They embody 'power-from-within' in daily prayer, practicing Buddhism, and cooking to bring food to the *kyang*. Power-from-within was also demonstrated in comments women made regarding how they felt about being women in Rakhine culture. The following comments exemplify a sense of self-acceptance and self-respect which extends to respect and acceptance for others as equals (Rowlands 1997):

I am proud to be a woman in Rakhine culture!

Men and women are equal.

Rakhine women enjoy more independence than Bengali women.

If a woman wants, she can do anything!

Women contribute towards provision for their family.

Most interview comments reflected that women's roles were important and valued in Rakhine culture. One of the male participants exclaimed that 'the role of women is very important in Rakhine culture'. However, one participant divulged that: 'Women still need more equal opportunities'.

From these interviews, I learned that weaving is still an important cultural practice and skill. In Taltali, out of the seven interviewed, only three participants knew how to weave, and none of them wove for a living. Two participants had paid work. In Kala para, all ten participants could weave, including the two men. All the women who wove profited from their weaving. All participants said they learned to weave from a female in their lives—grandmother, mother, or wife. Participants reported that the winter months from November to January was the time of year when weaving happened and when most woven goods sold. Participants shared that they inherited parts, if not all, their loom from their mothers or grandmothers. Lastly, participants reported that 200–300 taka profit was common for the shawls they sold. All this information was similar to what was reported by the weaver I interviewed in Taltli.

Reflections from T1

There were several lessons I learned from facilitating the workshops in T1 that informed my preparation and planning for T2. Two main reflections from T1 influenced my planning for T2. The first reflection from T1 had to do with the volunteer workshops. The purpose of involving volunteers was to invite feedback towards the workshop themes and process before involving the community. It was an attempt to involve local participation in leadership. It was evident with some of the outcomes of the volunteer workshops from T1 that the volunteers did not understand the purpose of the volunteer workshops, nor did they understand the community workshops' the full intent.

Due to reflection on how the volunteer training went in T1, I prepared a specific training for Noen on volunteer workshop material during our fieldwork preparation meetings in T2. I made him a folder identical to mine with copies of my workshop plans, interview questions, trip itineraries, and other documents. During T1, I had given Noen various copies of documents as we discussed it. However, giving him all the documents at once in an organised folder, appeared to trigger Noen's involvement in the project as I noticed he was more invested in my research in T2—often referencing back to the folder to consult fieldwork plans. Also, I learned that if I were not explicit in what those metaphors were and not clear with how Noen

understood those metaphors, it would be lost completely in translation. This was particularly important for the critical photography workshop. Additionally, I made sure I paid close attention to the interpretation process during the volunteer workshops, trying to ascertain as much information and feedback as I could from volunteer expressions and body language.

The second reflection was regarding creating opportunities for critical dialogue in order to generate opportunities for empowerment, participation, and resilience in a cross-cultural setting in which I could not speak the local language. In mulling over this barrier, I was inspired to look at using other art forms in the arts-based workshops. Thinking back on T1, I recalled the boy in Shaton para who was so adamant about setting up his Facebook page while Noen and I were visiting with the family who were making us papaya salad (details in chapter 4). After I left Bangladesh in 2016, I had connected with many of the younger participants on Facebook. Looking on their Facebook pages through my Facebook newsfeed, most of the photos featured were often selfies. This piqued my curiosity about using photography as another art form for the workshops in T2.

As discussed, when I read about photovoice as a participatory method, I became convinced that using photography would create opportunities for critical dialogue. I also wondered if using photography might generate more interest and involve more individuals from the Rakhine community in the workshops. The weaving workshops, though open to both men and women primarily attracted female participants. I was interested in how a photography project could inspire critical dialogue, give voice, incite participation, and increase feelings of empowerment amongst the Rakhine communities despite the language barrier.

Upon discussing this workshop plan with Noen, he became excited about the prospect. He said it was a new idea for him and was happy to share his passion—photography. I shared the project plan of teaching participants how to use the digital cameras I had bought with him. Then I shared with him that the task would require participants to understand how images could be metaphors and symbols to answering literal questions. For example, to answer the question: What are good things that happen within your village? one could picture the local shop. Noen was intrigued by

how participants might respond to the three questions asked of them through photographs. Initially, he was sceptical, not fully understanding how the questions could be answered with photographs. However, as I gave him examples and further explained how photographs could be metaphors, he agreed that it would be an interesting project to try out.

Findings from T2:2017

In 2017, I facilitated once again a weaving workshop, this time with the addition of the critical photography workshops. There were 58 participants in all; 36 in the critical photography workshops (comprising 19 in Taltali and 17 in Kala para); 22 in the weaving workshops: comprising 15 in Taltali (with eight participants who had come in T1) and seven in Kala para. There were no participants from T1 who attended the T2 Kala para weaving workshops.

Weaving and Critical Photography workshops in Taltali

In 2017, after discussing our volunteer experiences in 2016, Noen and I selected the volunteers Aye Win and Chong Naeu. On the day of the volunteer workshop, Noen and I spent the morning going through the art activities with Aye Win and Chong Naeu (see figure 35). In order to understand the metaphors that the art activities hold, is was, we thought, imperative that one must experience them for themselves. The metaphors must be explained explicitly, or the intended meaning stands to be lost. We went through the activity for the critical photography first. As Noen explained the objective of the activity and the use of photographs to answer the three questions I had prepared, it was apparent to me on the faces of the two volunteers that they did not quite understand how to use photographs to answer these three questions.



Figure 35. Volunteer training 2017. Source: Poon 2017

As Noen finished outlining the intentions behind the workshop, and the girls had learned how to use the cameras, I had a strong feeling that they still did not understand how to use photography in this way. Indeed, their first round of photographs confirmed my intuition. I asked Noen to confirm their understandings of what the task was. Through Noen, I also gave more examples of what photographs they might take to answer the questions. Upon reiterating the purpose of the critical photography activity, and how to use photography in this way, the volunteers began to understand the purpose and the metaphor of the activity.

When Aye Win and Chong Naeu returned the second time from taking photographs in their village, we copied the photos to my laptop and looked at them together. There were images of the new shop and an elder teaching a young person the Rakhine language. The photographs clearly depicted some things that were good in their village. As for things that needed improvements, they had pictures of fences that needed repair, and the garden in the *kyang* grounds that needed maintenance. Responses to ways in which they could contribute included photographs of them working in the garden and pumping water for a village member who was doing their

laundry. We ended our session with a discussion about what they experienced and learned and if they felt it was a relevant activity for the community workshop. It was confirmed that the critical photography workshops could generate experiences of empowerment, participation, and resilience.

According to the volunteers, before this activity they did not realise the advantage of having the new Rakhine market stall among other new improvements in their village. They said that this activity helped them realise the good things in their village and how new improvements have contributed to their wellbeing. Specifically, Aye Win shared that she sweeps the road every day in front of her house. Since it is a chore assigned to her, a task she has done every day for as long as she can remember, it has become mundane, a task that she ignores. However, after this art activity, she realised the value of the task and that she could contribute more by fixing up the road as she cleans it.

The volunteers agreed that village life is slow and can be mundane. This project encouraged them to see everyday things in a new light; they learned how they have a part in making their village and community a better place. Based on their experience in the volunteer workshop, both volunteers agreed it would be a relevant activity for the community workshop. The community workshops ran on two consecutive days following the volunteer workshop, and we conducted all interviews after the workshops.

In Taltali, of the 19 participants for the critical photography community workshops, 11 were female and eight were male. The oldest participant was 27 years of age. The youngest was 12 years of age. The younger participants were all paired with older group members to respond to the questions asked of them. I capped my numbers for participants in the workshops at 20 participants. Due to limitations based on budget and luggage space/weight (I had ordered cameras from America and brought them over from Australia), I only had ten cameras.

Noen and I facilitated the critical photography workshop and then sent the participants to collect photographs in their groups. Most of the participants went to Shaton para to collect images, though some walked over to Taltli. As we walked

around the villages, I watched as the volunteers checked in with the participants and gave them ideas about how to answer questions with photographs. It was clear that our reflections from T1, and the actions we took in response to these reflections, had worked. The volunteers understood the purpose of the art activity and workshops, and they took the initiative. Once all the participants had returned from collecting photographs, we reconvened as a group to look at all the photographs on my laptop. Participants agreed that they appreciated the new experience. There were several who mentioned that they were familiar with photography for ‘selfies’, but this was different. They enjoyed learning how to compose a picture and agreed that it was good to improve their own village.

The three questions comprising the interviews encouraged participants to notice good things in their villages, notice what needed improvement, and understand how they could contribute. Looking at their village through the camera lens was a metaphor for looking at their village with a new lens—a critical lens. In answer to the first question—What are good things that happen within your village?—participants photographed newly paved roads, the school’s proximity to their village, the proximity of the market, repaired fences and homes, solar power panels, Rakhine language classes in session, public toilets, the pond, homestead gardens, tube wells, and the new shop at the entrance of the village.

To answer the second question—What are things that can improve in your village?—they photographed broken roads, run-down areas on the *kyang* grounds, abandoned land, rubbish on the streets, broken tube wells, and the frequency to which strangers (specifically Bengalis) entered their village. In response to the third question—How can you help improve these things?—participants responded by photographing themselves caring for *kyang* grounds, helping with warping threads, pumping water for others at tube wells, cleaning the pond, teaching Rakhine to kids, planting new plants in abandoned land, picking up rubbish, and fixing broken roads. In all the photographs, participants depicted themselves doing the tasks as opposed to having someone else stand in for them.

The weaving workshop took place the day after the critical photography workshops. The workshop’s intention was to draw the same participants from T1 in order to find

out if they were still weaving and if they had implemented the activity from T1 into their weaving practice. Fifteen participants attended the weaving workshop; other than Chanda and the volunteers, eight participants were from T1. This time I was prepared, asking the four questions in writing (see Appendix E) of all participants. What I found is as follows: participants from T1 remembered the weaving project and did apply the project or skills learned from the project to their woven goods. Eight participants had made the floral medallion since the T1 workshop, but none of them used the woven medallion as an item they could make a profit with.

The T2 group spent the afternoon working on their projects. At the end of the session, Noen photographed each participant with their finished project. We then made sure to get the contact numbers of participants to arrange interviews for the following day(s). Lastly, we thanked everyone for their participation with tea and refreshments at the end of the workshop.

Weaving and Critical photography workshops in Kala para

After some discussion and organisation, it was decided collectively that Chanda, Aye Win, and Chong Naeu would accompany Noen and me to Kala para. We all met at Caritas and a small entourage of Caritas staff, parents, and friends who had worked closely with Noen and I came to say goodbye. After handshakes and hugs, the five of us boarded a motorised rickshaw, and we began our trip to Kala para. The weather was sunny and cool with clear skies. We drove through rice paddocks and farmland, passing also forested areas and other villages. With the wind in our hair and Noen playing the ukulele in the front seat, Chanda exclaimed, ‘My country is beautiful! I love the rice paddies and smell of the air!’ (Chanda 2017, pers. comm.).

Upon arriving in Kala para, I discovered we would be sharing the guest house with a group of NGO representatives from Cupping and ILO. The place was bustling, and it became clear right away that there might be some scheduling conflicts between the groups. Noen had also neglected to inform me that he helped that group to organise their consultation for the next day, coordinating launch tickets, travel plans, and accommodation at Caritas while he was with me in Taltali. Since he was aiding that group with travel arrangements, Noen was inundated with logistical questions and

administration for that group when we arrived. We decided that he would take the day off to work with them. Meanwhile, I would go with the rest of our team to Kuakata to visit Chanda's cousin Uchin and the beach. Noen agreed he would find out when a proper time and place would be for running our two workshops while staying at Caritas. I noted that the critical photography workshop would work better in a village than at the Caritas' office.

When we reconvened as a group, Noen updated us with times and places for our workshops. I found working at the Kala para Caritas office more challenging than in Taltali. The team in Taltali had more women in it; other than Chanda, there was another Bengali woman on staff. As well, the field director there always acknowledged my work, speaking to me through Noen. However, the dynamic at Kala para was vastly different. The team there are all men and all Bengali. The Rakhine field director who was there in 2016 was promoted to the ICDP-Rakhine position in Barisal in 2017 and his position had yet to be replaced. Therefore, at the office there was no clear director to whom I could refer. Getting information was a process of asking Noen and Noen doing the legwork, as opposed to Noen interpreting for me as I spoke with whomever was in charge. This dynamic affected organisation of the workshops. Nonetheless, with Noen's help we secured a space for the critical photography workshop at the Mudbar's house in Amkhola para. We decided to keep the weaving workshops at the Caritas office so participants from Kalachin para would not be discouraged from taking part due to having to travel to a different village.

The critical photography workshop took place in Amkhola para a few hours after the Cupping and ILO consultation. Noen and I had invited participants from the consultation, and the Mudbar from Amkhola para also invited community members from his village. Of the 17 participants for the critical photography workshop, eight were female and nine were male. The eldest participant was in their late 50s, and the youngest was seven. Just as we did in Taltali, the younger participants were paired with older group members to respond to the questions.

After introductions and explanations, the group walked throughout their village to take photographs. Chong Naeu and Noen went with the participants, but Aye Win

hung back. She said to me she felt quite tired from all the travel. I suggested she spend the time preparing the names for the draw instead. She agreed and found a quiet spot in the house to write participants' names onto small pieces of paper. When everybody returned, we copied their photos onto my laptop. One group had some issues with using the camera and had erased all their photos. We sent them out to retake them.

An electric excitement rippled through the groups when we set up the slideshow. In the closing part of the group process, many expressed gratitude for learning how to compose photographs and learn that they could use photography for other means than just taking selfies. Many expressed that they had not known they could use photography in this way; i.e., to tell stories of their experiences. One participant exclaimed: 'This is a more impactful way to show government officials what needs to happen in our village!' Two tube wells that had been installed were no longer working, and when they had asked for government support in restoring them, they were met with silence. The Mudbar also noted that using photography could help him remember the village's various needs. At the end of the workshop, with the help of Aye Win, I drew names for participants to win three of the eight cameras.

The same three questions were given to participants in Kala para as Taltali. Responses for—What are good things that happen within your village?—included women weaving, having electricity, having a rainwater drum, the village cultural group, the plaque that marks village history, homestead garden, tube wells, and the shop at their village's entrance. To answer—What are things that can improve in your village?—participants photographed abandoned buildings, broken roads, overgrown gardens, semi-automatic looms (acquiring more of them), rubbish on the ground, public toilets (having more private toilets), and broken tube wells. Lastly, when asked how they might improve things, participants photographed themselves planting new plants in gardens, cleaning up rubbish, and fixing broken roads.

