“My ‘W/ri[gh]t/E’ and My Land”:

**A Postcolonial Feminist Study on Grassroots’ Archives and
Autobiography (1937-2004)**

By

Sinith Sittirak

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To
Jaroon Ek-in,
my mentor and brother-in-law,
who was a dedicated educator in the Thai Ministry of Education.
Jaroon had waited many years for the completion of this thesis.
Sadly, he passed away a few months prior to its conclusion.

Abstract

Inspired by the story of Pornpet Meuansri, a land rights activist, who was brutally killed on the way back home from her farm leaving behind her 400 petitions, diaries, letters, news clippings, court documents and other archival records, my thesis aims to answer the central questions of “Can the subaltern write? And how do we begin to read their writing?” These questions are then addressed within the combined frameworks of postcolonial geography and feminist research practice specifically focusing on auto/biography and the innovative approaches of revelatory reading and engaging women’s archives and women’s life narratives intersubjectively. In this regard, Trinh Thi Minh-ha’s idea of “territorialised knowledge” as well as Luce Irigaray’s notion of “approaching the other as other” and Spivak’s question “Can the subaltern speak?” are applied to Pornpet’s work in an effort to create a more inclusive postcolonial geographical knowledge which reflects more in-depth race and class specificities. As a result, the thesis elaborates upon three significant areas of original contribution to the disciplines of postcolonial feminist geography and archives studies: theoretical, methodological and epistemological.

Firstly and theoretically, this study advances postcolonial feminist scholarship by applying the concept of ‘colonialism within’, a missing piece not touched upon by postcolonial feminist thinkers. Moreover, the study shifts the current discursive debates on postcolonial archives studies to ‘subalternity into crisis’ in that, at least in Pornpet’s case, she attempts to be heard and understood on her own terms in an effort to overcome her own subalternity. In this regard, the thesis asserts that overcoming subalternity is not possible without also having the dominants unlearn their privilege, and therefore overcome the internalised structured hearing of the dominant discourses that silence and marginalise the subaltern. Therefore, this thesis explores this possibility through Irigaray’s work on ‘listening’ and intersubjective dialogue.

Secondly and methodologically, the thesis critically and creatively applies the feminist innovative approach of ‘revelatory reading’ to assess the subaltern’s archives by developing Irigaray’s notion of “approaching the [sexuate and racial] other as the other” and applying it to the reading of texts of (deceased) others, specifically, the texts of a subaltern (-ity into crisis), in creative ways, eg reading ‘becoming’, reading ‘silence’ and reading ‘listening’, respectively.

Thirdly and epistemologically, a radical interpretation of the concept of de-bureaucratisation or a grassroots woman’s critique of mainstream Thai feminist scholarship is applied through the framework of Buddhism and the utilisation of multiple forms of inscription. This results in not only interrupting the homogenising effects of “Women and Development” and mainstream feminist discourse in Thailand, but it also brings the often ignored issue of patriarchal state ‘violence’ (through writing) against (men and) women to the forefront. Above all, a study on writing from women’s personal experience in the context of oppressive public structures not only reveals the hidden space of the internal colonial bureaucratic system but also offers the tools to challenge the centralised state organisation’s patriarchal structure. In this regard, a feminist critique that establishes both a body of knowledge built up from missing perspectives and that is directed by the need for a more just and equitable society will enrich the lives of (both) women (and men) and other “subalterns”.

Appreciations

The term “acknowledgment” has always struck me as a misnomer that carries with it more an obligatory recognition of debt than the valued recognition that appreciation implies. How to convey that gratitude that comes from those savored friendships, nourished by trust and care, that in turn enable bolder forays and more engaged critique? (2009: xi).

Agreeing with Ann Laura Stoler, an anthropologist and the author of *Along the Archival Grain*, I would like to start my thesis by showing my appreciation to the many people who had lent me their support along the way. First, are my supervisors, Dr. Teresia Teaiwa and Dr. John McKinnon, who patiently walked alongside me throughout my intellectual (unmapped) journey. Secondly, there is Dr. Fali Langdana, Dr. Valerie Schenk and my general practitioners, Dr. Susie Poon and Dr. Sue Pullon, who all contributed to my recovery from a serious illness that befell me part way through my dissertation. Thirdly, there are my graduate colleagues, friends and supporters who were always ‘within reach’: Peter Kitchenman, Peter Kohnke, Ed Challie, Leicester Cooper, Mario Alayon, Shabana Khan, Anaria Tangohau, Kath Boswell, Jan Thomson, Don Mudalige, Cheryl McDonald, Maria Lovrod, Maria Ashe, Grace Pamungkas, Jenny Hickman, Emily Parker, Petros Hadjicostas, Tuanjai Nuipium, Kampol Champapan and Chanida Chitbundid. Last but not least, there is my family who waited (in Bangkok) enduringly and unconditionally for the completion of my work and the end of its long journey.

Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract	
.....	iii
Appreciations	iv
Chapter 1: (of) Beginnings and Background	1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.1.1 Statement of Research Problems: Charting the Landscape of Knowledge Production on Thai Women and Development.....	2
1.1.2 Literature Review on Thai Women and Development	5
1.2 Research Approach and Methodology: The ‘Frame’ of the Work and The ‘Work’ in the Frame.....	6
1.2.1 On Postcolonial Geography and Feminist Research Methodology.....	7
1.2.2 ‘Autobiography’ and ‘Autoethnography’ ---What Are They and Why Do I Write My Thesis This Way?.....	12
1.2.3 On and About ‘Reading Intersubjectively’	15
1.2.4 The Politics of Reflexivity (and Footnoting)	35
1.3 Structure of the thesis.....	36
1.4 Significance	38

Chapter 2: (in-) Between the (Two)Fields.....	40
2.1 Learning (in) Between the (Two) Fields (of Lives and of the Archives).....	40
2.1.1 Subject Locating: ‘Why’ Pornpet?	40
2.1.2 When is Pornpet? : How Has ‘She’ Been Approached?	41
2.1.3 Archives in the ‘Field’ and In the Field of Archives	41
2.2 Reflecting the Fields: Reading Pornpet – Reading Irigaray and on the Way to Writing ‘Intersubjectively’	45
2.2.1 Positionality.....	46
2.2.2 (Language) De-objectification.....	47
2.2.3 Dialogue	48
2.2.4 Reflexivity.....	49
Chapter 3: Behind the Archival Grain.....	52
3.1 Script, Space and (the State of) Gender, Partiality and Biography	52
3.1.1 The Landscape of Three (related) Paddy Duty Receipts	53
3.1.2 Script, Space and (the State of) Gender.....	59
3.1.3 Script, Space and the (State of) Partiality	62
3.1.4 Script, Space and the (State of) Biography.....	64
3.2 Script, Space and the ‘State’ Formation.....	66
3.2.1 ‘State’ Formation and Its Debate.....	67
3.2.2 ‘State’ Formation and Personal Identification	68
3.2.3 ‘State’ Formation and Its Bureaucratisation.....	73
3.3 Script, Space and the ‘State’ of Philosophy.....	76

Chapter 4: Becoming a Writer 80

4.1 Reading Pornpet's (Introduction into Writing Culture through Her)

Dressmaking Course Notebook 80

4.1.1 Reading the 'Latitude and Longitude' of the Female Figure: from Basic to Technique 81

4.1.2 Reading Body-Mapping (through Unmapping) 85

4.1.3 Reading the 'Linkage': From Dressmaking to Protesting 86

4.2 Pornpet's Customer Account Record: Reading Archives from Below 89

4.2.1 Reading the Raw Facts from a 'Non-mainstream' Diary 89

4.2.2 A Female Managed Economy 91

4.2.3 Women's Space: Beyond the Public/Private Dichotomy 92

4.2.4 Reading (History) from Below: Reading the 'Un-conventional Archives' to Reveal the 'Un-represented' in the Dominant Archives..... 97

4.2.5 Reading Like a Woman and Reading the Linkages: Why Is There Only One Customer's Account Record? 99

Chapter 5: Becoming a Protester 105

5.1 The 1965 Diary: Displacement, Dialogue and Decolonising:

(or Bureaucracy, Buddhism and Becoming) 105

5.1.1 "'August 6, 1963': *Our Family Was Almost Broken into Pieces*": Reading the Civil Service..... 105

5.1.2 Re-reading and Learning to Read the 'Silence' 108

5.1.3 "*My Heart Is in Terrible Pain and Suffers*": Learning to Read 'Writing from the Womb' 112

5.1.4 *Can a Grassroots Woman Speak* with a Government Officer?..... 116

5.1.5 "Why Is the Government Officer Unable to Listen to a Grassroots Woman?" 117

5.1.6 "*Unjust Power, Unjust Man and Unjust Knowledge*" 122

5.2 From a (diary) Writer to a Petitioner 125

5.3 A Grassroots' Diary: Provenance, Subjectivity and Roles..... 128

5.4 Reflection: I am not a comprador (but an archon) 134

Chapter 6: Before Closing	137
6.1 On the Concept of ‘ <i>Colonialism Within</i> ’ and Its Critique of Postcolonial Studies.....	137
6.1.1 Postcolonialism: ‘What is the Matter?’.....	137
6.1.2 Postcolonialism: ‘What is Missing?’.....	140
6.1.3 ‘Colonialism Within’: (Some) Cases (Studies) in Chronology	141
6.2 On the Challenge of ‘Subalternity into Crisis’.....	151
6.2.1 Why Can’t the Subaltern Speak?.....	152
6.2.2 ‘Subalternity into Crisis’: Definition and Discussion	152
6.2.3 Overcoming the Condition of Subalternity: Reading What is Missing from Spivak and Irigaray	156
 Chapter 7: (and) Beyond (The Ending)	 159
7.1 The Practice of ‘Revelatory Reading’ and ‘Writing Auto/biographically- In-Between’: A Methodological Challenge.....	159
7.1.1 (Re-)reading Irigaray’s (Limitation on the) Concept of “Approaching the Other as Other”	160
7.1.2 Reading (and Reaching) the ‘Limit’	161
7.1.3 Reading ‘Appropriation’.....	164
7.1.4 Reading (My) ‘ <i>Positionality</i> ’ and (Pornpet’s Process of) ‘ <i>Becoming</i> ’ (a Writer)	167
7.1.5 Reading (‘Silence and) Perception’.....	170
7.1.6 Reading Listening	173
7.2 The (Grassroots’) Concept of <i>De-bureaucratisation</i> and its critique of Mainstream Thai Feminist Scholarship	181
7.2.1 (From) ‘Re-writing You’: the Representation of Thai Women as Constructed by Mainstream Studies	182
7.2.2 (To) Writing Selves-Writing De-bureaucratising: A Woman’s Challenge of the Patriarchal State’s Violence of Writing	183
7.2.3 Re-thinking the Notion of ‘Women’s Movement’: What is Left for a Future Re-visit	187
 Bibliography	 189

Figures

Fig. 1: Pornpet's family tree.....	17
Fig. 2: Paddy Duty Cover Sheet.....	54
Fig. 3: Pim and Nu's Paddy Duty Receipt	56
Fig. 4: Tien and Muan's Paddy Duty Receipt.....	58
Fig. 5: Pornpet's Dressmaking Course Notebook	103
Fig. 6: Pornpet's Customer Account Record.....	104
Fig. 7: Thailand's Central and Provincial Administration.....	120
Fig. 8: A chart outlining Pornpet's process of becoming a writer.....	132
Fig. 9: Public Administration Chart.....	149

1. (of) Beginnings and Background

“Can the subaltern write?”¹ And how do we begin to read their writing?” The central question of my research has been developed from an initial PhD proposal which aimed to critique the politics of knowledge in the Thai women’s movement through the study of a land-rights activist’s archival materials by asking two critical questions: 1) *How has knowledge about women in Thai society been produced, by whom, using what method(s), and what have been the results?* and 2) *Why has invaluable knowledge written by subaltern women (in particular that of Pornpet) been ignored in this process?*

1.1 Introduction

As a feminist academic from the so-called ‘Third World’, I have been inspired by the story of Pornpet Meunsri, a Thai farmer woman who had fought with the government for her land rights and justice for almost four decades. On May 31, 2004, she was brutally murdered on the way back home from her farm. What she left behind were her 400 petitions, diaries, letters, news clippings, court documents and other archival records.

Pornpet’s story prompted me to question how knowledge about women in Thailand has been produced in the mainstream and to seek alternative modes of knowledge production. To answer my opening questions, the geographical approaches of postcolonialism and feminism will be utilised to examine and critique the politics of knowledge production in the Thai women’s movement. The ‘bureaucratic’ women’s movement is developed and maintained by the government which has played a hegemonic role in knowledge production on and about women in Thai society in the form of the National Master Policy and Plans, training manuals and official reports during the past three decades. In contrast, there is a one-woman grassroots movement of Pornpet, who challenged the internal neocolonial power of the state bureaucracy.

My study involves a process of not only “talking back” (hooks, 1989) but “tracing back” the history and development of knowledge production on, about (and by) Thai women in the postcolonial context. Tracing ‘how’ such dominant knowledge has been constructed will help us to uncover the origin, and therefore where the suppression of grassroots women’s knowledge began, and to have a tool to *deconstruct*, *reconstruct* and above all to *decolonise*

¹This question was originally asked by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her groundbreaking article, “Can the subaltern Speak?” (1988), which she herself answers in the negative, asserting that they “cannot speak” (308). Her response is based on the assumption that as postcolonial theorists “... have been trained to listen in the language of **hegemonic**, white, **androcentric**, **Eurocentric** discourse they are incapable of hearing the subaltern” (McHugh, 2007:142). Thus, Spivak claims that “... in the long run, [their work] cohere[s] with the work of imperialist subject-constitution, mingling epistemic violence with the advancement of learning and civilization and the subaltern woman will be as mute as ever” (op.cit.: 295).

ourselves and open a new space to build up our own body of knowledge about women in the Thai context which will include marginal voices.

1.1.1 Statement of Research Problems: Charting the Landscape of Knowledge Production on Thai Women and Development

A huge gap exists between the First and the Third World, not only in terms of the political socio-economy, but also in the area of intellectual advancement. In the establishment of “Women’s Studies”, the trend among First World feminist academics since the 1970s has been geared toward the strengthening of feminist scholarship through interdisciplinary approaches. “Feminism” has become a powerful and motivating intellectual force that has challenged many different disciplines in Western academia. Marianne H. Marchand and Jane L. Parpart have pointed out that ever since “standpoint theorists”, such as Sandra Harding (1987; 1992), Somer Brodribb (1992) and Dorothy Smith (1990), launched their ideas regarding “*women’s lived experiences as the basis of feminist knowledge*” (1995:5, italics mine), there have been serious challenges that have forced a variety of mainstream academic disciplines to re-examine and re-evaluate their conventional theories and practices. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith has argued “[W]estern feminism has provided a more radical challenge to knowledge than Marxism because of its challenges to epistemology: not just the body of knowledge and world view, but the science of how knowledge can be understood” (1999: 43).

However, in the Third World, particularly in Thailand, women’s experiences have been ignored, suppressed and marginalised instead of valued. Thai feminist bureaucrats and academics remain trapped in the classical training stream of “Women in/and Development” where women are treated as ‘object’ rather than the ‘subject’ who is the source and author of new knowledge. Such research and methodologies have recently been critiqued from a feminist epistemological approach by Taweeluck Pollachom. Utilising the 1975 International Women’s Year (IWY) as a milestone, Taweeluck critically surveyed and divided the studies she found into two major clusters, ie 1975-1985 and 1985-present. The primary difference found between the two is that research in the former group was undertaken within an analytical framework grounded on population statistics and economics, with the intention of arguing a way to advance the potentiality of women’s labour and to bring it up to par with the productivity of men’s labour in an effort to improve Thailand’s economic growth. The shift discovered in the latter cluster, which attempts to expand across a broader range of areas related to women’s lives (ie political, religious, health, media and etc), is that it utilises ‘gender’ as a category of analysis, while significantly overlooking other aspects influencing women’s everyday experiences (ie class, race, etc). As a result, the differences among and the complexities within women’s lives and their subjectivity, have not only been neglected but also silenced. However, we should also be aware that beyond methodology is the issue of language. Most (if not all) of the studies are required to be presented in bureaucratic or technical jargon as they intend either to provide supporting information for the government’s formulation of national policy on Women and Development or to develop measurement indicators for project evaluations as required by First World donor agencies (2007: 104-105).

Taweeluck utilised 1975 and 1985, which signify the beginning and end of the United Nations' Decade for Women, as the marker years for the study period being investigated. However, chronologically, prior to 1975 (that is, roughly speaking, beginning around 1970), the concept and practice of "Women and Development" initiated by the UN and World Bank had been aggressively introduced to and implemented in Thailand (as well as many other countries in the so-called 'Third-World') through the government's policies and mechanisms. The concept, originally rooted in Western thought (Marchand and Parpart, op. cit.: 11), is aimed at "modernising" poor Third World women rather than allowing them to cultivate their own understandings of who they are and where they want to go from their own socio-political, economic and cultural context.

In establishing 'Women and Development' projects and activities the Thai government played a prominent role in producing 'official' knowledge on and about women in Thai society. It disseminated this knowledge in the form of the National Master Policy and Plans, training manuals, development project evaluations and annual reports to the United Nations. Of particular interest are the documents published between the 1980s and 1990s, including *The Five Year Plan on Women and Development (1982-1987)*, *The Long Term Women's Development Plan (1982-2001)*, and *Perspective Policies and Planning for the Development of Women (1992-2011)*.

The Five year Plan on Women and Development (1982-1987) was the Thai Government's first official response to the dictates of the global agencies on the issues of women's development. The implementation of the policies on a national basis by various levels of government would no doubt directly and heavily affect women's lives in many different ways. For example, on the assumption that "[P]opulation is the most important means of production ..." (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB thereafter), 1981: 1), the plan called for the acceleration of women's labour in terms of their skill, knowledge, efficiency and morals in order to "... ensure the expansion of economic growth ... for the sake of the country's development" (ibid.).

Thai feminist bureaucrats' writing on, for and about 'other' Thai (subaltern) women in Thailand's national plan reveals how the top-down process of "Women and Development" has not only ignored the diversity of women's lives and experiences but also stereotypically constructed their image as a homogeneous, powerless group who are little more than victims of poverty, male violence or "traditional" belief systems, for example. Additionally, if viewing this in a relational context between the First and the Third World, we would discover that this particular process of development has not only brought about the objectification and marginalisation of Third World women's body of knowledge but also served to maintain the colonial status of the Third World as "followers", especially in the area of intellectual development.

In the 1980s women's non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (mostly funded by First World donors) joined the mainstream by limiting their proposals to middle-class, urban-based, single-issue oriented problems. As part of their campaigns on rape, violence against women, prostitution, maintaining maiden names in marriage and political participation etc, a diversity of brochures, leaflets, posters, newsletters, journals and books were published and disseminated.

Official knowledge production on Thai women focused heavily on such developments and single issue themes that sought to solve day-to-day problems (Kaewthep 1991:19), while at the same time accommodating the donor's agenda, utilising the classical method of quantitative research through attitude surveys and structural/functional frameworks of analysis rather than a women-centred approach. As a result, this has strengthened and maintained the colonised status of current research and provided no intellectual progress or any in-depth understanding of the real situation Thai women have long been facing. This piece of research on Pornpet's life will begin to fill this gap. Placing it in time and space alongside major socio-political changes in Thailand, Pornpet's land rights campaign emerged in the media in the 1980s and lasted for two and a half decades, around the same time that significant changes began to take place in the women's movement both globally and locally.

Globally, the shift in the 'political' agenda of the United Nations brought with it significant domestic changes. Locally, the three dominant streams of the women's movement—academic, bureaucratic and NGO—were deeply integrated into the Thai sociopolitical context. Women's units in many universities and ministries, as well as women's NGOs, were set up with financial support in the form of foreign aid. In terms of their mission, the academic departments tried to initiate research, bureaucratic agencies paid attention to 'developing' (poor) women through various 'training' projects, while NGOs proposed Western-dominated campaigns on sexuality and related issues. The problems faced by rural women (comprising 80 percent of all women in Thailand), such as their land rights and their fight with bureaucracy, simply do not appear as part of the agenda of the mainstream women's movement.

Besides playing a hegemonic 'First World' role at the policy level through the UN, Government (GO) and NGO mechanisms, at the professional level there is a stream of individual Western scholars who have intellectual and financial privileges that enable them to produce knowledge on and about women in Thailand on 'non-developmental' issues. Such studies include, for example, LeeRay M. Costa's *Male Bodies, Women's Souls: Personal Narratives of Thailand's Transgendered Youth* (2007); and Ara Wilson's *The Intimate Economies of Bangkok: Tomboys, Tycoons and Avon Ladies in the Global City* (2004).

The colonial production of knowledge on Thai women has been undertaken in (at least) two different ways. Firstly, the 'colony' (Thailand as well as other Third World countries) is expected to produce knowledge on and about its own women according to 'the standard requirement' set up by the 'neo/colonial centre'. Secondly, it is the 'neo/colonial centre' that has abundant 'authority' and resources to produce knowledge about 'other' women in the colonies. In other words, 'colony' becomes a 'double field' for the neo/colonial centre. Firstly, it is the 'place' for implementing the policy of 'developing' poor women. Secondly, it is the field for collecting data to produce new knowledge on and about women by Third World and Western scholars. As Leela Gandhi notes:

The most significant collision and collusion of postcolonial and feminist theory occurs around the contentious figure of the 'third world woman'. Some feminist postcolonial theorists have cogently argued that a blinkered focus on racial politics inevitably elides the 'double colonisation' of women under imperial conditions. Such

theory postulates the ‘third world woman’ as victim *par excellence*—the forgotten casualty of both imperial ideology, and native and foreign patriarchies (1998: 83).

What Gandhi reinforces is that the way Third World women have been discursively written as the ‘perfect victim’ in order to justify the ‘civilising mission’, either to ‘save’ or ‘develop’ them, is a result of not only imperial ideology but also native and foreign patriarchies. How this double colonisation has affected Pornpet and other Thai women, that is, how Thai women have been discursively written as well as marginalised or forgotten by these patriarchies, will be surveyed in the following section.

1.1.2 Literature Review on Thai Women and Development

This section solely focuses on the Thai literature on women and development in order to provide some idea of how Thai women have been discursively constructed in this domain.

By Women, For Women: A Study of Women’s Organizations in Thailand (1991) by Darunee and Pandya provides a critique of both welfare and action-oriented groups run by urban middle-class women that “... often follow a cautious welfare approach so as not to offend the status quo ...” (1991, 1996: 44-5). In other pioneering studies on the relations between the Thai state, women and development (and Women’s Studies), Napat Gordon (1988), Amara Pongsapich (1997), and Napat Sirisamphand (2001) provide useful readings linking the state, women and development in a Thai context. Having reviewed 1,301 document titles, published between 1970 and 1987, Napat found that quantitatively almost half (48.5%) were on population and health studies (1988, op.cit.: 5-6). A later study by Napat (2001, op.cit.: 2) reinforces the observation that the United Nations’ Decade of Women had brought a positive impact to the status of Thai women in the area of structural development through the establishment of the National Commission on Women’s Affairs (NCWA), a national policy making and coordinating body. However, what remained the primary obstacle for the advancement of Thai women’s status was the government’s structure and mechanism itself. This included primarily its development policies and practices that caused the degradation of natural resources, inequality in income generation, poverty, and deterioration in social and cultural values. Such problems directly and most strongly affected women in disadvantaged groups.

Parissara Sae Kaay’s research on Thai women (1979-1999) also provided thoughtful observations. Firstly, she pointed out that most studies on the issues that affected Thai women’s quality of life aimed at “... making comments on [the role of] the state and its mechanism rather than offering a critique of the way of thought and logic on and about women produced by the state, Thai feminism and the women’s movement ...” (2001: 7-8). Secondly, although such research had been conducted under ‘different’ frameworks and methodologies (eg population studies, sociology and anthropology), these were significantly caught up in the ‘same’ pattern. None touched upon or offered an analysis on how the limitations of its discipline affected the way knowledge on gender inequality had been constructed in Thai society (ibid.: 13-14). Finally, she called for “... *an internal continuous critical assessment of methodology and theory prevailing in the studies about women in Thailand* ...” (ibid., italics mine).

Utilising an epistemological approach as a mode of critique offered by Sae Kaay to examine my own work, *Daughters of Development: The Stories of Women and the Changing Environment in Thailand* (Sinith, 1996), I found a methodological shift in the study of women (and development) and Women's Studies in Thailand. On the one hand, I undertook a mode of critical inquiry into knowledge production through a process of deconstructing and reconstructing the meaning of "development" under the theme of "what does 'development' mean to ... [each stake holder in the process]?" On the other hand, --- and as the highlight of my study --- I utilised my mother's oral environmental history to critique the hegemony of the Western development. This brought me to understand 'development' not in terms of a traditional Western socio-political and economic framework, but as a politics of identity and difference.

