Labour, Land and Everyday Lives

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CHAPTER 8

Mobile Bodies, Stolen Land

Visualizing Gendered Landscapes

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In 2017 I found myself in Naypyidaw, speaking on a panel about marginalized women and digital technologies. Ours was one session in a two-day event on women and tech, which featured a story from an organizer about how her mother had become more emancipated through online shopping. In the evening, my roommate, a Myanmar woman building apps, asked me, a white American, to explain what rural Myanmar was like. Like many *yangonthu,* or people from Yangon, this young entrepreneur had rarely left the city and readily admitted to knowing little about the countryside. Her curiosity and our discussion, one of many similar exchanges I had after explaining that I conducted research in villages and on farms, highlighted the gap between urban and rural perspectives on development priorities and women's rights.

As I spent more time in rural Myanmar, the importance of moving beyond urban and elite accounts to consider rural women's embodied perspectives became increasingly clear. One theme that emerged beyond the city was the centrality of land, both to livelihoods and to larger projects of cultural reproduction, family and autonomy. Agriculture has long been the backbone of Myanmar's economy, and while its relative share of GDP has declined, in 2017 just over half of the labour force was employed in agriculture, forestry or fishing (Central Statistical Organization 2020). Even as urban occupations increased, the majority of Myanmar's population was born in, and remained tied to, rural places. In many parts of the country, these landscapes were spaces both of violence and of cultivation: battlefields and farmers' fields overlapped. Land was central to forging a just and lasting future, as seen in efforts to establish ethnic territorial autonomy, formalize farmland registration or redistribute military crony plots. But the importance of gender in these processes

was often obscured. Elsewhere, I have drawn on rural women's perspectives to show that gendered reproductive work produces social value on the land; at stake in Myanmar's land reform debates, I argue, is the challenge of securing meaningful life (Faxon 2020). Here, I focus in on the ways in which gender structures landscapes in the southeast of Myanmar, in the context of two major rural issues: labour migration and land grabbing.

To do so, this chapter centres images from a photovoice project, in which women took and explained photographs of their own lives on the land. These images, and the connections and conversations they spark, highlight the gendered and contested nature of land and rural places, as well as possibilities for solidarity and positive change. Using a participatory photography methodology and a feminist political ecology approach allows me to explore themes that are often obscured in accounts of rural Myanmar – namely, how changing forms of gendered work, knowledge and identities have shaped rural transformation in the face of increasing migration and struggles over land. I argue that in order to understand the meaning of gender in Myanmar, both before the coup and afterwards, feminist activists and scholars must leave the city in search of rural women's perspectives. Rural women's own visual insights ground our understanding of gender not in urban dialogues of equality and rights, but rather in lived relations of soil, struggle and care.

In what follows, I briefly outline the key role of land in Myanmar's decade of agrarian and political transition, my feminist political ecology approach, and the photovoice methodology, before turning to a selection of women's photographs of mobile bodies and stolen land. In Kawkareik, a site close to the Thai border with high mobility, plural authorities and a recent history of civil war, I focus on the ways in which women explained the impacts of labour migration on daily practices and the physical environment. In Dawei, which was the focus of high-profile and controversial foreign investments in a Special Economic Zone, oil palm plantations, offshore oil extraction and mining, I show how gendered labour and interfaith resistance shaped and took shape on layered and contested landscapes. I close each section with a reflection on the methodology in each site, highlighting the types of insights that photovoice can bring.

Transforming Gendered Landscapes

While land rights and rural development took centre stage in debates over Myanmar's transition (Hong 2017; S. McCarthy 2018; Suhardiman,

Kenney-Lazar and Meinzen-Dick 2019), relatively little attention has been paid to how women and men differently experience and participate in these processes (for a recent exception see Hedström and Olivius 2020). In the context of historic and ongoing land grabbing by the military and economic elite (Buchanan, Kramer and Woods 2013; Ferguson 2014; Woods 2011) and decades of restrictive colonial and socialist agrarian policies (Mark 2016; Thawnghmung 2003), Thein Sein's government prioritized new regulations for land and rural development. While, under the 2008 Constitution, all land and resources remained the property of the state, laws since 2012 introduced new procedures for registering different types of land, and more expansive usufruct rights. Under the NLD, drafting began of a National Land Law, and a high-level commission investigated the return of land taken under the military regime. Despite living and working on the land, rural Myanmar women were notably absent from these land reform processes (Faxon 2017). This finding aligns with a broader trend of gender inequality in political participation, in particular in rural governance (Minoletti, La Ring and Bjarnegard 2020). The result was new patterns of gendered exclusion. For example, the government promoted farmland titling, but women were unlikely to have farmland registered in their own names (Pierce and Oo 2016), even though they had been adversely affected by land confiscation (Pierce, Hurtle and Bainbridge 2018).