I had two main goals for the critical photography workshops: to find similarities and differences between the Rakhine villages I visited, and to see if the activity could act as a catalyst in getting participants to see themselves as solutions to what they identified as 'problems'. The critical photography activity illuminated many

similarities between the villages, however it also revealed different strengths the villages had and different priorities concerning their needs. For example, Amkhola para has a music and culture group, whereas Taltali and Shaton para do not. Participants in Amkhola para showed in their images the desire for more private toilets at their homes, however for residents in Taltali and Shaton para, most of them had access to home latrines. In terms of whether the critical photography workshops were a useful catalyst for participants to see themselves as ‘solutions’, this was evident in how they photographed themselves solving the problems they’d identified. Comments from both Taltali and Kala para workshops conveyed that participants benefitted from the critical photography workshop.

Just as in Taltali, the weaving workshop took place the day after the critical photography workshops. Over the days leading up to the workshop, I had asked Noen and Chanda to help me phone the participants from T1. Initially, seven of the ten participants said they would come, but only one participant showed up on the day of the workshop. He was one of the volunteers from T1, also the CCU federation president and an elder in Kalachin para. Unfortunately for him, he was the only participant who arrived. We waited with him for 30 minutes. Noen informed me that he had spoken with the Mudbar of Amkhola para and that participants were coming from that village. After 45 minutes, no one else had arrived. I thanked our one participant for coming, gave him the snacks we had prepared for the group as a token of thanks and told him we did not want to waste his time any further. He agreed, saying he had to leave anyway. However, we arranged a time to meet with him the following day to interview him about his position as village elder in Kalachin para as well as the CCU federation president.

The participants from Amkhola para did not arrive until two hours later. We were not able to reengage any of the participants from T1. All the participants who arrived were between ages 15 to early 20s. After introductions, Chong Naeu and Aye Win explained the weaving activity. It was interesting to see the increased confidence they displayed compared to the first community workshop they co-facilitated with myself and Noen. They took the initiative to make sure all participants understood the activity, stayed on track (time management-wise), and completed the project within the time given. They also took the time to build rapport with participants as

they showed them how to make the woven activity. Since the participants had come so late in day, we were aware of the time, aiming to finish before dark so travel back to their village was easier.

Since none of the participants were the same as in 2016, the workshop questions I had prepared were irrelevant. Instead, Noen and I took down the names and contact details of participants and informed them we would come to Amkhola para the following days to interview them.

Findings from Critical Photography Interviews

There were three themes I focused on during the critical photography workshop. These related to the participants' workshop experience, how technology influences their lives and culture, and how community development occurred in their villages. When asked about their experiences, many participants reported that they enjoyed learning to use the camera in this context. Everyone interviewed shared that they were familiar with taking photos on their phones of themselves or other people. However, this was the first time they took photographs to relay a message. Also, several participants said that this was their first time using a digital camera to take photos. Besides enjoying the arts-based activity itself, several reported that this activity inspired them to see that they could contribute to changes in their own communities. Some statements about how this activity inspired a new perspective include:

This activity helped me see everyday things in a new light. Village life is simple and slow, and it can easily become mundane. I can become apathetic; this activity helped me notice good things about my village and how I am a part of making my village better. (Ayewin 2017, pers. comm.)

This activity caused me to explore many things in the village that I had not looked closely at before. It helped me notice what has changed and what can still be improved. (Moe kyaw 2017, pers. comm.)

From this activity, I learned how to improve the village. Before, I never cared or noticed. This photovoice project helped me realise the needs around my village. (Ushohun 2017, pers. comm.)

I never realised that photos could tell a story and be used for community development. (JoJo 2017, pers. comm.)

These statements convey that participants were able to engage in some level of critical dialogue using the camera. Through naming good things, things that needed improvement, and finally how they could contribute, participants started noticing how they can play a larger part in their own communities.

The Mudbar of the village in Kala para (who hosted the workshop at his house but also took part in the workshop) shared how this project had given him a tool for solving some of the community's problems. For example, photographs of broken tube wells and other needed improvements helped him to remember to address these things. The photographs of the needed improvements also saved him time; he now did not have to physically look at items' villagers reported as needing change. He could refer to photographs and ask community members to photograph any needs. This allowed him more time to think of how he could fix the varying issues.

I inquired about how technology influenced daily life because I was interested to see how technology might affect the transmission of Rakhine culture. In response to questions regarding how technology has affected daily life, participants responded that technology allowed for increased communication, electricity, mobile phones, internet access, the ability to take selfies to send to family members in different villages, transportation, food sanitation and storage, access to Bollywood and Hollywood movies, as well as access to music and other media. Participants noted that they are reliant on technology. They listed that getting electricity to their villages has changed their lives, particularly with listening to the radio, watching television, and refrigerated food. They talked about how the mobile phone helped them stay connected with family living in other parts of Bangladesh. Many also talked about the internet and their access to more information, particularly movies, music, and Facebook.

Some participants listed negative effects of technology, in relation to media, saying that it was a distraction from study. In fact, it was interesting for me to observe that another reason why Chanda's house is the hub of activity is that she has electricity, access to the internet, and cable TV. During our downtime after a day of work, people would quickly visit to connect to Chanda's Wi-Fi and check their Facebook, emails, and other social media. Also, there was frequent references to Bengali and Hindi pop-culture and Western pop-culture as conversations would arise about the latest YouTube video that was circulating.

Since the three workshop questions were intended to be a catalyst for social action or change, I was interested in the process of that action or change. When asked if making a change was easier as one person or in a group, all participants interviewed replied that it was easier to make changes in a group. When asked how participants start a change, participants divulged four different answers on where to air concerns and how to start improvements in the village. Most would start with talking to their village Mudbar and elders. However, depending on the scale of community improvements, participants shared they would either do it with their friends and family or participate in a community group appointed by the village Mudbar. Two participants said that they would start the change themselves. One of the two was the village Mudbar of Kala para, but the other was a young man new to Taltli. He had moved from a different village to study in Taltali. He was living in the monastery and showed himself to be quite proactive. He took many photographs of himself helping around the village and explained that he was not only posing for the photograph, but he was also helping and doing those activities when his partner photographed him. He had pictures of himself cleaning the roads, tutoring kids to learn Rakhine, cleaning the pond, and pumping water for a man who was using the tube well for a shower.

Findings from T2 Taltali Weaving interviews

For the weaving interviews, I prioritised speaking with those whom I had interacted with in T1. Since I was interested in delving into deeper conversations with participants, I used the interview questions as prompts but allowed participants to

drive the conversations. Three participants' stories illustrate how they perceive Rakhine culture and tradition is expressed and continued.

Thaung Nynt Cime did not come to the workshops in 2016 because she was working at an NGO at the time. She heard about the workshops through her daughter Chong Naeu. She really enjoyed the 2017 workshop and believes that the skills learned and products produced can be sold for commercial use if practised and perfected. She particularly liked how the workshop brought young and old together, which she felt is good for bonding and unity. She expressed that it was beneficial for villagers to gather as a group as she felt that one of the main problems for the Rakhine is that they are not very united. Thaung Nynt Cime also noted that group activities could improve women's conditions and place in society through the collective generation of ideas for better income particularly around weaving. She noted that the Rakhine did not have good marketing strategies for their products and that there were many inherent barriers for women that make it difficult for them to get ahead.

Thaung Nynt Cime felt their culture is governed by a superstition that prevents them from advancing or changing. She observed that a lot of girls were not even allowed to go outside (leave their houses) as their parents are afraid that they might meet a Bengali man and marry out of their culture and religion. Others, she said, will not allow their daughters, wives, daughters-in-law to work, even though they are educated, for fear that work might take away from childcare and care for in-laws. I asked her how she had the opportunity to study and get these ideas about equal opportunities for women. She said she was always interested in studying since she was a child. Her father did not encourage her to study, but her mother did. After she finished primary school, she moved to Taltali to study. There she finished high school and met her husband. Her in-laws discouraged her from continuing study. However, once she had her baby, she thought of how she would support her kids and how she wanted to give them a life she did not have. These thoughts inspired her to find work and continue her studies. She finished her bachelor degree in humanities and is currently working on her master's degree in social sciences. She encourages her children to get out and see the world. She was incredibly grateful for the opportunity for her daughter to volunteer with the workshops.

Thaung Nynt Cime believes that gender imbalance must be addressed to improve things in their community. She recognises that education is helpful but access to income is needed to further equality between men and women. Now that she has time off work, she tries to engage in conversations with her neighbours about giving their daughters more opportunities. She says they listen with deaf ears. She hopes that by giving her own daughter opportunities and support to learn about the world, she will be an example to others in her community. She also hopes to see the Rakhine unite more and learn to work together as a stronger unit and community. She brought up how the Rakhine did not celebrate their lantern festival this year due to the Rohingya issue. 'It is our culture to light lanterns during that festival, but we did not stand up; instead we are passive and non-united' (person. Comm., Thaung Nynt Cime, 2017).

Thaung Nynt Cime gave a different view on what it was like for women in Rakhine culture. Though many participants in the workshops reported that they felt men and women were equal in their culture and worked together, Thaung Nynt Cime noted some ways in which women's roles within Rakhine culture were still limited: girls are expected to live under the rules and expectations of their parents' house and as married women are expected to conform to the rules and expectations of their in-laws. Furthermore, she illustrates the expectation for women to stay home to care for their children instead of furthering their education or pursuing work that could equate to a career. Thaung Nynt Cime also expressed that she felt her culture and tradition had better chances to continue if they (the Rakhine) were more united. Unity for the Rakhine is seen as a quality that is needed to stand up for their rights within Bangladesh and continue their culture, tradition, and existence (person. comm. Noen 2017). This would happen as she pointed out as community members gathered together more and conversed about important issues concerning their community. Thaung Nynt Cime provided a critical view of women's roles and Rakhine culture, Lanay on the other hand shared with me how she uses her business to continue Rakhine culture.

Lanay came to the weaving workshops in both 2016 and 2017. She wanted to practice the flower medallion (project from trip 1), but her daughter ripped the loom (the paper plate) that she had saved from the workshop. Her daily life includes

supporting her husband and family. Her husband is a tailor; she works for his business by ironing and sewing on the buttons on items that he makes. Besides helping her husband, she spends her time looking after their daughter and overseeing household duties such as cooking and cleaning. She has also just recently started a new business with her mother-in-law. Once a week, she learns from her mother-in-law how to make *mondi*. Every Monday, they take orders from villagers and sell it in bulk. Then every Thursday, they distribute the noodles. They also set up a pop-up restaurant outside their home where they sell bowls of *mondi* for ten taka each. In this way Lanay contributes to continuing her culture.

Lanay does not know how to weave on the loom but has enjoyed the weaving-themed projects she learned from the workshops. She believes that knowing how to weave is important, but their house has no room for a loom. They live in a Bengali-style house, which is one floor instead of two, with no extra space to install a loom. Many of the traditional looms are set up on the beams of the first floor of Rakhine houses. Since their house is not a two-story house, there are no beams for her to set up a loom. Instead of weaving, she says that she will continue expressing her culture by wearing Rakhine *htamee*, speaking Rakhine, following Buddhism, living in Rakhine villages, and making Rakhine food.

Lanay's example shows different ways an individual can continue Rakhine cultural practices. Also, woven into our conversation is how Lanay lives out her role as a woman in Rakhine culture. Her portrayal of women's roles was more in line with what was reported in the T1 post-weaving interviews. Women's roles are integral to supporting their families, whether in the family business or childcare, however Thaung Nynt Cime pointed out that when a woman wanted something different from supporting their husbands, in-laws, family business, and childcare, that this type of lifestyle is possibly more difficult to navigate within their culture. However, women's roles in their culture may be changing to reflect what Thaung Nynt Cime hopes for as exemplified in the next story. My conversation with Lilywen illustrates a young woman's aspirations for her future.

Lilywen is noticeable for her large inquisitive eyes and soft rounded facial features. She volunteered for the 2016 workshops and, regardless of her age (14 years old),

was quick to learn the art project and held a presence when teaching the art skills during the workshop. She, like her peers, is influenced by Bengali and Hindi culture. Popular culture from India dominates a lot of Bengali television and media, therefore the Rakhine youth are inundated with it. Lily is one of the students tutored by Chanda. As an end-of-semester celebration, Chanda allows the students to have a party, eating snacks and watching music videos at her house. Lily and her friends learn the song and dance from these videos for fun.

Lily does not know how to weave. She spends her time studying as she hopes to be a doctor like her father. She will get together with her friends to draw or watch television when they are not studying. She enjoyed being part of the workshops as she felt it was a chance for her to learn something new and be creative. She also enjoyed gathering as a group because it was a chance to be together with other Rakhine and share skills. She hopes that she can one day contribute financially to preserving her culture when she is a doctor. She wishes to work in Taltali and put the money she makes towards continuing cultural practices and traditions. One of the ways she identified as saving her culture was in the continuation of celebrating their festivals. She was disappointed that they cancelled the lantern festival this year due to the Rohingya issue.

These three stories provide a detailed insight into the lives of Rakhine women—the expectations and roles they live with, and how they view their roles. Further, these stories show how Rakhine women preserve and maintain their culture and traditions. As mentioned above, in Kala para I was not able to reconnect with the same weaving workshop participants as from T1 as I did in Taltali. However, those I did connect with as a result of the weaving workshops provided insight into how Rakhine youth perceive their culture and traditions and how they intend to transmit them.

Findings from T2 Kala para weaving interviews

One of the participants who attended both workshops inspired my questions for the Kala para post-weaving workshop interviews. Moe Kyaw is a psychology student studying in Dhaka and was back in the village for the holidays. He had a good grasp of English and was adamant about conversing with me in English, seeking prompts

from Noen if he forgot words or did not know how to express certain sentiments. He was excited to meet me, saying that people like me inspired him. ‘I love meeting people who are creative and open and interested in learning new cultures and religion’ (Moe Kyaw 2017, pers. comm.). Due to his ability to converse in English, our interview was less structured, covering the questions I had for all critical photography participants while also expanding into other topics.

He shared with me that he was inspired by the fact that I wanted to learn about the Rakhine because he felt distanced from his culture. He acknowledged that knowing Rakhine culture and religion was important, but living in Bangladesh, ‘we have to know Bengali culture and language’ (Moe Kyaw 2017, pers. comm.). He stated that to survive, be relevant and successful, there is a pressure to keep up with the day-to-day life and culture (which for him meant living among Bengali culture, as well as keeping up with the influences of Westernisation that is more prominent in larger cities like Dhaka). Therefore, as a minority in Dhaka, he had less time for his own culture, less time to practice cultural traditions. My conversation with Moe Kyaw stirred a curiosity in how other young Rakhine experience the reality of growing up in two distinct cultures. The following summarises findings from conversations I had with weaving participants in Amkhola para.