Three years later my study, "Forest Women: Narratives by a Grassroots Woman in the Thai Environmental Movement" (Sinith, 1999), presented an unconventional biography of Sa-ing Tawaisin, a 40-year-old farmer from Roi-Et, one of the poorest provinces in this country, who fought to protect the forests located just behind her village from the military and the eucalyptus plantation companies. For the first time the tables turned and the rural poor, as the helpless and uneducated "object" of development, became the "subjects" themselves. However, to link her story to the wider context of the politics of knowledge production in the Thai women's movement was beyond the scope of this piece of research.

In summary, much has been written on and about poor (rural) women in Thailand. For example, in the 1970s classical mainstream 'Women in/and Development' literature emerged (of which about 50 percent focuses on population and health studies) which primarily critiqued the state's role, mechanism and related policies. Then, in the mid-1990s an alternative 'trend' developed, emphasising the voices of poor women, which brought about a shift by asking questions of epistemology regarding research approaches. What is still missing however, are writings of and by 'Women' (who have been involuntarily put) 'in Development' themselves. In this regard, a study of grassroots literature and the archives of Pornpet Meuan Sri will be a timely piece of work that will help fill in this missing aspect and offer an invaluable critique on the critical area of the politics of knowledge production in the Thai women's movement.

1.2 Research Approach and Methodology: The 'Frame' of the Work and the 'Work' in the Frame²

²I often feel very **uncomfortable** whenever I am asked by a colleague (and related parties), "Sinith, what is your epistemological standpoint? What is your framework? Or further, and in particular, "I utilise a Lacanian and Derridean lens to look at the world, how about you, Sinith?" As a 'Thai', I politely answer "my '**interest**' is with 'Feminisms'". However, my 'voice' might be too 'soft' to be heard as he continues to push as to "what 'school' of Feminism is your lens: Liberal, Marxist or Radical? Please clarify!"

I stopped answering and returned to myself to think things through in an effort to resolve my discomfort. Later, I discovered two critical answers. Firstly, the issue is not '*what*' but '*how*'. That is, the problem is not so much finding an in-depth theory in which to frame one's work. This is not to say that I think theory is unimportant as I clearly and definitely do understand that a theoretical

1.2.1 On Postcolonial Geography and Feminist Research Methodology

Making an effort to answer the questions “*Can the subaltern write? And how do we begin to read their writing?*” brings me to the process and struggle of learning *how to read and write intersubjectively through the lens of a postcolonial-feminist geography*.

Postcolonialism, as framed by Robert Young, is “... insurgent knowledge that came from the subaltern, the dispossessed ...” (2003: 20). This body of writing was first developed in the early 1980s in an attempt “to shift the dominant ways in which the relations between western and non-western people and their world are viewed” (ibid.: 2). While Young placed heavy emphasis on the political dimension, Blunt and McEwan elaborated it in terms of “knowledge production” which “... has been, and to a large extent still is, controlled and

framework is a fundamental requirement for thesis writing. In fact, I can recall being thrilled after a long struggle reading Trinh and attempting to understand what she might mean by the concept of ‘displacement’ in the context of ‘territorialised knowledge’ and finally coming to understand its meaning in relation to my own experience of ‘displacement’ politically, professionally and (above all) personally. It is not only a delight but enlightenment! Thanks to her radically critical and crystallising thought and work, it has helped me break through to another level of intellectual (and emotional) growth.

However, the ‘way’ I have been asked the above questions makes me feel small and patronised (I don’t mean that these questions should not be asked or that they are not important). I couldn’t help but think that like a horse I have been pushed to run around in search of the exact stable or farm (theory) to which my work would belong. If I am able to label myself, I am allowed to speak. In regard to this issue, I am indebted to Hélène Cixous who helped me find the proper language when she observed that “... -- **women more often than men -- they are immediately asked in whose name and from what theoretical standpoint they are speaking, who is their master and where they are coming from: they have, in short, to salute ... and show their identity papers**” (in Trinh, 1995: 332, bold mine). Further, as a ‘Third World woman’, the implication and requirement of having to show one’s ‘identity papers’ is more strictly enforced.

In sum, I am looking forward to participating in a learning process that is based on mutual respect and interest, and with the goal of helping us ‘decolonise’ ourselves from rigid presuppositions grounded in ‘First World-Third World’ categories and discourses (which are primarily colonial and “Western”), and that is instead intellectually enriching for all of us involved, rather than being strictly concerned with declaring our ideological and theoretical identification papers at the beginning of any dialogue. (Regarding “dialogue with another”, Irigaray (2002:37) insightfully remarks that “... [S]ometimes it is a matter of being attentive to what is proper to the other without wanting to appropriate it ... Dialogue with another would take place within the horizon of a same appropriation of the world through language.”)

Secondly, the traditional approach in conducting research is to ‘find a theory in which to fit one’s case’. Academically and administratively, it is quite ‘safe’ and ‘saved’ (both in terms of energy and the university’s timeline for finishing). However, alternatively, some researchers take a different route eg Polly Longworth, a noted Emily Dickinson scholar, challenges us when she asserts that “**[S]ome approach her [Dickinson] intellectually. What I hope is to treat her life as a human being and see the growth and change so the reader can really understand why she developed as she did. A lot of people create a theory and fit her in. I take a different approach to develop a theory out of what I see happening**” (Lehrer, 2007: B 3, bold mine).

In regard to my work, how often in one’s academic life do we have a chance to happen upon a grassroots woman’s 400 petitions, diaries, letters, news clippings, court documents and other archival records that ranges over a 70-year period (1935-2004)? Its unconventionality and uniqueness challenges me to think alternatively. Therefore, instead of asking me ‘to show my identity papers’ (as usual), any critical support to help me further ‘develop a theory out of what I see happening’ is much more deeply appreciated.

produced in the West; the power to name, represent and theorize is still located here” (2002: 9). Therefore, the key aspect of postcolonialism is

... [to challenge] the experiences of speaking and writing by which dominant discourses come into being and understanding the spatiality of power and knowledge. Spivak (1990) has shown that practices of speaking and writing are not innocent, but are part of the process of ‘worlding’, or discursively setting apart certain parts of the world from others. Knowledge is a form of power and, by implication, violence; it gives authority to the processor of knowledge (Said, 1978) (ibid.).

The authority (and non-authority) of knowledge production, the key concern in the study of postcolonialism, will be taken up in my thesis along two vectors. First is the process of tracing, revealing and critiquing mainstream knowledge production on Thai women. Second is the act of bringing marginalised/suppressed knowledges by subaltern women to the forefront and to demonstrate how to assess this knowledge from different disciplines. In particular, the discipline of *Postcolonial Geography* which “... addresses the ongoing struggle over geography as both discourse and discipline and investigates the intersection of place, politics and identity in colonial and postcolonial contexts” (ibid.: 1) with the multifaceted ‘task’ of

...reflecting the need to reassess the history of geography; ... to reveal the geographical underpinnings of colonial power and knowledge; to resist these geographies of colonialism and colonial knowledge; ... [and above all to ‘recover’] the ‘hidden spaces’ beyond the west while, at the same time, destabilising notions of ‘West’ and its centrality to the exercise of power and the production of knowledge (Blunt and Wills, 2000: 168).

‘Recovering the hidden space’, the critical aspect of a postcolonial geographic approach, will be taken up and illustrated in my thesis, along with the cutting edge analysis of feminist discourse in which its politics “... have always been distinctively geographical ...” [or ‘spatial’] as it seeks to “... overturn gender inequalities between men and women in different places and spheres of life” (ibid.: 120). On postcolonial feminism, Young argues that

[F]eminism in a postcolonial frame begins with the situation of the ordinary women in a particular place ... postcolonial feminism involves any challenge to dominant patriarchal ideologies by women of the third world. Such political activism may consist of contesting local power structures, or it may be a question of challenging racist or Eurocentric views of men and women (including feminists) in the first world ... (2003: 116, 109).

On this point, Shirin Rai emphasises that at the local level:

... [T]he state is also largely unchecked ... in terms of the scale of violence it operates against the people. The women's movement in India, for example, is rooted in women's opposition to police brutality (Spivak, 1987) in the 1970's. Rape, murder and beatings in police custody continue to be a common feature of state operations especially in rural areas (1996: 35).

However, the experiences of Third World women in a postcolonial state have been largely ignored by much of the Western feminist state theory (ibid.: 26). Therefore, any discussion on women's lives in the Third World not only needs to "bring the state back" (as a power structure to critique) but also needs to gain entry for "the lived realities of women's existence, negotiations and struggles" (ibid.). This is because "for the majority of women the question is not whether or not to approach the state. [Rather it] *is they that are approached by the state*, in many instances in a brutal and violent way ..." (ibid.: 36). My study will illustrate the practice of a postcolonial feminist approach through the process of reading Pornpet's archives and her multiple forms of writing (particularly her diary). Her clear-cut, continuous and long term (1965-2004) disclosures of the violent nature and relation between the state and subaltern at different layers and levels also reveals the experiences of a woman and her body of knowledge, which was instrumental in challenging hegemonic authority and enforcement through her writerly activism.

Aside from the 'concrete' violence committed by the state, another bitter obstacle for grassroots women is the inability to effectively 'voice out' even within the broader women's community. This holds equally true in the case of Thailand, which has a strongly entrenched "colonialism" within the bureaucratic system of the centralised state organisation. As a result of the "Women's Development" enterprise, "crypto colonisation" has been able to take place through the manipulation of local [intermediary or] "comprador" feminists as critically observed by Chanida Chitbundid:

The process engenders a new class of "women" who are educated in the West. By taking the role of "comprador" and human resource in their state or private organization ... the new class of women are privileged in their position to represent those subordinate women who are defined as a "problem" and thereby blocked out of women's space for voicing out ... (2005: 22, 23).

Inspired by Chanida as well as my own experience as a Third World academic, who has had a chance not only to observe how First World women 'speak for' Third World women (and other women throughout the world) through global mechanisms but also to witness comprador feminists at the local level 'silencing' poor women by 'objectifying' them in the development process, has brought me to further touch upon the core relation between *subject* and *object*. That is, the authority (and non-authority) of speaking for oneself which Luce Irigaray has elaborated upon and which has helped me understand the hegemony of Western thought at a deeper level:

[The] Western philosopher wonders very little about the relation of speaking between subjects. It is the relation between a subject and an object or a thing that he tries to

say or to analyze, hardly caring about speaking to the other, in particular starting from a listening to the other (2002: 15).

The Western practice of ‘colonisation’, either in the form of conquering new territories or dominating the prevailing discourse(s), is undertaken in a process of ‘non-dialoguing’ (a top-down imposition) that reduces the other(s) to an object(s) and in so doing, assumes (through a distorted thinking that presupposes the ‘West knows best’) the right to speak for (or speak on behalf of) this (these) other(s). Irigaray’s critique of Western philosophy that argues for a relation of speaking between subjects or dialoguing, is a groundbreaking act of political and philosophical decolonisation.

Politically, in order to *decolonise* ourselves and open a new space to build up our own body of knowledge among Thai women, the grassroots archival material which Pornpet left behind is a gift from which to learn. Particularly, the process of her ‘*writing back*’ as ‘*subaltern*’, both personally and publicly, not only confirms her existence as a living person, who has her own agency and cannot be *spoken about* or *written for* by any authority, but also helps create a space for understanding Thai women’s lives from our own standpoint and in our own locations.

Philosophically, my commitment to decolonise the geographical ‘task’ of uncovering Pornpet’s ‘*hidden knowledge*’ has led me delve further into to the concept of “the postcolonial archive”. As proposed by Sandhya Shetty and Jane Bellamy, “... [it] is a task of ‘measuring silences,’ a task, in Spivak’s words, of ‘attempting to recover a (sexually) subaltern subject [...] lost in an institutional textuality at the archaic origin ...” (2000: 32).

In “Can the Subaltern Speak?” the way Spivak examines how the colonial and nativist representations of Sati³ play their parts in silencing the subaltern subjects from the polarised notion of ‘she must be saved from dying’ and ‘she wanted to die’, has revealed the status and process of double colonisation not only as Indians but also as women. As she concludes:

[I]t is, rather, that, both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow (op.cit.: 287).

Recognising that what is more important than “... there are very few records of the feelings and experiences of women themselves who committed sati” is that “... colonial and nativist discourses made it impossible for such women to speak and to be heard...” For Spivak, the subaltern is both *created* and *silenced* by dominant discourses” (Blunt and Wills, op, cit.: 192, *italic mine*). Moreover, a further striking question to be explored is the one proposed by Shetty and Bellamy: “Can we approach the gendered subaltern more productively if our project is to recover not ‘lost voices’ but rather lost *texts*?” (op.cit.: 25).

Pornpet’s case is different, as her text is not **lost** literally. However, ‘politically’ it **is**, as her voice is still not heard. This is the result of the process of silencing the (female) poor

³The practice of burning the Hindu widow on the funeral pyre of her husband.

by the Women's Development enterprise as earlier asserted by Chanida and obliquely reinforced by Trinh in her politically charged and lyrically styled observation: "... [T]hus to understand how pervasively dominance operates via the concept of hegemony or of absent totality in plurality is to understand that the work of decolonization will have to continue within the women's movements" (in Ashcroft et al., 1995: 268).

To begin the process of decolonising knowledge production within the Thai women's movement, the *concept of feminist research* as an investigative tool needs to be utilised. The most distinctive aspect of feminist research practice is "its insistence on its political nature and potential to bring about change in women's lives" (Maynard 1994: 16). Defining "feminist research" as a process of turning women's lives and experiences into the "subject" of knowledge production, the practice of epistemology from a feminist perspective is something worth touching upon.

The term *epistemology* is defined "not only as 'theories of knowledge' but also 'theories of knowledge production'" (Letherby 2003:5). Realising that "women's worlds are organized in ways which differ from those of men" (Maynard in Letherby, *ibid.*: 42), feminism not only challenges the traditional epistemology but also proposes alternative concepts of epistemology which acknowledge women as knowers whose knowledge is grounded in the "*everyday experiences of their personal and private lives*" (Hughes 2002: 152, *italics mine*). However, as argued by Maynard, the act of emphasising experience is problematic:

[T]o begin with there is no such thing as 'raw' experience... the very act of speaking about experience is to culturally and discursively constitute it. People's accounts of their lives are culturally embedded. Their descriptions are, at the same time, a construction of the event that occurred, together with an interpretation of them... to do anything other than simply let women 'speak for themselves' constitutes violation ... this is that it overlooks the fact that *all* feminist work is theoretically grounded... No feminist study can be politically neutral, completely inductive or solely based in grounded theory (1994: 23).

Pornpet's life experience and thought in her mission to fight for justice is best understood as being neither a product of 'raw experience' nor as 'politically neutral', but the cultural interpretation of a constructed occurring event. As reinforced by Dorothy E. Smith, experience is "... a method of speaking that is not preappropriated by the discourses of the relations of ruling" (1997: 394) and so is instrumental in providing a point of departure for resisting and dissembling the narratives of official power and knowledge. This then undermines any notion of experience as politically neutral. As Smith asserts: "[B]eginning in women's experiences told in women's words was and is a vital political moment" (*ibid.*). Returning to Pornpet, then, the process of interpreting her experience to provide situated knowledge that counters official state narratives and policies will be undertaken through her *un/conventional autobiography* that she left behind in the belief that, as Marilyn Ferris Motz points out:

... private writing by individual women can provide insight into the way those women interpreted and responded to their immediate environment... to the national and international milieus and to popular and elite culture, in order to create themselves on paper and in person (in Bunkers and Huff, 1996: 191).

Re-evaluations of women's diaries, such as undertaken by Motz's work, are the result of critical reflections "brought on by second wave feminism and the emergence of Women's Studies as a challenging academic discipline" (ibid.: 8). Women's writing (as well as other types of daily chores taking place in the domestic sphere), once considered insignificant, irrational, unacademic and emotional pieces of work, have reversed this attitude and gained momentum in attracting and inspiring new interest in literature criticism and related fields. Bunkers and Huff articulate that according to Marlene Kadar (1992), the innovative directions in autobiographical theories have been progressively developed through the assessment of "life writing" embracing a wide range of "autologous texts"; for example, "journals, notebooks, letters, memoirs, personal essays, oral narratives and even metafiction" (ibid.: 9).

Locating myself in this critical and alternative writing stream has brought me to realise that theoretically, my main task is to experimentally write Pornpet's biography from her archival materials, embedded within my own intellectual autobiography in the (de)constructed site of the postcolonial Thai state. In practice, after long years of researching her archives and now undergoing the stage of writing, I find myself not only writing about '*what Pornpet writes*' and *what 'writes' her* but also '*writing myself*' along the way (or, in other words, I discover myself involved in the double act of *biographising* Pornpet's life as well as *autobiographising* my own life). Such a shift has brought me to review and reconsider the process of '*writing intersubjectively*' with a focus on *autobiography* (and *autoethnography*).

1.2.2 'Autobiography' and 'Autoethnography' --- What Are They and Why Do I Write My Thesis This Way?

At this point, there are four different aspects to be considered, which are reflected in and related to each other: writing politically, postcolonially, positionally and personally.

Politically, as first and foremost, the 'I' "... is, of course, what autobiography is about" (Smith, 1993: 2, bold mine) and the autobiographising process is the practical act of "theorizing the subject" (Ashley, Gilmore and Peters, 1994: 3). In order to avoid the colonising gesture of objectification and instead provide more critical space for the process of subjectivisation where one comes into one's own, there is no doubt that the autobiographical approach is a promising tool. It is the process whereby subalterns (especially women) move from "*silence into self-narrative*" or (in Walkerdine's words) to "struggle to become [a] subject" as she simultaneously '*resist[s] provided subjectivities* in relation to the regulative power of modern social apparatus'" (Smith, op.cit.: 4). The political process of subjectivisation is relevant for both me and Pornpet in this thesis.

Postcolonially, the act of autobiography includes not only an "... interest in the politics of writing in the first person" but also a reconceptualisation of the relation between

“ethnicity, gender, race, sexuality, and differing forms of representation” (Ashley, Gilmore and Peters, op.cit.: 4). Regarding the First and Third World representational relationship, Mohanty challenges us by asserting that

[Through the specific frames of Western feminist analysis] ... a homogeneous notion of the oppression of women as a group is assumed, which, in turn, produces the image of an ‘average Third World woman’ ... [who] leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being “Third World” (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc). This, I suggest, is in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of Western women as educated, modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities and the freedom to make their own decisions (1984:337).

The representations of Third World women as victimised, ignorant and uneducated are challenged through the process of autobiographically writing my thesis, utilising an alternative method of reading and weaving Pornpet’s (various forms of) autobiography. This act in which two Third World women, Pornpet and myself, bring about their own self-representations by speaking on and about our own realities and decisions from our own ground, is in itself a contrast to the image of an ‘average Third World woman’ constructed by hegemonic Western feminist scholarship.

Positionally, I have found that in the process of working with Pornpet’s writings, my position is that of a **reader**. I am the first reader honoured with the chance to access her invaluable archives after she was killed. Therefore, my main task is to write (from ‘I’ or my own voice) about what I have read and its interpretations. As emphasised by Standley and Wise (1993), “...the researcher is also a subject in her research and that her personal history is part of the process through which ‘understanding’ and ‘conclusions’ are reached” (cited in Maynard, op.cit.: 16). Or, if I want my subject to speak, I myself must speak to her first.

What I have discovered helped transform the subject-object relation between me and Pornpet from the researcher and researched to an intersubjective relation between reader and writer. Moreover, it helps ‘free’ me from the obligation to compose a single text that would presume to say all there is to say about Pornpet. It allows me to write ‘freely’ from a position that is critically and reflexively aware of the distance between our respective positions, places and times, and the dangers (discursive violence) that arise when this awareness is not respected. Additionally, the distance maintained is not one where we feel we cannot say anything, but instead where we can ‘weave’ a new space between us while safe-keeping or harbouring what is essential to Pornpet. In this way, I will undertake a process whereby I weave ‘writing me’ through ‘writing her’ (and vice versa ‘writing her’ through ‘writing me’) as a method of intersubjective learning and understanding.

Personally (and thinking of autobiography as an integral and critical process of becoming a ‘resisting subjectivity’), as a response to the serious criticism regarding the approach of autobiographical social research having “the potential for romanticizing the self

or of engaging in self-indulgence”(Lewis-Beck, Bryman and Liao, 2004: 46), I would offer a counter-criticism provided by Richardson: “[W]riting from our Selves should strengthen the community of qualitative researchers and the individual voices within it, because we will be more fully present in our work, more honest, more engaged” (ibid.: 516). Additionally, the more I have gone through this journey, the more I find that the unique challenge of my thesis, is that it is not merely an autobiography (of myself) or a biography (of Pornpet), but something that is both and in between. In this regard, I propose this approach of writing to be called ‘*auto/biography-in-between.*’

Finally, I have reached the stage where I have *found the language that identifies my own work*. It helps not only to explain what I have done in the past but also to guide me as to what to do in the future. At this moment I understand my PhD struggle as, firstly, the practice of *reading what Pornpet writes as well as writing what I read* (by and about her), *weaving together the act of reading and writing my own life*. Secondly, it is the act of *reading what writes* both Pornpet and me as well as *writing* (out) what we *read* (through our process of thinking, questioning, deconstructing and reflecting) on and about the socio-political and postcolonial context of Thai (bureaucracy and) society in which both of us are embedded.

Besides the act of (reading and) writing ‘auto/biography-in-between’, in particular chapter 2: ‘(in-) Between the (Two) Fields’ (of lives and archives), the approach of *autoethnography* will be employed. What is it about? Why and then how and by whom has it been theoretically discussed?

If ethnography is “... the task of the inscription and interpretation of culture” (Dorst in Reed-Danahay, 1997: 8), autoethnography is further defined as “... a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context. It is both a method and a text ...” (ibid.: 9). However, influenced by the trend of postcolonial and postmodern challenges in academic domain, currently the approach has been politically viewed as

... [a] part of a corrective movement against colonizing ethnographic practices that erased the subjectivity of the researcher while granting him or her absolute authority for representing “the other” of the research. In autoethnography, the subject and object of research collapse into body/thoughts/feelings of the (auto) ethnographer located in his or her particular space and time (Gannon, 2006: 475).

Although having its start in anthropology three decades ago (Ellis, 2004: 38), autoethnography has been widely adopted and further developed within many different disciplines eg sociology, geography, art and education etc. The principal character of autoethnography of ‘using [one] self as the only data source’ (Holt, 2003) has also led to inscribing the “first-person voice ... in a variety of forms --- short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, ... and social science prose” (Ellis, op.cit.:38). Moreover, such a text, fabricated through the process of “thinking like an ethnographer, writing like a novelist,” (ibid.: 330) has often brought up innovative seamly stories (as well as blurred genres) as it “inverts binaries between individual/social, body/mind, emotion/reason, and lived experience/theory in academic work” (Gannon, op.cit.: 476). However, a good autoethnography is not “simply a confession tale of self-renewal; [but] a provocative weave of story and theory” (Spry, 2001: 713) which offers a ‘writerly rather than readerly’ touch of

the text. Readerly texts produced through the research process in a linear, logical and predictable character could provide only a little room for readers to be able to textually connect, interpret, participate and evaluate from their own understanding and location (Wilson, 1998: 173). However,

... the writerly text is less predictable. It does not attempt to control the reader; he or she must make his or her own connections between images, events and settings that are presented by the author. In this sense, the writerly text asks that the reader 'write' while reading: to more deliberately bring to the reading his or her own experiences as a way of filling in what Iser (1978) calls the 'gaps' in the text. It calls on the reader to engage with the text to more deliberately bring to the reading his or her experience as a way of filling the gap in the text." (Sumara and Luce-Kapler, 1993: 390).

Lastly, there is no doubt that different decolonising and unconventional aspects of autoethnography could be criticised for being (not only 'untheoretical' but also) too self-indulgent (Ellis, op.cit.:34). At this point, instead of looking for ways to justify it, Holt has creatively shown how to 'turn the tables around' and question such criticism through both his own research and other scholars' studies. For example, whereas Andrew Sparkes (2002) articulates that the reason why autoethnography is marginalised in academia is because "... such accounts do not sit comfortably with traditional criteria used to judge qualitative inquiries", Garrett and Hodkinson (1999) straightforwardly conclude that "... traditional criteria used to judge qualitative research in general may not be appropriate for autoethnography" (in Holt, op.cit.: 19).

'Autoethnography', a major approach employed in chapter 2, covers the experience and story of conducting fieldwork and returning with Pornpet's archives. Further, it includes the 'field reflection' in conversation with Irigaray's *The Way of Love* (2002), in particular with regards to 'writing intersubjectively' and enveloping the four topics of positionality, (language) de-objectification, dialogue and reflexivity, respectively.