From the hilly agroforestry systems of the north and southeast to the dry central plains and the rice-growing delta, Myanmar's diverse agrarian landscapes form the basis of life and livelihoods for the majority of the country's population. Previous work has highlighted the diversity of gendered relations on the land, including variations in inheritance patterns across ethnic groups, as well as the ways in which gender structures daily practices of work and care that are intimately tied to particular landscapes. A gendered division of labour in rural Myanmar, which often separates men's work in the fields from women's work in home and gardens, are accompanied by dominant cultural norms that reward 'tough' male work with higher wages and social status (Gender Equality Network 2015; Metro, this volume).

At a time of momentous change in relation to the way in which land is valued, used and controlled, empirical investigation into how men and women actually use, access and own land is critical to understanding Myanmar's rural transformation. Here, I focus on two important national trends: mobile labour and stolen land. Both internal and international migration

rose sharply in the 2010s, with the International Organization for Migration reporting that 20 per cent of the population were internal migrants, while over four million lived abroad, including three million in Thailand alone (IOM 2021). New patterns of mobility not only brought remittances into rural places, but also reworked relationships between husbands, wives and children. While estimates of land grabbing are difficult to come by, even existing data indicates staggering amounts of land transfers: across Myanmar, the government allocated over five million acres of land to agro-business between 1991 and 2016, much of it so-called 'vacant, fallow and virgin' (U San Thein et al. 2018).

I focus on two sites in the southeast in order to understand women's experiences of landscapes marked by conflict and change. In and around Kawkareik, ceasefires in 2011 and 2012 with the Karen National Union (KNU), the Democratic Karen Benelovent Army (DKBA) and the Karen Peace Council (KPC) gave way to mixed administration (Jolliffe 2016), even as the completion of the Asia Highway link in late 2015 accelerated travel to and from the Thai border at Myawaddy–Mae Sot. In Dawei, long histories of militarized resource extraction had produced landscapes of dispossession that were slated for billions of dollars of foreign investment for one of Southeast Asia's largest SEZs. Women's photographs of stolen land in Dawei and mobile labour in Kawkareik provide new perspectives on questions typically considered with a gender-blind, political economy perspective, allowing us to better understand and imagine equitable rural transformation.

Feminist Political Ecology

Political ecology offers a way to interrogate the shifting and multiple channels through which women and men negotiate access to land, bringing attention to the materiality of resources and to relations of power (Ribot and Peluso 2003; Rocheleau and Edmunds 1997). Here, I align my analysis with a new wave of feminist political ecologists who move beyond assumptions of women's uniform (disadvantaged) position and instead ask how gender intersects with age, race and class to mediate social status and control of resources (Elmhirst 2011; Mollett and Faria 2013; Nightingale 2011). Gender is not a static or separate category. Rather, women's relationships to land are multi-scalar and situated, conditioned not only by national policies,

but also by ethnic norms and market and family structures in specific times and places (Radcliffe 2014; Razavi 2003). Bringing this feminist political ecology approach to women's images of the southeast underscores how rural women's labour and status as farmers, daughters, wives and grandmothers shape the politics and practices of mobility and dispossession on Myanmar's landscapes.

Extensive scholarship on labour migration in Southeast Asia has highlighted the gendered pathways and effects of mobile work (Bylander 2015; Mills 1999; Resurreccion and Ha Thi Van Khanh 2007). Over the last two decades, various patterns of migration have reshaped agrarian economies, identities and landscapes (Kelly 2011), even as smallholder farmers (Rigg, Salamanca and Thompson 2016) and conventional gender norms (Parrenas 2005) persist. Relationships between labour mobility and land use and control are historically conditioned and vary across sites (Kelley et al. 2020). Across Southeast Asia, migratory labour provides capital that finances houses (Rigg and Vandergeest [eds] 2012), purchases livestock and reshapes forest use (Peluso and Purwanto 2017), and remakes what Deirdre McKay (2005), writing of villages in the Philippines, calls *remittance landscapes*. In Myanmar, recent increases in both domestic and international labour migration are reshaping livelihoods and aspirations, even as grounded relations of work and care help to explain the persistence of the smallholder farmer and the social value of land (Faxon 2020).