When I met with the weaving participants for interviews, I asked them about their experience of being Rakhine—what that meant, how they felt about being Rakhine, if they could weave, what their traditions were, and what they felt were challenges to being Rakhine in Bangladesh. Many participants named their different facial features, language, traditional clothing, and religion as signs that made them Rakhine. One participant said that being Rakhine meant being part of a community that saves themselves and their culture. All the participants said they were proud to be Rakhine. And all the participants (males included) said they knew how to weave on a frame loom and that weaving was an important practice in their culture. It is a practice that their mothers and grandmothers engaged in. Only one interviewee had learned how to weave on the hand loom. Some participants talked about helping their relative (mom and sister) with their weaving business during the winter.

Concerning traditions, the Rakhine youth I interviewed talked about their language and festivals. They acknowledged that they were practicing their language and festivals less and less due to not being united, not having the resources for language schools or festival celebrations. Participants agreed that the biggest challenge to being Rakhine was keeping with their cultural practices, particularly their language and festivals. The following illuminates some of their comments and conveys their feelings about challenges in keeping their culture,

I would like to grow in my confidence to live out my culture. We need to continue to practice our culture. As a member of the music cultural group, I can aim to teach others about Rakhine culture by sharing Rakhine dance and music. (Mela 2017, pers. comm.)

Saving our culture is a big challenge for us. Everyone should practice our culture. We need to ensure the younger generations of Rakhine marry other Rakhine and don't give up Rakhine culture. (Khen Ma 2017, pers. comm.)

We need to follow our elders and be Rakhine like them. (Ne Ne Chan 2017, pers. comm.)

I think that to save our culture and community, we need to work together, be united, and enact our cultural practices together to be encouraged and reminded. Maybe we can also give some workshops that educate others about our culture. (Ushan 2017, pers. comm.)

The latter participant was studying history in university. He found that his degree only included the history of Bangladesh and Bengali history, and said that there was a unit on Buddhism but no mention of Rakhine history.

The Rakhine youth that I interviewed provided insight on how they thought their culture could be transmitted. They identified speaking their language, celebrating their festivals, sharing their traditional music and dance, marrying within their culture, acting as their elders do, and education about cultural practices and traditions as ways they could preserve and transmit their culture and traditions. At the end of

T2, I also noted changes that occurred among those with whom I worked closely. The last section of this chapter describes how participating in the arts-based workshops and fieldwork tasks influenced Aye Win, Chong Naeu and Noen .

Arts-based workshops- postscript

After the arts-based workshops in 2017, I presented Chanda, Aye Win and Chong Naeu each with a camera, and some other items I had bought with me from Australia as tokens of thanks. The three of them travelled back to Taltli leaving Noen and me to complete interviews and village life observations. It felt quiet without them because we had spent 14 days together. I asked Noen to check in on their safe return and let me know once he heard from them.

Chanda texted, saying they had arrived home with no delay or problems. She then called us a day later to inform us that Chong Naeu and Aye Win had organised a group of village youth volunteers to work on the *kyang* grounds. They worked on cleaning the grounds and planting new plants. Chanda relayed to Noen that this plan had nothing to do with her, that she did not even ask the girls to do anything, but they, on their own initiative, had brought their friends together to improve their village. She told Noen she was proud of them and wanted to share that she felt they were putting what they had learned while volunteering with Noen and I into practical application.

At the end of our project, I interviewed Noen. Among the questions I asked him, I wanted to know how his involvement with this project had changed him. In our first interview in 2016, Noen had told me that his future aspirations included being involved in a business, continuing his journey as an entrepreneur, and his wish to have a big restaurant. In 2016 Noen had collaborated with two Bengali friends and started a Western influenced café in Barisal. His focus was to grow his business and repay the loan they took out to start the restaurant. Noen was proud to show his business off to me, especially to check what I thought of the menu as it featured hamburgers, nachos, pasta, and other Western dishes. In our conversations, Noen would check his knowledge of Western influences, often talking to me about Hollywood movies or American sitcoms. He liked asking me about life in Australia

and Canada. He would also tell me about media influences in Bangladesh, showing me music influenced by Indian pop-culture. When I asked him what it meant to be Rakhine, Noen talked about Buddhism's 5 tenets, but spoke little about other cultural or traditional aspects of Rakhine life.

During our final interview, I asked Noen if the project had taught him anything new about his own culture. Noen said,

The interview questions and opportunities to talk to so many different people gave me insight into my own culture. I did not see how weaving was so important. I grew up in Barisal, a city where I did not have experience with village life and livelihood. It was cool to get to see what other Rakhine are doing and how they live. I did not know so many still weave for a livelihood. I thought it was only an ancient Rakhine tradition. (Noen, 2017, pers. comm.)

Noen also told me how connecting with old friends and relatives while in the villages really inspired him to keep his culture alive. I asked him what he felt was next for him after this project. He said,

I live quite far from the villages we visited, but I should practice Rakhine language more and be more involved. I have been thinking about how I can develop our lives and culture despite our financial obstacles. I want to continue to try to inspire the new generation of Rakhine. I want to inspire them to travel around and see more of the world and experience more. It was great to take Chanda, Aye Win, and Chong Naeu around. I am trying to invigorate the Rakhine student organisation to get them to stay active. I hope to work with Chanda in starting more cultural activities and workshops in Taltli. I would really like to see the young boys get more active and involved. Did you notice? I tried to talk to a few of them after we interviewed them. I tried to encourage them to stay in school and be actively involved in their communities. (Noen, 2017, pers. comm.)

From the interview, Noen showed a change in himself surrounding his own understanding of his culture and traditions. He also shared about a renewed passion to be involved in his community in a way he had not done in the past.



Figure 36. Noen and I. Source: Poon 2017

The phone call from Chanda and my interview with Noen confirmed my observations about the changes in those I worked with throughout my fieldwork. I had noticed the change in Aye Win and Chong Naeu from when they were participants to when they became volunteers. I also noted the shift in their confidence and perspective as the workshops wore on. However, hearing that, on their own initiative, they organised a group of friends to attend to the *kyang* grounds confirmed that they had internalised the change I noticed in them. This was also true of Noen. Over the time we worked together, I noticed his change in first being someone hired to assist me to becoming someone as equally (if not more) invested in the research. He had told me by the end of T1 that he enjoyed most the interviews. He said that it was during the interviews where he could see the impact the arts-based activities had made on individuals and where more conversation about their opinions and lives could be had. During T2 I felt a shift in his investment in our

work that was confirmed by his comments during our last interview. As a result of our work together, he learned more ways in which he too could continue his Rakhine culture and traditions.

Summary

This chapter documented data I collected relating to the arts-based workshops and semi-structured interviews I conducted over my trips to Bangladesh in 2016 and 2017. Findings from this chapter continue to address my research question of what cultural practices the Rakhine deem as important as well as to provide examples of how they preserve and transmit their culture and traditions. In this chapter, I provided details regarding my arts-based workshop design and rationale. I gave a brief literature review on the practices of weaving and photography and how I used them to engage with the Rakhine. I then described my fieldwork during T1, and summarised the findings I collected from the workshops and interviews. Findings from T1 primarily provided insight on the daily lives and roles of Rakhine women. I also collected information about weaving's significance and prevalence in the culture.

Next, I discussed reflections I made and learnings I gleaned from T1 that informed how I prepared for and conducted the T2 workshops. I then provided a description of T2 and a summary of the findings I collected. In T2, I learned more about women's roles and expectations, specifically I was able to learn from personal stories from participants with whom I had built a deeper rapport. I also learned which cultural practices are deemed important and how they are preserved and transmitted from the perspective of Rakhine youth. Finally, I documented how the work I did with Aye Win, Chong Naeu, and Noen changed their involvement in their own culture and communities.

PART 4-

Part 4 comprises of one chapter. This chapter includes the final discussion and conclusion of this work.

Chapter Seven: Discussion and concluding thoughts

Introduction

Throughout this work, my overarching aim has been to learn about the significance of cultural preservation and intergenerational cultural transmission among the Rakhine of Bangladesh. Specifically, I have aimed to gauge the importance of culture and cultural pursuits such as food, cooking, language, religion, and festivals, with a particular focus on weaving. To do so, I visited Bangladesh 26 October–14 November 2016 (T1) and 30 October–8 December 2017 (T2) at the end of the monsoon season into the dry winter season. I spent time in the *upazilas* of Taltali and Kala para, mainly in the Rakhine villages of Talti, Shaton para, Amkhola para, and Kalachin para. I used the lenses of precarity and intersectionality to learn about the Rakhine. Drawing from my experiences and interactions with the Rakhine, I learned, in the face of manifold uncertainties and precarity, which cultural practices the Rakhine deem important, how they preserve these practices, and how they transmit them intergenerationally. In this work, I also implemented arts-based activities which enabled me to work collaboratively with the Rakhine in a manner different from traditional research methods, such as interviews and observation. The implementation of arts-based activities also addressed my last research question: By working with the Rakhine using an arts-based approach to research, what have I learned about cross-cultural work, precarity, intersectionality, empowerment, participation, and resilience?

In the following chapter, I discuss what I have learned, address my research aims and questions, draw conclusions, outline limitations, and make recommendations for future research in relation to this work.

Interpretation and implications of Findings

What I learned about the Rakhine

In this research, I sought to explore the significance of cultural preservation and intergenerational transmission of culture by engaging the Rakhine community as a

case study. To do so, I first asked: Using precarity and intersectionality as conceptual lenses, what can be learned about the Rakhine of Southwestern Coastal Bangladesh?

It is helpful to recall that ‘precarity effectively invokes the insecurity of all those who live without reliable and adequate income or without identification and/or residency papers, it also applies to those with unstable, or no, access to the institutions and communities best able to provide legitimacy, recognition and solidarity’ (During 2015). The condition of precarity is usually associated with contemporary neoliberal processes (Standing) and a condition that can evoke ethical responsiveness (Butler). Meanwhile, intersectionality takes stock of other axes of influence and acknowledges that oppression is multi-layered and affected by various intersecting influences (Hopkins 2017). Therefore, using these two concepts, I first learned about the structural influences such as geography, environment, history, and culture that sustain Rakhine experiences of precarity.

Specifically, I examined the influences of climatic pressures, a strong propagation of a national identity, socio-political instability, Bangladesh’s longstanding history of international development policy and NGO involvement, and neoliberal processes. I also investigated the cultural, historical, and ethnic markers of being Rakhine. By analysing these axes of influence, I learned that the Rakhine, living in Bangladesh, situated on the southwestern coast are particularly susceptible to climate-related disasters such as cyclones and flooding. I also learned how Bangladesh’s strong national identity resulted in the marginalisation of the Rakhine within the country. This marginalisation is entrenched since all indigenous groups including the Rakhine live without UN indigenous rights status in Bangladesh. Without this, the rights of the Rakhine are undermined; this is particularly true in the case of land rights, a situation which leaves them susceptible to land-grabs.

Furthermore, I discussed the relationships between Caritas and the Rakhine, specifying some ‘NGO entanglements’ (see Sampson 2017) that perpetuate neoliberal processes. Despite these entanglements, I described the interventions Caritas provides such as helping the Rakhine with incidences of land-grabbing and running the ICDP-Rakhine program. Though there are available supports for the Rakhine to mitigate experiences of precarity, marginalisation contributes to what

Theophil calls ‘ethnic pressure’ ‘Ethnic pressure’ is the fear of accessing available government/NGO support due to unfamiliarity with available support, and, more so, the fear of being othered (Theophil 2016, pers. comm., see chapter 3). I then used intersectionality to examine the history, racial, and ethnic origins of the Rakhine, as well as identified cultural roles and expectations associated with being Rakhine.

Secondly, I investigated the lifestyle and livelihood of the Rakhine living in Taltali and Kala para. In chapter 4, I learned about life in the villages of Taltli, Shaton para, Amkhola para, and Kalachin para. It became clear to me that some Rakhine from these areas live without reliable and adequate income. Specifically, I focused on weaving as a traditional form of livelihood. I learned that this cultural practice, which once met the needs of the Rakhine, is no longer sufficiently doing so. Weaving, along with other subsistence activities such as farming, fishing, and hunting, are associated with traditional Rakhine livelihood. Thus, I also learned that the livelihoods of the Rakhine are inextricably linked to their culture. However, as values surrounding subsistence living are changing due to various axes of influence, some of these changes have resulted in the dissolution of Rakhine culture.

An important area of investigation for me has been those axes of influence that have affected subsistence living for the Rakhine. In chapters 4, 5, and 6, I noted how neoliberal values and Westernisation permeate Rakhine culture through information systems (development efforts, technology, social media, media). These values contribute to pressures towards urbanisation, education, and types of employment that replace traditional forms of livelihood. Although the villages I visited had limited electricity and access to technology, everyone still had access to a mobile telephone. In fact, most young Rakhine had access to smartphones enabling them to use Facebook, play online games, download music, and watch global movies. Access to snippets of global information and culture influenced the Rakhine I met in diverse ways. For some, access to global information was benign and they went on with their everyday lives. However, others (those who had a chance to go to school in Dhaka or Barisal) seemed to embrace a fascination with Western and global culture. This was expressed in varying ways from spending a lot of time watching American movies, to listening to the latest hits from Bollywood, to dressing in a more Western-influenced way, and in one case, starting a Western-themed café restaurant.

The pressure to urbanise, develop, gain education, and look for more ‘sustainable’ forms of economic livelihood influenced many to move away from villages or sustain long distance relationships with their families or partners. It also increased the pressure to be educated in the mainstream Bengali education system, which contributes to a loss of knowledge in traditional crafts and skills associated with living in an agrarian, rural society. Weaving is an example. The push towards education as a conduit towards more reliable income, and a fulfilment of the UN sustainable development goal of ‘quality education’ (United Nations 2020), has meant that many younger girls and women are not learning to weave but spending their time furthering their education in other ways. This was exemplified in chapter 6, where most Taltali T1 interviewees aged 30 and under did not know how to weave. Furthermore, when asked why they had not learned to weave, most said that it was due to being too busy studying, and additionally, for some, disclosed that their mothers worked in NGOs and did not have time to teach them to weave.