1.2.3 On and About 'Reading Intersubjectively'

1.2.3.1 Pornpet: Passage and Pages

"*Can the subaltern write? And how do we begin to read their writing?*" The precise answer to the first question should be nothing less than "Yes, of course, Pornpet did." Moreover, not only could she write well but she also wrote in many different genres: public and private, political, professional and personal. Four major genres of her work --- *diary*, (*alternative*) *memoir or occasional note*, *petition* and *autobiography* --- are chosen for discussion.

First, Pornpet kept a *diary*, which spanned a period of 38 years (1965-2003), composed of at least 16 diary booklets. The number of volumes is less than the number of years because, firstly and economically, some covered a two-year period, eg entries for 1966 were found on the blank pages of the 1965 diary and the only entry for 1968 was written in the 1967 diary. Secondly, and politically, within one ten year period (1977-1987) Pornpet

frequently traveled back and forth from her hometown to protest in Bangkok. Records show that there were at least two additional diaries written. However, unfortunately, one was lost the day she had to quickly climb a tree in front of the Government House in an effort to avoid arrest by the police. The other was taken from her by the director of the mental health hospital while she was admitted after having been accused of having “mental problems (Sukanya, 1988 and *Sarakadee*, (Sept. 1988)). Additionally, the entries in the last few diaries, written before she was killed, are very short and of no more than a few lines related mostly to appointments and court cases.

Secondly, Pornpet often took *occasional notes* of significant events eg while she was in jail, a conversation with the head district officer’s wife offering ‘under the table’ help in exchange for a part of her land, and an argument with a judge at the provincial court. These inscriptions could be found written on a writing pad, a notebook or loose leaf paper. Thirdly, Pornpet compiled and submitted approximately 400 land rights *petitions* from 1968 to 2004. The first one is dated May 14, 1968. It is probably quite likely that no other farmer, male or female, has ever engaged in such prolific effort over so many years to petition the government over land rights.

Lastly, during the last two years of her life (2002-2004), Pornpet began writing an *autobiography* composed on school composition notebooks of which eleven have been found. Some notebooks were written on one, a few or alternate pages with one side left blank. In others, almost every page is used but the entries were not dated or numbered. I tried to serialise the notebooks from 1 to 11, by observing events or content: for example, the entry “... Miss Arpa Meaunsri ... passed away at 71” suggests that that notebook was written sometime after June 2003, as Arpa, Pornpet’s eldest sister, died in that month.

In assessing her work, I am inspired by Irigaray’s concept of ‘reading with’ which Donald A. Landes further elaborates: “... in many of [her] readings of other philosophers, she is often exploring *with* them, taking them at their word and yet placing those words in the context of an exchange, a dialogue between herself and a presumed closed text or horizon” (2008:169). The wealth of meaning of the word ‘with’, or *parteger* in French, not only embraces the connotation of “... sharing *and* separating, of simultaneously interrupting and connecting, separating and bringing together” but also induces the ideas of “... co-production ...” and “... a between” (ibid.). Theoretically, utilising the ‘reading with’ approach to explore Pornpet’s text and thought would allow the intertwining process between the reader and the writer to take place along the way. However, practically, I have come to realise that the task of *reading what Pornpet writes and writing what I have read (her writing)* or to ‘(re-) biographise’ the life of the writer who already wrote her own autobiography, is not uncomplicated and painless. It seems that there is little to say because whatever topic I would choose to touch upon (eg her family, her childhood memories, her education, her battles etc) has already been written about by Pornpet herself. It has taken me quite a long while to figure out that the manner of introducing Pornpet’s background to the readers could take place under the theme of “Pornpet and her pages”, that is, to read (and share with the readers) ‘some pages’ of her autobiography in relation to the ‘other pages’ that took place in her life. The autobiography begins:

*Ms. Pornpet ... was born into a farmers' bloodline. [My]⁴ father's name is Pim. [His] last name is Meuansri. [My] mother's name is Nu. [Her] last name is Pipitsaree (**Prapipitsaree**). [I] have seven siblings. [I] am the third born.*

Pornpet was born ... at house number 2, village number 6, sub-district Thap Krit, district Chum Saeng, province Nakhon Sawan, in the month of July 2480 [1937] ... (Vol.10).

Fig.1: Pornpet's family tree

The issue of pronoun and family background are noteworthy points. Firstly, she refers to herself by her first name, 'Pornpet', instead of using the personal pronoun 'I'. Linguistically speaking, 'I' could be used by both male and female subjects in English. However, in Thai, the term utilised in referring to oneself is different according to both class and gender. For middle (and high) class subjects, '*pom*' is employed by males and '*di-chan*' (or '*chan*', the shorter version) is used by females. However, roughly speaking, the 'I' for both sexes of the working class is '*Kuu*', which is not only unacceptable in written and official (speaking) language but also judged as impolite, inappropriate or even a 'vulgar' expression. However, in regard to gender (regardless of class), some women feel more comfortable to refer to themselves by utilising their first name or nickname. As for Pornpet, it appears that she preferred to refer to herself as *chan* in speech or verbal-related occasions such as when she gave interviews or in negotiations with officials. When she wrote (as with her autobiography), she preferred to either use her first name or skip the subject altogether and start the sentence with a verb (ie "[I]have seven siblings. [I] am the third born."), which is an acknowledged style in spoken language, not a written one (we might understand this as Pornpet's lively way of bringing spoken language into the 'formal' writing genre of autobiography).

⁴ Notably, there are no possessive pronouns in Pornpet's text. Pronouns are placed in brackets in the English version as part of the translating process as the grammar rules need to be acknowledged. However, in terms of content, I try to adhere to the original meaning of her wording and sentences as much as I can, although sometimes it is not 'grammatically correct' according to the dominant writing standard.

Regarding the latter, should the absent-subject sentence be understood merely as a (superficial) syntactic device or, more significantly, as an in-depth cultural phenomena? The highly regarded Western doctrine of individualism, which was introduced to Thailand more or less a hundred years ago, is still undergoing a process of negotiation as it finds its way further into the local context. However, much of Eastern culture (including Thailand) was originally cradled in what we could loosely identify as (hierarchical) collectivism, where group interest (ie family, clan, ethnic group or tribe) takes precedence over the individual. To stand up and speak independently on behalf of one's self is not customary for commoners, either male or female.

Literally, what is considered to be lying at the heart of autobiographical practice is the ability to subjectivise (and inscribe) oneself as the '*I*' (Smith, 1993, op.cit.: 2). However, in regard to a Thai grassroots autobiographer, what comes first (or hand in hand) before the assertive state of being able to say '*I*' (or '*chan*') is really a challenge for linguistic and cultural decolonisation. It seems that, firstly, Pornpet might not feel comfortable using the personal pronoun '*chan*' as it is too general and too intangible (anyone can be '*chan*' or anyone can identify herself as '*chan*'). Secondly, she had a very clear and strong intention to narrate herself by her first name, *Pornpet*, in order to be recognised and to be remembered by that name as there will not be a second or other Pornpet.

Exploring and questioning the concept of '*I*' in relation to Pornpet's autobiography had me wonder whether this is the sort of practice and approach that could cultivate a proper 'reading [along] *with*'. Further, it reminds me of the insight that, as asserted by Irigaray, to affirm oneself as '*I*' is not only too subjective and too abstract but also too undifferentiated. Moreover, Irigaray proposes a stage of learning where saying '*I-she*' is

a way for women to auto-represent themselves on their own, assert their belonging to a gender, to a concrete activity that protects against fusion and undifferentiation. It's also a requisite linguistic history to find out how to communicate between *I-she(s)* and also to discover the path of possible dialogues with *you-he(s)* without renouncing oneself or nullifying the other as other (2000: 86-87).

Western thought, according to Irigaray, is informed by a philosophy in which masculine subjectivity is established as the (natural and universal) norm underpinning Western cultures' rationalisations at the expense of feminine subjectivity's erasure. Irigaray's proposal to bring back women's gender -- its existence and assertion-- through the domain of language is a critical and creative move in taking back space linguistically and politically. Her idea inspires me to re-think and review Pornpet's utilisation of different pronouns (ie *chan*, *kapachao* as well as her use of her first name and her dropping of pronouns, beginning the sentence with a verb instead) on different occasions in a more radical perspective, politically and personally. I found that to call oneself *I-she* suggests acknowledging oneself without making oneself the self-consuming centre of interest/concern as the latter often is the focus of the patriarchal ego. '*I-she*' is indirect as the '*she*' in the coupling decentres the '*I*', but the '*I*' also prevents the '*she*' from falling into abstraction and undifferentiation (in the same way that '*chan*' by itself would likely result in abstraction and undifferentiation). Calling herself by her first name (instead of *I* or '*chan*') both helps

decentre the 'I' (because referring to herself as 'Pornpet' grammatically refers to a third person the way 'she' refers to a third person), while also at the same time implying the 'I' (because the author who refers to the third person 'Pornpet' is Pornpet herself). Lastly, on those occasions where Pornpet skipped the subject altogether and began the sentence with a verb (ie *[I] helped [my] father and mother, brothers and sister in the paddy fields*) could be read as a challenge to the Western prejudice of the grammatical framework of 'subject-verb-object' in which the (active masculine) subject has hegemonic and unidirectional power over the (passive) object. Furthermore, to create sentence(s) that emphasise the verb signifies an emphasis on both the relational and temporal aspects of expression, thereby undermining the unidirectional power relation embedded in the Western grammatical standard format.

Moving now from (political and) linguistic concerns to her mother's noticeable maiden name, 'Prapipitsaree' which indicates that she came from the family of a noble civil service official. 'Pra' is a royal title granted by the king during the period of the absolute monarchy. However, the saying "every family has a secret" applies to Pornpet's family as well. She gave very little information on her grandfather's background except to say that "... *[my] mother was the daughter of Foong and Jaeng ... [My] grandfather [Foong] felt bored living in Bangkok [and so] moved to Ban Nong Kraw [Tha Tako district], divided [his] land and gave a portion to each of [his] children*" (2002-2004: Vol. 5). No one knew exactly the reason why he left his luxurious life in the capital city and came to live modestly as a farmer in a remote area.

With vivid recall Pornpet elaborated upon the memory of her parents' hardship during two major crises: the great flood of 1942 and World War II when her hometown, Nakorn Sawan, which at the time was a strategic military location where Japanese troops had chosen to set up their camps, was bombed. All schools were closed. Pornpet had to wait until the war ended before starting her compulsory elementary education and finally return to work full-time on the farm after graduation.

... After the war was over, [my] father enrolled [me and] Jaroen [elder brother] in school as [I] reached age 8, the compulsory age for starting school, followed by [my] younger brother, Jaroon.

... After Grade 4 ... [I] helped [my] father and mother, brothers and sister in the paddy fields. [My] father had two pairs of oxen ... When [I] was much younger and could not reach the handle on the plough, [I] brought lunch for [my] father and [my] sister who did the ploughing. When [I] was older [and tall] enough to reach the plough, [I] did it together with [my] sister, using two pairs of oxen. ... After the harvest, the bullock carts were used to carry the rice to the barn ... Riding the cart in the dark of night, [I] was very impressed with the in-depth feeling of quietness and loneliness. ... (2002 – 2004: Vol. 10).

The four oxen that pulled the cart were "Yai, Noi, Pa and Leung". I could make out their names and other details from the ox description tickets and learned more about the various locations and sizes of the Meuansri's land from the many copies of the land tax receipts which had been kept by her mother even before Pornpet was born. These age-old

documents helped reveal the picture of a hard-working farmer family over a period of half a century and from different angles. Pornpet's daily activities revolved around the cattle, the carts, the barns and the fields without foreseeing that the life of a farmer girl like herself could be dramatically changed overnight.

In 1959, auntie Manee Pimsawad, came to search for Pornpet's mother after forty years of estrangement (2002-2004: Vol. 8 and 10). This incident not only paved the way for Pornpet to reconnect with her long lost relatives of "noble status" from Bangkok but also gave her an opportunity to continue her studies in dressmaking at a reputable school in the capital city. Completing her course in three months, Pornpet came back home with a *dressmaking course notebook* in hand and opened her own two-in-one dressmaking shop and school, which no doubt would have attracted a number of customers and students in that rural district as documented in her *customer account records*.

The year 1959 had two significant meanings. Firstly, it bracketed two distinctly separate groups of written archives in the Meuan Sri family: the official documents (such as the land tax receipts) that were in the care of her mother and the more recent documents produced (and/or kept) by Pornpet herself. Secondly, 1959 can be considered the first milestone for Pornpet's writing, which was later followed by many other documents of various contents and types resulting from a series of violations by the local authorities to her family, especially in regards to two major incidents that took place in 1963 and 1968.

... It was on August 6, 1963, in the afternoon ... It was still clear in [our] memory and maybe for the remainder of life ... Dad in [his] work outfit walked frustratedly and distressingly [toward us/me]. The first sentence we⁵ [I] heard from him was "dad was arrested by the district officer; find someone to bail [me] out." At that moment, [we/I] felt like someone had stabbed a knife directly into [our/my] heart (diary, 25 January, 1965, bold mine).

Originally, the story began two years earlier from when she recorded it in 1965, when Pornpet's father, Pim, was arrested after being falsely accused of cutting down trees "without first receiving permission from the district officers" (diary, January 11, 1965). He was jailed at the provincial prison for two weeks but it took almost three more years to complete the case in court (2002-2004: Vol. 12). Pornpet regularly traveled from Nong Bua to Nakorn Sawan and Bangkok to seek help from her relatives and their lawyers. During those days Pornpet began penning her thoughts in her first diary in 1965 in order to "pour the pain out of my heart" (2002-2004: Vol. 10). However, the personal value of the diary had its own limits when Pornpet found herself thrown into a more complicated political crisis when government officials undertook public land mapping in April 1968. A few weeks later, another milestone occurred and was recorded in Pornpet's passages and pages; that is, on May 14, 1968, the first petition, under her mother's name, Nu, was sent to the district head officer objecting to the expropriation of her family's land.

⁵In her personal writing space, such as her diary, Pornpet referred to herself with the pronoun 'we', and not by "I" or her first name. Additionally, in speech many Thais, either male or female, would prefer to refer to themselves with the pronoun 'we'.

As kapachao⁶ [I] Mrs Nuu Meuansri ... bought the land in B.E 2500 (1957) and have been working on it ever since. ...

Now, the land officers have come to measure [my] land and declared it as public land. Kapachao [I] desperately distressed as kapachao [I] have invested a lot of [my] energy and money into it. ...

When I first arrived at Pornpet's house in 2005 and perused her archives, this piece of paper attracted me the most. Surprisingly, Nuu's handwriting is graphically well-constructed with appropriate spacing on each line and paragraph (in comparison to other farmers who have a lot of difficulty even in signing their own names). The content is very clear, right to the point and reflects a 'feminist' concern for caring for her children and family. Initially I mistakenly believed that this letter was written by Pornpet's mother as it is indicated in the first line that "[A]s *kapachao* [I] Mrs Nuu Meuansri." It was not until later that I found another petition with Nuu's signature along with other villagers' signatures that showed that her writing is significantly different from what appears in the above letter. Evidently, it is not Nuu's but her daughter's handwriting. Although written under her mother's name, this is **Pornpet's first petition**, the earliest petition of among (more or less) 400 others, written over the next 36 years.

This tragic episode took place more than three decades prior to Pornpet being killed; however, for Pornpet, she would speak of it as if it had taken place just the other day. In her autobiography, for example, this incident that motivated her to remain true to what would become her life mission, was often recalled and inscribed throughout her writings. "Everyone in [my] family is a trustworthy person. [We] work hard to earn [our] living honestly. However, the more [we] live [our] lives truthfully, the more [we] get abused. ... How can [I] possibly live in this unjust world? ... [I] have to fight for justice" (2002-2004: Vol. 11). Noticeably, Pornpet's standpoint was not rooted in or influenced by any school of thought such as Marxism, socialism or anarchism. Her principles are straightforward: if there is something wrong, make it right. What is very simple but sophisticated about her mission is that she used her own life to underscore what she believed.

As with other farmers in other cultures around the world, Pornpet's family understood the meaning of the land as something more than just soil or earthly space: it is their heart and soul. The history of her family originated and developed along with the history of the land where they lived and worked. As she documented:

In B.E. 2500 [1957] ... [my] father bought 50 rai⁷ of land; later, [he] bought more for ... himself, my mother ... and [his] five children: another 50 rai for each. Altogether, there was about 350 rai. [We] built the house and worked hard to earn [our] living ... In B.E. 2501-02 (1958-9), [our] farm was praised by Mr Viboon ... I cannot

⁶ 'Kapachao' is used particularly in official written language.

⁷A *Rai* is "a Thai unit of measurement of land. One *rai* is approximately 1,600 square metres or two-fifths of an acre" (Sanitsuda, 1991: 15).

remember his last name ... the local agriculture officer, as the model farm.⁸ [He] reported it to his Department [in Bangkok].

...
Before buying the land, dad had already checked with the district [land] officer. Dad also thought that the oxen we had were not enough to cope with ploughing [such a large parcel of land]. Therefore, dad bought a Massey [Ferguson] tractor directly from abroad in 1963. [It] was the first tractor in the Nong Bua district (2002-2004: Vol. 11 and 12).

...
...The head of the sub-district and district land officer had a plan to capture our land Through the scheme of the B.E. 2511 [1968] public grazing tract map, the land officers were in charge of surveying under the biased guidance of the sub-district head. The areas belonging to [his] acquaintances were not included in the map. However, the line was drawn in such a fashion as to embrace Mr Pim Meuansri[']s] and [another 28] villagers['] lands The damage caused by the officers' brutality fueled [me] to stand up and protest (2002-2004: Vol. 11).

Under such circumstances of illegal expropriation, Pornpet, along with other villagers who were affected by it, spent the first ten years (1968-1978) petitioning and protesting at the local level. Once realising that "... our suffering could not be solved by either the district, provincial or ministerial levels ...", the next step was to "head off to ask the government to solve it" (Sarakadee, op.cit.: 77). However, in those days, it was extremely difficult as the highway was in very poor condition,⁹ therefore, the strategy of "... getting organized and making long trips to demonstrate in Bangkok during 1978-1981 was a failure. It affected the villagers as they couldn't bear that hardship ..."¹⁰ (diary, December 31, 1988).

Though other villagers were not available to join in the mission, Pornpet did not give up. She herself would often come on her own. The longest protest was when she brought her buffalo wearing a suit (to satirise the cabinet) to demonstrate in front of the Prime Minister's

⁸At the farm, there were tamarind, jackfruit, mango, watermelon, cassava, green beans, castor beans etc. Moreover, their shady, peaceful but fruitful land became much more than merely a farm. It was a popular local recreational place where school teachers and students as well as local officers would often come to visit ... "and my father always gave them a treat!" recalled Saroj, Pornpet's youngest brother (Interview April 4, 2005).

⁹Pra [monk] Kru [teacher] Krai, the abbot of Nong Klup temple and a life-time supporter of Pornpet, pointed out that Nong Bua is about 350 (700 roundtrip) kilometres away from Bangkok; however, it was widely known in the area by its nickname, 'Siberia' as it was quite difficult to access. The railway passed Chum Saeng, a nearby district (about 30 kilometres away), but not Nong Bua. Moreover, the dusty local road connecting Chum Saeng and Nong Bua was often in a dilapidated condition as it was, in Pra Kru Krai's terms, a 'hand-made road' (meaning it was made by hand without the assistance of heavy machinery). During rainy season, the road became flooded and boats were used as on a canal. The upgrading of the local road joining Chum Saeng and Nong Bua occurred in the late 1970s. The major highway named "Inburi-Kaosai" connecting Nong Bua not only directly to Bangkok (rather than via Chum Saeng) but also to several northeastern provinces, opened in 1982 (Interview Pra Kru Krai's July 2, 2006).

¹⁰In her petition dated October 23, 1984, to the Prime Minister, Pornpet elaborated that "... due to the cruelty and coercion caused by the civil service officers [over the land issues] through the many long years, among the original 28 petitioners ... 6 people have already died ..."

office for twelve months, from September 12, 1984 to October of the following year and the most highlighted incident was when she made an effort to burn herself alive as recorded in her *memoir* (1987):

*June 9, 1987 at 8.30 pm, [I] wrapped myself in a piece of cloth ... soaked with gasoline ... jumped to the roof of the van which was hired [from home] with a loud speaker As the case had dragged on for many years [I] proposed to the Prime Minister that he solved the issue by noon time. If not, [I] would burn myself alive ... As there was no response from the government ... [I] stood up, read my statement ... and lighted three matches ...*¹¹

Pursuing the case at the national level cost her another ten years up until March 1988, when the cabinet ruled that the ‘public gazing tract’ was illegally expropriated and assigned the Department of Land (DOL) to handle the process of issuing the land title deeds to the proper owners. However, under this resolution, Pornpet would not be able to get her land back until she herself removed the squatters from her land. Earlier, the squatters had been “allowed by the authority[’s] ... to move onto the land in question” during those long years of controversy (Sanitsuda, 1994: 95).

Later, Pornpet documented in her autobiography that the real meaning of the cabinet resolution was that “the authority, in solving the problem, [merely] handed [the problem] back to the long-term [and original] wrongdoer, the DOL” (2002-2004: Vol. 11). In other words, the crisis began with the DOL’s abusive authority of *mismapping* that cost lives and damage to hundreds of poor in that area over a twenty year period. However, their function, operation and staff were rarely questioned, investigated, forced to take responsibility or penalised by the upper level. Further, at the end of the game, the outcome was inverted as the *problem makers* were rewarded and given more absolute authority as the *problem solvers*.

Furthermore, because the cabinet’s resolution did not help resolve the problem, this placed Pornpet in the position of having to carry the burden of another double-sided battle. Firstly, she now had to make many more long trips back and forth from Nong Bua to Bangkok in order to follow up on her case at the DOL. Secondly, during the long years of crisis, other local folks took the opportunity to occupy the controversial areas, leaving Pornpet after the verdict to chase them out one after another. The authorities took no responsibility for rectifying the unjust predicament that they had created. Instead, Pornpet spent the next 16 years (1988-2004) walking to the police station and the provincial court, defending, suing and paying for these efforts with her own limited finances. According to both the documentation and personal evidence, there is no doubt that Pornpet would have eventually won the case and gotten her land back (some days in the future). Therefore, it seems that what she tried to do was not only to claim her property through the assigned bureaucratic channels but at the same time turning the tables around and making those channels accountable. By persistently following up and going through each step of the

¹¹After that Pornpet was arrested, sent to a mental hospital and then straight to prison. I presume that this special memoir was written while she was in the prison as it was recorded on one page that “Tuesday, July 7, 1987 my sister, Arpa, came to visit ... July 23, 1987, the lawyer, Komkrit, came [to discuss] the issue of bailing me out ...”

bureaucracy's land administration and its related operational functions, she had revealed or 'de-seamed' not only its historical and hierarchical construction but also the hidden root cause of the injustice. At this point, I am reminded of the critical debates in the field of postcolonial geography, which places its focus on critiquing the imperial politics of mapping and calling for destabilisation of its power by "rethinking the map" (Blunt and Rose, 1994: 14-20). In Pornpet's case what she fought for was not only the legal (and moral) issue of **keeping the map** (of her land) as it was originally drawn but also the issue of destabilising the unreliable remapping/rezoning of the land to become a public grazing tract which proceeded to take place despite being unjust. Moreover, what is really needed to be radically changed is the unjust mapping of the political and social relations originating in and resulting from the hegemonic operation of "colonialism within" the bureaucratic system of the centralised state organisation.

From local to national and back again to local level, Pornpet had produced a wide range of 'resisting pages', from petitions to posters, banners,¹² leaflets, statements, memoirs, occasional notes, preparation notes for the court cases as well as autobiography. I found that among these documents, the most prominent one that helped make her passage "round" (and complete) is a (drafted) handwritten letter dated *May 12, 2004*, following up on her case at the constitutional court. I started this section by pinpointing her first petition dated *May 14, 1968*, only to discover that, although thirty-six years had gone by, the same woman farmer still patiently penned down her request asking for her land and justice without knowing that that piece of paper would be her *last page* of petitions.

May 31, 2004 ... around 6.30 pm ... Pornpet was on the way back home from her farm ... an unknown person used a cement mile marker to hit her on the head, killing her.

1.2.3.2 From 'Unlearning Privilege' to Territorialised and *Seamly* Knowledge

Pornpet's texts can offer a concrete answer to the question "*Can the Subaltern Write?*" Yes! She can. The problem, however, is not her but her readers/listeners. In other words, *how can I*, a middle class Third World academic and a PhD candidate in a First World University, *read* her documents? I will elaborate on what '*reading intersubjectively*' means to me and how I have learned to 'read intersubjectively' from thinkers and scholars as well as from my own experience. *Philosophically* and methodologically speaking, both Spivak and Trinh have shown us some critical examples of 'how' to read the text to 'recover' the subaltern voice and theorise it. These examples include an approach for '*unlearning privilege*' by Spivak and the groundbreaking concept of '*displacement*' in the context of *territorialised knowledge* production by Trinh.