Scholars have convincingly argued that gender and other social relations structure experiences of and responses to land grabbing in Southeast Asia (Lamb et al. 2017; Morgan 2017; Park and White 2017) and globally (Behrman, Meinzen-Dick and Quisumbing 2012; Chung 2017). Land loss can have catastrophic consequences. For example, a report by the Tavoyan Women's Union on the impact of the Dawei Special Economic Zone on rural women linked land confiscation, often without compensation, to reduced incomes, rising food insecurity and inability to afford schooling for children (Tavoyan Women's Union 2014). In his comparative historical analysis of the gendered implications of dispossession, Michael Levien (2017: 1111) writes that land loss often intensifies women's work, threatens their livelihoods and reduces their autonomy, noting that, 'while defensive struggles against land dispossession will not in themselves transform patriarchal social relations, they may be a pre-condition for more offensive struggles for gender equality'. Writing of gendered land reform and state-making in nearby Cambodia, Alice

Beban (2021) not only notes the disproportionate negative impacts of titling on women, but also women's role in mobilizing for land justice and imagining alternatives to authoritarian violence. Below, I build on what Beban calls a feminist ontology of land to centre women's images and descriptions of their embodied relations and generative connections to place.

Picturing Rural Land

While existing analyses of land in Myanmar tend to use a combination of political economy and interviews, often with male experts, to understand resource conflicts, participatory visual methodologies highlight women's own perspectives – here, on what I have called mobile bodies and stolen land. To understand gendered land issues, I worked with a talented team on a mixed-method participatory action research project from 2016–2018.[1] The project included events such as a women farmers' forum and participatory photography exhibition and produced policy briefs and a final research report (Faxon and Knapman 2019). Like other feminists working in Myanmar, we combined scholarship and activism with the goal of listening to and amplifying women's voices (Frydenlund and Wai Wai Nu this volume; Hedström and Zin Mar Phyo 2020).

The photovoice methodology was developed by feminist public health professionals seeking to understand the perspectives of women and marginalized groups and has been used widely to understand and advocate for transformative social change (Hergenrather et al. 2009; Wang and Burris 1997). Scholars have used photovoice and related methodologies to explore perspectives on environmental change, rural community life and migration globally, for example in work on women's perspectives on resource extraction and ecological destruction in Indonesia (Spiegel 2020); the value of women's unpaid care work in rural Tanzania (Chung, Young and Kerr 2018); and youth perspectives on migration and land concessions in Laos (Sentíes Portilla 2017). In our study, we recruited groups of around six rural women each through grassroots partners in three study sites, then spent approximately one week with each group working together on basic photo skills and on taking and presenting images of gendered life on the land. Here,

1 I gratefully acknowledge Land Core Group and my co-lead Catriona Knapman as well as collaborators including Naw Mu Paw Htoo, Pyo Let Han and Agatha Ma for their work in design, data collection and analysis for this project.

Figure 8.1. 'We will go harvest the rice and collect the hay.'

Figure 8.2. '[Threshing] rice with the machine. It is easy and we won't be tired.'

Figure 8.3. 'The new village to come.'

Figure 8.4. 'Money from nature.'

Figure 8.5. 'Because I don't want it to go extinct.'

I draw on photovoice data from two of our research sites in the southeast of Myanmar: Kawkareik in Karen State and Dawei in Tanintharyi Division. My discussion of the images is informed not only by the women's explanations of them and by our interviews and analysis for the project, but also by an additional 26 months I spent conducting ethnographic fieldwork on agrarian change and land politics in Myanmar.

Kawkareik

The history of armed conflict, the persistence of plural authorities and the pervasiveness of labour migration across the nearby Thai border have all shaped how land has been used and imagined in Kawkareik. In nearby villages, Buddhist Karen people farmed a mix of rice, durian and other fruits on paddy and orchard land. Armed conflict between the KNU, the DKBA and the Myanmar Government had given way to mixed administration, visible through overlapping land titling, taxation and policy schemes (Suhardiman, Bright and Palmano 2019, Mark 2022). When I visited in 2017, both the Myanmar Government and KNU taxed and administered land and appointed local leaders in the villages where our women photographers lived. Kawkareik

is about an hour's drive from the Myawaddy–Mae Sot border on a recently-improved road, and labour migration to Thailand was common. Women's photos illustrated how mobility spurred new farming practices, reshaped family relations and patterns of care work, and remade the physical landscape.