These seemingly disparate worlds create a new ‘in-between’ where individuals are educated for work that is appropriate for urbanised areas but have for whatever reason chosen (or not chosen) to stay within their villages, rendering them somewhat ‘skill-less’ for the agrarian rural lifestyle. For some educated women who have stayed in villages, there is an expectation to prioritise childcare and care for ageing in-laws over pursuing a career. For some, this creates a tension as the opportunities provided by education often stand in contrast to traditional values. Moreover, the employment opportunities with which education may have provided them are not common in village life. However, this experience is not shared by all women in Rakhine villages.

In contrast, in the Kala para, all of the participants could weave, and there were several who wove during the winter seasons as another form of income for their families. The younger participants (aged 30 and under) noted that they had learned or were learning how to weave. This difference in responses from those in Taltali might have been related to the fact that more of their mothers were still weaving as a form of income. Therefore, though some make choices to move away from traditional forms of livelihood, others continue to capitalise on their traditional skills, finding

ways to continue to profit from traditional skills, crafts, and culture. This was shown in the story of Uchin where she made traditional foods such as *ngapee* and dried shark to sell in Barisal and Dhaka and owned her own shop that featured cloth that she both wove and sourced from a variety of places (as described in chapter 5).

Thirdly and finally, using precarity and intersectionality encouraged the view that privilege and oppression can be experienced simultaneously. This view denotes an acknowledgement of complexity involved in individual experience. Therefore, I also used intersectionality to examine how the Rakhine respond to their experiences of precarity, a response which includes exercising power in continuing to practice their culture and traditions. In the next section, I outline the cultural practices the Rakhine deem important, how they preserve these practices, and how they transmit them.

Rakhine cultural practices: preservation and transmission

I have aimed to gauge the importance of culture and cultural pursuits to the Rakhine such as food, cooking, language, music, dance, religion, and festivals, with a particular focus on weaving. In this section, I summarise my findings, presented primarily in chapters 4, 5 and 6, discussing the practices that the Rakhine deem important.

As illustrated in chapter 6, the arts-based workshops yielded insights into the lives of several Rakhine women. The participants who attended the workshops and interviews revealed how and to what extent weaving is central to the Rakhine way of life. I learned that weaving is traditionally a skill and an art form that was passed on matrilineally and was a common skill that Rakhine women learned. For example, participants who knew how to weave disclosed that they had learned from their grandmothers, mothers, aunts, wives, and sisters.

All interviewees reported that weaving was the main source of women's income. Presently, weaving is still one form of employment that some women choose to do to make a living for themselves and their families. There were two women who claimed to weave year-round. Most others, however, only weave during the winter months when the demand is high. All interview respondents expressed concern that weaving

is under threat of disappearing. Already, fewer women weave or even know how to. Furthermore, younger generations of women are no longer learning to weave, nor are they aspiring to learn. Despite these changes, the Rakhine continue to preserve this cultural practice albeit in smaller ways through making, buying and wearing Rakhine shawls and men's shirts made of Rakhine woven cloth. Sample sizes of woven cloth are still made as symbols of past traditions and used as part of Kathin chibor dan and other festivals.

Interview respondents also shed light on other cultural practices and traditions that are part of the Rakhine way of life. As described in chapter 3 and 5, festivals marking important religious dates are significant to continuing cultural practice, maintaining tradition and identity, and social cohesion. Ekman (1999) describes festivals as opportunities to express collective belonging to a place or group. Significantly, Quinn (2005) maintains that festivals are occasions for drawing on shared histories, practices, ideals, and social interactions that engender arenas where local knowledge is produced and reproduced. In my observations, festivals are an opportunity to see old friends, catch up with extended family, wear traditional dress, observe religious beliefs collectively, and share food.

The absence of festivals impacts the ability of Rakhine communities to express their shared cultural identity. In 2017 when the severity of the Rohingya situation resulted in the cancellation of the annual Lantern festival, several participants expressed deep lament. One interview participant explained that it was because the Rakhine were not united enough to continue a crucial expression of their culture and identity during a time when she felt expression of it was needed most (see interview with Thaung Nynt Cime, 2017, Chapter 6). Despite laments of the diminishing size of certain festivals, or their outright cancellation, the Rakhine continue practicing their culture and traditions through the organisation and attendance of monthly and annual festivals.

Illustrated throughout this work, but specifically in chapters 5 and 6, producing, preparing, consuming, and sharing food is another cultural practice significant to the Rakhine. Food is central to many Rakhine festivals and gatherings. During Kathin chibor dan in 2016, many aspects of the event consisted of the food. Pop-up food

stands were bustling with people eating and catching up. The main event consisted of food being served, first for the men and guests, then women and children. Food preparation is also linked to women's roles. All interviewees reported that one of the Rakhine women's roles is to prepare food—for the festivals, for the monk, for their families.

During my field trips, there were several times where I was greeted and hosted by Rakhine women who cooked a delicious spread of fish, curries, sautéed forest vegetables, turtle, shark, iguana, pork, fried larvae, among other dishes to share with me. Women transmit this cultural practice through teaching their daughters and learning from one another. During T1, when Noen and I were invited to stay for papaya salad (see chapter 4), the younger women and girls worked alongside older women to prepare this dish.

Language is also significant to the identity, culture, and tradition of the Rakhine people. It is commonly accepted that language and culture are inextricably related (Brown 1994; Jiang 2000). Language is influenced and shaped by culture, while at the same time reflecting it; it is a symbolic representation comprising a group's history and background (Jiang 2000). During T2, I learned that the *kyangs* in Taltli, Shaton para, and Amkhola para offer language classes for Rakhine children. However, though Rakhine is still spoken in the villages and often within most families, the fluency of younger Rakhine in their own language is waning. For example, during the interviews, many of the younger participants would start the interviews speaking in Rakhine, but when conversation became complex, switched to speaking Bangla. Some of the younger participants only spoke Bangla during the interviews.

Even Chanda would catch herself switching to Bangla and laugh, saying that she had forgotten how to say that phrase in Rakhine. Though I did not gain fluency in Rakhine, or Bangla, my language classes in both languages trained my ear enough to hear the differences between the two languages. This enabled me to hear when participants had changed from speaking in one language to the other over the course of our interviews. Moreover, to confirm my observations, I asked Noen and he would confirm my observations. Though younger Rakhine default to speaking

Bangla among themselves and in school, it is still acknowledged that the ability to speak their own language is important. This was observed in how T1 Taltli interview participants were not bothered by Bengali police presence. Besides being informed that the police escort was there for my safety, they also knew the police could not understand what was being conveyed in their interviews due to the language barrier.

The practice of Buddhism is central to Rakhine culture and tradition. Most of the festivals I attended were based on significant dates or practices in Theravada Buddhism. Also, when asked what it means to be Rakhine, many participants referred to their religion. For example, Noen listed the five tenets of Buddhism to illustrate what it meant to be Rakhine (see chapter 6). Additionally, all the participants I interviewed in T1 about women's roles listed praying and prayer as one of the first practices in the morning, one that is part of their daily lives. The practice and transmission of Buddhism is continued through monthly *kyang* events, festivals, and daily prayer.

All interview respondents shared that they were passionate about preserving their way of life and culture. From conversations and observations, I learned that Rakhine culture is transmitted through modelling and expectations. For example, festivals model and showcase many aspects of Rakhine culture—food, dress, values, beliefs, and expectations. Culture is also modelled in the language and religion classes. Given the opportunity, the Rakhine would continue their culture by educating others about their culture. The cultural music group exemplified this in Amkhola para. They were often invited to perform in Bengali festivals and, at times, featured on the local radio. Furthermore, Rakhine culture is transmitted through expectations. For example, the expectation to marry within their own culture and/or religion.

Many understood the relationship between the preservation of their culture and accessibility to economic resources. For example, Lilywen said she wanted to study to be a doctor to contribute to saving her culture through funding festivals. Uchin practised her culture by making traditional foods (shark and *ngapee*) and shawls to sell. The Taltali market's Rakhine tailors exemplify how they continue Rakhine culture by selling men's shirts and women's jackets made out of Rakhine woven cloth during the winter months. Lanay also disclosed that she will continue

expressing her culture by wearing Rakhine *htamee*, speaking Rakhine, following Buddhism, living in Rakhine villages and making (selling) Rakhine food (Lanay 2017, pers. comm.).

The arts-based workshops I conducted further expressed how culture is important to the collective identity of the Rakhine. In the following section, I discuss what I learned through the implementation of arts-based activities.

Cross-cultural arts-based activities

This section focuses on my third research question: By working with the Rakhine using an arts-based approach to research, what have I learned about cross-cultural work, precarity, intersectionality, empowerment, participation, and resilience? In the following, I summarise what I learned using an arts-based approach to research. Arts-based activities are useful in cross-cultural research, international development, and documenting change among the Rakhine.

(MacDonald & Struthers-Montford 2014) surmise that building rapport with participants is crucial to building their trust, which helps with eliciting rich material relating to the area of study. However, attempting to cultivate this with a new community through attending community meetings, meeting with key people for tea, and interviewing only gets a researcher so far. In some cases, relationships built in this way can seem contrived, somewhat manipulative and contrary to building rapport and trust (MacDonald & Struthers-Montford 2014). I found that arts-based activities effectively build rapport and trust that allowed for a natural and non-confrontational way to relate.

Arts-based activities lend opportunities for an opening to liminal spaces. Turner ([1969]1989) observes that liminality is a ‘state of unstable intermediate existence, which is marked by the transition and redefinition of identity, thus opening up spaces for experimentation, play, and innovation’ (Zobl & Huber 2016, p. 7). Therefore, liminal spaces imply the ‘continuous updating of social relations and structures’ (Zobl & Huber 2016, p. 7), which offer a way to mitigate power differentials in research. The arts-based activities I implemented provided an informal way for

participants to get to know me. It was also a chance for me to observe power differentials—among participants and in relation to me. Noting these differences in power enabled me to mitigate differences and build rapport and trust.

Arts-based activities are also an effective way to practice reciprocity, which is essential to research and is underscored by ethical standards of establishing a working relationship that is mutually beneficial (Maiter et al. 2008). Reciprocity is not just giving something back to someone but is expressed as an *exchange* between social equals. For example, as much as possible, I sought to mitigate power differentials and foster reciprocal relationships with volunteers, asking them for their feedback throughout the workshop on the arts-based activity, workshop questions, and workshop format. Spending time working with a smaller group also contributed to personalising the workshops' experience and building rapport.

Including volunteers on the leadership team helped me extend reciprocal relationships to other participants on several levels. For one, participants were learning from individuals they already knew, which allowed for more intimate interactions. Further, because the volunteers demonstrated they trusted me, this increased participants' trust in me as well. Lastly, the arts-based workshop itself was reciprocal in nature. I was learning about the participants through observation and through the questions I had prepared. Simultaneously, they were learning another weaving technique and participating in a group event facilitated by members of their community. After the workshops, all the participants shared that they appreciated learning something new, gathering together as a community over a shared activity, and meeting someone new from Canada (myself).

Implementing arts-based activities in a cross-cultural setting informed my knowledge of (non-)effective practices for cross-cultural work. One example concerns the use of metaphors in arts-based activities. I used metaphors associated with the art activity to make associations and inspire insight into particular topics. However, I realised that meanings do not translate directly. In contrast to making metaphors in one's own linguistic and cultural prism, I found that I had to explicitly explain the metaphor as I was making it. Metaphors and figures of speech are an abstract language and differ between cultures due to both language and the non-

universality of cognitive processes and understanding (see Kitayama et al. 2003; Nisbett et al. 2001). Similarly, Rechsteiner et al. (2020) study on trauma and metaphor suggests that across cultures, most expressions carry different connotations, which reflects the particularities of the sociocultural contexts of the specific group. Therefore, for a metaphor to resonate, the analogies must be culturally relevant. I learned that this is only possible via familiarity with the local culture and/or a local informant.

Arts-based activities were also useful in development ‘interventions’, particularly in listening to and meeting local needs. Here I found it helpful to refer to Freire’s praxis as applied in Boal’s theatre practice. I was curious whether other artforms could create similar opportunities for critical consciousness-raising conversations. Using weaving and photography, I found that different artforms result in different outcomes. The weaving workshop was not particularly effective in helping participants to realise their problem-solving potential. The cultural and language barrier prevented me from using metaphors and questions to cultivate group discussion. In fact, it was often challenging to have group discussions, for it was arduous and time-consuming given the number of participants.

Nonetheless, the weaving workshops created an opportunity to assess whether the practice of weaving was still familiar to community members. Weaving techniques are not complicated, but handling thread with mastery and familiarity can be easily observed. The display of mastery and familiarity gives hints as to whether weaving is still practised and whether these skills have been transmitted intergenerationally. For example, during the community T1 and T2 Taltali weaving workshops, the older participants exhibited a stronger familiarity with weaving techniques and handling thread compared to some of the younger participants. Later in the interviews, it was revealed that most of the older participants had learned how to weave from their mothers or grandmothers, whereas the younger participants had not learned to weave at all, and in some cases did not have mothers who knew how to weave. Essentially, weaving was a useful tool for assessing whether and how the practice of weaving was being transmitted intergenerationally.

Photography, on the other hand, was more effective for creating dialogue and cultivating a space for critical consciousness. Photography acted as an alternate form of communication. The action of walking around their villages and capturing their thoughts through photographs gave participants tangible evidence of their ideas. This provided an alternate form of dialogue. It enabled a process in which participants had to think about their village, what problems they saw, and how they could participate in its improvements.

Several interviewees reported that they enjoyed opportunities to gather together in a common activity. Specifically, participants from the weaving workshops enjoyed gathering together as women and sharing weaving skills. This unity, evident also in the photography workshops, allowed the Rakhine to act together in maintaining their culture (C.M. Shoe, Noen & Thinlen 2017, pers. comm.). This was evident in how they photographed themselves, making what they thought were necessary changes. Furthermore, the stories documented of the changes in Aye Win, Chong Naeu, and Noen (chapter 6) after engagement with the arts-based workshops support the benefit of arts-based activities in community development.

Arts-based activities were useful in cross-cultural research, critical theory application for development interventions, and invigorating change among the Rakhine. In this next section, I address what I learned about the concepts of precarity and intersectionality when used with an arts-based approach to research.

Precarity and intersectionality

Although it does not provide a framework for dismantling injustices, the concept of precarity is a heuristic tool used to identify how neoliberal, capitalistic values and ways of being have influenced the Rakhine. It is a useful lens for taking stock of how global structures of power often make it challenging for people to take note of, let alone empathise with, the precarity experienced by those who don't take up their immediate and proximate realities (Ruti 2017). According to Zembylas (2018), Butler points out how certain social and political norms prevent us from noticing and therefore acting to alleviate the suffering of those who are different or 'inferior' to ourselves. Butler uses precarity for the basis of a renewed ethical and political action

by making known lives that may have been deemed ‘ungrievable’: ‘Those who are not “recognisable” as “humans” are more precarious and therefore “ungrievable” compared to those who are recognised as human and thus deserving to be “grievable”’ (Zembylas 2019).