Spivak emphasises that "[T]he postcolonial intellectuals learn that *their privilege is their loss*" (op.cit:285, italics mine) and continues by provocatively proposing that:

¹² Messages on the banners include, for example, "Where is the Government? Help!", "Why are we suffering? It's caused by the officers", "To object to the crooked officers, grade 4 villager has to bring a law book to talk to the government" etc was drafted on a handy 5x7 inch *writing pad* (1982).

[I]n seeking to learn to speak to (rather than listen to or speak for) the historically muted subject of the subaltern woman, the postcolonial intellectual *systematically* ‘unlearns’ female privilege. This systematic unlearning involves learning to critique postcolonial discourse with the best tools it can provide and not simply substituting the lost figure of the colonized. (ibid.: 293).

What Spivak refers to as ‘female’ privilege is the way privileged women (eg feminist academics and intellectuals) feel that because they are women, they have a **privileged** access to the subaltern woman (ie “I’m a woman and I know what women think and feel”). In other words, on the assumption (in patriarchal culture) that as women, they are “different” from man and by virtue of their ‘difference’ they are able to access the subaltern woman (and in so doing they assume that they “produce difference by differing”). This bias or prejudice that makes some women think they have privileged access to the subaltern woman by virtue of BEING a woman is the privilege that first needs to be unlearned.

Additionally, Spivak points out that the hegemony of the ‘West’ is in the privilege they have garnered for themselves in the production of knowledge that names, represents and theorises the ‘other’. However, the other side of ‘privilege’ is ‘loss’. It is simply because the conditions of dominant race, class and gender in themselves causes not only narrow limits but also prejudice which ‘blocks out’ the West’s ability to critically gain other alternative knowledge. Therefore, for someone like me (although a Third World academic, I also have been ‘Westernised’ to a significant extent), the intellectual act of “unlearning one’s privilege as one’s loss” is the process of learning to learn the unlearned, to see the unseen and to think the unthought-of in order to open up the hidden knowledge which has been ignored by and located outside the mainstream as well as to be able to challenge the hegemony of the West and its monopolised and stabilised power in the production of knowledge and their assumed privilege in speaking for the ‘other’. The key to unlearning one’s privilege is to begin dialoguing in order to (re-)learn not only to listen differently to what the other has to say, but also to do the work of leaving one’s biases. In sum, it is the process in which both sides co-operate in creating a new relation in which it suspends the power of one over the other in terms of naming or ‘grasping’ the other in language. In my case, the questions I have to carry along in this process are, for instance, am I ‘theorising’ Pornpet or am I relating/ dialoguing with her? Am I able to suspend my own (either positive or negative) biases, prejudices, opinions on her ‘culture’, ‘gender’, ‘behaviour, habits and attitude’, respectively?

In regards to *territorialised knowledge*, this concept has been distinctly discussed in (at least) two different ways. Firstly, and geographically, according to Blunt and Rose (op.cit.), *territory* or “the image of land claimed and conquered” has been redefined to strip off the imperial ideology of *transparency* and its acts of mapping all places in relation to European civilisation. However, feminism has not only offered a critique to displace this form of dominant power of claiming, conquering and cartographising on and over land and space, but also called for a more critical multidimensionality and fluidity in the creative process of reimagining and remapping the ‘third’ or ‘in between’ spaces beyond the conventional boundaries and dichotomies of ‘margin and centre’ or ‘same and other’ etc at both the personal and political levels. Secondly, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have critically revealed that the literary aspect of the term “deterritorialisation” is the condition of

“minor literature” which in turn is alienated and displaced language and literacy from the dominant and established language and literature. More interestingly, they both argue that this “minor literature” provides “... the revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature” (1995: 61). The masters’ familiarity of genre and canon has been challenged and demolished with the shift to “nomadism” as the movement and interaction between centres and margins (Kaplan, 1987). Their cutting edge question “[H]ow many people today live in a language that is not their own? ... [or] ... even know their own and know poorly the major language that they are forced to serve” (Deleuze and Guattari, op.cit.:61), not only challenges the dominance of the West’s right to its core but has also brought the subaltern (refugees, immigrants, and displaced, border or marginalised groups, who could not speak English well) up into the scene.

The political intersecting and intertwining of geography and language through the term *territorialised knowledge* has been elaborated upon by Trinh. She points out that the problem is not only that of ‘*speaking for*’ (as Spivak earlier elaborated upon) but also ‘*speaking about*’, which operates in the domain of the binary oppositions “... subject/object; I/It; We/They ... on which territorialized knowledge depends” (1995:327). Thus, in order to break the dichotomy of subject and object, “... the question ‘who speaks?’ and the implication ‘it-speaks-by-itself-through-me’ is ... a way of foregrounding the anteriority of the tale to the teller, and thereby the merging of the two through a speech-act [of *speaking to*]” (ibid., italics mine).

The philosophical concept of ‘speaking to’ suggested by the above feminist thinkers will be employed to shed light on Pornpet’s ‘territorialised knowledge’ resulting from her long years of violation and ‘displacement’ by the postcolonial bureaucratic system and respective bureaucrats. Theoretically, ‘displacing’, that is, the stage of ‘living-in-between’, is considered “a *way of surviving*” where, on the one hand, the displacer proceeds by

unceasingly introducing difference into repetition. By *questioning over and over again what is taken for granted as self-evident*, by reminding oneself and the others of the unchangeability of change itself. Disturbing thereby one’s own thinking habits, dissipating what has become familiar and clichéd, and participating in the changing of received values — the transformation (without master) of other selves through one’s self (ibid.: 332, italics mine).

What does displacement mean to me? Personally, I ‘feel’ its meaning when looking back at my intimate experiences. Feeling displaced when someone dearly close to your heart for many years says ‘good bye’ leaving you in a “no-where land” (where you easily lose your bearings, direction and purpose in life). Days and nights of struggling to survive in between unknown locations --- no place to go further as well as no place to go back --- is a lifetime of unforgettable memories which (at that moment) cannot be translated into any spoken or written language. Politically, once hearing the terms and stories of *displacement*, *exile*, *(im)migration*, *expatriation* etc, I am often overwhelmed by very mixed feelings of anger at the brutal patriarchal system which is the root cause of many dehumanising circumstances, as well as feeling sympathy for so-called ‘refugees’ who we often see holding their spare belongings in their left hand and their children in their right hand as they attempt to cross the

border to a safer place. From personal to political and then philosophical, my understanding of the notion of “displacing” has gradually evolved making the relation of subject and object central to this concept. According to Trinh, the act of ‘surviving-in-between’ could be ‘read’ not only as the work of “... transformation (without mastery) of other selves through one’s self” (ibid.: 332) by challenging the compartmentalised “subject-object” system “... while filling the shifting space of creation with a passion named wonder ... [which] ... never seizes, never possesses the other as its object” (ibid.: 333). Moreover, it involves “... the invention of *new forms of subjectivities*, of pleasures, of intensities, of relationships, which also implies the continuous renewal of a critical work that looks carefully and intensively at the very system of values to which one refers in fabricating the tools of resistance” (ibid.: 331, italics mine). The emerging of new forms of subjectivity would take place whenever one reaches the moment where s/he could fully authorise him/herself to speak in his or her own ‘I’. Becoming the subject of one’s own sentence brings not only the ending of the patronising circumstance of being spoken for/about, but also the engendering of defiance.

Moreover, the process of imposition and control over ‘transparent’ space is not totally one-sided as the act of resisting and displacing (or alienating) will find its own way to emerge. This de-positioning moment is precious as it is the state of refusing to be fixed and instead moves in between, thereby creating hybridity or the ‘third space’, which, according to Homi Bhabha, “... displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom” (1990: 211). In this regard, while Spivak offers the strategic tool of ‘unlearning privilege’ or learning to read the unread, Trinh emphasises and utilises the philosophically paradoxical process of ‘reading the third space’. However, what I have to keep in mind is that what is specific about Pornpet’s case is its different notion of the ‘third space *within*’. That is, its location and relation does not take place in the domain of the Third-First (English speaking) World. Rather, she had been (forced to be) displaced within her own ‘land’ and country and exiled within the familiar terrain of the Thai language.

There is something that Trinh’s, as well as Blunt and Rose’s works, rarely touch upon. It is the issue of “colonisation within”. The work of conquering and controlling the so-called transparent space was undertaken not only by the ‘Western White’ but also the ‘Brown domestic within’ elite, especially in the case of Thailand. As elaborated by Thongchai Winichakul:

Ethnographic construction ... was part of the colonial project to formulate and control the Others of the West. Alongside the colonial enterprise, the Siamese rulers had a parallel project of their own, concerning their own subjects, a project which reaffirmed their superiority, hence justifying their rule, over the rest of the country within the emerging territorial state. It was a project on the ‘Others Within’. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (roughly speaking 1885-1910), travels had mediated the construction of an ethnographic classification in the eyes of Siamese élite (2004: 41).

Besides the ethnographic construction, during the same period, utilising the British and Dutch Southeast Asian colonial administration as a model, King Rama V and his associates started reforming the central government and provincial administration on the

basis of dividing it into sub-units of province-district-sub-district (or commune) and village (with the villagers on the bottom rung of the ladder) (Tej,1989:111-184). The modern bureaucratic process of recruiting, training, positioning, promoting, ranking and providing salaries etc, was set up to run a new administrative system effectively (Siffin,1966). Therefore, although Thailand was not occupied by either the British or French, it strongly held *colonialism within* the bureaucratic system of the centralised state government. The names (and frames) of the system might change from time to time (especially after the 1932 coup which overthrew the regime of absolute monarchy and established the regime of the constitutional monarchy) but it seems that the fundamental hierarchical concept of having central power over the periphery has remained.

From Britain to America, under the guidance of the International Development Research Center, Indiana University (and other U.S. institutes eg the Public Administration Clearing House), in the early stages of the development era (1950s-1960s), studies on “(politics of/and) bureaucracy in Thailand” by both American and Thai elites, had been conducted on a noticeable scale. William J. Siffin (op.cit.), Fred W. Riggs (1966), and Arsa Meksawan (1961), to name just a few, focused their discussion and analysis within the domain of academic and administrative practice --- and were written from above. This thesis focuses instead on the margins where writings by Pornpet, a farmer who had been caught within the Kafkaesque bureaucratic world, were written from below by documenting her intolerable experience in her diary. Through the process of reflecting, observing, questioning and challenging the hegemony of the bureaucratic system, her critical viewpoint had been shaped and sharpened. Initially, the critique of colonialist (and colonised) knowledge is defined as *territorialised knowledge*. However, in regard to Pornpet’s experiences, the term decolonising needs to be extended to embrace the concept and practice of de-bureaucratisation in the postcolonial context. Above all, as she was a dressmaker; I’d rather privilege her wisdom by naming it *seamly knowledge* (as the ‘seam’ is the hidden part and is not overtly shown). It is created and occurs (at the in-between) along the edges and margins, which as we know, are the places of new emerging, diversity and radical creative production. In the [dressmaking] process, seams are produced by placing edges together, which are then jointly stitched, thereby helping connect the different parts that hold themselves collectively to become a body (shirt) of knowledge for her to wear and for us from which to learn.

Struggling to subjectivise as the ‘in-betweener’ by utilising “marginality [or seam] as a starting point rather than an ending point” (Trinh, 1995, op.cit.: 331), helped Pornpet to develop her capacity for writing (and archiving) as an effective tool of resistance. What is more astonishing is that this same woman also crafted her work through the means of many different genres: public and private, political and personal.

1.2.3.3 On reading de-colonisingly

Practically, I found that, as written in Thai, each of these six documents follow their own particular and constellated ‘*signage*’ (ie the customer account records have nothing in common with the petition; moreover, the dressmaking course notebook comes in two different ‘languages’: text/alphabet and graphic). Multiple levels of semiotic competency and social background is demanded in order to be able to decode each document in depth and

breadth. Crucially, as their significant identities are as ‘women’s archives’ in a postcolonial context the concept and practice of *reading along (and against) the grain, reading as women and reading in detail from below through a ‘decolonising’ lens* as well as *reading for dialoguing and supporting*, has critically assisted me in this ‘journey’ of decoding.

Firstly, on the issue of reading the archives, according to Ann Laura Stoler, a critical approach to the colonial archives over the last fifteen years is a commitment to assessing them “*against their grain*” (2002: 91). However, what Stoler asserts is also required is a rigorous approach that reads ‘*along the grain*’. As she argues “... we need not only to brush against the archive’s received categories. We need to read for its regularities, for its logic of recall, for its densities and distributions, for its consistencies of misinformation, omission and mistake, along the archival grain” (ibid.: 92).

Stoler’s method of reading archives de-constructively and not essentially in itself reflects the advent of postmodernism, where we find ourselves “no longer studying things but the making of them”. The traditional treatment of “archives as a means to an end” or “archive-as-source” has shifted to “archives-as-subject” or “archives as epistemological experiments” (ibid.: 83-86). In particular, the colonial archives’ constructing principle is both “a process and a powerful technology of rule” in itself (ibid.: 83). In order to examine how it has been made, a researcher needs to employ her approach to practice reading both along (and against) the grain.

Principally, in the field of postcolonial studies, the term ‘colonial archives’ refers to the conventional documents produced by the colonisers (top-down and therefore assumed to be authoritative), on and about their colonised states and people (eg the Dutch East and the British West Indies). Such a definition cannot be extended to embrace the Meuan Sri’s 1930s land-tax receipts, documents created by the Siamese/Thai state’s practice of internal colonisation. Additionally, what is more complicated is although they were officially produced, they are not the archives of the Thai state but of a farmer’s family as it was issued to and kept by them for a number of years. As a result, archives produced by ‘colonisation within’ has brought Stoler’s strategic injunction to read ‘upper class sources upside down’ and ‘along (and against) the grain’ to its limit. This is because Pornpet’s archives — which are not upper class (ie written by the elites) and which, if I were going to read it against the grain, might produce different effects from what Stoler is describing in the quotation above. In this regard, endless effort in searching for many innovative ways to assess Pornpet’s documents critically and creatively has not only methodologically advanced (what was offered by Stoler in) the discipline of archive studies, but will also make an original contribution to the field of postcolonial geography once the particular and missing category of ‘colonisation within’ archives (not mainstream ‘colonial archives’) has been taken into consideration and brought to the forefront.

Additionally, Jacques Derrida’s etymological analysis of the archives (1996), James S. Duncan’s critical discussion on the issues of the complicity and resistance in colonial archives (1999), Francesca Moore’s critical review of the different strands of debates on the partiality of archives (2010), and Miles Ogborn’s approach to the archival materials’ relation to state formation (2003), will be brought in to be dialogued with historical geography scholars. I am particularly inspired by Stephen Daniels and Catherine Nash’s “Lifepath: geography and biography”, which has demonstrated the historical connection between the

arts of geography and biography in Western culture through their study on the “relations between *script* and *space* in the making of life histories, both individual and collective” (2004: 449, *italic mine*). Recognising that there are a variety of forms of life writing, eg autobiography, novel, memoirs, etc, that can be characterised as ‘narratives of a lifepath’, which, having been plotted through mapping techniques and metaphor, has offered me a critical and creative lens to (re-)read Pornpet’s family paddy duty receipts. That is, each of them is a piece and part of their biography on the landscape of their personal life, or conversely, they are documents that offer a perspective on the Meuanisri family’s personal geography (within a public historical Thai context), and, at some level, can be ‘dug up’ or ‘traced’ through the ‘biographical site’ (of the 70 year-old paddy duty receipts).

The ‘top-down’ public documents written by male public officers, include, but are not limited to, the paddy duty cover sheet and paddy duty receipts issued to Pornpet’s parents. These documents will be contrasted to, through a significant reversal, the personal ‘bottom-up’ (grassroots) documents passionately and professionally written by Pornpet, which will include her dressmaking course notebook and customer account records. In chapters 4 and 5, the theme and the tone of the archived materials have radically shifted from ‘phallic’ to ‘gynocentric’ or from ‘vertical’ to ‘horizontal’ in which the ‘decolonising’ lens of reading ‘in detail’ and ‘from below’ will be employed.

Regarding women’s archives, I feel gratitude to *Working in Women’s Archives* (2001), a collection of articles by seven Canadian scholars sharing their unique experience of working on women’s archives and theoretical reflections. Not only does it provide me with critical and ‘professional guidance’ on ‘how to work and read’ women’s archives, but also ‘personal support’ where I can turn back to dialogue for new ideas or occasional consultation. For example, while Gwendolyn Davies “... has taken twelve years of putting bits and pieces together to be able to say that [she] now ha[s] nine Cottnam mother or daughter letters and seven poems of one of [the] earliest Canadian women writers”, Mary Rubio, who could easily access L.M. Montgomery’s “Life-books”--- ten volumes of five hundred pages each ---, has to face the problem of ‘editorial headaches’. Her critical challenge is to find “... how to condense a lifetime of entries into several book-length volumes, how to use footnotes productively in order to make an earlier culture alive in the present and how to make a publication that is both rigorous in its standards of scholarship and good reading for the general public” (ibid.: 2-3). Nevertheless, I found that in terms of conducting research outside of the mainstream area of women’s archives (where the major focus is on and about upper class women), the challenge is not only ‘what’ (either scarcity or plenty of materials) to read but ‘how’ to read archives, especially the unfamiliar ones. Generally, any researcher has at least some level of experience in reading typical genres of writing such as letters, poems, memoirs or life-books, either old or new, but how often in one’s life does s/he come across a dressmaking course notebook? There are no lessons to be learned from any “pioneer” who can guide me into Pornpet’s written work and archival materials. I must struggle to access this unique material at my own risk and reward.

After many months of trial and error in assessing Pornpet’s dressmaking course notebook, my conclusion is that in order to decode the pattern or the latitude and longitude of the female body ‘map’, I have to start off by furnishing myself with not only the technical

knowledge of cartography but also its theoretical critique. Professional dressmakers, whose knowledge was passed on through both personal and published interviews, taught me how to read body/dressmaking 'patterns'. In terms of mapping a theoretical critique, Blunt and Gillian Rose argue that "... [M]aps are graphic tools of colonization ... [which] not only *describe* colonies: they also *discipline* them through the discursive grid of Western power and knowledge" (1994: 9, 15; italics mine). Moreover, it is "... an instrument of interrogation, a form of spatial interview which made nature answer the invader's need of information [for colonisation]." As Graham Huggan elaborates:

... [R]epresentations of women and landscapes as sites of colonization were often codified through mapping because "the map operates ... as a dual paradigm for the phallogocentric discourse which inscribes women, and the rationalistic discourse which inscribes the land as 'Other.'" Theoretically parallels can be drawn between the disciplinary power and surveillance imposed on landscapes by mapping and imposed on the body (in Blunt and Rose, *ibid.*: 13, 11).

Under the legitimacy of the transparency of knowledge production, (virginal or) 'naked' (transparent) lands and nude (transparent) (female) figures could be simply penetrated, explored, explained, appropriated, exploited and regulated. The process and product of cartographising has brought us to be "prisoners in its spatial matrix" (Harley, 1992:245). This 'locked up' situation is a double-bind for women as they are imprisoned in both the governing patterns that are hegemonically placed over their own living bodies and the terrain of their communities and homes where they live and belong. The shifting concept from accepting the map as 'a mirror of nature' (therefore creating the illusion/allusion of transparency) to 'a (cultural) text' of collecting codes, has not only liquefied the rigid boundaries that the territoriality of hegemony requires but also persistently opens up into other texts which helps create "the space of intertextuality" (Burgin in Harley, *ibid.*: 240). Therefore, first and foremost, the key tool needed in reading a map is to 'unmap' it or "... to dismantle ... all of the frame that the cartographer has placed around it" (*ibid.*).

From decoding the pattern, then, there is the dramatic shift to reading her *diary*, one of the most intimate forms of personal writing. Philosophically, I am challenged by Irigaray to practice reading 'the silence' or "a still virgin space-time for [one's] appearance and its expressions" (1996: 118) and to make a journey back to one's own interiority in order to access becoming as well as correspondingly connecting back to exteriority (2008, *op.cit.*: 24-35). Additionally, I am inspired to furnish myself with the perspective of 'reading through the body' in response to Trinh's concept of "women's writing through their bodies", particularly through their wombs. As she observes:

... writing as an "intrinsic" child/birth process takes on different qualities in women's contexts. No man claims to speak from the womb, women do. Their site of fertilization, they often insist, is the womb, not the mind. Their inner gestation is in the womb, not in the mind. The mind is therefore no longer opposed to the heart; it is, rather, perceived as part of the womb, being "englobed by it" (1989, *op.cit.*: 37).

Trinh is in concert with Janet Ellerby's proposal of calling for the approach of 'reading like a woman' as she asserts that "[R]ather than assuming the guise of the rational male critical reader that I had learned to don when reading as a scholar, *I allowed myself to read like a woman --- emotionally, intuitively, and lovingly*" (2001: xv, italics mine). Her solid theoretical position is inspired by Jonathan Culler (1982: 63) who proposes that "[A] reader, who is reading as a woman, asserts the continuity between women's experience of social and familial structures. Experience --- her own and others'--- is set in a vital and productive relation to the text and becomes a firm ground for interpretation" (ibid.). Moreover, Jeanne Braham, a critic who has read through journals written by May Sarton, Audre Lorde and Nancy Mairs published from 1975 to 1995, asserts that there is no other magical lens in reading except a "lens of empathy". As she concludes:

Through the deployment of extended metaphors that allow readers to enter their texts imaginatively, they invite us to pursue our discoveries, arrive at our own truths. *They remind us that the essential transaction between reader and author is not in simply grasping the alternative script the author extends, but in using it as a 'lens of empathy' ... a window flooding our own lives with light* (1996: 71, italics mine).

What does reading as a woman in an empathetic way mean to me and 'how' do I do that while reading Pornpet's archives? First of all, Culler has argued that to read like a woman is not *essentialising* but a radical act of textual interpretation based on one's own experiences in connecting with others and with the social structure. Looking back at my background, I have been raised in a Buddhist household, professionally trained in the interdisciplinary domains of history, women's studies, environmental studies and human geography, and politically engaged in social justice activism since my undergraduate years. This so-called "baggage" backgrounds and crystallises into, using Braham's term, a 'torch of empathy', throwing a light that assists me in assessing the life writings of a grassroots rural woman. In practice, one does not arrive overnight to find the right approach. After a long trail of trial and error, I finally found that 'dialoguing' is the key. As a reader, I have had to dialogue with myself in parallel with passionate attentiveness to what Pornpet had to communicate in order to make the connection between her stories and my background and begin the process of 'displacing' myself from the uncritical writings and reading system, that ignores the value of life and pays less respect to finding new ways to open up new horizons of knowledge. In this regard, 'empathy' helps create an 'openness' and 'unassuming attitude' that is essential to a critical and radical 'at its roots' dialogue with 'others'. For instance, by wearing a woman's empathetic lens to read the *customer account records*, they no longer remain physical pages filled with numerical credit and debit transactions but a record of dedicated, detailed, time and energy consuming work by a young dressmaker who made effort daily to earn income for her family. Additionally, moving further to explore 'between and behind the lines', I found that her tragic loss could be touched and felt here and there throughout the records. For example, we can find no customer names, and debit and credit records after 1963, the year that her family began to come under attack by the land district officer and his party.

Above all I acknowledge that I am a reader who reads ‘subjectively’. As Ellerby points out “[A]ll of us read texts through highly personalized lenses, refracted through experience and cultural baggage, even if we wrote those texts”¹³ (op. cit.: 108). However, the more I have researched articles on *Western* women’s diaries, the more I feel alienated/displaced from what they have written. For example, in *Space of Her Day* (1995), a study on 16 Australian women’s diaries during the inter-war period (1920s-1930s), Katie Holmes points out that many of these dairies “... capture the art of the everyday. The weather, the shopping, the housework, the mail, are all compressed into entries which reveal the fabric of the writer’s daily existence” (13). The diaries by Pornpet are entirely different in that within the smallest of ‘private’ spaces (the diary), the ‘public’ issues of state violence and the political, economic and social consequences experienced by a farmer family are revealed and squeezed into entries. At this point, Trinh’s critique shifts me to approach Pornpet’s diaries by *reading through a decolonising lens*. As she argues:

The “personal” may liberate as it may enslave. We set it up against “impersonal” as if the two were mutually exclusive for each other, then start asserting that emphasis on the personal, the intimate, and the domestic has always been determining to the [Western] Women’s Movement, hence the importance, for instance, of the personal diary form, which remains an effective means of self-expression for women to whom other avenues are often closed. *True, but looking at the diary exclusively as a means of self-expression is already a distortion and a confinement* (1989, op.cit.: 35, italics mine).