One photo essay by a Karen woman in her early 30s illustrated the material shifts in village life. Nann Z's essay, entitled 'The Changes in the Village', featured roads, bridges, schools and solar panels that had recently appeared and proliferated around her home. Two images from her collection highlight a technological shift with widespread impacts in agrarian communities around the country. In the first (Figure 8.1), the photographer captured a traditional method used by Myanmar farmers: an ox and cart. Nann Z explained that, in the past, everyone in the village used cow carts for transportation and farming, but that now most families had replaced them with tractors. In the second image (Figure 8.2), she pictured a newer machine: a rice thresher. She explained that this machine was more and more popular. While there was currently only one machine in the village, villagers could rent it out for a modest fee. This machine was always operated by men.

Tractors, threshers and combine harvesters have changed patterns of farming by replacing or supplementing animal and human labour, for example when the harvest is performed not by the daughters and sons of the landowner or by local landless men and women but by threshing machines or combine harvesters operated by waged, male drivers, often from outside the village. While the complex gendered effects of mechanization are still playing out in rural Myanmar, these photos underscore the immediate importance of this technological change for agrarian communities. Nann Z's captions – 'We will go harvest the rice and collect the hay' and '[Threshing] rice with the machine. It is easy and we won't be tired' – hint at new questions about the shifts in farm work that go hand-in-hand with the arrival of the new machines.

In 2010s Myanmar, migration was often intimately tied to mechanization – studies in other parts of the country have shown that as young people have departed and farm labour has become more scarcer, rural wages have increased and machines have become more economical and attractive (Belton and Filipski 2019). Migration was widespread in the villages around Kawkareik, prompting changes not only on the farm but also in the family. Unlike other parts of Myanmar I worked in, where the destinations, jobs and remuneration for women and men's labour abroad was quite different, the numbers and

earnings of men and women who migrated from Kawkareik to Thailand were roughly equivalent. Yet their combined absence prompted a redistribution of care work to women in their extended families. In our photovoice group, both a grandmother and a teenage girl shared photos of grandchildren, nieces and nephews whose parents worked in Bangkok, and whom they fed, washed and cooked for during the parents' absence. But our discussion also highlighted the strength of family connections grounded on specific landscapes, even in the face of mobility, for example in one returned female migrant's image of her daughter in the family fields, titled 'farmland and the new generation.' These images index broader shifts in gendered and generational roles and identities that are taking place across Karen State as increasing numbers of young women move back and forth between town and village, and migrate abroad for work (Chambers 2019; Balčaitė and Chambers in press).

Across Myanmar, reciprocal and hierarchical relations of work, care and charity have historically played an important part in funding, developing and maintaining communities (Griffiths 2018; Hedström 2022; G. McCarthy 2019; Ong and Steinmüller 2020). Over the decade between 2008 and 2018, the World Bank reported that the national volume of remittances increased 5,000 per cent, even as the legalization of some forms of migration and remittance transfer as well as the partial cessation of conflict provided new chances to invest in the landscape. While some new infrastructure around Kawkareik, such as roads, was financed by the Myanmar Government, many of the changes Nann Z documented were funded by remittances. The clearest example was her image of a new, concrete multi-storey home, a type of structure that had only appeared, she explained, in the last five years, funded by money from Bangkok. In Kawkareik, new homes, tractors and solar panels were visible evidence of this broader phenomenon.

Another Karen Buddhist woman in her late 50s, Daw SK, took a photograph (Figure 8.3) that featured a mango tree in the foreground and, in the background, two houses erected on land purchased with money earned in Bangkok. She explained that the owners were currently working abroad, but planned to return and settle. Such buildings evidence the ways in which remittances are invested to make homes in rural places, even in the midst of intermittent conflict and economic uncertainty. In the face of new livelihoods and mobilities, the connection to land persists. This insight was underscored with her caption for the image, which attests not to decline, but rather to future flourishing: 'The new village to come.'

In comparison with other sites I worked in as part of this project, the process of learning from women in Kawkareik was particularly poignant. This was, in part, because, unlike other study sites, these I did not personally visit. Our team decided that permission for foreigners to visit the villages where our photographers were living would be difficult to obtain. As a result, we had discussions about the photographs in Kawkareik town. The women's images and descriptions are therefore critical to my understanding of these particular landscapes. This experience highlights the potential for photovoice methodology to provide insights not only into marginalized perspectives, but also into inaccessible places.