My case study of the Rakhine in Bangladesh illustrates their experiences of precarity and contributes to a recognition of their cultural practices and traditions. Furthering an understanding of the Rakhine also contributes to developing grievability for the Rakhine, particularly concerning gaining UN indigenous status in Bangladesh.

Butler, Gambetti & Sabsay (2016) argue for a reconceptualisation of vulnerability as resistance, and this study shares stories of individuals whose experience of vulnerability showed aspects of resistance and power. In highlighting the ambivalent character of vulnerability, space can be formed for new forms of pedagogical intervention. In knowing and having a deeper understanding of the experiences of the Rakhine, modes of alliance can be developed that are grounded in interdependency, ethical responsiveness, ethical openness, and the critique of social norms (Butler, Gambetti & Sabsay 2016; Zembylas 2019).

Combining intersectionality with precarity allows us to see that it is not just one thing that influences another. Nor is determining causal relationships between many things sufficient. Rather ‘intersectionality served as a tool to mitigate the totalising effects of rigid categorisations by signifying the complex, irreducible, varied, and variable effects which ensue when multiple axes of differentiation—economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential—intersect in historically specific contexts’ (Chow 2016, p. 458; see also Brah & Phoenix 2004).

Intersectionality framed research methodologies—engaging in cross cultural work that is culturally sensitive, decolonising, and participatory (see Lahiri-Dutt 2017). The concept also influenced my data analysis which helped me focus on context, recognising that the ‘social identity categories and the power systems that give them meaning shift across time and geographical location’ (Chow 2016, p. 458). For example, intersectionality prompted me to take notice of power systems and social identity categories; it also made me identify which wider contexts of economic,

political, environmental, ideological processes, trends, and events are specific to Bangladesh, and then which affect the Rakhine. Intersectionality also helped me recognise and reflect on what understandings I may have on gender, class, ethnicity, and other social categories which affect my thoughts on the experience of the Rakhine.

Lastly, this concept enabled me to notice what notions of oppression are attached to the Rakhine but which do not necessarily apply to all Rakhine. For example, one might assume that Rakhine women might be disempowered because they are coloured, of minority status in Bangladesh, and live in a coastal area susceptible to environmental impacts such as floods, erosion, and cyclones. However, as I have discovered and documented in this research, that is not necessarily the case. Rakhine women exert varying levels of power and empowerment based on their access to resources, and family life. Thus, this conceptual lens provided me with a process to better understand the oppression as well as the privileges that are felt by the Rakhine that I interacted with.

Intersectionality reminds us that multiple structural forces at work create new and distinct forms of oppression. These can differ between individuals of the same distinctive ‘community’ based on access to power and social divisions. For example, while most Rakhine women would marry into a household that required them to live by the expectations of their in-laws, Chanda experienced more freedom because she lived only with her husband whose mother had died and father had become a monk. Lastly, social categories and class divisions exist based on economic wealth, marital status, in-law responsibility, education, age, gender, and access to resources within each Rakhine village. Noting all these factors and relationships between axes of influence enabled me to have a deeper, more complex understanding of the experiences of the Rakhine.

Empowerment, participation, resilience

Concepts of precarity and intersectionality were also useful in analysing how power was enacted as expressions of empowerment, participation, and resilience. In chapter 2, I noted the terms empowerment, participation, and resilience have been

appropriated to mask neoliberal values following a deficit model where communities are deemed not empowered, not able to participate, and/or not resilient. In examining these themes among the Rakhine, I chose to look at how power is enacted instead of whether individuals within these communities possess these qualities.

Used often as a buzzword among other fields, empowerment is widely used and ‘mainstreamed’ in a manner that has robbed it of its initial meaning and strategic value (Batliwala 2007). Therefore, it was important for this work that I defined empowerment. I chose to examine empowerment through Rowlands’ categorisations of power: power-over, power-to, power-with, and power-from-within. Identifying power relations is inextricably part of looking at empowerment (Ciulla 2020; Rowlands 1995).

I found Rowlands’ categorisations useful in looking at where power and empowerment can be exercised, and enabled me to observe how power is exercised in varying realms instead of perceiving the Rakhine as in need of empowerment. They also helped me examine how the arts-based activities contributed to fostering empowerment, specifically in power exercised as power-with and power-to.

During my two trips to Bangladesh, I observed several examples of power-over. I learned that many processes impinge upon Rakhine women’s ability to exercise power-over (and we have no indication of any individual or cultural predilection to do so). Some of those processes are structural and include patriarchal societal norms throughout Bangladesh that restrict all women’s use of and visibility in public space. Also, Rakhine women (and, indeed, Rakhine men) experience social, economic, ethnic, and religious marginalisation; they have limited access to land, money, and other resources, and are vulnerable to land acquisition.

Structural limitations aside, Rakhine individuals can and do hold positions of power in their communities. For example, a Rakhine woman is one of three regional directors for an Integrated Community Development Program (ICDP) managed by Caritas. Rakhine women are, or have also been, employed as Caritas Cooperative Credit Union (CCU) field workers, and CCU community leaders. Some have been appointed part-time employees for Caritas, working as field midwives and medical

officers. Others own businesses like the tailor in Taltali and the weaver in Kala para. Rakhine men also hold various positions of power, such as fulfilling the role of Mudbar in their village, being a monk, and being an elder. Men also work with Caritas as managers or directors, own businesses and land.

According to Rowlands, power-to is generative or productive power and sometimes incorporates or manifests as resistance or forms of manipulation that create new possibilities and actions *without domination* (1995, 1997). In Bangladesh, through ICDP programs, Caritas plays a significant role in providing resources so that Rakhine women can exercise this form of power. Caritas also extends this consideration to Rakhine men and Bengali settlers in the region. One example is the Cooperative Credit Unions. Mandated to have a minimum of 60 percent women in their membership, CCU individual members can save income and take out low-interest loans for various reasons. CCU members gain returns from the interest on loans taken out by other members, and those managing the CCU provide leadership training opportunities and other skill-building activities.

Outside Caritas' circle of influence, the Rakhine maintain the power-to enjoy living in villages separate from Bengali influence, in houses that reflect traditional Rakhine architecture. Though they live among Bengali districts and follow the same Bengali laws, the Rakhine have their own governance system that represents their needs to the *upazila* officials. Rakhine women also appear to have more freedom in physical and social mobility than Bengali women and have fewer cultural and religious constraints than their Bengali counterparts. Many Rakhine women start, (co-)own, and manage family businesses. Many sell clothing and woven goods; they are tailors and manage small food stalls in the market. Many make business decisions, work alongside their husbands, or take care of particular enterprise aspects. They have the power-to continue living out their cultural practices through wearing cultural dress, living in traditional-styled homes, eating Rakhine food, speaking their own language, and participating in religious events and festivals.

'Power-to' was also observed as a result of the arts-based workshops. Examples of power exercised as power-to and power-with include developing a critical consciousness and engaging in dialectical dialogue, one that calls into question

exploitative authority and names the root causes of problems (problematisation) (see Freire 2009). When this occurs, individuals see how they can be part of solving some of their perceived oppressions. Participants of the critical photography workshop disclosed how, through participating in the workshop, they could be responsible for improving their villages. This was best exemplified in the example of Aye Win and Chong Naeu at the end of T2: as a result of their involvement with the arts-based activities as participants and volunteers, they exhibited power-to gather a group of their friends and the power-with to contribute to their own community as a group.

Rowlands (1997) describes power-with as a collective power oriented to problem-solving. When visiting Taltali and Kala para, I observed—and Noen confirmed—that many women would cook together and trade foods that they made. One might make a large portion of vegetables, make meat or rice, and then share and/or exchange food with other families. In this manner, in Shaton para I participated in making green papaya salad. I watched as women of varying ages from different families brought out spices, and then prepared the spice mixture and the papaya. When finished, the large salad was put on a bench, men and children came, and everyone ate collectively; as a guest, I was served with a separate dish and utensils. Likewise, when I first met Mathin in Taltli, she and a group of four others were working together to make toasted rice.

Festivals and gatherings were another way to observe power-with. Several interviewees described being united as important to them. Participating in Kathin Chibor Dan, I noted power-with in how large groups of Rakhine individuals from various villages worked collectively to organise and put on the event. This was evident on a more intimate level when attending the picnic gathering Chanda and her friends organised during T2.

Other instances of power-with were observed in how women join each other for tea on their verandas. When all the household chores are completed for the day, women will gather at one of the houses, drink tea, put clay facial masks on one another, and chat. Jokingly, Noen said that this is a time for women to gossip, which certain feminist writers describe as an important component of women's oral culture (see Jones, 1990). In such settings, women are likely to talk about community events,

share child-caring strategies, organise for village religious events, and discuss ways to better their communities. 'Power-with' was also demonstrated during the volunteer and community workshops as the participants worked together to help each other learn and ensure that everyone was keeping pace. The fact that men were present did not deter the women, nor did the men tell them to participate in a particular way; in addition, they were subject to women's strong views on weaving approaches.

Rowlands (1997) reports that power-from-within manifests as spiritual strength, self-acceptance, and self-respect, as well as the extension of respect and acceptance to others. My observations in the field suggest that Rakhine women hold an air of confidence different from Bengali women. Nevertheless, power-from-within was subtle and more difficult to ask about in translation. However, involvement in spirituality and weaving seems to exemplify elements of this form of power. For example, during workshop discussions, several spoke of the importance of their spiritual practice. Praying and participating in religious festivals are integral parts of their lives. It was reported that one of the daily tasks for women was to wake up and pray. In turn, weaving seemed to foster a sense of mastery among practitioners which contributes to power-from-within. While most women learned the T1 workshop activity with ease, those who struggled were quickly supported by others to make and improve their woven medallions. During interviews, Rakhine women said that weaving gave them a sense of self-sufficiency, the ability to contribute to family and community, and feelings of independence, particularly when selling woven goods.

'Power-from-within' was also seen among men in the community. It is helpful to note Thinlen's interview about the Rohingya situation in chapter 5, where he expressed that he was not worried for his safety because he felt he had an understanding between himself and his classmates. The basis of power-from-within is self-acceptance and self-respect, which extends to respect and acceptance for others as equals (Rowlands 1997). I also observed power-from-within among the participants of Kathin chibor dan as they took turns to pay their respects to the Buddha and the monks. Also, as they collectively listened to the teachings of the monk.

Considering participation, Rowlands' view of empowerment includes a strong emphasis on an individuals' ability to participate in various spheres (Iqbal 2020; Rowlands 1995). From observing the expressions of participation, it is undeniable that an analysis of power is also related to participation. Adhering to the Foucauldian view of power, which 'is understood as something that is exercised, not possessed' (Foucault 2003, p. 13), some of the items discussed above also denote ways the Rakhine exercise the power to participate in their communities: villages, homes, and interpersonal relationships.

Participatory methodologies and strategies are 'approaches that directly involve local people in the design and delivery of development initiatives: projects, programs and partnerships' (Eversole 2015, p. 50). Recognising that participatory methodologies and strategies are often not as participatory as they claim, during fieldwork I aimed to uphold involvement where possible and reflected on processes to ensure increased participation from locals. Therefore, in discussing the participatory aspect of my research, 'it might be useful to make a distinction between discourse—what is said or written about participation—and practice—what is done under the auspices of participation—how those involved in the project activities, the techniques they use to influence one another or to resist or evade such influence, and what effects all of these actions have' (Gallagher 2008, p. 400-401). The following considers my attempt to design participatory arts-based workshops (what I set out to do) and include my reflections on what came of participation.

In response to Cornwall's (2003) comment (see full quote in chapter 2) about not just adding women and stirring in hopes that participation is attained, I understood while designing the arts-based workshops that several factors would limit participation. Some of these factors included the short time I had with the Rakhine—it takes time to build collaborative relationships based on trust—the fact that I am a Westerner, and that my 'outsider' identity would contribute to power differentials. For example, my experience working with volunteers highlighted existing power differentials that required more time to mitigate than I anticipated.

It was apparent that T1 volunteers were not fully informed of the purpose of their participation. Both groups of volunteers were organised by individuals they respected and who, to some extent, had power over them. Both of the individuals who organised the volunteers were Caritas staff that had heard through correspondence with directors in Caritas Barisal of my arrival and workshop intentions. Neither of these individuals had a strong understanding of what my workshop purpose or content would be. They were acting out directives from higher positions within Caritas.

The different outcomes between working with the volunteers from Taltali and Kala para in 2016 were attributed to two main influences. First, relationship and the second, the exercise of power. In Taltali, I was able to spend time with Chanda and cultivate a relationship. She came to understand my research intentions, as well as the workshop content. She was then able to relay that to her volunteers who then better understood what they were participating in. Aside from this, the volunteers in this group were students in grade school and were accustomed to following directions without questioning. Furthermore, given that both were high achieving students, they followed directions so that they excelled in what they were asked to do. As a result, the two volunteers in Taltali performed well in their roles as volunteers. Noen and I had noted that though the volunteers in Taltali were good at performing their tasks, they were quite young and might not have felt comfortable giving feedback on the relevance and cultural appropriateness of the workshops. Both volunteers enjoyed the activity and agreed (when asked) that it would be relevant for the community in Taltali.

Noen and I were quick to check in with the field director in Kala para to make sure his group was more mature in age. However, I did not have time to explain the premise of my research before his communication with volunteers. As a result, it was apparent that the group of volunteers in Kala para were not well versed on their roles. Despite communication in the volunteer workshop, and the feedback Noen and I received, it was apparent during the community workshop that the volunteers did not understand the purpose of their roles. This was made explicit when they complained that we were doing the same thing as they had done in the volunteer workshop. Furthermore, none of them took the initiative to show the community

workshop participants how to make the medallions, nor were they ready to ask participants the prepared questions. Noen suggested that our lack of success with the volunteers in Kala para was because these participants were older and stuck in their ways.

What happened in this instance reflects much of what has been documented in critiques of participatory community work. Even with the intention for participatory design of workshops and the recognition of power differentials, nuances prevent participation from being truly ‘participatory’. This experience was insightful and informed preparation for T2 volunteers. It also informed how I recruited volunteers in T2 as I detailed in chapter 6.