Trinh’s criticism of Western white women’s overemphasis on the politics of the personal that seems to bring enslavement rather than enlightenment is insightful. However, in regard to Third World women’s experience, particularly Pornpet’s, the term ‘decolonising’ needs to be extended to embrace the concept of de-bureaucratisation in the postcolonial context. Employing a de-bureaucratized lens to read Pornpet’s diary comprises (at the very least) a double meaning postcolonially and politically. Firstly and postcolonially, ‘de-bureaucratisation’ refers to thoroughly examining a grassroots woman’s documentation in order to reveal the domination of the ‘colonisation within’, which has been constructed, operated and legitimated through a hierarchical bureaucratic system of the centralised state organisation as well as to peruse her struggle and experience, especially her process of subjectivisation to name, shape, change and challenge their authority. Secondly, in terms of the politics of location, recognising that the text was produced not only by someone with a low social status but also on the edge of a rural district in a far-off province, I need to re-position myself and learn to read back and forth from the seam to the centre and back as well as in-between. This practice reminds me of what was proposed earlier by hooks that “[L]iving as we did --- on the edge --- we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We

¹³Such a proposal might lead to the question of ‘bias’ which was noted by Stoler when she argued that “[T]he issue of ‘bias’ gives way to a different challenge: to identify the conditions of possibility which shaped what could be written, what warranted repetition, what competencies were rewarded in archival writing, what stories could not be told and what could not be said” (op.cit.: 86).

looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as the margin. We understood both” (1995:241).

Besides the issue of self-repositioning in the process of reading and the thorny critique over the diary’s dichotomy between the public and private, Irina Paperno, a Russian history scholar, calls for a radical re-assessment of the genre. As she argues:

[It is important to remember that] the diary is not merely a genre, but a cultural artifact existing within a social cultural context. ... [E]mphasis on form and genre obscures the working of diaries as intimate writings and intimate records – an archive that situates self in history (in Beattie, 2009: 83).

Paperno’s critique inspires me not only ‘*to read beyond the boundary*’ but also to realise that the diary comes in many different forms as well as, approaching this in reverse, that many forms (of writing) could also be considered as diary writing, for example, Pornpet’s *customer account records*. Its primary difference from the conventional diary is that it does not flow chronologically, but instead by client name (100 names, approximately). One client’s record was regarded as one entry with details of one purchase with a paid or payable amount. Once the amount was paid, the record would be crossed out. Then, she would write down a new entry for a new customer. It is no surprise then to discover that there is a large number of listed miscellaneous items (alongside the price of each) under each entry eg 1 shirt, 1 skirt, 1 brassiere, 1 needle, 1 pack of cigarettes, 5 duck eggs, 1 bottle of shampoo. These large numbers of miscellaneous items might have completely ‘buried’ me under their numerical weight if I hadn’t come across Laurel Thatcher Ulrich’s *A Midwife’s Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary 1785 - 1812* (1990). This Hallowell woman of Maine, whose “living was to be measured in doing. Nothing was trivial”, faithfully recorded 816 births over a range of twenty-seven years. There are the repetitive acts of crossing the river or wading through snow to sit out a tedious labor, pickling meat, sorting cabbages etc (9). Ulrich’s style of meticulously ‘combing’ through and revisiting each of Ballard’s entries is reinforced by her observation that “[Y]et it is the (... so unyielding in its ...) very dailiness, the exhaustive, repetitious dailiness (... and its astonishing steadiness ...), that the real power of Martha Ballard’s book lies” (ibid.: 9, 21, 31). These comments encouraged me to read Pornpet’s *customer account records* again and again, a perseverance that helped me discover new insights at yet another level. It is the recognition that “the trivial that so annoyed earlier readers provide a consistent, daily record of the operation of a female-managed economy” (ibid.: 33).

Moreover, Ulrich not only offers a way of ‘*reading in detail and from below*’ but she also provides an approach to writing that considers “juxtaposing the raw diary and the interpretive essay ... [in order to] ... remind readers of the complexity and subjectivity of historical reconstruction, to give them some sense of both the affinity and the distance between history and source” (ibid.: 34). She provides an exceptional ‘experimental’ model with which to approach Pornpet’s own raw material. Lastly, it is her insightful observation that “[O]pening a diary for the first time is like walking into a room full of strangers. The reader is advised to enjoy the company without trying to remember every name” (ibid.: 35). Of course! I do! I greatly enjoy their company along the way and look forward to bringing

the customer account records back to be ‘read’ by these customers (who are still alive), and to continue documenting, reflecting and writing on this living alternative diary.

Reading Pornpet’s customer account record gave me the ‘sense’ that I was reading a diary. However, surprisingly, when I read her ‘real’ (that is, conventional form) diary, I found that the ‘text’ I ‘touched’ upon was (at least on some level) similar in some ways to the text of her (‘so-called’) petition (again, but in the form of a diary). Her documentation of state violence against her family and a cry for justice appears in many entries throughout 1965. Furthermore, her *autobiography* comes in both conventional and non-conventional forms (which can be considered as occasional memoirs). The conventional autobiography is written in eleven school composition notebooks. The non-conventional autobiography, which relates to some specific events or significant moments in her life, was found on loose or scrap paper scattered throughout her documents. I found that such complexities are ‘delightful’ rather than difficult when read in parallel to the *dialogues* of earlier ‘resistance’ writings offered by Third World and black feminist writers such as Anzaldúa and Lorde. Particularly, Lorde’s *The Cancer Journals* (1997) has provided me with not only the original ideas and a means to insightfully understand Pornpet’s work, but also the wisdom and strength to critically and alternatively struggle through the journey of my recent illness together with my own intellectual passage throughout the long years.

In sum, I have learned that in engaging with the decoding of Pornpet’s archives by utilising multiple methods (ie reading along (and against) the grain, reading as women, reading in detail from below through a ‘decolonising’ lens as well as reading in an effort to dialogue and support) is in itself the creation of an innovative (and integrated) approach which I will refer to here as ‘*revelatory reading*’. In other words, the process of intersubjectively interpreting Pornpet’s texts as it relates to the movement and rhythm of her life gives us a chance to appreciate the slow unfolding of insight with a critical element of surprise along the way rather than in advance.

1.2.4 The Politics of Reflexivity (and Footnoting)

Methodologically, *reflexivity*, a valuable tool to de-hierarchicise the power relation in the research process, can be defined in two ways. Firstly, it can mean “... reflecting upon, critically examining and exploring analytically the nature of the research process in an attempt to demonstrate the assumptions about gender ... relations which are built into a specific project” (Fonow and Cook (1991), cited in Maynard, 1994: 16). Secondly, it “... refers to understanding the ‘*intellectual autobiography*’ of researchers” (ibid., italics mine).

Traditionally, reflexive entries are always placed at (or near) the end of the writing piece, either in the form of a footnote, an endnote or afterword. Earlier, I had planned to use footnotes --- in the last chapter --- as ‘modeled’ by Ruth Behar in *Translated Women* (1992). However, throughout the day-to-day process of my writing, I had come to the conclusion that each piece of work has its own ‘origin’ and ‘identity’; therefore, reflexivity cannot wait until the last chapter as was the case with Behar’s work. Therefore, it will be inserted chapter by chapter or paragraph by paragraph and even in the form of a *footnote* at the bottom of each page. In particular regarding the latter, in this thesis I will use footnotes conventionally and unconventionally; that is, providing the sources for the ideas which have led to a particular

analysis and conclusion and to create a space for reflection and open dialogue for the writer herself and between the writer and her readers, respectively. In this way it would also act as a bridge connecting the unknown to the known in the process of searching for new knowledge and the language proper to it, as well as other innovative functions, such as serving as a place for acknowledgments at the proper moment.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. The abstracts for each are provided below:

1. (of) *Beginnings and Background* provides an introductory sketch on the structure and landscape of the research and, guided by the questions ‘*Can the subaltern write? How do we begin to read what the subaltern writes?*’ utilises the theoretical ‘frameworks’ of *postcolonial geography* and *feminist methodology*. Further, these frameworks will undergo a process of *reading and writing intersubjectively* with a specific focus on an *autobiographical* approach and critical reflexivity. It also includes a background *literature review* on ‘Women and Development in Thailand’.

2. (in-) *Between the (Two) Fields*. Within the concept and practice of *autoethnography*, this chapter reflects on my experiences researching two different but related and intertwining fields. These are the ‘field of lives’ of Pornpet’s family and friends, and the ‘field of archives’ which (re)presents Pornpet’s passions, personality and positionality, followed by a reflexive piece on learning and struggling to ‘*write intersubjectively*’ guided by Irigaray’s work while attempting to dialogue with Pornpet’s writings.

3. *Behind the Archival Grain* aims to enrich and enlarge the horizon of historical geographical debates by utilising the concept of postcolonial archives to ‘re-read’ *70 year-old land-tax receipts* and related documents of Pornpet’s family. These receipts reflect the complex relation between citizen and state through a bureaucratic system of tax collection and issuance of receipts. The act of critically ‘reading along (and against) the grain’ or ‘tracing back’ the dominant process of ‘vertical’ writing in which state power is manifested and shapes ordinary people’s life and land in the modern era, will help us to learn not only about the ‘origin’ of suppression but also provide a tool of resistance to ‘reconstruct, revive and rewrite’ from the ‘bottom up’ from the subaltern’s ground.

4. *Becoming a Writer* traces, elaborates and ‘re-maps’ Pornpet’s life and work by re-reading her *50-year-old dressmaking course notebook* (1959) and *customer account records* (1959-1962). Moreover, it will also try to utilise a feminist geographical perspective to critically connect her process of learning how to make patterns or ‘map’ the latitude and longitude of the female shape, to her subsequent ability to read and *resist* the Thai government’s ‘official’ landscape cartography (which brought profound conflict and suffering to villagers in that area many years later). Then the *customer account records*, an alternative form of diary, which gives a limited but insightful perspective and understanding of the community from below and its female-managed economy, is elaborated and discussed.

5. *Becoming a Protester* focuses on re-reading the earliest piece of Pornpet's resistance writing, the *1965 diary*, in the transitional context of shifting from being a dress (/pattern) maker and accounts recorder to becoming a committed diarist (1965-2003). Following the trail tracing her struggling efforts to 'produce text' provides both an insightful understanding of land problems and a critical decolonising geographical lens for reading her *first handwritten petition of May 14, 1968*, the first of 400 petitions generated over the next 36 years (1968-2004). This chapter covers two main parts: 'Being' a Diarist and 'Becoming' a Petitioner.

6. *Before Closing*. The last two chapters (6 and 7) cover the four distinct contributions that distinguish my research as significantly different from other works in the field of postcolonial studies, especially as it relates to the fields of postcolonial feminist geography and archives studies. In chapter 6, we begin with a discussion on the concept of "*colonisation within*" which has not been addressed by postcolonial-feminist thinkers (ie Spivak, Trinh and Blunt and Rose). The process of employing this concept to critique missing scholarship in the current postcolonial studies debates will be demonstrated by three case studies and presented in chronological order. Secondly, it is through a critical assessment of the (unexpected) availability of Pornpet's archives and her writings that we are able to introduce the notion of '*subalternity into crisis*' (Spivak, personal communication, September 4, 2012), a new chapter in postcolonialism and archives studies. The introduction and critical discussion of '*subalternity into crisis*' is undertaken through three sub-topics: Why Can't the Subaltern Speak?, 'Subalternity into Crisis': Definition and Discussion, and Overcoming the Condition of Subalternity: Reading what is 'Missing' in Spivak and Irigaray.

7. (and) *Beyond(the Ending)* covers two parts. Firstly, the innovative approach of *revelatory reading* (and *writing autobiographically-in-between*) advances beyond Irigaray's use of intersubjectivity between 'sexuate' or racial 'others', which is based on face to face dialogue, by reworking it so as to be applicable to the reading of texts of (deceased) others, particularly the subaltern (-ity into crisis). The lessons learned as well as the successes and failures in creatively engaging with Pornpet will be critically and chronologically (2005-2012) reviewed under reading (my) '*positionality*' and (Pornpet's process of) '*becoming*' (a writer), reading 'silence and perception' and reading 'listening'. Secondly, the chapter offers an interpretation of the concept of *de-bureaucratisation* or a grassroots woman's critique of mainstream Thai feminist scholarship, which had neglected the issue of patriarchal state 'violence' (through writing) against (men and) women. Structurally, it includes two major sub-topics: (from) 'Re-writing You': the Representation of Thai Women as Constructed by Mainstream Studies, and (to) Writing (Our) Selves --- Writing De-bureaucratisation: A Woman's Challenge of the Patriarchal State's Discursive Violence. After critically assessing the six categories of (rural/ poor) Thai women's representations as constructed by (middle class) researchers, a review of Pornpet's multiple forms of inscription undertaken through the process of de-bureaucratisation will be elaborated within the framework of 'women and language' and its link to the discussion on 'women and movements' which will be both the conclusion and consider what is left for future study.

1.4 Significance

My thesis provides an original contribution to the disciplines of postcolonial feminist geography and archives studies in at least three facets: theoretically, methodologically and epistemologically.

Theoretically, this study has advanced the concept and practice of postcolonial feminism by bringing it to a new theoretical stage in at least two different ways. They are firstly, an attempt to fill in missing scholarship that has not been touched upon by postcolonial feminist thinkers, particularly an elaboration of the concept of '*colonialism within*' and related chronological case studies in the Thai context. Secondly, it is the first study of its kind in which a (female Thai) *subaltern's archives and her writings* in various contents and forms is critically brought under analysis. This unique phenomenon has shifted the current discursive debates on postcolonial archives studies to '*subalternity in crisis*' in that at least in Pornpet's case, she has effectively answered Spivak's question "Can the subaltern speak?" with a resounding "Yes!"

Methodologically, due to the fact that Pornpet's archives are such that they provide a radical challenge to Spivak's question in that we need to instead ask "Can the subaltern write? And how do we begin to read their writing?", we need therefore to distinguish my research from other works in the field of postcolonial studies in another two dimensions. Firstly, while other (mainstream) postcolonial research (eg the South Asian Subaltern Studies group) aim to utilise the method of reading official documents 'against the grain' or from the bottom up to indirectly reveal the subaltern histories, my work is rooted in a subaltern's very own archives. What it seeks to reveal is not only the subaltern's knowledge but related missing perspectives in (feminist and) postcolonial debates (ie colonisation within and subalternity into crisis). Secondly, and as a result, this process helps create a number of critical methods for assessing the subaltern's archives from a feminist perspective; particularly, the innovative approach of '*revelatory reading*' which, firstly, privileges a slow unfolding of insight with an element of surprise in the task of accessing both 'vertical' official and 'horizontal' unofficial writing. Secondly, it improves upon Irigaray's notion of "approaching the [sexuate and racial] other as the other", which is based on face-to-face dialogue between two parties, by re-formulating it so as to be applicable to the reading of texts of (deceased) others, specifically, the subaltern (into crisis), in many critical and creative ways eg reading 'becoming', reading 'silence' and reading 'listening', respectively.

Epistemologically, it offers a radical interpretation of the concept of *de-bureaucratisation* or a grassroots woman's critique of mainstream Thai feminist scholarship through the framework of Buddhism and the utilisation of multiple forms of inscription. Pornpet's archives and writing as well as her groundbreaking conclusion that "[T]he bureaucracy is the root cause. The people's problem will never be solved unless we change how our bureaucratic system works" (Sanitsuda, op.cit.: 97-8, italics mine) will, firstly, interrupt the homogenising effects of Women and Development and mainstream feminist discourse in Thailand, which stereotypically constructs and represents the image of women as

a powerless and victimised homogeneous group steeped in poverty, violence and “traditional” belief systems. Secondly, it will bring the issue of patriarchal state ‘violence’ (through writing) against (men and) women, which had been ignored by the mainstream feminists, to the forefront.

A study on writing from women’s personal experience in the context of oppressive public structures not only reveals the hidden space of the internal colonial bureaucratic system but also offers the tools to challenge and change the patriarchal structure of the centralised state organisation. A feminist critique that establishes both a body of knowledge built up from missing perspectives and that is directed by the need for a more just and equitable society will enrich the lives of (both) women (and men) and other “marginal” lives. In summary, it is hoped that this work will help create an independent local intellectual climate where women will be treated in terms of ‘subject’ (rather than ‘object’) in the approach of knowledge production as well as the recognition of the need to include marginal subaltern voices in the process of *epistemological de-colonisation*.

2. (in-) Between the (Two) Fields

In this chapter, an ‘autoethnographic’ approach is employed in the process of sharing my experience of research in two different but related fields that also are reflected in each other. Firstly, it is the ‘field of lives’ where Pornpet’s family members, relatives, supporters, monks and mentors played their parts. Geographically, the ‘field’ is located in Nong Bua and related districts of Nakorn Sawan province in the central plain of Thailand. Secondly, it is the ‘field of archives’ (re)presenting Pornpet’s passion and personality, which was initially preserved in her own house and later moved to a proper storage place in Bangkok and in transition to being relocated and donated to the National Archives. After sharing lessons learned in working (in) between the (two) fields (of lives and of the archives), my struggles with writing Pornpet’s biography drawing from both fields in conversation with Irigaray’s theoretical points are presented under the theme “Reading Pornpet - Reading Irigaray and On the Way to Writing ‘Intersubjectively’”.

2.1 Learning (in) Between the (Two) Fields (of Lives and of the Archives)

2.1.1 Subject Locating: ‘Why’ Pornpet?

Question: “Why Pornpet?” Answer: “Because I had enrolled for my PhD and the university’s requirement is to develop a proposal at the soonest time possible.”

I was often asked this question by acquaintances and I simply (and defensively) replied so. ...Oh dear! The one who asked and the one who answered understood that graduate studies require a topic for a dissertation. I do not have any secret nor am I trying to conceal anything (I am curious myself!). I had answered what I could, even if it sounded incomplete and superficial. Eventually, I would learn three years later that the real answer was buried in a school storage room.

Graduate students at Victoria University of Wellington (VUW) are allocated a compact common working room. Each is equipped with a computer, a desk and 3-4 book shelves, to fit the room size. I packed the rest of my belongings in cartons and (discreetly) put them away in the storage. In December 2007, an assignment prompted me to revisit my reference files from top to bottom.

The document archiving process, like a human life, is a ‘repeating’ as well as a ‘circular’ route. What happened first would be buried at the bottom of the carton, hidden. What lies at the end is the beginning of my tertiary education. *WISC 403: Women’s Lives* was the first course I had taken at VUW. Apart from the course outline, I rediscovered my handwritten manuscript that I had drafted and prepared to hand in to my lecturer. Writing about my life at five and ten years of age was not too difficult. Surprisingly, when it came to the ‘present’ time, I could not write more than three pages, which took me to June 2002. I didn’t

make any further progress. The autobiographical essay was left 'undone' in a file folder. Finally, I abruptly quit the course.

I closed the folder and quickly returned the cartons to the shelf before brimming tears would drop and stain the ink. Leaning against the wall, I sat down and sighed with mixed emotions. I was both stirred and relieved as the 'old wound' was rubbed. It looked as if it had left a scar after 'quite a while' had passed, yet it was still 'raw' in my memory. It was a relief that I could finally find an answer for others and myself:

I have to write Pornpet's stories because I cannot write 'my OWN story'.

2.1.2 Where is Pornpet?: How Has 'She' Been Approached?

Question: "'How' can you find Pornpet?" Answer: "Using the *Yellow Pages*." Curious persons asked and 'gently warned' me to answer frankly without too many jokes. It is an honest answer and not a joke. But not many people believed it then.

After making a lot of effort investigating her location from various sources with many failures, I couldn't help but feel incredibly depressed. Surprisingly, an enlightening but simple idea flashed up at a moment that appeared to be a dead-end.

"Nakhon Sawan province, Nong Bua district, I'd like to request the number of Pornpet Meuansri."

"Yes, (056) 251 – 011," an operator replied in a second, followed by the address "530/2 Chat Kaew Village, Nong Klup sub-district, Nong Bua, district."

At the other end of the line, Oy, Pornpet's sister-in-law delivered the shocking and heartbreaking news that Pornpet was "'murdered' seven months ago". I hung up the phone and made the decision to take a van from the station near the North-Northeastern bus terminal to 'Nong Bua', 300 kilometers up north of Bangkok.

Finally. You see! I actually did find Pornpet in the *Yellow Pages*. It was not a joke!

When Pornpet was conclusively reached, I would 'go to the field' to meet her.

2.1.3 Archives in the 'Field' and In the Field of Archives

As Pornpet's documents were indeed in the 'middle of the field,' so I literally call this section "Archives in the 'Field'", despite being stored in a white single storey brick and concrete house --- not a bamboo hut as we might have expected. On the east side lay *Khao Phra* hill and on the south was Meuansri's land which they had fought so long to have returned to them.

2.1.3.1 (Traveling to and) Arriving at the Field

Reaching Nong Bua intersection, I got off the van and hired a motorcycle taxi to drop me off at Chat Kaew village. Pornpet's younger brother and sister-in-law were waiting to welcome me. They took me on a tour of the orchard where Pornpet was murdered. We returned later to Pornpet's bedroom which contained an enormous table housing several miniature Buddha statues, basketry, a vintage wooden closet and five coloured ceramic bowls inherited from ancestors.

I was stunned by the large number of documents, piles of diaries, newspaper clippings, petitions, personal letters, court documents, New Year cards and many photograph albums which were maintained and created by a peasant's daughter. I was also depressed to see that these collections had been neglected and piled up among cobwebs and dust in the bedroom and garage. Pornpet's brother - her only remaining direct relative still living here - had been ill continuously for a number of years. Oy only recently married him and moved to stay here soon after Pornpet died. She is a new member of both the family and this rural community. After the day's housework of cooking, cleaning, and taking care of people and pets, she would set aside time to sort out the documents. Nevertheless, the upcoming rainy season would arrive before she would have finished. Humidity, ants and insects that are the 'enemy' of documents were waiting triumphantly. My concerns had been well received by my advisors at that time, and I extended my pilot research period to collect data for my dissertation and to preserve the at-risk documents for the following generations' research benefit.

2.1.3.2 Approaching the Archives

Since that first journey I had become accustomed to getting up as early as five in the morning and taking many round trips from Bangkok to Nong Bua. I travelled many thousands of kilometres, switched transit at many van stops, rode with countless motorcycle taxi-drivers. As the kind Oy, my key informant, busied herself in the kitchen, I joined her and helped her with such tasks such as washing vegetables and peeling fruit, talking to her while we cooked. Debts and financial burdens from the struggle and long-term illness resulted in overall poverty and lack of money for everyday life. Oy talked to me for comfort about financial matters and her deep personal concerns and anxieties when we walked to the market, went to the temple or even while we ate at the roadside noodle soup stall. When she received a court appointment notice to represent Pornpet's case pending in court, Oy worried about it as she was not accustomed to official premises. I promised to travel from Bangkok in advance to prepare documents and accompany her.

"Pornpet Meuansri," a judge called.

"She passed away, sir. Her brother, my husband, inherited the case and I represent him," Oy said as she stood up and introduced herself.

"Did you bring a power of attorney form?" the judge inquired.

"Yes, sir," Oy replied and handed him the form and related documents to confirm her authority to represent her husband.

"These documents must be sent to a supervising unit for consideration and approved in advance. You will be notified in the next investigation. Trial is closed!" the judge proclaimed as he stepped down from the bench and exited the trial room through the back door.

Oh my Buddha! Is this how the court system works? Villagers had traveled for half a day only to hear the order "Next appointment!" I kept my irritation and annoyance hidden as

I walked down the stairs, not knowing that there was another task to complete at the district telephone office, settling several months of overdue bills dating back to Pornpet's time.

The cashier suggested "It would be more complicated and more disturbing for both sides if we had to settle in court," and advised us to pay what we could and settle the rest later.

The long day ended with a special dinner, salad and teriyaki chicken assembled by Pornpet's brother. Then I worked in Pornpet's room, which was converted into both my office and bedroom.

Turning each page of the many documents confirmed my belief that the archive produced and maintained by Pornpet must have been one of the most complete personal collections in the country. I quickly came to the conclusion that they would benefit not only Women's Studies, but other disciplines such as Law, History, Anthropology and Literature. Once I realised their value, I approached Pornpet's brother:

"What your sister left behind is invaluable and not just as a Meuansri family's treasure but a 'national asset' that should be kept in an appropriate place like the National Archives where others can research them. There are not many people who could take these long multiple trips to Nong Bua to study the documents like I have been able to do."

"Please feel free to do what you deem appropriate," he politely replied, as simply and clearly as if it was a task not much different from cooking teriyaki chicken.

I almost could not suppress my excitement and gratitude. A temporary storage space in Bangkok was rented to ensure a certain degree of protection to the archives as well as ease of access. Soon after, the house in the middle of the field where the archives were kept for years was confiscated and auctioned off by a bank.