Our conversations were also, at times, uncomfortable. Women in Kawkareik and other field sites shared images that they had taken of places where women were not allowed to go, including pagodas, waterfalls, boats and mines. These photos presented my colleagues and me with a question of whether to intervene, questioning the patriarchal cultural norms that constructed these as male spaces, or to simply listen. Usually we choose to do the latter, opting to validate women's knowledge, even if their views chafed with our feminist values. These uncomfortable moments highlight a tension inherent in photovoice and other forms of participatory action research, between documenting local perspectives and enacting transformative change.

Finally, my time in Kawkareik was memorable because my parents joined our trip. Despite not sharing a language, my mother and Daw SK shared a strong and immediate connection, holding hands during a get-to-know-you game and going on to ask about each other months, even years, later. Such experiences are an intimate and visceral reminder of how my own position as mobile worker and daughter shapes my research questions, connections and analyses. These images and encounters underscore the fact that changes in farm and migrant work, rural demographics and remittance landscapes are fundamentally the gendered and generational questions of family relations.

Dawei

Dawei became a national flashpoint for land conflicts and mobilization during the 2010s. Like neighbouring Karen State, Tanintharyi Division has seen its hills, plains and beaches remade by waves of conflict. As Myanmar opened up, these landscapes became targets for foreign investments in fisheries, offshore gas, oil palm and conservation, projects that often dis-

possessed locals even as they strengthened Myanmar government authority (Barbesgaard 2019; Woods 2019). This rich and violent history makes the area around Dawei a particularly important case for understanding and resolving land conflicts nationally, for example as seen in the internationally funded multi-stakeholder platform established to address land disputes in the region (Bächtold, Bastide and Lundsgaard-Hansen 2020). Women in our photovoice project identified as Burman, Dawei, Karen, and mixed ethnicity and lived both in coastal communities and hilly orchards further inland, all of which were fully under Myanmar Government control. Their images showed how struggles over land and environments in and around Dawei were inflected through and enacted by gendered work and identities. Together, their photos revealed the gendered nature of land grabs and pointed towards possibilities for inclusive mobilization.

In comparison to Kawkareik, the women we worked with in Dawei were more likely to be aware of and involved in land rights struggles. For example, one woman devoted her photo essay to documenting different parcels of land that had been taken by the Myanmar government, oil palm companies, or EAOs, and to discussing the effects of dispossession. Another two produced images and descriptions of places scarred and polluted by mining companies. This focus reflects not only the prevalence of land grabbing around Dawei but also the strength and reach of local organizations working on land justice. While we worked with civil society organizations to recruit participants and host trainings in both sites, most of the photographers in Dawei had worked with that organization's female director on regional land issues or led campaigns in their home communities, whereas none of the women in Kawkareik had participated in that male-led group's past activities.

If the emphasis on land grabbing set the Dawei photos apart, the theme of gendered work that appeared in the Dawei images was common across all study sites. In our wider set of images, pictures of women and their mothers repairing nets, tending home gardens, cooking and weaving contrasted with images of men fishing, harvesting hay, and tapping rubber, illustrating common gender norms and work. An image by Daw S encapsulates these themes of labour and loss. Daw S was in her mid-40s, and had lived in Yangon and Myeik before returning to her hometown on the coast, where she was involved in grassroots work on land issues. She took a photo related to one of her activism activities: writing petition letters for farmers whose land had been taken by the government as part of an urban development plan. In an-

other of her photos (Figure 8.4), a man climbs a palm tree to extract jaggery, a dangerous job culturally understood as male. This gendered work takes place upon a landscape of layered land grabbing. Daw S explained that behind the palm tree was land that had been taken by the government; further back, land had been claimed by a company. Her description highlighted the multiple actors involved in land grabbing around Dawei, while also underscoring the continued centrality of this land for local livelihoods. While grabbed land could no longer be farmed, harvesting jaggery provided essential family income. Her caption, 'Money from nature', emphasized the value of this land both to the jaggery worker and his family and to the powerful actors who lay claim to it. Her visual account powerfully illustrated that a land grab is not a single, violent incident; rather, waves of acquisition and everyday gendered work remake living landscapes.