Following what I learned in T1, I engaged in conversations with Noen during the preparatory stages of fieldwork in order to ensure he understood the workshop aims. I also made certain to check volunteer understanding during volunteer workshops. This resulted in having volunteers who supported and were invested in community workshops. I also had more time to build rapport with them. As a result, participation among volunteers during T2 was significantly different. In many aspects, our team worked more collaboratively together.

Several other individuals exhibited interest in participating when it was for a cause that they inherently believed in. For example, during T2, Chanda offered her house as a location where we could meet every day after Noen and I had completed formal research objectives. Her house was where we would go to unwind at the end of the day, often among friends, and the place where informal meetings concerning the community workshops and the picnic party occurred. Although I never formally organised these meetings, nor did I ask the others who came to Chanda’s home to help in the community workshops, a group of Rakhine youth and young adults formed organically. Under Chanda’s leadership, they started taking responsibility for various parts of the community workshops and the picnic party.

These expressions of participation that I saw over my field trips shed light on participatory community efforts. I learned that given opportunities to participate, community members will participate at varying levels. These varying levels of

participation depend on several factors. Community members participate when they see the value in participating. The group in T2 that self-organised to help with the community workshops and picnic party saw value in the event. Community members participate if they understand their purpose in participation. The T1 volunteers resisted participation in part due to not having a clear idea on their role and the workshops' value as opposed to the volunteers in T2 who understood what their roles were and the purpose of the workshops. Further, community members participate if they see that they themselves have something to offer. This was seen from the outcomes of the critical photography workshops. From these workshops, participants realised how they could take part in changing things in their own communities. This was also exemplified in Noen's involvement with Cupping; he felt confident that his skills and experience with organising travel to Caritas Kala para and working with community members could benefit Cupping's work. Lastly, community members participate based on relationships they have with the individuals organising events, and their relationships with others who also choose to participate.

These findings suggest that participatory action is influenced by agency (Choudhury, Haque & Habib 2016). Cleaver (2007) argues that an important factor in determining one's agency is emotionality, which is the conscious and unconscious emotions that shape people's sense of self-efficacy and social relationships. This sense of self-efficacy relates to the extent to which they publicly engage and assert their rights. Admittedly, many other factors influence participation, such as gender, class, tradition, and kinship structure. However, in observing individuals' power to participate and viewing power as possessing a net-like anatomy instead of being a centralised entity, I observed participation primarily in the individual realm, among those I interacted with, noting how they participated in my work with them.

The examples of resilience I encountered were also expressed in relation to empowerment and participation. The way power is exercised illustrated resilience among the people with whom I interacted. Reiterating what Hillier (2015) summarises as a spectrum of resilience, resilience can be understood as persistence, which emphasises protecting, maintaining, and/or conforming to the status quo. Resilience can also be understood as adaptation, which focuses on adjusting to

dynamic contingencies. Lastly, resilience can be understood as transformation, which focuses on steering away from undesirable trajectories caused by stimulus and creatively transforming its own structure.

In the midst of the intersecting challenges they face, the Rakhine demonstrated *resilience as persistence* in living out their daily lives and pursuing their livelihoods, and in practicing their cultural traditions, religion, and culture as I detailed in chapters 4, 5, and 6. As a minority, the Rakhine maintain themselves as a unique culture in place. This was evident in several ways. There is an observable difference between Rakhine villages to Bengali villages, specifically with regard to architecture. It was also evident in the way the Rakhine proudly wear their cultural dress within their villages and in the marketplace, in hearing the Rakhine language in conversation, eating Rakhine traditional foods, practicing Buddhism, organising and attending religious festivals, how the Rakhine value marrying among their own ethnicity and in weaving regardless of the little money they make from it.

The Rakhine also exhibited resilience in adaptation. This was seen in how villagers are adapting to changes in their traditional livelihoods. For example, weaving in the past brought in greater return and was practised year-round. However, despite lower financial return and demand for the product, women today still weave for a living. Other than weaving, the Rakhine living in Taltali and Kala para's traditional ways of livelihood relied primarily on subsistence agriculture and aquaculture. However, younger generations are now securing different futures through increasing their education and training. The younger generation of Rakhine I interviewed were all enrolled in high school and/or post-secondary education and had aspirations of careers in NGOs, textile trades, social science, commerce, and medicine. Several of these Rakhine youth expressed that finding secure jobs could help them continue their culture. Specifically, one participant directly correlated her job security and income to having money to pay for community festivals.

Another example of adaptive resilience was how the Rakhine in Taltli responded to the Rohingya situation. The Rohingya situation caused significant uncertainty and fear, particularly around safety. For example, under the leadership of Ching Tao Maung, Taltli elders and other volunteers self-organised to discuss contingency plans

related to the situation. The group collaborated with local police and governing bodies to ensure safety within their village from these meetings. One of the temporary laws they negotiated was that non-residents could not enter within Rakhine village parameters after dark unless residents were with them. They formed a security team that monitored their village 24-hours a day. Rakhine exhibited resilience in being able to self-organise ways to create safety in their villages.

Other than maintaining/conforming to the status quo and adapting, the Rakhine also exhibited resilience concerning transformation. The cultural group in Amkhola para is an example of transformative resilience. Recognising that their cultural practices are a minority amid the nation's cultural life, and at risk of disappearing, as well as unknown by many in Bangladesh, the Mudbar of Amkhola para runs a cultural group consisting of young adults from his village to practice, share, and educate others (Rakhine and Bengalis alike) about Rakhine music, dance, art, and culture. Their cultural group has gained enough traction that they have been featured on Bangladeshi radio, been invited to perform at various government-run and NGO conferences, and perform at their own festivals. The group aims to educate, share, and maintain Rakhine culture through music, dance, and art.

Viewing resilience as a spectrum gave me a framework with which to gauge levels of resilience within the Rakhine. It also helped me ask what resilience looks like, instead of whether or not the Rakhine are indeed resilient. Taking on the question of what resilience looks like enabled me to recognise that resilience can be expressed differently. For example, resilience exists even in the midst of larger barriers that would evoke vulnerability, such as those identified as barriers for the Rakhine (marginalisation, poverty, climate-related pressures, land-grabbing). Looking at resilience as a spectrum also prevents judgements of vulnerable communities as being 'just not resilient enough'.

Autoethnographic reflections

This research process and experience yielded many personal reflections. Indeed, although there were no immediate 'aha' or 'see the light' moments for me, it was a gradual process of coming to understand, learn and being educated more

circumspectly through undertaking empirical research in developing contexts while practicing (teaching) in Western contexts (see Willis 2019). These reflections have informed my practice as a researcher and practitioner. They have helped me realise more of how my analysis and interpretation of data, the way I make meaning, are enmeshed with value judgments and rhetorical devices that may reflect the social expectations of my own culture (Willis 2019). I hope that my reflections invigorate further learning for other researchers and practitioners so that collectively our practices and attempts to address social injustices can resolve rather than perpetuate them in other ways.

This work's process challenged me to reflect on my own inherent colonialist, neoliberal, and culturally insensitive practices that came through in nuanced ways at every stage of this work. It has taken consistent reflection and several drafts for me to write this work to represent values from culturally sensitive, decolonising, and participatory frameworks, and still I fear I have much to improve. In the following, I will detail an intention I had when I started this thesis to discuss how this research process has made me aware of my own cultural biases. What is more insidious is that some of the expectations I carried into the study I would proclaim now to be unjust and wrong. However, it was humbling to recognise that albeit good intentions, that until upon reflection, I unknowingly perpetuated these social expectations.

I started this research dissertation because I had met the Rakhine in 2014. Upon learning about their culture and traditions and the vulnerabilities of being a marginalised ethnic group in Bangladesh, I thought I could do something that could help them. I developed an idea based on the possibilities of social enterprises in community development. I thought it would be novel and useful to reconnect with the Rakhine and see if there was a possibility of setting up a weaving social enterprise. Specifically, the business would be an enterprise where I would buy Rakhine woven cloth at a fair price. With the help of local tailors, I would work with them to make tailored clothing and goods to send abroad for sale. There were some Rakhine who had already spoken to me about such ideas when I first went there. From those conversations, I thought I could use some of my connections in Canada and Australia to help set up a business. This would give me something to write about in a dissertation as another example of social business in community development.

Upon starting my research, I quickly understood my naïvety and inherent bias. In the following, I look at this initial intention, from how it was formed to how it was re-formed as an example of lessons learned while attempting to practice cross-cultural work that expresses values from culturally sensitive, decolonising, and participatory frameworks.

My first impressions of Rakhine culture came with arriving at their village and noticing the built environment. In chapter 4, I gave physical descriptions of Taltali and Kala para illustrating that Rakhine houses are built out of wood, *golpata*, mud, concrete, and corrugated iron sheet metal often on a densely packed mud base. What I saw was visibly different from my Canadian home. I was familiar with houses built with European architectural influence and streets paved with concrete, lit up by streetlights. My naïve first impression was that these people lived in poverty, without resources I had come to know as the norm—in-home electricity, running water, and toilets. This first impression formed my narrative of the Rakhine. I saw myself as privileged and the Rakhine as in need of some of the privilege that I enjoyed. It was not that I felt the need to advocate for electricity, water, and toilets but that in some way or another, I saw the Rakhine as primitive, in need of aid so they could survive in the technological, Western world that I was familiar with. In other words, I perpetuated a settler myth—the helping Western Other.

As I spent more time with the Rakhine, I learned of the fallacy of my first impression. This realisation gave insight into how deeply the effects of colonisation run and how easily colonisation is perpetuated. Decolonising methodologies include undoing white privilege and allowing the colonised to view and understand themselves through their own worldviews (Chilisa 2012). Further, Land (2015) notes that we need to thoroughly understand it to undo white privilege. When I first learned of white privilege, my immediate response was, ‘I am not white, I am Chinese’. I was born in Canada. My personal history did not include a history where my people were colonised, nor did I come from a history of people who were colonisers. However, decolonising methodologies also includes undoing ‘the privileging of dominant Euro-centred cultural values and beliefs in education, scholarship, knowledge production, the legitimisation of intellectual capital, and the

networks and systems of power' (Styres 2017, p. 19). This is where I noted how I fit into the equation of colonisation.

I noticed that colonisation, in one way or another, had influenced me in such a way that I, too, was perpetuating it as much as I am oppressed by it. For example, though I am Chinese, I was born in Western society, which afforded me aspects of white privilege, and education and experience that is Eurocentric. This reality became clear to me throughout my research as I noticed how it affected me and my interpretations of information. Using my first impression as an example, my Eurocentric cultural values and beliefs influenced the formation of the narrative that the Rakhine are vulnerable and in need of my contributions. Further, it was my Eurocentric perspective, heavily informed by neoliberal values, that led me to assume that I could help the Rakhine by appropriating their culture—through buying their woven goods and employing them to tailor their cultural weaves into designs I could see would sell abroad.

Although conversations with my supervisors, along with literature reviews into social enterprises, informed me that this type of project would not be feasible as a dissertation, the curiosity of whether this idea could be possible remained with me when I returned to Bangladesh in 2016 for fieldwork. In preparation for fieldwork, I considered the five components outlined in Tillman's (2006) framework for culturally sensitive research. Specifically, I considered how my interview questions, participant information sheets, and participant consent forms might be challenging to translate/interpret in using culturally congruent research methods. As such, I prepared two versions of the interview questions, participant information sheets, and consent forms. The first version was to satisfy higher education requirements as part of a Ph.D. dissertation and the ethics board; the later version expressed the questions and documents in simpler English for ease of interpretation. I also considered how I could include participatory aspects into my research design, which (as already described) resulted in consultations with Noen and the inclusion of volunteer workshops prior to the arts-based community workshops.

Once in the field, it was clear that though I had prepared my interview questions and documents into simple English, some elements of it were still challenging to

interpret. Further, the meetings I had with Noen before my fieldwork held significant weight: what I did not communicate to him before the start of fieldwork translated into how effective his interpretation was of my interview questions and other research goals. To ensure a clear understanding of interview questions and research goals, I had to check that Noen understood the underlying purposes of my questions and goals. Initially, I was timid to do what I felt was over-explicitly explaining my research purposes. Particularly concerning my reflections on decolonising and participatory work, I did not want to come across like I was enforcing my research intentions onto Noen. It was a balancing act to pair being explicit and insistent on checking for understanding and cultivating a collaborative relationship. I found that when I managed that balance, it brought Noen on board, encouraging his participation. He took on the research questions and goals as if they were his own, showing much more investment in the entire fieldwork process.

Working closely with Noen, I noticed the fissures I had between what I ideologically wanted to practice, how I planned to execute my ideologies, and what I was doing in practice. The former example of preparing interview questions in simple English exemplifies how I intended to be culturally sensitive; however, I expected that simple English would be enough. I did not pre-empt the need to explain the purpose behind the questions thoroughly and explicitly link that back to my research questions and intentions. Furthermore, when it became clear that I needed to take the time to thoroughly explain aspects of my research I thought were clear, I had to question whether I was functioning out of a decolonised and participatory way. Experiences such as these made me ask myself if I had rigorously prepared for my fieldwork—thinking if only I had read more on each of these methodologies, I would have adjusted faster or pre-empted more.

Anderson (2004) claims that spaces that are not colonised do not exist. Ngũgi wa Thiong’o in 1986 claims that, ultimately, abolishing Western epistemological dominance is a challenge of ‘decolonising the mind’ (Held 2019). The practical aspect of applying culturally sensitive, decolonising, and participatory research values in the planning phases of this research (but more so in the field) prompted the action towards decolonising my mind as I exemplified in the former example. I had to reflect in the most nuanced ways whether my actions expressed values of cultural

sensitivity, decolonisation, and participation while balancing those values surrounding the desire to meet the standards of my research (that are predominantly influenced by Western Euro-centred values). Recognising the gap between my theory and practice prompted me to rethink my ideas around starting a social enterprise in collaboration with this community. I realised the value of relationships and how long it takes to build trusting reciprocal engagements for effective community development to occur. I also learned that rather than claiming that one community development project is participatory and the other is not, looking at participation on a continuum is a more accurate view of the work. For participation praxis to move from one end of the continuum where community members are given tasks to participate, to shared leadership, and to the other end of eventual community-based leadership takes time and strong relationships based on trust.

These trusting reciprocal relationships are pivotal in ensuring that both parties' needs are voiced, power differentials are managed in a collaborative way, and actions reflect an agenda that is just and fair. I was not interested in starting a social enterprise that perpetuated injustice, albeit while generating profits that might benefit particular individuals within the Rakhine community. I also acknowledged the time needed to build trusting relationships with several key people within the community for a social enterprise to be successful. Furthermore, as I learned more about the value the Rakhine placed on their cultural identity, I realised how ignorant I was to think that selling their traditional cloth adapted into Western tastes would actually help them feel proud of their culture. I would be inadvertently contributing to diluting and dissolving their cultural identity.