2.1.3.3 In the Field of (a Grassroots Woman's) Archives

Now, it was time to sit back, take a long read and assemble information to bring back and discuss with my supervisors. Unfortunately, I had made a 'WRONG' decision! After a few weeks of forcing myself to read her documents, I had to close those files, shut the door and lock the storage area. Having seriously convinced myself that what I was studying was extraordinarily important, and although the family of the deceased unquestioningly trusted me and my professors were intensely supportive, I found myself unable to proceed: every sentence and paragraph I read was heart-breaking and tearing me apart.

I became dejected. I could not 'read' her petitions as a (general) 'reader', only as 'another writer' (who has also written countless petitions of this kind). In front of me, the text:

Subject: Asking for justice.

Attend: District Chief [and later Governor and Prime Minister]

I, Mrs Nuu Meuansri [and later Ms Pornpet Meuansri], am gravely suffering from ... [due to official conducts... so I hereby request that you address my grievance ...]

Thirty years after Pornpet started to write petitions, I, unaware of her existence, had started do the same thing. It was depressing that so little had changed. Beginning with an

address and date like any normal letter, followed by the ‘Subject’ line, the petition would usually read: asking for justice; enquiring about the (long) overdue matter etc. The ‘Attend’ portion would start addressing any person with the highest authority in a certain agency. The opening paragraph would begin with a self-introduction, the nature of the grievance and a request for assistance from that authority in the respective agency to solve it.

I personally know that to put pen to paper and write a petition would have already brought with it an unspeakable bitterness. When a person is threatened, immediately and severely assaulted, they will be consumed by doubt, confusion and shock, like being smashed on the head with a big stick. Instead of having a quiet moment to rest and prepare, one must hastily transform one’s sorrow in the petition to call out for redress and justice, despite crying while writing. “*Why me?*” one could not help thinking. “Why have I been through what other people have never encountered? Will they help solve my problem? When and how?” Everything seems hopeless with nothing to hold on to. But there is no other way, except to *write*.

From writing to mailing each following step requires more energy. Petition letters, like letters to an ex-lover rarely elicit replies; and when they do those replies frequently initiate more pain. “The case is closed [‘Nothing to talk about’ or in the case of an ex-lover ‘We are no longer related’]” or “We have inspected the facts and ‘confirm’ the decision arrived at by the officer concerned etc”.

Fate plays tricks on our lives. Intending to escape my bitter past by choosing to do research on Pornpet I found no escape, on every page of her archives I found my own story repeated. On that day, I closed her files and “STOPPED”.

2.1.3.4 Arriving and (Not Leaving but) Living in the Field

Another year went by quickly. Then, it was time to depart for Five College Women’s Study Research Center in Massachusetts, USA, where I was invited to be one of 18 Research Fellows. Apart from warm overcoats in my luggage, I carried photocopies of Pornpet’s key documents. Thanks to the ‘distance,’ I managed to ‘adapt’ and read them as a ‘reader’ (instead of as a writer) and could trace a ‘network map’ of Pornpet’s and related peoples’ life with the social and political events of that period. Therefore, after fulfilling my work in the USA, I had to make more frequent visits to Nong Bua than before.

At this point, there are so many ‘fascinating’ aspects of the fieldwork and research process. Firstly, it is a place where we unexpectedly meet ‘like-minded persons’ who turn out to become lifetime friends (like Oy). Secondly, it is a journey that often ‘knocks us over’ with ‘surprises’ from many unforeseeable and unscheduled events. For example, by chance I met the 74 year-old village tailor who taught Pornpet how to make dresses 50 years earlier. And then there was Pornpet’s student who took her class and later returned to her village to open her own dress making shop. The people mentioned in her diaries and letters etc could be found everywhere: her paternal and maternal relatives, and all interconnecting relations surrounding Pornpet.

In this regard, I have learned that the place I visited was not only a geographical or cultural field to be discovered by a researcher, but also a ‘life field’ of a woman who, although having passed away, continued to remain alive through her connections and

relationships. Each step I took into this field allowed me to become a part of that world and then my very own life field. At the moment of *arriving*, I never *left* because I am living in the field with them -- both the living and the dead.

Finally I had reached the other 'end' of the field described by another researcher "[W]hen I return home from the Gathering, I experienced a prolonged state kin to culture shock. In my mind and heart, it seemed I was still "in the field". Eventually, I came to understand why I felt this way. Indeed, I had never left the field because *I* was the field" (Linden, 1993: 4).

2.2 Reflecting the Fields: Reading Pornpet - Reading Irigaray and On the Way to Writing 'Intersubjectively'.

In March 2008, while I was still reflecting on my field experience and writing Pornpet's biography, an invitation to the fifth "Luce Irigaray PhD Students Seminar" at Queen Mary University of London (QMUL), June 15-20, was circulated. Initially, I was attracted to Irigaray's book, *The Way of Love*, which "proposes a way to approach the other, to prepare a place of proximity: with the other in ourselves and between us" (2002: ix), and to other articles and books that established her critique of the notions of subject-object, difference, silence and much more. I found that to write "Reflecting the Fields" where I would be in dialogue with her work would not only be extremely challenging but also invaluable. Philosophically, it would strengthen and enrich the final part of the chapter that I was struggling to complete. Practically, it could be adapted and polished as a proposal to be handed as part of the seminar requirement.

Having gone through both authors' writings, I found that Pornpet, a Thai farmer, and Irigaray, a French feminist and philosopher, two very different women by race, class, occupation and location, held something in common in their honest mission in making change on the ground which they believed in with their own *life* and *writing*. While Pornpet spent almost four decades, since 1965, unhesitatingly fighting the government for her *land rights* and justice, Irigaray proposes *sexuate rights*, a concept that values biological difference on the grounds of challenging the traditional definition of femininity and masculinity. Moreover, Irigaray argues for the enhancement of harmonious cohabitation not only between men and women but also between different cultures, races, ages and religions (2000: 103).

Under a time constraint, in May 2008 I managed to mail to Irigaray's Paris address my PhD research presentation relating to her work as a required document along with a CV and a PhD abstract for consideration to attend the seminar. Three weeks after, I found myself heading to QMUL, the honorary host of the fifth seminar (after the previous four at Nottingham and Liverpool). On June 16, I was asked to start off the seminar and end it after all the questions from each participant were answered. This was then followed by other presentations, feedback, comment and discussions. Each session concluded with Irigaray's critical input and insightful reflections.

What I presented in the seminar room reproduced below is a piece of work that concentrates on elaborating on what ‘writing intersubjectively’ means to me and how I have learned to ‘write intersubjectively’ from my own experience under four prominent points: Positionality, (Language) De-objectification, Dialogue and Reflexivity respectively.

2.2.1 Positionality

It took me several years to write Pornpet’s life story as the introductory chapter for my thesis. Like many others who have been disciplined according to the subject-object culture of writing research, to break the ‘old’ cycle and practice the ‘radical’ style of writing intersubjectively is not an easy task and does not occur overnight. Month after month, I struggled to experiment with writing from different starting points such as starting with her diaries and then following up with her petitions and finally her autobiography. However, this did not provide the expected results, so I then reversed the order of my approach by starting with her autobiography before going back to the rest.

Unfortunately, it seems that the more I tried, the more I seemed to fail until my situation appeared increasingly desperate regardless of what topics I touched upon, whether her family, her childhood memories, her education, her (real) ‘field’ work experience (of planting and harvesting rice) and her ‘marathon’ fight. It seemed that there was little left for me to write! In hindsight what I appeared to have done up until then was engage in a process of writing ‘about’ an ‘object’, not writing ‘to’ a subject which I had originally intended to practice.

What is missing? I kept on questioning myself. In the end, I realised my failure to properly engage intersubjectively with Pornpet’s work had little to do with any perceived or assumed failings in Pornpet’s work. In fact, it appeared that it was ‘*my own voice*’ which was missing from this writing process. If I wanted my subject to speak, I myself had to speak to her first. As emphasised by Standley and Wise (1993) “... *the researcher is also a subject in her research and that her personal history is part of the process through which ‘understanding’ and ‘conclusions’ are reached*” (cited in Maynard, 1994: 16, italics mine).

Looking back, I have come to realise what Peter Kitchenman, my ex-PhD roommate, meant when he challenged me over the long years with the insightful question: “Sinith, where are you? What is your positionality?” In the process of working with Pornpet, my position is as a *reader*. I am the first reader honoured with the opportunity to access her invaluable archives after she was killed. Therefore, my job is to write (from my own voice) about what I have read and its interpretations. Previously, I was stuck because I was not quite clear about my position (or I positioned myself in the wrong place and placed Pornpet in the wrong position).

What I discovered helped transform the subject-object relation between me and Pornpet (the researcher and researched) to an intersubjective relation between reader and writer. Moreover, it allowed me to appreciate Richardson’s assertion that

...poststructuralism suggests two important things to qualitative writers: First, it directs us to understand ourselves reflexively as persons writing from particular *positions* at specific times; and second, it frees us from trying to write a *single text* in which everything is said to everyone. Nurturing our own voices releases the censorious hold of “scientific writing” on our consciousness, as well as the arrogance it fosters in our psyche. Writing is validated as a method of knowing (1994: 518, *italics mine*).

In sum, my first and foremost lesson learned in the practice of writing intersubjectively is to start off from positioning oneself.

2.2.2 (Language) De-objectification

Once the writing position is found, a stream of ideas and sentences spill out like a broken dam. I strategically title the introductory chapter in a simple but stylish manner of “Locating the ‘Subject’ (and positioning myself)” with the following subtitles:

1.1 Subject Locating: ‘Why’ is Pornpet?

1.2 **Where is Pornpet? How could I find Her?**

1.3 Archives in the ‘Field’ and the Field of Archives.

Then, in the section on “‘Positioning’ myself”, there are another three subsections:

2.1 The Process of ‘Positioning’ Myself.

2.2 How to Document ‘Becoming’?

From mid to the end of New Zealand’s Summer 2007, I wrote wildly for many days and nights only to find out in the Fall term that *there is another inhabited “consciousness and culture which urgently needs to be ‘de-colonised’ in this writing process”*. What is that? Let me tell you the story of my de-colonisation process ... (It seems that in the ‘Eastern’ style of writing, story comes after story, proverbs and anecdotes scattered here and there ... along the way).

While editing my work, my eyes were attracted to subsection 1.2 “Where is Pornpet? ‘How’ Could I Find Her?” What happened? Why have I made such a mammoth mistake? I asked myself and quickly changed it to **How She Has Been Approached**, while recalling my childhood. As a student in a so-called Third World country, starting from grade 5, English is required as a compulsory subject in the elementary school curriculum. What we were taught about grammatical structure was that “a sentence is composed of subject+verb+object (where the subject is the actor and the object is what is being acted upon).”

From elementary school to PhD, I wrote without realising that as a writer, **I play a crucial role in this process of objectification**. In order to carry out this process, there is no other place to properly begin than at the starting point --- the original sentence. Once I realised that Pornpet was placed at the ‘object’ position of the sentence, I changed the structure of the sentence to put her in the ‘subject’ position wondering how long this --- the process of (language) de-colonisation --- will take? When will the time come when I can write it “naturally” without having to go back and forth fixing it?

What I have experienced brings more proximity and deeper understanding to the idea of language proposed by Irigaray:

The use of a language is much less neutral and universal than one believes, at least if the subject is not erased, among other things through the denomination, the nominalization of the world. ... Likewise some verbal constructions will be used more with a masculine subject than with a feminine subject: the reflexive or pronominal form...

....

Almost everything is to be reinvented, rebuilt. And, for this building site what is most necessary is to discover how speech can help to change levels – vertically and horizontally (2002: 61-62, 58, italics mine).

2.2.3 Dialogue

“How will you avoid objectifying Pornpet?” Peter Kohnke, my Canadian interlocutor, often challenged me with the above question. It is a ‘directional’ inquiry that I could not instantly answer, but kept taking note of in my mind. Finally, I found that Pornpet would not be objectified in either the written sentence (as elaborated above) or in the research process. The meaning of the latter is that she will not be ‘spoken for’ by the researcher. A platform where ‘subjectivisation’ could take place can be created in many different ways.

In order to do so, there is no better place to start than to cultivate the culture of ‘listening’, dialoguing and “approaching the other as the other” (2004: 23) on the grounds of keeping ‘irreducible distance’. As Irigaray argues:

The distance from the other becomes interiority available to welcome their words. The interval between the other and me can never be overcome. ... This distance is never covered, always to be passed through and even to be started anew. And the gap has to be maintained. The transcendence between us, this one which is fecund in graces and in words, requires an interval, it engenders it also. The space will be more or less left in its elemental form, the air, or will be more or less woven from the flesh of the one or the other, and from the flesh generated by the encounter. But it is important that an irreducible distance will remain where silence takes place (2002: 65-66).

...

In order for the relation in difference not to fall back into submission, subjection to one sole subject, to values univocally established, each must bring a meaning of one’s own into the dialogue. That requires the capacity for objectivizing the subjective --- on the level of sentiments as on the level of knowledge ---, the ability to say oneself to the other without for all that forcing upon the other one’s truth. The ability to listen to the other as well, to hear a meaning different than the one from which a world of one’s own has achieved its course (ibid.: 8-9).

The process of dialogue does not only challenge the dominant hierarchical model of communication but also brings in the horizontal mode of relating between two subjects on the grounds of respecting each other's singularity and identity. No one's voice will be heard above the other; each subject is secured from any kind of appropriation. Significantly there are two concepts involved in this process: *difference* and *silence*. In contradiction to traditional Western civilisation, the idea of difference is not something peculiar which needs to be erased or controlled. Rather, according to Irigaray, it is a fertile source for cultivating care about the otherness of the other without possessing or obliterating anyone's value. Additionally, beyond the notion of 'sound' (or communicating) dialogue unconditionally embraces 'silence' as a 'not yet manifest' space for one to 'return home' in order to find his or her own language and define one's own subjectivity. The infinite moment of 'becoming' has gradually transformed the conventional dichotomy of active/passive (male/female, centre/periphery) relation: that is, the moment where intersubjectivity simultaneously emerges. The treasure of silence is reflected through its natural potential character of being an 'unknowable' (but sharable) space (for exchange) (Wells in Irigaray, 2008: 24-35).

2.2.4. Reflexivity

Lastly, I have learned that in order to write intersubjectively, the issue of the hierarchical power relations between researcher and researched cannot be neglected. In this regard (as mentioned earlier), the process of reflexivity, which not only encourages the notion of self-discovery but also induces the insightfulness of study and analysis (England, 1994: 82), is a critical method in de-hierarchicising this *power* relation. Additionally, it can be undertaken along any point in the writing process. For instance, I utilise the space and time of 'footnoting' as an 'open' area in which I can dialogue with myself, my 'subject' and even with my readers. In particular, with respect to the latter, I first came across this idea of "bringing the reader in(to) my writing" without knowing at the time that this is one of the 'highlights' of Irigaray's work: "[I]n this style of writing, Irigaray not only will not assume the position of a master-knower who imparts knowledge in a linear manner, she also considers her readers' reactions to her work to be an integral part of that work" (<http://www.iep.utm.edu/i/irigaray.htm>). This idea is further discussed in Margaret Whitford's *The Irigaray Reader* (1991), where she elaborates that "... [Irigaray] is trying to produce writing that cannot be reduced to a narrative or a commentary, but that calls for an interlocutor At its best, it is a creative response in which there is a productive interaction between reader and text" (14). In her own words, Irigaray stresses that:

No narrative, no commentary on a narrative, is enough to bring about a change in discourse. [...] Two approaches are important for the establishment of different norms of life: the analysis of the formal structures of the discourse, and the creation of a new style. Thus, in *Ethique de la difference sexuelle* ... there is no basic narrative and no possible commentaries by others, in the sense of an exhaustive deciphering of the text. What is said in this book is conveyed by a double style: a style of amorous relations, a style of thought, exposition, writing...

....

The only reply that can be given to the question of meaning of a text is: read, perceive, feel... *Who are you?* would be a pertinent question, provided that it does not collapse into a demand for an identity card or an autobiographical anecdote. The answer would be: *and who are you?* Can we meet? Talk? Love? Create something together? Thanks to which milieu? What between-us [entre-nous]? (ibid.).

My work is very different to Irigaray's philosophical text; hence, as the first assessor of my own writing, I found that (in her terms) I 'read, perceive, feel' and think a lot more after each reading. In particular, thanks to the structure of footnoting which not only provides a practical space for self-dialogue (at the critical point while letting the main text flow) but also serving as a strategic area where the readers can be invited to "... meet? Talk? Love? [and] Create something together?" I hope along the way we both might find something between us and in-between.

Trials and errors in composing my report entitled "(in-) Between the (Two) Fields" brought me to appreciate the philosophy and practice of "writing intersubjectively" through the process of positioning myself, (language) de-objectification, dialoguing and reflexivity. "Particularly, what could be considered as the wealth of the latter not only offers an influential method in de-hierarchising the power relation between the researcher and the researched but also provides an open space for interaction between interlocutor and the writer," I concluded before returning the floor back to the audience for comment.

The entire week had gone by with in-depth and broad ranging presentations and discussion except for the final day, Saturday June 21, which was designed as a 'personal meeting session' with Irigaray in order to dig further into the questions left unanswered or incomplete from the seminar room, to ask for further explanation on some of her key-words and key-thoughts and above all to ask for her signature on your most beloved book in her series (as a special gift for yourself). From being the first among twelve participants asked to give her presentation in the first morning of the week, I was assigned to be the last in this final session. When I left the seminar room, there was no one in the hallway to say farewell to me. Professor Irigaray kindly walked me to the QMUL entrance. We stopped at the security guard booth, the place where I first stopped when I came to this university.

"Sinith is my student. I am her Professor. We just finished the class. She is required to return her ID card to the university security office. Please pass it on to them," Irigaray helped explain what I needed to do. While untying the ID card and placing it on the counter, I carefully listened to what she said with very mixed affection. Roughly, I felt odd but at the same time I couldn't deny that I felt very honoured. It was the first time in many years that I was introduced to another as (his or) her 'student.' Due to my background as a university lecturer, it is often me who calls him/her (or them) my student(s). Then, shifting to continue my education in the research-oriented program at the tertiary level, I have been labeled as a PhD candidate or a PhD researcher and referred to by my supervisors as their supervisee. It had been over a decade (or more) since I was last identified as (his or her) student by anyone. Personally and politically, I don't mind being a student. Having a chance to take leave from work and go back to school is precious. Additionally, to be accepted and announced by "one of the twentieth century's most influential feminist thinkers" as her student is much more than an honor, it is a life-time privilege. Therefore, what struck me was not so much being

referred to as a student but that little word which comes in front of it composed of only two letters - *my*. Hearing such an expression made me feel like I had lost some part of my (freedom and) subjectivity as if I had been owned or ‘possessed’. Frankly (but fundamentally) speaking, I felt as though I had been objectified. I don’t mean that this was Irigaray’s intention, but I did feel it! How “enchanted” (the English) language can be! By putting just two letters in front of my attribute, suddenly I felt owned! “Is there any link between the development of English’s possessive feature and the construction of exterior culture which has been the major cause in motivating men in the West to conquer ‘the rest’ through their mission of colonising, controlling and owning?” I couldn’t help whisper such a query to myself while comparatively thinking about the language of my mother tongue.

Culturally speaking, in terms of my personal experience (not from the point of view of linguistic expertise - as I clearly cannot claim such), the reason why I strongly felt strangely at odds with this reference might simply be because I am not acquainted with this style of referencing as there is not much use for the so-called ‘possessive’ pronoun in the Thai language. Where for example I would have to introduce someone as my husband (if I were to have one), it would be said thus: “this is Paul, [---] husband” [there is no “my”]. Or “this is [---] sister [---] husband, Tom” [no mine and no “s”]. Even though, there is no ‘my’ in the sentence, it is already (contextually) understood between the speaker and the listener that Paul is my husband. (Obviously, I could not and would not introduce another person’s husband as my husband. As my farmer friend straight-forwardly explained “even though there is no fencing, we all know which part of the paddy rice field belongs to whom in the same way we know which man is a husband to whom”. Her metaphor was very clear. I could not help but laugh whole-heartedly when I heard it.)

I remained possessed by the issue of the possessive pronoun and did not notice that East London was now far behind as I reached Heathrow Airport to fly back, via Bangkok, to Wellington. Due to my illness, it took me another four years to finally write what remained of my thesis, particularly to compose Pornpet’s biography through her family’s land tax receipts, her dressmaking course notebook, customer account record and her 1965 diary that will be presented in the following chapters.

3. Behind the Archival Grain

This chapter aims to enrich and enlarge the horizon of historical geographical debates by utilising the concept of postcolonial archives to ‘re-read’ 70 year-old *paddy-duty* receipts and related documents of Pornpet’s family. These receipts reflect the complex relationship between citizen and state through a bureaucratic system of tax collection and issuance of receipts. The feminist approach of ‘reading in detail from below’ as well as critically ‘reading along (and against) the grain’ or ‘tracing back’ the dominant process of ‘vertical’ writing in which state power is manifested and shapes ordinary people’s lives and land in the modern era, will help us to learn not only about the ‘origin’ of suppression but also provide a tool of resistance to reconstruct, revive and rewrite from the ‘bottom up’ from the subaltern’s ground. This chapter is structured according to three main sub-headings: 3.1 Script, Space and the ‘State’ of Gender, Partiality and Biography, 3.2 Script, Space and ‘State’ Formation, and 3.3 Script, Space and the ‘State’ of Philosophy. Noticeably, the subheadings are formulated under the common theme of “Script, Space and the ‘State’ of ...” in the understanding that it is the study of the ‘text’ on the ‘site’ of the particular receipts and its relation to different aspects of the concept of gender, partiality, biography and philosophy as well as ‘state’ formation. Methodologically, the long years of continuously assessing and analysing these archived receipts through an interdisciplinary lens has brought me to realise that such a process is in itself an innovative method of ‘*revelatory reading*’. In other words, it is (both) the approach (and appreciation) in which a slow unfolding of insight is undertaken that reveals different aspects of the phenomenon, both intellectually and intimately.

3.1 Script, Space and (the State of) Gender, Partiality and Biography

“How did Pornpet become a writer?” A short question posed by my supervisor during the meeting brought me back to trace Pornpet’s archives (1959-1964) and 23 items from her parents’ collection dating back to 1935. The three (related) paddy duty receipts in particular are of value not only for historical reasons but also because they function as the first official linkage that traces the relation between this farmer family and the state.

Methodologically, the traditional injunction to read the ‘colonial archives’ (ie as elaborated by Stoler) does not apply to Thailand. Instead, we need to approach these archives according to the process they are rooted in, that is, ‘colonisation within’. In order to critically assess those land tax receipts, the feminist approach of reading from below through a ‘decolonising’ lens is employed. In other words, the landscape of these documents is examined in depth and breadth, particularly the issue of gender relations across changing historical periods and the way that the concept of *vertical writing*, the practice of state legal writing, excludes

citizen participation in the process. The lens of ‘reading the lack’ as well as ‘reading the lives’ (of the archives’ owners) is then utilised. The former refers to the shifting perspective on the (un)availability or the silences within the archives which becomes a challenge instead of an impediment. The latter provides a biographical perspective of the Meuanstri family’s personal geography in the public landscape of the historical Thai context.

3.1.1 The Landscape of Three (related) Paddy Duty Receipts

In presenting these archives, the statements quoted directly from each of them will be introduced in two different forms: normal fonts for the pre-printed statement on the form and italicised fonts for the statements filled out by the officers. Additionally, Thai numbers (from 0 to 9 they are: ๐ ๑ ๒ ๓ ๔ ๕ ๖ ๗ ๘ ๙) were used in the original documents. Arabic numbers are added in my own handwriting.

The oldest document (Fig. 2) with the ‘garuda’ insignia in the middle was the Revenue Department Form No. 39 (or abbreviated in Thai as Sor. Por. Kor. No.๓๙).

... Vol. ๓ Serial No. ๒๕๓... Dated ๒๕/๑๐ B.E. ๒๔๗๕ [1935] Surveyor’s Name: *Khoon Phanomrokraksa* ... Duty paddy amount B.E. ๒๔๗๕[1935]. Guide for surveying *Mr Pim* addressed that ***Mr Pim [and] Mrs Nu*** are the *owners* of the land located at Sub-district *Phanomrok* District ... Province *Nakorn Sawan*. Name ***Mr Pim [and] Mrs Nu*** are *users [who]* reside at Sub-district *Phanomrok* District: ... Province *Nakhon Sawan* Land located at Sub-district *Phanomrok* District *Tha Tako* Province [*Nakhon Sawan*] ...” (bold mine).

Fig. 2: Paddy Duty Cover Sheet

In case of any loss to the following paddy field in the form more than one of three parts and the reduction fee is sought, a request should be made to the local district committee within 30 days after the date appearing on the cover sheet.