The centrality of land to local livelihoods and the rising number of both legal and illicit acquisitions made mobilization for secure land rights and safe environments essential. During the 2010s, a number of civil society organizations and grassroots groups emerged to protect local land, water and resource access around Dawei. Many of these groups negotiated with foreign companies and the regional government about extraction and development projects, for example in the case of the Dawei Development Association's work on the Dawei SEZ (Aung 2018). Women often played key roles in these movements, whether by leading organizations, preparing legal cases or recruiting their neighbours. One strategy to raise awareness and build solidarity in land-related struggles was the *su taun bweh,* or prayer ceremony. These events brought villagers and activists together to pray for land return or for the withdrawal of foreign companies polluting local environments. Often, the prayer ceremonies were explicitly inter-faith, bringing together different ethnic and religious groups in solidarity. NT, a Karen Christian woman in her mid-30s from a hillside village two hours inland from Dawei, took a photo that captured a *su taun bweh* that brought Muslims, Christians and Buddhists together to protest against the operations of a foreign mining company in the area and to pray for the protection of their farming practices and cultural heritage (Figure 8.5). In the photo, Karen blouses, Burmese *htamiens* and Muslim skullcaps appear together as the participants gather to share prayers, protest and encouragement. In her description of the image, she explained:

> I take great satisfaction from this photo. There are a lot of problems involving Muslims in Rakhine at the moment, with a great deal of discrimination against different religious communities. By looking at this photo, I want people to know that it's possible for people [from different faiths] to congregate together like this.

The image in Figure 8.5, and the description of it by the photographer, NT, resonate with other accounts that highlight women's memories of inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations (cf Frydenlund and Wai Wai Nu, this volume) and of women's roles in forging inclusive social movements (Faxon, Furlong and May Sabe Phyu 2015; Agatha Ma, Poe Ei Phyu and Knapman 2018; Olivius and Hedström 2019). The subsequent circulation of NT's text and image point towards the possibilities of using participatory photography for broader emancipatory change. Six months after the photo was taken, I travelled to Mandalay University with my colleague to share some of the images from our project at a workshop on research approaches. During the two-day meeting, we displayed images and captions from the project in the foyer of the Department of Anthropology. At the end of our time, my colleague suggested that we let the students select one image to keep. The students, mostly Burman Buddhists from Mandalay Region, chose this image of a *su taun bweh* held over 1,000 kilometres away. They explained to us that they had never seen anything like this before. Showing these students an example of inter-faith cooperation and mobilization had opened their minds to the possibility of new types of solidarity and social change.

Conclusion

Women's photographs provide a window into local experiences of land, and the gendered nature of agrarian and political transitions. In Kawkareik, new remittance infrastructures emerge on former battlefields as men and women navigate work abroad and remake home. In Dawei, everyday gendered work and interfaith resistance take shape on layered land grabs. Viewing these images together gives us new perspectives on the ways in which labour migration and land grabbing not only impact broad trajectories of rural development and inequality, but also reshape intimate relations of work, care and struggle. In these accounts, gender is not an abstract category, but is rather a relationship that, alongside relations of age, class and ethnicity, structures

resource access and everyday life. These social processes are embedded in particular, dynamic landscapes, which carry the physical imprints and collective memories of violence, whether past armed conflict or contemporary pollution by foreign corporations. And yet women's images also provide powerful possibilities for resurgence and solidarity, as encapsulated in the *su taun bweh* photo and its circulation to Mandalay University students.

My discussion here highlights not only the gendered dynamics of mobile bodies and stolen land, but also the importance of rural women's perspectives. Some of the women who participated in our project came to discuss their images at a photography exhibition we organized in Yangon in 2017. Seeing rural women speak to urban journalists and visitors about their own experiences as experts and artists inverted traditional hierarchies, sparking new conversations and demonstrating the power of participatory photography to bridge the gap between elite and grassroots perspectives. In light of the 2021 coup, building understanding and solidarity across these class and geographic divides is even more crucial for gender equality and social justice.

While rural women's voices are often excluded from discussions of land, development and equity, theirs are not the only perspectives crucial to understanding the dynamics of gendered landscapes. Photovoice provides powerful tools, for example, to explore how masculinity and youth identities are forged in relation to work, mobility and dispossession on and across particular landscapes. In using a selection of women's photographs from the southeast of Myanmar, this chapter is not an endpoint but rather an invitation to seek perspectives – outside the city and across the gender spectrum – on the material and social processes of rural and political transformation.

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