This research prompted me to notice how I perpetuated colonising ways of being. Specifically, it was confronting to realise how predominantly I functioned out of a Euro-centric, neoliberal, Western perspective, even if I identify with socialist and critical philosophies. Barker (2010), Denzin and Lincoln (2008), and Held (2019) suggest that a crucial step towards empowering and emancipating Indigenous peoples *vis-à-vis* the dominant society; to obtain true (research) collaboration; to gain a stronger understanding of each other and of each other's approaches, concepts, and worldviews, is to move beyond settler myths such as the Helping Western Other. Practicing reflexive thinking throughout this research process

furthered my journey of noticing the hegemonic nature of European/Western thought in myself. This process has informed my practice in how I might relate to people from other cultures, ethnicities, and ways of being when working with them towards a more fair and collaborative future. This realisation sparked further understanding of how Euro-centric values have been implemented in development strategies. And although these strategies might come with the best intentions, some of these strategies counter local initiatives, local knowledge, self-autonomy and therefore limit empowerment, participation, and resilience.

Limitations, horizons, and recommendations

Although the findings from my fieldwork support evidence that keeping cultural practices and traditions is related to an exercise of power, some aspects of this case study's generalisability are limited by the sample size and by using intersectionality as a conceptual lens.

First, the Rakhine I refer to throughout this study are those I met, interacted with, and formed a research relationship with, which was a relatively small population of Rakhine. Though I make references throughout this work to 'the Rakhine', these statements cannot be generalised to represent *all* Rakhine. The Rakhine refers to an ethnicity of people who live in various villages, primarily within the southwestern coastal areas of Bangladesh, and within Myanmar (Burma), primarily within the Rakhine state. Tun (2015) notes how ethnicity is defined by considering borders, nation-state identifications, and locality. Therefore, there is a likelihood of variability in cultural practices and traditions within the Rakhine as a whole. Nonetheless, my findings represent how cultural practices and the preservation and transmission of them are significant to the Rakhine. For example, though there existed a variance in the number of women who wove for a living between the villages I visited, all the people I interviewed still supported that weaving was important in their culture.

Second, intersectionality may be effective as a heuristic tool in seeking understanding but has the potential to lead policymakers into situations where their 'hands are tied', or they are made 'ambivalent' (Chow 2016). Once identifying the axes that influence oppression, it can be assumed that addressing those axes or

categories would help alleviate the issues. However, this can create other problems. As Chow (2016, p. 473) illustrates: ‘it is easily presumed as a result of both gender and religious identities that “all Muslim women are subordinated” despite the fact that this is not always the case’. Therefore, solutions become difficult to find, create, or implement because intersectionality looks at so many identities that an individual or group holds. For example, (Chow 2016, p. 472) denotes that, ‘even where broad structures of inequality such as race, nationality, class, and gender must have an impact on individuals—and thus need to be thoroughly addressed—they do not define the intricacies of everyday life experiences no matter how fine the level of disaggregation. [However,] an over-emphasis on the impact of structural forces on an individual may serve to obscure agency’. Thus, a limitation I found was that intersectionality makes it difficult to draw generalisations from the collected data. I acknowledge that the collected stories and experiences of the people I interacted with represent a minute experience of what Rakhine individuals experience, not all of the experiences even represent all of those I met. Nonetheless, they do shed light onto further understanding of how some Rakhine live and experience precarity.

The reliability and validity of this research are impacted by its cross-cultural nature, specifically in relation to my dependence on Noen to communicate my research aims and questions and interpret all my interactions I had with the Rakhine. Nonetheless, wherever I could, I cross-referenced information to ensure my interpretations of situations and documented findings were as exact as possible. One example of this was when I noted interviewees change from speaking Rakhine to Bangla when conversation topics became more complex. In each of those instances, I checked in with Noen if my observations were right. Also, for any documents written first in Bangla and translated by Noen, I cross-checked with my Bangla language tutor in Australia to ensure accuracy of translation and meaning, recognising that not all words translate directly from Bangla to English.

Lastly, the methodological choice to reconnect with the same participants from the weaving workshops both in T1 and T2 was constrained by the fact that some participants from T1 were not available to participate in the weaving workshops in T2. This was true in Kala para as none of the ten participants who came in T1

attended the workshops in T2. This affected the data collected from workshop questions as these questions could only be used for the group in Taltali. All participants in the Kala para weaving workshops were between the ages of 15–22. Therefore, I chose to interview them about what it means to be Rakhine in relation to their experiences of growing up in two cultures. Despite limitations that were part of this research, new knowledge was attained.

This case study contributes to literature that purports that culture is significant. Culture is significant in many ways—as an ancient identity landmark (Kanu 2020), as an evoker of a collective sense of belonging (Zulkarnain et al. 2020), as a factor that contributes to resilience in the face of environmental disasters (Mori et al. 2019), among others. Revisiting the claims made on the importance of cultural preservation and transmission of cultural practices by Redner (2004) and others I cited in the introduction, what I learned from the Rakhine was that their traditional culture contributes to their collective identity. It provides meaning, purpose, a sense of belonging, a set of values and beliefs, and also governs personal relationships.

The analysis of findings suggests that preserving cultural practices and the transmission of them contributes to creating and maintaining social cohesion, identity and meaning. Practicing culture is also part of an exercise of power that relates to empowerment, participation, and resilience. The example from this case study documents how a marginalised culture can find ways to sustain their cultural practices regardless of their social, economic, environmental, and geopolitical situation and the development programs that have been implemented to improve their situation. This supports the idea that there is value in encouraging a continued, if not an augmented, expression of a community's cultural practices and traditions (noting that this would not apply to cultural practices that violate human rights and ethics) in development programs. Further research can be conducted to find effective ways for development programs to support continued expressions of culture within marginalised communities.

This work also contributes to the existing scholarship surrounding the concepts of precarity and intersectionality. Intersectionality aided my analysis of the variety of

ways power is used, not used, reinforced, and shared among the Rakhine, within the structural influences that affect them. Throughout this work, rather than thinking of power as something to subvert or invert, I used intersectionality to observe ‘practices in which the individual-society relation develops offers a more pluralised account of ways in which power games may collide in the everyday’ (Gemignani & Hernandez-Albujar 2019, p. 142). Intersectionality has its roots in Black feminism, making distinctions to how Black women’s experience of inequality and oppression is compounded by race and ethnicity as much as their experience of gender roles and expectations. Intersectionality has since been applied to understanding how race in general (not just being Black but Asian, or other races), gender and other intersecting axes such as class, sexuality, and colonisation influence women’s experiences globally (Brah & Phoenix 2004). In expanding and adding to the scholarship of intersectionality, my work contributes by providing another example where intersectionality is applied to learn about a particular ethnic community.

This work also adds to the scholarship of precarity, offering another account of how precarity affects communities from non-Western cultures. In particular, this work adds to a critique of Standing’s ‘new class’ and other ideas about precarity being a ‘new’ phenomenon, when many in the Global South have always lived in precarity. Instead, this work shows how lives that already exist in precarity are further influenced by today’s neoliberal processes. As Tappe & Nguyen (2019) illuminate, urbanisation, agrarian lifestyle changes, and liberal economic restructuring have been drawing rural populations into mobile economies, trade networks across and within borders. This work contributes to documenting how people who have always lived in precarity continue to craft ‘diverse everyday tactics to negotiate uncertainty and power in pursuit of their aspirations for better futures’ (Tappe & Nguyen 2019, p. 7).

In analysing data collected from arts-based activities, I found the lenses of precarity and intersectionality effective as heuristic tools to seek an understanding of my subject. These concepts were also useful for observing how power is utilised and enacted in ways that express empowerment, participation, and resilience. Examining empowerment, participation, and resilience as enactments of power instead of a quality to possess allowed me to avoid regarding the Rakhine in a manner that

insinuates possible deficiencies. By actively practicing a perspective where I regarded individuals and communities I met as sufficient, and, in some cases, bountiful, our interactions and work together became more collaborative, reciprocal, and honest. Further research can be conducted on development strategies that are designed based on an initial analysis of power within the community and how that impacts development outcomes.

Examining how power is exercised also allowed me to see that the Rakhine exert power despite external ‘interventions’ (development efforts, etc.). I also observed that arts-based activities can be useful in invigorating participants to exercise empowerment, participation, and resilience in areas that were previously limited. These changes in the exercise of power also establish that empowerment, participation, and resilience can be encouraged by invoking critical praxis using arts-based activities. Inspired by Boal (2002), I was curious if other art-forms other than theatre could be useful for this kind of application. Wang (1994) had shown that photography could be used for critical praxis. Findings from this work suggest that even if the photovoice method is not implemented, photography as a medium can still be used to invoke critical praxis. Weaving, on the other hand, did not as easily draw participants into critical reflection. It would have been interesting to see if results would be different if I could speak Rakhine and did not have to rely on an interpreter. Further research can test if other artforms can be used to effectively invoke critical praxis. Also, further research can find if certain art mediums are easier to use than others for critical praxis in cross-cultural situations where there is a language barrier.

In addressing the cross-cultural nature of this research, I considered culturally sensitive, decolonising, and participatory research values. In applying these research values, what I learned, contribute to praxis related to cross-cultural work. The autoethnographic reflections that this work prompted suggest the nuanced ways colonisation affects us all. One way towards the action of decolonising one’s mind (recognising it is not possible to erase the effects of colonisation), is to learn through the combination of becoming educated about what decolonising processes mean and engaging in the practice of decolonising work. I attempted to share my experience within personal reflections. I explained how this research process had informed my

own practice. As a practicing social worker for over 15 years and an aspiring academic, these reflections challenged me to consider what it means to decolonise one's mind. These learnings have informed my future practice—how I will relate to people from other cultures and ethnicities when working with them towards a more fair and collaborative future. Further autoethnographic research on the nuances related to practicing in culturally sensitive, decolonised, and participatory ways could contribute to the reflexivity that is needed to effectively practice these values. As De Castella and Byrne (2015, p. 260) have explained: 'knowing change is possible is not the same as believing personally in one's ability to change'. Real change takes place through gradual private successes over time. Therefore, more autoethnographic accounts that illustrate the changes within researchers and practitioners when practicing in culturally sensitive, decolonised, and participatory ways will contribute to those gradual successes over time.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Ethics Application Approval

12 August 2016

Professor Keith Jacobs School of Social Sciences University of Tasmania

Student Researcher: Hannah Poon

Sent via email

Dear Professor Jacobs

Re: FULL ETHICS APPLICATION APPROVAL

Ethics Ref: **H0015787 - Art, creativity and socio-economic resilience in face of climatic pressures among the Rakhine of Bangladesh**

We are pleased to advise that the Tasmania Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee approved the above project on 12 August 2016.

This approval constitutes ethical clearance by the Tasmania Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee. The decision and authority to commence the associated research may be dependent on factors beyond the remit of the ethics review process. For example, your research may need ethics clearance from other organisations or review by your research governance coordinator or Head of Department. It is your responsibility to find out if the approval of other bodies or authorities is required. It is recommended that the proposed research should not commence until you have satisfied these requirements.

Please note that this approval is for four years and is conditional upon receipt of an annual Progress Report. Ethics approval for this project will lapse if a Progress Report is not submitted.

The following conditions apply to this approval. Failure to abide by these conditions may result in suspension or discontinuation of approval.

1. It is the responsibility of the Chief Investigator to ensure that all investigators are aware of the terms of approval, to ensure the project is conducted as approved by the Ethics Committee, and to notify the Committee if any investigators are added to, or cease involvement with, the project

A PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Social Science Ethics Officer Private Bag 01 Hobart Tasmania 7001 Australia Tel: (03) 6226 2763 Fax: (03) 6226 7148 Katherine.Shaw@utas.edu.au

2. Complaints: If any complaints are received or ethical issues arise during the course of the project, investigators should advise the Executive Officer of the Ethics Committee on 03 6226 7479 or human.ethics@utas.edu.au.
3. Incidents or adverse effects: Investigators should notify the Ethics Committee immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project.
4. Amendments to Project: Modifications to the project must not proceed until approval is obtained from the Ethics Committee. Please submit an Amendment Form (available on our website) to notify the Ethics Committee of the proposed modifications.
5. Annual Report: Continued approval for this project is dependent on the submission of a Progress Report by the anniversary date of your approval. You will be sent a courtesy reminder closer to this date. **Failure to submit a Progress Report will mean that ethics approval for this project will lapse.**
6. Final Report: A Final Report and a copy of any published material arising from the project, either in full or abstract, must be provided at the end of the project.

Yours sincerely

Katherine Shaw
Executive Officer

Tasmania Social Sciences HREC

Appendix B: Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms

Participant Information Sheet

Art, creativity and socio-economic resilience in face of climatic pressures among the Rakhine of Bangladesh

Participant Information Sheet
(UTAS version)

Dear Sir/Madam,

Introduction and Purpose

As part of my doctoral research project at the University of Tasmania, Australia, I will be conducting an ethnographic research on the effectiveness of arts and creativity in building socio-economic resilience amongst vulnerable populations facing climatic pressures.

This research will be conducted under the supervision of Dr. Keith Jacobs and Associate Professor Elaine Stratford. It is an interdisciplinary study with the output of an 80,000-100,000 word thesis, possible publications and a series of artwork at the end of the project.

Role of the Researcher

As part of this research I will be engaging as a participant observer to the daily livelihoods of the Rakhine people, learning culture, traditions, way of relating, roles and language. I will also be conducting a series of arts-based workshops,

undertaking semi-structured interviews and intentional conversations with participants.

Any observations and documents I take will be deidentified unless otherwise approved/consented by the individual. I will have a photograph consent form available to you. I will be audio recording interviews and any intentional conversations to be translated. Once the recordings have been translated, they will be erased. Any de-identified data cannot be removed from the research.

Role of Participant

Your participation in this research is voluntary and at any point you may withdraw your participation. Participation involves no foreseeable risk and you are free to terminate any interview/conversations at any time. At any point, you can ask to see any documentation that has been recorded of you. The final thesis will be available February of 2020 for community review.

This study cannot guarantee any direct benefits to the Rakhine community, however any outputs from art based activities are yours to keep. Also, the findings of this study will be shared, wherever possible to increase support in arts based practices in international and community development strategies.