Revenue Dept. Form No. 39

Land Duty Cover Sheet

Vol.3 Series No.253

Surveyor's Name:
Khoon Phanomrokraksa

Warning

Date
25/10
Year 1935

Duty Paddy

Amount
Year 1935

Name
Mr Pim
Mrs Nu
[no Last Name]
are users.

Land Area
rai /
ngarn/
waa

Land No.

Damaged area
about 35 rai

27/8/1934 Sophon Printing

Surveying guide *Mr Pim* addressed that **Mr Pim and Mrs Nu** are the owners of the land located at Sub – district *Phanomrok* ... Province *Nakorn Sawan*.

[Signature] **Khoon Phanomrokraksa**

Lontitue
sen | waa
(Thai measurement unit)

Latitude
sen | waa

At the bottom of the form were printed vertical columns to indicate land location by latitude and longitude, and its width and length in the Thai measurement of ‘*sen*’ and ‘*wah*’¹. Khoon Phanomrokraksa’s signature was on the last line, which indicated the estimate of the amount of ‘*damaged area* *๓๔ rai*’.

Upon receiving the cover sheet from the surveyor, the recipients had to pay a fee at the district office, whereupon the paddy duty receipt (or Sor. Por. Kor. Form No. 42) was issued to the fee payers to be retained for evidence (fig. 3). For the receipt Vol. 1 No. 22 issued at:

District office *Tha Tako*

Date ๗ Month ๘ B.E.๒๔๘๐ [1937]

This receipt is issued to **Mr Pim Mrs Nu** to certify

That the paddy duty fee is paid [for] ... Amount B.E.๒๔๗๕ [1936]. Location of the paddy field [at]

Sub-district *Phanomrok* District *Tha Tako*

Amount of money (word) as described below

... (bold mine)

¹ One rai is equivalent to four ngarn or 400 square wah. In comparison to a Western unit of measurement, “one rai is approximately 1,600 square metres or two-fifths of an acre... and ...one wah is equivalent to two metres” (Sanitsuda, 1991: 15).

Fig. 3: Pim and Nu's Paddy Duty Receipt

This receipt is issued to **Mr Pin Mrs Nu** to certify that the paddy duty fee was paid [for] the amount Year 1936.

Revenue Dept.
Form No. 42
Vol. 1
No. 22

Location of the paddy field at Sub – district *Phanomrok* District *Tha Tako*.

Cover sheet No.

Paddy Duty Receipt

District *Tha Tako*

Date 7 Month 1 Year 1937

Amount of money
.....
(word)
as described below.

Remark

Signature cashier

duty fee
baht | satang

Land Area
rai | ngarn | wah

The receipt contains the following fields and handwritten information:

- Header:** ต.พ.ก. แบบที่ ๔๒ (Revenue Dept. Form No. 42)
- Title:** ใบเสร็จเงินอากรค่านา (Paddy Duty Receipt)
- Location:** ที่ว่าการอำเภอ (District Office) - อำเภอ (District) - ตำบล (Sub-district) - หมู่บ้าน (Village)
- Date:** วันที่ ๐๗ เดือน ๑ ปี ๒๕๑๐ (Date 7 Month 1 Year 1937)
- Amount:** เงินอากร (Duty fee) - ๑๕๐ (150 baht)
- Signature:** (Signature of cashier)
- Land Area:** ไร่ (rai) - งาน (ngarn) - วา (wah)
- Remarks:** (Remarks section)

Sophon Printing 16/8/1936 = 2000 copies

The lower portion of the form had vertical columns, which was to be filled in with the cover sheet number received from the surveyor, the indicated land area and the amount of duty paid (in baht and satang). According to cover sheet No. 126, six rai of paddy required duty payment of 1 baht and 80 satang (or 30 satang per rai). The receipt was signed by a receiving officer named “*Lek*”. On the last line of the document at the right-hand corner, the printing place is indicated as “printed at Sophon Printing ๑๖ / ๘ / ๒๕ = ๒,๐๐๐ copies.” Another receipt kept together with the previous two was the paddy duty receipt issued on “Date ๗ Month ๑ B.E. [๒๔] ๘๐ [1937] to *Mr Tien Mrs Muan*,” the family of Mr Pim’s brother. This receipt indicated that for a paddy field of 16 rai, a duty of 4 baht and 80 satang had been paid (fig. 4).²

² I speculate that this receipt was inadvertently in Pim’s possession and that he had paid the paddy duty for his brother’s land (with the latter’s money) but had overlooked returning the receipt to him.

Fig. 4: Tien and Muan's Paddy Duty Receipt

This receipt is issued to **Mr Tien Mrs Muan** to certify that the paddy duty fee was paid [for] the amount Year 1936.

Revenue Dept.
Form No. 42
Vol. 1
No. 1

Location of the paddy field at Sub – district *Phanomrok* District *Tha Tako*.

Cover Sheet No.

Paddy Duty Receipt

District *Tha Tako*

Date 3 Month 1 Year 1937

Amount of money (word) as described below.

Remark

Signature cashier

Duty Fee
—baht | sataang

Land Area
—rai | ngarn | waa

Sophon Printing 16/7/1936 = 2000 copies

ไร่	งาน	วา	บ.	อ.	ค.
๑๐๐	๑	-	-	๕	๕๐

Numerically, it is noteworthy that the documents retained by the Meuansri family had significant changes in the usage of numbers. From 1935 to 1942, the four documents from this period used only Thai numbers. The Arabic numbers were partially used in mixed patterns from 1945 onwards. After 1960, Arabic numbers were almost exclusively used. In sum, in learning to read the three (related) paddy duty receipts critically and in detail, has provided me not only with a critical orientation but also a sense of readiness to proceed to a further step of utilising a feminist approach to read them from below through a ‘decolonising’ lens as will be elaborated in the following section.

3.1.2 Script, Space and (the State of) Gender

Reading these receipts through a gender lens, I was surprised to discover that women did not ‘disappear’. They were found side by side with their husbands, sharing the bed and working shoulder-to-shoulder to make a living as well as *sharing in the ownership of the land bought or reclaimed together*. The two most important spaces were reserved for the owner’s name and user’s name and unexpectedly *what I found here were the first names of **both** the wife and husband without the last name*, not as one would expect, a single name indicating the head of the household (mostly men, who led the surveyor to the field, provided information and contacted government agencies) and family name (which also belonged to men).

There was *at least a formal acknowledgment of husband and wife as co-owners of land, and that since then that formal recognition has eroded so significantly that women have become “hidden”* in comparison with the receipts found in the following decade. Furthermore, such a *living document* not only alienated, but also reflected and confirmed, the realities of everyday lives in terms of social and gender realities as well as economic status. Also, there are *lives in the documents* that dynamically weave and connect to each other in at least three ways. First, a person who worked was valued. There was no product without collaboration; no one person would be able to plough a paddy field on their own. A husband and a wife are the principal labour in the paddy fields (with support from children, siblings, relatives and neighbours that ‘gather to lend a helping hand’ during the heavy workload periods of sprout planting and harvesting). Recording the names ‘Mr Pim, Mrs Nu’ as ‘users’ on the cover sheet for the land survey (1935), was recognition of their identity and value as ‘*paddy farmers*’.

In regards to class, if we were to read them critically, we get some idea of the relations regarding land in Siam/Thailand whereby much of it was rented out (by the elites to the rural poor). For example, in the reign of King Rama V there were several cases involving disputes between the owners and the rentees over land along the Rangsit canal in the north of Bangkok, the mega irrigation project which opened up about 2,000,000 rai of fertile paddy. The elites, who had much more opportunity to access information about this project, preempted the ownership of the land and later rented it out to landless farmers (Noparat, 1977: 52-69). Therefore, accurate information on “who owned the land? How it was used and by whom?” would be needed and kept for potential use for further administrative endeavours. Generally, in such systems of land

ownership like capitalism and feudalism, the owners of production often do not do the actual work but take control over the use and access to land and make a profit by renting to or hiring those who will be doing the actual work to farm it. The term owner-user reflects the unequal relationship to land in which, at some level, the state's language (as written in the receipts) tries to normalise control of land.

Secondly, the gender and economic issues in an agricultural society are intertwined. The relationship between husband and wife was not only about sexuality but also about fulfilling the labour demand in the field. That is why the verb for marriage in local dialect uses the direct terms 'live and eat [together]' or 'cohabit'. Often it starts from being attracted to each other (or sometimes arranged by the elders) at the beginning. Then they may decide to 'cohabit' to help 'make a livelihood together' (in the orchards or rubber plantations if in the South) in order to build a fortune and a family.

Thirdly, the document '(stealthily) whispered' that the use of family names was still alien to people in that period. Despite the Family Name Act being implemented in 1913, whereby the concepts and practices were imported directly from England by King Rama VI (an Oxford graduate), these changes did not take hold even after another 22 years had passed as during this period it was not widely practiced as a familiar ritual. Regardless, farmers did eventually acquire family names. They had to invent or find names because it was an order from the state. However, in remote areas (even today), if someone asks, which Pim? no one would reply Pim Meuan Sri. Instead, one would answer "Pim, Nu's husband." Unmarried people can be identified by a parent's name: "Mitr, Ma's child; Sroi, Sai's child." The relationship between persons is used as a referential system rather than traditional surnames. Family name laws and culture had never existed in Thai society until my grandfather's time.

Having gone through many of Pornpet's parents land related archives, I found that for each decade, marital relationships between women and men on the documents were changed significantly as the following details point out:

1. 1930s - 1940s *The 1935 land duty cover sheet* had the first names of the husband and the wife written as "Mr Pim Mrs Nu," side by side in owner and user spaces. Family names and individual ownership were not indicated. As written on the paddy duty receipt 1937, "...the receipt is issued to *Mr Pim Mrs Nu* to certify that the paddy duty fee was paid".

2. 1950s A significant change in the form was that the wife's name disappeared. Only the first and last name of the husband remained. As indicated in *the 1952 local area maintenance contribution receipt*, "...the receipt is issued to *Mr Pim Meuan Sri*...".

3. 1960s The woman's name, which had disappeared in the earlier forms, was brought back but this time secondarily as 'a spouse' of the land owner in the *1962 local area maintenance tax payment survey cover sheet* "... indicating that the owner's name *Mr Pim Meuan Sri*, husband or wife of *Mrs Nu* ... has ownership over the land or possesses the land that does not belong to any other individual...".

The way of addressing both parties no longer appears in the more recent documents. Whereas previous versions of the form had a space for the husband and wife to have their names

penned under “landowner”, current documents have a space reserved for one name only (it seems primarily for the husband, since in the Meuansri’s case, although the land was inherited by Nuu, it was Pim’s name that appeared). The remaining 50 percent of the space, previously used to write the woman’s name, was replaced with the husband’s family name. Thus, now the husband possesses 100 percent of the space. In the blank space for ‘landowner’ the woman’s name no longer appears. At one time standing side-by-side, women are now pushed back to stand behind the husband as appendages or added in the next section as mere ‘spouses’. However, women might not even be able to place their names here if they did not register their marriages, so that their co-ownership of the land by marriage is not recognised in these documents.

Making an observation on the changing space and position of the wife’s name (case, Mrs Nuu) that was ‘written’ on the land tax forms over a forty year period, we find a shift in the position of the wife’s name where it is shown side-by-side with the husband’s name in the forms from the 1930s but later it disappears entirely in the forms from the 1950s. Finally, in the forms from the 1960s, we find the wife’s name placed secondarily in the subordinate position under ‘spouses’. What should be noted is that despite the wife’s name being removed from the documents in the 1950s, Nuu still owned her land together with Pim but no longer had her name appear next to her husband’s on the land tax receipts in demonstration of formal recognition. Additionally, the appearance of the name “*Miss Lek Meuansri*” on the 1954 local area maintenance tax payment survey cover sheet suggests that the particular space for ‘owner’s name’ is not reserved for males only, but considering how Nuu was excluded, this appears to be typically the case.

The more complicated question is what is at stake for power (bureaucracy) to implement these changes ie could these changes reflect a need to (re-)structure their administrative requirements according to a patriarchal framework influenced by European legal practices,³ or perhaps to make the paper work more simplified and standardised?

Thanks to these hidden stories, I began to see why Pornpet’s struggle was so complicated, and why she had to spend so much of her time and her life in this struggle. She had been fighting the ‘vertical writing’ (or writing from above) of the legal system, a writing which does not include participation of the very people that the laws are designed to administer. Above all, it is a writing pattern where identities of the ones who are written could be marked off or largely erased (almost) without trace.

³Roughly speaking, as women were considered irrational subjects in Western rationality, they were considered unprepared for the tasks of landownership and exercising democratic rights (which were reserved for landowners). Contrarily and in comparison to other regions of the world, women in Southeast Asia had a significant role in opening up, cultivating as well as owning land for a number of centuries as it was based on a mode of paddy rice production which fundamentally needed women’s labour and their managing capacity. (Van Esterik, 1995: 247-259).

3.1.3 Script, Space and the (State of) Partiality

Practically, there are only two 1937 paddy duty receipts of two families (Pim and his brother) where husband and wife's names appear together side-by-side that I was able to access. Nonetheless, politically, the challenge of making reliable and critical observations from an inadequate number of similar documents still provides an opportunity to make meaningful observations by 'reading the lack', both in terms of current theoretical debates and the (legal) absence of Nu'u's name from these land related documents.

3.1.3.1 Partiality in theory

'Partiality', provides a crucial aspect in conducting historical geography research either through "the (un)availability of sources, the negotiation of absent, powerful or powerless voices in the archive, or the immaterial qualities of certain kind of historical sources" (Gagen, Lorimer and Vasudevan, 2007: 4). In her thorough review, Moore elaborates on the debates on the politics of partiality and its methodological scholarship which provides several different but complementary approaches, particularly a deconstructive approach and an approach that works with 'absence' (op.cit.: 263).

Firstly, regarding the issues of limitation and the availability of archives as well as the politics of its preservation, creation and maintenance, Ogborn (2003) notes that "... what is created and what survives is a social and political process that can tell us much about the conditions under which information of different sorts is produced, used and evaluated" (in Moore, *ibid.*). However, as Matthew Kurtz (2001) further elaborates, such processes "... are not a value-free exercise in preservation but rather a social practice that effect the material itself" (*ibid.*). Each piece of archives, as challenged by the deconstructionists, whether preserved by public institutions or included in private collections, not only provides its own tales, voices, value (and content) but also carries different complicated layers of social construction, which need to be de- and re- constructed. Then, there is the changing concept of viewing the condition of the lack, incompleteness and silences within the archive as an opportunity rather than an obstruction as well as the shifting ground that values "... the inherent difficulties associated with historical recovery and as a result mastery over a topic is [no longer] the ultimate aim of the research". This has helped create more room for an "unconventional and methodological innovative research project" such as those offered by Caitlin De Silvey (2006) and Tim Edensor (2005), respectively (*ibid.*).

Moore's review brings an appreciation to the 'politics of incompleteness' which turns out not to be an impediment but rather a challenge to the larger and superior scope of inquiring, imagining as well as crafting more "emotionally sensitive geographies" (Lorimer, 2009: 264). Moreover, it encourages me to return (in order) to re-view and re-visit the three receipts with a greater degree of latitude.

3.1.3.2 Partiality in practice

Quantitatively, Pim and Nu's (as well as Tien and Muan's) land duty receipts were only two among a total of 2,000 copies ordered by the government to be printed at Sophon Printing House in 1936 as indicated at the bottom of the forms. It is beyond my (or any other researchers') capacity to locate the remaining 1998 copies in order to prove that the land duty receipts held by other families would have had both the husband's and wife's names (as the landowners) appearing on the form, or would have instead had other arrangements eg father and son's or parents and their children's names. My curiosity had recently been validated and clarified when I discovered a September 1900 lecture on 'land law' and 'husband and wife law' by Prince Raphi Phattanasak. Under the topic of "multiple owners", Raphi argued that

... it is not necessary that a piece of land must be owned by only one person. There might be two or three owners ie having jointly signed to preempt or purchase it or to receive as an inheritance and not yet divided [among the receivers]. Land under multiple owners is not allowed to be indicted for expelling one of the other owners...(1959:26).

Then, regarding the "name on the important document", he elaborates further:

Generally, land belongs to any person whose name appears on the red-seal land title deed.

...

[If] the father and child's or mother and child's names [appears on the deed], [it must] be judged that half goes to the father or mother and the other half to the child.

[If] there are parents and two children's names, it must be divided into four portions: two to parents and one to each child.

In case anyone holds the land title deed with another person's name, s/he must elucidate on how it has been obtained (ibid.).

Remarkably, he asserts in his lecture that "husband and wife, agreeing under the law as the same person, might have both of their names appear on the title deed, although the husband has the right to sell/ exchange it as he has authority [over his wife] according to the husband and wife law" (ibid.). Honoured as the "father of the modern Thai legal system", Raphi was an 1894 Oxford Christ Church College Law School graduate. However, his lecture (given at the turn of the century in 1900) was mostly based on the concept and practice of traditional Thai law passed on from generation to generation and case studies on land disputes, husband and wife relationships, and property based on his experience as a judge during that period. Since then, the significant changes to the husband and wife law that took place three decades later in the promulgation of "the 1934 Civil and Commercial Code Books V", initiated by the newly established democratic government, has offered women a little more room to exercise their legal

rights. For example, it was enacted in section 1469 that any litigation concerning the maintenance of the community property or its related affairs could be done by the wife with “[her] husband’s permission unless there is any other different determination made on the antenuptial agreement” (*Royal Gazette*, 1934: 488).

(Re-) reading Pim and Nuu’s 1930s’ paddy duty documents in the legal context, revealed to me that although, technically, Nuu’s name was written down (by the officer) ‘there’ side-by-side with her husband’s name, politically it was ‘not there’. In other words, in Nuu’s name being present, Nuu was absent; or contrarily, in the state of her being legally absent, her name was present. It was only her name that was allowed to be on the document but not her legal title to the land (as this would go to her husband). Any legal actions on her part would first need the approval of her husband (but not the other way around). It was not until 1976 and then 1980 that this code was amended to confer legal status upon the wife and permit her to manage jointly owned property *equally* with her husband. As the revisions state:

Section 1476. In managing the **Sin Somros** [marital property or community property] in the following cases, the *husband and wife have to be joint managers*, or one spouse has to obtain consent from the other:

(1) Selling, exchanging sale with right to redemption, letting out property on hire-purchase, mortgaging, releasing mortgage to mortgagor or transferring the right of mortgage on immovable property or on mortgageable movable property.

...

Section 1477. *Either spouse* is entitled to litigate, defend, take legal proceedings concerning maintenance of the **Sin Somros** or for the benefit of the **Sin Somros** ... (Kamol, 2007: 293-294, italics mine).

It has taken a hundred years for Thai wives to realise their full legal status in terms of having not only their names acknowledged on the land (and related) documents but also their right to take any legal action on it as equally as their spouses. The three 1930s’ paddy duty receipts belonging to the Meuansri family provide a starting point and a stepping stone to learn more about the ‘hidden’ stories on gender relations at the crossroads (of time and space) where traditional concepts and practices of the traditional Thai legal system intersected with the (Western) modern concepts and practices (and the changes that occurred thereafter).

3.1.4 Script, Space and the (State of) Biography

From ‘reading the lack’ we proceed to ‘reading the life’ (in her archives). Coming across Daniel and Nash’s study on the “relations between script and space in the making of life histories, both individual and collective” (op.cit.:449), inspires me to (re-)assess the ‘space’ of the land tax related documents not only in the context of (the state and) bureaucracy but also biography, particularly on the issues of (property) **details** and (natural) **disaster**. Apart from identifying

‘who’ they were, the 4x6 inch paddy duty cover sheets and receipts tell us much about their attribution of ‘what’, ‘where’ and ‘with whom’. According to her family tree, Nuui had a brother named Jumpee⁴. Therefore, the name of ‘Tien’, which appeared on another receipt, must be one of the many uncles on Pornpet’s father’s side. The receipts also indicated that the address of Pim and Nuui’s workplace, which would be the location of their land, was at “...Sub-district *Phanomrok* District *Tha Tako* Province *Nakhon Sawan*....” In terms of the size of their land property, Pornpet’s parents, a young couple in their mid-twenties at the time of issuance of this receipt, owned (at least) 40 rai of paddy land. My estimation of 40 rai relies on both documents: the 1935 paddy duty cover sheet, which indicated that the damaged area was “๓๔ rai”, and the payment record on the 1937 receipt, which was 1 baht and 80 satang for six rai of land, for a total of (34+6=) 40 rai.

The information on the land tax related receipts is in concert with the text from Pornpet’s autobiography written six decades later:

... [My] mother inherited from my grandfather 80 rai of paddy. ... When the harvest season arrived, ...we [I] always followed [my] mother to [the paddy] as the paddy was located near [my maternal] grandfather’s place but the house [we lived in] was close to [my paternal] grandfather’s house. (2002-2004: Vol. 12, 10).

The land tax related documents issued before Pornpet’s birth had travelled through time, nature and shifting social crises, so that they would tell their story of a rural peasant family living in a remote rural community. The Meuanisri family had moved many times, from one district to another (Chum Saeng to Nong Bua) and even within the same district (of Nong Bua). Additionally, in 1942, there was a major flood that had a severe impact upon the people living in central Thailand for several months. In particular, at Thap Krit, what Pornpet recalled was:

[My] parents moved [their] children to live on the rooftop. As our house was a twin house, we could reside in the [tiny] area between the roofs of each house. [My] father went fishing and sold [what he caught] to buy food for us. [My] mother stayed home and took care of [her] children [who remained] within eyesight as she was so worried that [they] might [fall from their high perch and] drown in the flood. The vendors traveled by boat from house to house to sell food. One time [my] mother bought popcorn to eat with ripened banana. So yummy! I can remember how yummy it was, even now! (ibids.).

A tasty dessert was the highlight of the day for five year-old Pornpet, providing a lasting memory to recall of a period of severe crisis. However, regarding her parents, a couple with four children (the youngest just turning two), cattle, carts, a barn and farm etc had to be managed and taken care of. This would have been one of the most difficult times in their lives. I wondered as

⁴ From an interview with his son, Thongyuu Pitsaree, 13 July, 2009.

to how and where Pornpet's parents were able to keep their documents safe so as to survive the severe flooding, moving and other demanding circumstances throughout these years. According to Chun Pitsaree -- a younger relative -- Nuui was very neat, clean, and above all "kept [everything] well" (interview July 13, 2009). Having gone through the Meuiansri family archives, in terms of quality, quantity and variety, it would seem that Nuui's meticulous habits were inherited by her daughters, Lek and Pornpet. In summary, it is women's tradition in this family to keep their archives safe and in good condition.

All these documents were faded and had become crisp and yellowed with time, with some parts having been torn and decayed. Yet the ink from the fountain pen (or perhaps a quill had been used at that time) is still clearly visible, legible and stands as evidence that these documents had been written to record the realities of people's lives and livelihoods, the size, quantity and location of their property, their way of life, gender relations and economic status between spouses. Additionally, these documents create links connecting the relationship between the more complex micro and macro systems in the context of the general social history of relations between citizens and the state, through a bureaucratic system of tax collection and issuance of receipts, in order that a person can be identified and given the status of full citizen. However, from reading archives as a piece of the Meuiansri's biography, we now need to critically assess it as 'the site of state ethnography.'

3.2 Script, Space and the 'State' Formation

In agreeing with Stoler's definition of colonial archives as the "... site of state ethnography" (op.cit.: 85), I return to re-consider the (colonisation within) archives held by the Meuiansri family (ie the three land related documents) as exemplar documents and a 'place' to trace, recognise and understand the process of the state's formation and its performance within the postcolonial context. I begin by reviewing the theoretical debates of state formation by two scholars, Stoler and Ogborn, and critique their lack of feminist perspective. Then, through a gender lens, I reveal and elaborate upon the state's attempts to construct people, in particular, women's identity in terms of title, last name, marriage license, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries (and related periods). Additionally, these documents reveal information that can be useful to researchers. For example, despite the fact that official marriage licenses were not implemented until 1935 or later, we discover that paddy duty cover sheets can be used to determine marital status prior to 1935 and therefore act as unofficial proof of marriage. Furthermore, these archives need to be assessed in light of political and bureaucratic developments and also with attention to its inconsistencies and errors. Apart from its hegemonic process of constructing personal identification, state ethnography will be assessed through the crafting of its day-to-day bureaucracy (eg staff, operating system and office space). Above all, and in aiming to inscribe our own, "'un-state-d' histories" (Stoler, op.cit.: 91), the authoritative

‘vertical writing’ (from form filling to legislation making) of state craft needs to be challenged, in particular, through the act of horizontal writing as, for example, undertaken by Pornpet in various contents and forms.