Contact

If you have any questions or concerns about this project, please feel free to contact Hannah Poon at Hannah.poon@utas.edu.au and/or to the chief investigator: Keith Jacobs at keith.jacobs@utas.edu.au. Any complaints and/or concerns regarding ethics should be directed to: Tasmanian Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee on +613 6226 7479 or human.ethics@utas.edu.au.

This research project has passed through a rigorous University Ethics Committee process to ensure that it is relevant, ethical and appropriate, and conforms to international best-practice human research protocols.

This information sheet is yours to keep, if you are willing to participate in this research, I will provide you a consent form.

We kindly appreciate your interest in our project and your participation.

Regards,

Hannah Poon

Doctoral Researcher at University of Tasmania

School of Sociology and School of Land and Food

+61 4..

hannah.poon@utas.edu.au

Participant Consent Form

1. I agree to take part in the research study entitled “*Art, creativity and socio-economic resilience in face of climatic pressures among the Rakhine of Bangladesh*”
2. I have read (been informed) and understood the Information Sheet for this study.
3. The nature and possible effects of the study have been explained to me.
4. I understand that the study involves no foreseeable risk(s).
5. I understand that participation in arts-based activities, in an interview or in an intentional conversation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without effect.
6. I understand that all research data will be securely stored on the password encrypted computer and cloud storage of Hannah Poon. On Hannah’s return to Australia, all data will be stored at the University of Tasmania Sandy Bay campus, and, after the study is completed, will be securely archived and available to refer to in other projects in the future.
7. I understand that the researcher will maintain confidentiality and that any information I supply to the researcher will be used only for the purposes of the research.
8. I understand that the results of the study will be published so that I cannot be identified as a participant. **or** I agree to be identified as a participant in the publication of the study results.

- I agree to be identified ☐ I do not agree to be identified ☐
- 9. If I so wish, I may request that any data I have supplied be withdrawn from the research. I understand that once the research has been published I will not be able to withdraw my data.
- 10. Photographs taken of me may be used in the final publication Yes ☐
No ☐ Please also sign the UTAS photograph consent form
- 11. I agreed to be audio recorded in interviews/conversations with the understanding that the recordings will be erased once researcher has completed translating the interviews/conversations for the purposes of the research. Yes ☐ No ☐
- 12. Any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

Participant's name:

Participant's signature:

Date: _____

Statement by Investigator

☐ I have explained the project and the implications of participation in it to this volunteer and I believe that the consent is informed and that he/she understands the implications of participation.

If the Investigator has not had an opportunity to talk to participants prior to them participating, the following must be ticked.

☐ The participant has received the Information Sheet where my details have been provided so participants have had the opportunity to contact me prior to consenting to participate in this project.

Investigator's name:

Investigator's signature:

Date: _____

Appendix C: Post Arts-based Workshop Interview Questions

T1, 2016: Post Weaving Workshop Interview Questions

1. What was your experience of this art workshop?
2. Did you learn anything new?
3. What is the role of Rakhine women in Rakhine culture?
4. What kind of work do Rakhine women do?
5. How much of that work generates income for the family?
6. When do women get free time? Is there a choice on when?
7. Do/Did you know how to weave?
8. Do you like to weave?
9. Do you use your weaving as a way to generate income for your family? If so, how much money do you make on a monthly basis? (If no was your answer to question 8) Would you use weaving as a way to generate income for your family?
10. What resources and skills do you need to be able to use weaving as a way to generate income for yourself/your family?
11. Did this art workshop make you feel proud of: a. the women in your community/family? B. yourself as a woman?
12. Did this art workshop make you feel proud of weaving as a craft/artform?
13. Anything else to add?

T2, 2017: Post Weaving Workshop Interview Questions

Taltali

1. What did you feel about the workshop activity?
2. Did you learn something new? How will you apply what you learned?
3. Do you find it beneficial to gather as a group?
 - a. If so, why? How?
4. Have you weaved much since last time we met?
5. How do you think that technology and changes in culture have affected weaving practices?
 - a. Have these changes helped the practice of weaving?
 - b. Have these changes lead to Rakhine people choosing different livelihoods from before?
6. Do you find that weaving is an opportunity for you to be creative?
7. Is creativity important for you?
8. What are some ways to continue the tradition of weaving?
9. What are other ways to continue Rakhine tradition and culture?
10. Any other things you wanted to ask or talk about?

Kala para

1. What is your age?
2. What grade are you in at school?
3. What does it mean to be Rakhine?

4. What do you feel is a challenge to being Rakhine?
5. Are you ever fearful of being Rakhine?
6. Do you ever wish to be of a different culture/ethnicity?
7. Do you weave? Who taught you? Do you do it for income?
8. Do you like weaving? Why/why not?
9. How does weaving play a role in your culture?
10. What ways do you practice your culture?
11. How can you continue your traditions in the future?

T2, 2017: Post Critical Photography Workshop Interview Questions

1. How did you feel about the workshop?
2. Did you learn something new?
3. Was this the first time using a digital camera? How was the experience of using a digital camera like for you?
4. How has technology affected your life?
5. Pictures taken- (refer to the photos participant took to discuss)
6. Did this activity encourage creativity?
7. Did the experience of the activity today inspire you to contribute to your own community?
8. Do you think that improving your community can be done easier by yourself or in group?
9. Would you ask a group of people to work with you?
10. Are there any community groups in your village that focus on developing your village?

11. From what you learned in this workshop, what are you inspired to do next?

Appendix D: Interview Guides

Interview Questions for Caritas staff

Individual staff member and their role

1. Please state your name and job title
2. Tell me in your own words what does Caritas do?
3. Tell me more about your position here at Caritas
4. Tell me more about the programs Caritas offers for the Rakhine

Integrated Community Development Program

1. Tell me more about ICDP, how its run, what programs are involved, who the programs are for, and who runs it?
2. Are there any parts of this program that is Rakhine specific?
3. How is this program funded?

Cooperative Credit Unions

1. Can you elaborate more on what the CCU is?
2. What role does Caritas play with the CCU?
3. What benefits have you seen from the CCU groups?
4. What are some other benefits to being a CCU member?

Skills Training programs

1. Tell me more about the weaving, tailoring and embroidery program you offer
2. Do you teach skills other than weaving as part of that program?
 - a. Literacy?
 - b. Money management?
 - c. Entrepreneurship?
3. Are the women from the weaving program informed about the credit saving circles?
 - a. Do you get guaranteed membership to the credit saving circle due to being part of the weaving program?
4. Where do the women in the weaving classes live, in the same village or city as the program?
5. Do you collect information about how easy it is for the women to access the programs?
6. How long does it take women to get to the program?
7. How are they transported to the program?
8. How often does this weaving program run?
9. How long is the length of one session?

10. What is the process of recruitment to the weaving program?
11. How many of the women who participate are:
 - a. Married
 - b. Single
 - c. Employed in weaving business after
 - d. Start their own weaving business after
12. How do you measure success in your program?
13. How do you fund the program?
14. Do the women get paid for participating in the program or do they pay to participate?
15. Do you notice the significance of maintaining a cultural tradition for the Rakhine women?
16. How is a day of the program structured?
17. Would you consider this a training program or a guild?
18. Do the women make products to sell while in the program?
19. What sorts of products?
20. If so, who profits?
21. Who teaches the weaving program?
 - a. Rakhine or Bangladeshi?
22. What is the significance of weaving?
23. Are there Caritas funded programs training specifically on Rakhine weaving?

Interview Questions for weavers/weaving/tailoring store owners

Business

1. Tell me more about your business
2. What has contributed to success in your weaving business?
3. What has limited/hindered your weaving business?
4. What are some future goals for your weaving business?
5. Do you think that weaving can contribute to improving your community?
6. Are you part of the CUU?
7. How has the CUU helped your business?
8. Has the CUU helped promote weaving in your culture?

Tradition

1. How is Rakhine weaving different from Bengali weaving?
2. Has Bengali styles of weaving been used in Rakhine weaving?
3. Does weaving represent your experiences? Culture? Tradition?
 - a. Are the patterns you weave metaphors for any of these things?
 - b. What inspires your weaving patterns?
4. Is there freedom to design your own patterns?
5. Where did you learn the patterns you weave?
 - a. Do they represent anything?
6. What other kinds of weaving/patterns do you know of?
 - a. Any from other cultures?
7. What other kinds of patterns do you use?

8. Tell me about your loom
 - a. What do you weave on it?
 - b. How do you use it?
 - c. How did you get it?
9. How has technology affected weaving?

Roles

1. Is it primarily women that weave? Why?
2. Do women ever weave together or is it something one does by themselves?
3. Does the decline in weaving affect a woman's ability to contribute financially to their families?
4. What are some challenges to being a weaver?
5. Will weaving lose its importance in your culture if it did not earn money for your family?

Climate/Environment

1. Have the changing weather patterns affected weaving?
 - a. How?
2. How has the push towards moving to cities/having more jobs in cities affected weaving?

Feelings

1. What do you feel when you weave?
2. Do you feel creative?
3. Is creativity an important part of weaving?
4. Has weaving been a source of stress release for you?

Interview Questions for Village Elders and Mudbars

Roles

1. What is your role in the village?
2. How did you become the elder of the village?
3. How long will you be the elder of the village?
4. Do women ever get selected to be elders in villages?
5. Do you get paid to be an elder of the village?
6. What work do you do to earn a living?

Rakhine Lifestyle

1. What is the role of women in your culture?
2. What is the role of men?
3. What is village life like?
4. What are the main ways villagers make a living in your village?
5. Have there been a lot of Rakhine families that have moved to the city for work?

6. How does people moving away affect the village/community?
7. What do you think is the biggest strength of your village/community?
8. What do you think is the biggest risk/limitation to your village/community?
9. What are some ways that the Rakhine build community?
10. Are there regular village meetings to improve the village/community?
11. Where does the money come from to improve the village/community?
12. What are some current challenges that the Rakhine are facing?
13. How has western culture affected the Rakhine?
14. How has technology affected the Rakhine?
15. How has changes in weather patterns (climate change) affected the Rakhine?
Has it affected weaving and other forms of livelihoods?
16. What are some things that would improve the situation for the Rakhine people?
17. What are your thoughts on CUU?
 - a. Have you seen CUU as a helpful part of your community?
18. What does resilience mean to you?
19. In what way does your people show resilience?

Weaving

1. What are your thoughts about weaving in your culture?
2. What kind of significance does it hold for your culture?
3. How has the prevalence of weaving changed over the years?
4. Do you think it (weaving) is still as important to the Rakhine?
5. How has Rakhine weaving represented your culture? Your village?
6. Are there images/patterns in Rakhine weaving that are significant?

Festivals- Festivals are a part of your tradition and religion

1. What are festivals that are part of your tradition?
 - a. Which ones are still practised?
 - b. Why, if not practised anymore?
 - c. Are all festivals religious?
2. Tell me more about Kathin Chibor Dan

Questions for Monks

Role

1. What does your daily life look like?
 - a. What are some responsibilities attached to your role?
2. Tell me how you became a monk
 - a. Why did you choose to?
 - b. Did you have a choice?
 - c. What was the process
3. How long have you been a monk?

Buddhism

1. What kind of Buddhism do the Rakhine follow?
 - a. Why?
2. What are the 5 precepts?
 - a. How are these practised in the community?
3. Tell me more about the value of taking care of the earth, how is this practised?

Rakhine

4. What does it mean to be Rakhine?
5. History of the Rakhine
6. How are the villages governed?
7. What are the roles of men?
8. What are the roles of women? Are there women monks?
9. What are your goals for your village?
10. In what ways do you contribute to developing your village?
11. What are festivals that are part of your tradition?
 - a. Which ones are still practised?
 - b. Why, if not practised anymore?
 - c. Are all festivals religious?
12. How often are religious holidays/festivals practised?
13. Tell me more about Kathin Chibor Dan
14. How often do people visit the *Kyang*?
15. How does the *Kyang* influence everyday life?
16. Has technology affected people's participation with the *Kyang*? How?
17. Has the move towards cities affected people's participation with the *Kyang*? How?

Culture

1. Is there a push for villagers to move to cities to find work?
2. Has western influence affected Rakhine culture? How?
 - a. What about religion?
3. How has Bengali culture affected Rakhine culture?
 - a. What about religion?
4. How has technology affected Rakhine culture? List some positive effects and some negative effects
 - a. What about religion?
5. How has changing weather patterns (climate change) affected Rakhine people?
6. What are some current challenges that the Rakhine are facing?
7. What does resilience mean to you?
8. In what way does your people show resilience?
 - a. Socially?
 - b. Economically?
9. What are your thoughts on CUU?
 - a. Have you seen CUU as a helpful part of your community?
10. What are some things that would improve the situation for the Rakhine people?

Weaving

4. What significance does weaving hold for the Rakhine culture?
5. Who has traditionally been weavers?
6. How has weaving represented Rakhine culture and tradition?
7. Are there images/patterns in Rakhine weaving that are significant?

Pre-Project Interview Questions for Noen

1. Tell me a little about yourself- education? Age? Family? Employment?
2. Where were you born?
3. Do you travel around a lot within the country? What about abroad?
4. Tell me about your employment
5. What does it mean for you to be Rakhine?
6. What are some of your future aspirations?
7. Do you or anyone in your family weave?

Post Project Interview Questions for Noen

1. Have you learned anything new about your culture through this research project? If so, what?
2. What have you learned about community development?
3. What are some continuing challenges for the Rakhine?
4. What are challenges for Rakhine youth/young adults in Bengali culture?
5. Do you see yourself as multi-cultural?
6. What do you think of technology and how has it affected your life and culture?
7. How has the environment affected your culture?
8. What role can you take to change the conditions for the Rakhine?
9. What is next for you now that we have completed this project?
10. Any additional comments/questions?

Appendix E: Arts-based Workshop Questions

Trip #1, 2016: Weaving Workshop Questions

1. What are some daily tasks that women do?
2. What are some decisions women make at home?
3. What are some decisions women make in the village?
4. Why is weaving important to Rakhine people?

Trip #2, 2017: Weaving Workshop Questions

1. Do you remember the medallion project from last year? (Check in if activity was significant enough to remember... change agent? Did they enjoy that activity as much as they had claimed to?)
2. Have you made the floral medallion since the workshop from last year? (was the project relevant to stimulating new designs or weaving practices?)
3. Have you added the technique learned from the medallion project to your regular weaving designs/practice? (Did an *outside* influence impact local culture/tradition?)
4. Have you attempted to make the medallion into a product you could sell? (did last year's project stimulate economic growth/new interactions?)

Trip #2, 2017: Critical Photography Workshop Questions

1. What are good things that happen within your village?
2. What are things that can improve in your village?
3. How can you help improve these things?