3.2.1 ‘State’ Formation and Its Debate

...We are now critically reflecting on the making of the documents and how we choose to use them, on archives not as sites of knowledge retrieval but knowledge production, as monuments of states as well as site of state ethnography. This is not a rejection of colonial archives as sources of the past. Rather, it signals a more sustained engagement with those archives as cultural artifacts of fact production, of taxonomies in the making, and of disparate notions of what made up colonial authority (Stoler, *ibid.*: 85).

While Stoler elaborates the concept and practice of the archives in relation to the state as its ‘monument’ and ‘ethnography’, Ogborn frames it under the concept of ‘formation’ in which its procedure is imperative to understand “... in terms of the meanings and identities that are being put into place both for those making the rules and those subject to them” because *states* do not only ‘*state*’ but also ‘*act*’ (op.cit.: 9-10). This means that firstly, “[P]art of the operation of state apparatuses is the production of statements - in reports, policy documents, speeches, press releases and parliamentary debate - about the situations they are dealing with and about what they are doing.” Secondly however, the “[P]rocesses of state formation are about attempts to shape and regulate ways of life and identities. Not only do states attempt to define things discursively, but these statements are a crucial part of policies and programmes which seek to alter people’s ways of life and their identities” (*ibid.*).

The Meuansri family’s 1930s’ paddy related documents are evidence reflecting the complex relation between citizen and state through a bureaucratic system of tax collection and receipt issuance. State power (in the name of the law) is manifested in and shapes ordinary people’s way of life by identifying and labeling them as *taxpayers* who have the (annual) responsibility of guiding the government surveyor to measure their land for tax estimation and paying the respective fee at the proper office within the announced timeline. Failure to do so would result in some level of penalty sometimes to the point where “... the state [would be] able to enforce its rules by using violence” (*ibid.*: 9). The process of colonisation through the production of specific ‘state’ ment(s) has had a profound effect on the ‘geography of existence’ for subalterns. From the imperialists’ point of view and practice, in order to be able to ‘colonise’ officially and effectively, the complexity and richness of the life of the underclass must be simply reduced to (and represented as) a few lines of identity attributes on the ‘assigned’ space on an otherwise unremarkable piece of paper (ie approximately 4x6 inches which would be the size of the receipt). Therefore, it is crucial “... to understand that resistance to state formation is also often conducted in terms of challenging the meanings that the state is trying to make and the

identities and ways of life that it is trying to construct ...” (ibid.: 11). I am quite confident that a feminist methodology and critique would sharpen and strengthen Stoler and Ogborn’s critical arguments. This would be demonstrated by employing a gender lens to re-read the ‘colonisation within’ archives held by the Meuansri family along two different but complementary trajectories: personal identification and public bureaucratisation.

3.2.2 ‘State’ Formation and Personal Identification

This section will critically (re)-read the Meuansri’s three documents issued by the state to reveal how the state attempts to regulate people’s way of life and identity by tracing the reflexive linkage between state formation and the formalisation of women’s personal identification such as title, last name, marriage license and related issues. We see these changes occur within the historical context of a shift from (so-called) pre-modern to ‘modern’ (ie Western) forms of colonial centralised state bureaucracy that was appropriated by Thai elites and administered within a broader program of ‘colonialism within’, which in part, attempted to establish and/or intensify gender and class-based hierarchies (Harrison, 2010: 13). For example, firstly there was a shift and change from women’s class-based title, as either *Amdaeng* or *E*, which was implemented by the late 19th century feudal state, to a gender-based title reflecting one’s marital status, as either *Nang* (Mrs) or *Nangsao* (Miss), which was implemented by the state in the early 20th century. Secondly, the cultural practice of having (first name only and) ‘no last name’ was officially replaced in 1913 with the Western tradition of officially identifying persons by both first and last names (the latter following paternal lineage). Lastly, as Pornpet’s parents were ‘married’ a few years prior to the proclamation of “the 1935 Family Registration Act” (which made marriage licenses official), the earliest official document in which both of their names were found together as a married couple, and therefore confirmed their married status, was the paddy duty cover sheet B.E. ๒๔๗๘ (1935) and not a marriage license. Therefore, their paddy duty cover sheet can be ‘read’ as proof of marriage. Moreover, special attention must be paid not only to inconsistencies and errors in the documents but also its linkage to other personal (state produced) documents ie identification cards and household registration, accordingly.

3.2.2.1 Title

... Vol. ๗ Serial No. ๒๕๓ ... Dated ๒๕/๑๐ B.E. ๒๔๗๘ [1935] Surveyor’s Name: ***Khoon Phanomrokraksa*** ... Duty paddy amount B.E. ๒๔๗๘ [1935] Guide for surveying ***Mr Pim*** addressed that ***Mr Pim Mrs Nu*** are the owners of the land located at Sub-district ***Phanomrok*** District ... Province ***Nakorn Sawan*** ...” (bold mine).

Mr, Mrs and Khoon are three types of titles (or formal address) in this document. Historically, the formal address for male persons in Thai culture, such as ‘Mr’ or ‘*Nai*’ (in Thai),

dates back to 1861 when King Rama IV proclaimed “the Act of Using Titles for Classes of People” to the public. The Act states that

generally male subjects in the Kingdom – those who are not Chinese, Westerners, Indians and Arabians ... who are not ordained monks, ... a doctor or a healer, a teacher, a civil servant that had been given a feudal title, -- can only have two titles: that is, either *Nai* or *Ai* ... placed in front of their given names. (in Charnwit, 2004: 293–295, italics mine).

According to this Act, *Ai* was a title conferred on those with low social status, and thus lower than *Nai* (in fact, the lowest title conferred in Thai society). For female persons, the king assigned the title ‘*Amdaeng*’ to the wives of commoners. Women who were punished with a heavy penalty for some crime they had committed, slaves and prisoners of war had the title ‘*E*’ in front of their names. No title was granted to unmarried women or minor wives during his reign. However, this changed when in 1917, under King Rama VI’s proclamation of “Female Titles Royal Decree”, unmarried women were distinguished and identified separately from married women by granting the title ‘Miss’ or ‘*Nangsao*’ to the former and ‘Mrs’ or ‘*Nang*’ to the latter (Prawit, 1997: 73–74; Sathien, 1934: 268–272; and *Royal Gazette*, 1921: 242).

The significance of this Decree was that firstly, it brought to an end the feudal state’s policy of using class-based titles, that is, either *Amdaeng* or *E*, to address women. Secondly, it lay the ground for utilising gender-based titles which also doubled as signalling women’s marital status through the use of either *Nang* (Mrs) or *Nangsao* (Miss). This policy continues to this day and affects women from all walks of life.

Legal changes and newly established traditions affected how a person was to be addressed for Pornpet’s parents’ generation. As it also appears on the Meuansri’s documents, a male would normally be addressed as ‘*Nai*’ and a female as (either) ‘*Nang*’ or ‘*Nangsao*’, which would be placed before his or her first name, respectively. Then, during the 1950s, ‘*Khun*’, a unisex title for both men and women, became widespread in usage. This is evident in the 1959 public elementary school support contribution receipt that was paid by ‘*Khun* Nu Meuansri’. Originally ‘*Khun*’ was used to address higher classed women who belonged to the royal court. Later it was ‘borrowed’ to be used in the wider society by the Thai Radio and Television announcers in the attempt to present a new ‘friendly’ personality and casual talking style by referring to listeners as ‘*Khun*’. As recalled by Arjin Panjapan, Thai Radio and Television pioneering staff member, “[T]he word ‘*Khun*’ [You] ... and *Dichan* [‘I’ for women] ... and *Phom* [‘I’ for men] was first used at the new radio station” (Sinith, 2000: 136, italics mine).

Afterwards, ‘*Khun*’ seemed to be a popular alternative to ‘*Nai*’ and ‘*Nang*’, the latter being primarily used to address villagers, rural people or someone with a lower social status. Furthermore, ‘*Khun*’ was being used by persons with higher social status (in the urban areas). In Thai culture, language is not only about gender, but also expresses deep-rooted and more pervasive differences (explicitly and implicitly) and disparities between classes: the rich and the poor; the urban and the rural; the educated and the uneducated.

However, the title ‘*Khun*’ (ขุน) is different from ‘*Khoon*’ (ทูล), the official title granted by the King for his officers, which appears in front of the surveyor’s name, *Phanomrokraksa*, on the paddy duty cover sheet. The equivalent titles used in English might be *Sir* and *Lord*, for example *Sir* Isaac Newton or *Lord* Louis Mountbatten. Royal titles, which had been granted by kings during the period of absolute monarchy, had 11 ranks and include, from the lowest to the highest, respectively: *pan*, *meun*, *cha*, *khoon*, *luang*, *chameun*, *pra*, *chaochameun*, *praya*, *chaopraya* and *somdejchaopraya* (Wales, 1965: 35-36). The ranks signified the amount of paddy land or compensation granted by the king. Kings would also grant royally conferred names, which also indicated one’s duties or responsibilities. For example, *Luang* Pradit Bahtuka referred to a shoemaker. *Khoon* Phanomrokraksa referred to persons [assigned] to preside over [on behalf of the king] the Phanomrok area. In 2478 [1935], only three years after the changeover from absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy with the king as the head of state but under the dictates of a constitution, many civil officers still retained the titles and royally conferred names they had been given during the absolute monarchy period.

3.2.2.2 Surname

Besides titles, the insistence on surnames was another area where state invention imposed itself on the individual. The proclamation of King Rama VI’s “1913 Family Name Act” had critically changed men and, particularly, women’s lives. As indicated in Section 3-6:

“[The] name of every Thai person must be composed of first and last names [The] [f]irst name is the name which has been given since the child was born [The] [l]ast name is the family name inherited from the father by his children Women, who are married, either use their husband’s last name or keep using their first and last names (*Royal Gazette*, 1912: 284).

I am quite surprised to learn that during this period women were offered the alternative option of (choosing and) using their last name as indicated above. Interestingly, this was completely removed from the “1941 Person’s Names Act” (1941) which proclaimed in Section 13 that “[A] married woman shall use her husband’s last name” (*Royal Gazette*, 1941: 1388). As a result, Thai women faced similar problems that Western women once encountered (of being buried and made invisible under their husbands’ last names). However, there is a significant difference in that Thai women are still addressed by their first names. For example, my mother’s name is Ganda; not once do I recall hearing her referred to as Mrs Sittirak, my father’s last name.

A group of elite women thus founded the ‘Women Law Graduate Association’ to fight for issues regarding women’s last names, property inheritance and nuptial properties since 1953 (Jittima, 1995: 86-94). There was a lengthy campaign for women to retain their last names in marriage before the movement was finally able to force legislators to amend the “The Person’s Names Act 1941 3rd Amendment 2008”. Enforced under Section 12, the first paragraph now

stipulates that “[A] spouse may use any party’s last name, as agreed upon, or retain the original last name of each party.” Women can also choose a title after marriage or dissolution of a marriage as now “either Mrs or Miss can be used voluntarily by notifying a legal registrar under the family registration law” (*Royal Gazette*, 2008: 73).

3.2.2.3 Marriage License (and Related Documents)

Following the state’s implementation of legislation governing rules over (men and) women’s last names, was the creation of marriage licenses, which became the initial document marking a particular family’s history and inaugurating the life cycle of many family archives. Pornpet’s parents, Pim and Nu, were ‘married’ around 1931 as their first child, Arpa (or Lek), was born in 1932, three years prior to the enactment of “the 1935 Family Registration Act”. Therefore, the earliest archive belonging to Pornpet’s family which could be found was not her parents’ marriage license but rather the ‘paddy duty cover sheet B.E. ๒๔๗๕ [1935]’ which could be considered an ‘alternative’ marriage license (that is, as proof of marriage) as it was the first official document in which both of her parents’ names appeared together as a couple.

Arpa’s year of birth is used to roughly calculate their marriage. As Pornpet indicated in her autobiography, her sister “...passed away [in 2003 when she was] 71 years old” (2002-2004), which places her birth in 1932. The point I would like to share here is about a *method* of reading the archives, *not* about some empirical truth. Therefore, the paddy duty cover sheet can be ‘read’ as a marriage license but *cannot be used* as an official document to prove one’s married status, especially when dealing with any legal matters that require such proof. Additionally, in tracing back from Arpa’s year of birth to determine the year Pim and Nu were married, I came across other related documents, such as identification cards, household registration certificates, and a civil registration surveying and inspection certificate.

Initially, I was surprised to discover that Pim and Nu’s year of birth were *inconsistently* recorded on all major official papers ie while the household registration certificate indicated that both were born in 1907, their identification cards recorded Pim and Nu’s year of birth as 1911 and 1910, respectively. Nevertheless, the household registration and identification cards as official documents were not ‘issued’ to them until almost 50 years later. The “Civil Registration Act”, governing household registration and promulgated under King Rama V’s reign in 1909 with several amendments thereafter, had a major modification in 1956. The implementation of the act resulted in the issuance to all families (including the Meunsi family) of an unremarkable 4x2.5 inch slip entitled, “civil registration surveying [and] inspection certificate B.E. ๒๔๘๐ [1956]”. The certificate included, in Thai, the abbreviation “Tor.Ror.๕” in the top right hand corner and the following text:

To certify that the officer has already surveyed [and] inspected the Civil Registration [of]
House No. ๒ Village No. ... Sub-district *Thap Krit*
District *Chum Saeng* Province *Nakhon Sawan*

According to the surveying and inspection form No. ๔๗

Date ๗ June B.E. ๒๔๘๕ [1956]

Signature.....[unreadable].....

(Surveying [and] inspection officer)

The “Identification Card Act”, initially promulgated during the Second World War in 1943, was revised and enacted in 1962 with the hidden agenda of a national security strategy in the period of the ‘Cold War’ or communist insurgency (Prakit, 1966: 2). According to section 5 “... anyone of Thai nationality and seventeen years of age but not exceeding seventy years, is a resident and/or has their name registered on the household registration certificate for the area where they reside ... must have an identification card issued within sixty days after the proclamation of this act....” (*Royal Gazette*, 1962: 24).

In the 1960s, the implication of having an identification card was much more than something to represent oneself but to confirm that s/he was [a ‘real’] Thai and not a ‘non-Thai’ (or rather a ‘communist’, regardless of whether they were Thai). (In reading between the lines, as ‘Red China’ was the most important opponent to the US and Thai governments during the ‘Cold War’ period, some Chinese immigrants were unjustly and easily targeted as insurgents. To obtain an ID card, which would require a household registration certificate as a major supporting document in the application process as a witness of their residency, would confirm they were of “Thai nationality”. Furthermore, it would confirm that they were already living in Thailand for some time and were not ‘outsiders’ or (potential) communists who were attempting to ‘slip in’ to carry out political insurrection).

Generally, archival materials are regarded as having greater authenticity and credibility than any verbal act or other form of evidence. However, the regular pattern of incorrect spelling and inconsistencies (eg apart from the inconsistencies of birth-year, Pim’s name was often written as ‘Pin’) on many government documents issued to the Meuansri family, not only reflected and reinforced the point about the “fallibility” of archival evidence but also alludes to what was already challenged by Stoler regarding the necessity of reading archives for “... its regularities, for its logic of recall, for its densities and distributions, for its consistencies of misinformation, omissions and mistakes ...” (op.cit.: 91-92).

Reading, comparing and connecting the significant changes in the Meuansri’s archives over many years enabled me to trace out the changing concept of person (hood) and its relation to the state. The promulgation of new rules regarding (female) titles, family names and marriage certificates had just recently been imported and ‘constructed’ in Thai society over the past hundred years. In tracing the state’s ‘vertical’ writing through a gender lens in the Meuansri’s land related documents, what has been revealed is not only the shifts and changes in the state’s process of constructing and formalising the identity of Siamese/Thais but also consolidating and maintaining the state itself through ethnographic construction. However, the construction of identity by the state is only one side of the coin. On the other side is state craft (understood as the

state constructing its own identity) which involves the process of bureaucratisation and a particular practice of writing that projects and reinforces its self-construction.

3.2.3 'State' Formation and Its Bureaucratisation

Employing the framework of state formation to (re-)read the Meuansri's paddy duty cover sheet and paddy duty receipts, we encounter the process of state operations through the politics of bureaucratisation along at least two different vectors. Practically, in running the system, the state needs *staff* to undertake statecraft (ie compile *statistics*, conduct surveys and day-to-day paper work) at a specific facility (ie *office building*). Professionally, the state exercises, accumulates, maintains and strengthens its powers through the process of 'vertical writing' (from filling out receipts and other forms to making legislation). In this section, then, state formation and its bureaucratisation will be presented under the topics of 'the state and its operation' and 'the state's writing and writing the state'. Regarding the latter, the discussion on the issue of 'de-stating' and the way to inscribe our own "un-state-d' histories" (Stoler, op.cit. 91) will be provided as a critique with the linkage to Pornpet's practice of 'horizontal writing' as an example.

3.2.3.1 The State and Its Operation

.... Colonial statecraft was built on the foundations of statistics and surveys but also out of administrative apparatus which produced that information. Multiple circuits of communication ... were funded by state coffers and system of taxation that kept them flush Colonial office buildings were constructed to make sure [the documents] were properly catalogued and stored the majority of 'mixed-blood', 'Indo' youths ... were the scribes who made the system run (Stoler, *ibid.*: 90-91).

According to Stoler, the process of paying attention to the Dutch colonial state's scaffolding elaborated above, helps provide "an ethnographic reading of the archives [that are] very different from what histories of the colonial looked like several decades ago" (*ibid.*). Employing her approach to 're-read' the Meuansri family's land related archives, a variety of observations is possible. For example, firstly, as Thailand had never been fully colonised, it was not the 'mixed blood' but the local Thai scribes themselves who ran the system. Among the two names found on the documents, "Lek" was the cashier and "Khoon Panomrokraksa" was the surveyor. Regarding the latter, in order to properly conduct the cadastral survey with modern technology, quite likely he had training provided by his superiors as the Survey Academy had been founded fifty years earlier (1885) under the guidance of the British official, James McCarthy, with the purpose of "giving survey training to the local Thai in order to reduce the cost of hiring foreign surveyors" (Noparat, op.cit.: 225).

Additionally, apart from the ‘state’s scaffoldings’, Stoler has also touched upon the issue of ‘statistics’, one of several features of ‘statecraft’ which was invented in the eighteenth-century and merged as a powerful tool in the process of building the nineteenth-century liberal state (Desrosières (1998) in Stoler, *ibid.*: 87-88). The politics of numbers under the philosophy and practice of (mathematics and) statistics (through the techniques of categorising and manipulating data) did not only ‘dictate’ the state’s duties but also instantiatively ‘evaluated’ the successes of its operations. Her discussion can be applied to King Rama V’s implementation of a 1905 project “‘counting’ (his) citizens” based on the categorisation of gender, age and ethnic groups in order to build up the ‘citizens account’ in his kingdom (National Archives of Thailand, “King Rama V’s Census List/1-30, 1891-1910 and Census 1-9, 1894-1909”). Later, his successor, King Rama VI, founded the Department of Statistical Forecast in 1914 in order to “... demonstrate the country’s statistics by compiling and categorising the registrars and reports produced by [different] ministries and departments...” The [imported] Egyptian General Statistician was hired to perform the duty and to provide supervision for the government officers on how to conduct statistical matters properly (*Royal Gazette*, 1914: 558).

In this regard, Lek and Khoon Panomrokraksa were not only wearing the hats of cashier and surveyor, respectively, but also acted as the state ‘statistician’, who had to ‘create’ each ‘statistical item’ through the process of inscribing each receipt and each land duty cover sheet (the original issued to the recipient and the duplicate copy kept as reference at the office). Secondly, whether by month, year or other time frame, they would have to ‘categorise, count, calculate and compile’ each statistical item into a statistical report to be sent to the provincial and ministerial levels for inclusion in the national statistical report.

Therefore the numbers “Vol. Serial No. ๒๕๓ ...” on Pim and Nu’s paddy duty cover sheet did not ‘stand alone’ but in relation to and in connection with the numbers written on the paddy duty cover sheets issued to other farmers in that district. In the context of bookkeeping, “Vol. ๓[3]” meant there were earlier volumes of 1 and 2 and “No. ๒๕๓ [253]” indicated that there were previous cover sheets numbered from 1 to 252 as well as from number 254 and onwards issued to other recipients. Then, on their paddy duty receipt, the (number) “๖ [6] (rai)” of paddy required duty payment of “๑ [1] baht and ๘๐ [80] satang” and “๔ [4] baht and ๘๐ [80] satang” for “๑๖ [16] rai” was charged to Tien and Muan, their relatives. From these two receipts, we can see that the sum of $(6+16=)$ 22 rai of paddy was surveyed by Khoon Panomrokraksa, the surveyor, and the sum of paddy duty amounting to $(1.80+4.80=)$ 6.60 baht was collected by the cashier. When the numbers on each duplicate paddy duty receipt kept at the district office were added together, it would show the total amount of the surveyed paddy as well as the total amount of paddy duty earned by “Tha Tako District office” in the year of 1937. The statistics recorded and compiled by Tha Tako (and many other) district(s) would be kept at the Nakorn Sawan provincial office in order to build up the entire provincial statistical report to be sent to Bangkok.

The fact that “....[C]olonial office buildings were constructed to make sure (the documents) were properly catalogued and stored” (Stoler, *op. cit.*: 91) could be applied to the case of the Tha Tako District office (as well as others). Several volumes of paddy duty cover

sheets and receipts, (statistical) reports and other documents needed their own place to be kept. “*Tha Tako* District office” was printed at the top of each paddy duty receipt which I was able to see, functionally conveying (at least) double meanings; that is, the place where government staff would perform their daily duty as well as where documents are to be catalogued and stored properly. Lastly, as Stoler discusses further, “[S]ystems of written accountability were the products of institutions, but paper trails (weekly reports to superiors, summaries of reports, recommendations based on reports) called for an elaborate coding system by which they could be tracked” (ibid.: 90). At this point, what should be added is that there is another side to (public) institutions in that they are also the products of the written accountability system since the politics of “paper empires” of filing and classifying is “a part of their technologies of rule” (ibid.).

3.2.3.2 State’s Writing and Writing the State

I repeatedly read these documents and wrote several interpretation but without successfully ‘breaking through’. However, on the final round, I came to the conclusion that the official ‘forms’ were little more than the government’s ‘semi-readymade’ documents that were partly ‘pre-written’ (or printed) before the inclusion of such information as date, address, name and amount of money, to be filled out by officials in their own handwriting. The documents would be completed once the official had filled in all the blanks and stamped the document with an official seal. The writing process---that is, the formulation of the document itself (ie what was included/excluded and how it was written) and the answers given (as gatekeeper the official decided how and what to include in order to ‘fit’ the requirements of the document) --- was completely under the control of the state and its representatives (who had knowledge and power regarding the survey, latitude and longitude of land location as well as owning and overseeing the technology of the modern cadastral survey, such as theodolites for measuring angles and engineering levels for measuring elevation or height).

The person inscribed in the form does not participate in the writing process (again, regarding the document design itself or the answers given), but did have to pay the fees so that he could be visible to the state as someone who owns land (or abstractly, what is gained by the recipient is some measure of assurance and leverage from the issuance of the document).

Once I had been taught that the ‘state’ is a sovereign with territory, citizens and the authority to issue orders, rules and regulations for establishing peace and order in society. A ‘bureaucracy’ is the mechanism of the state that implements the latter’s orders. ‘Citizens’ are the lay people (thereby excluding the ‘royal elites’, the royal family members and bureaucratic officials). Thanks to these three documents I have ‘re-formulated’ a definition from my own understanding that *the state is a sovereign that has hegemonic ‘writing power’ over its citizens within its territory through the exercise of its bureaucracy*. My interpretation gains support from Andrew Ashforth, who earlier noted that “‘the real seat of power’ in modern states is the bureau, ‘the locus of writing’” (in Stoler, ibid.: 86). In conclusion, I do agree with Stoler that for any

scholar who is attracted by the colonial archives, it is not adequate to dedicate him/herself just to the task of reading “‘*upper class sources upside down*’ that would reveal the language of rule and the biases in statist perceptions”(ibid.: 91,italics mine). The more critical task is “... to write ‘un-state-d’ histories that might demonstrate the warped reality of official knowledge and the enduring consequences of such political distortions” (ibid.). This is in concert with Michel de Certeau who has called to not “simply adopt former classifications” of history as “a redistribution in space, the act of changing something into something else”, but to break away from it and replace it “with new ‘codes of recognition’ and ‘systems of expectation’ of our own” (in Stoler, ibid.: 100). In Pornpet’s case, the distorted official knowledge which she experienced was firstly that the district officers acknowledged her land ownership (and even praised her family’s work as a model farm). Secondly, later they took it away from her as if the Meuansri family had no claim to it. Politically and literally, what Pornpet lost was not just her ‘land’ but her ‘rights’, dignity and above all justice (or ‘dharma’) as both a Buddhist and a citizen. As she frequently asserted, “if there is no justice in the world [society], how could we [I] live our [my] life?” (2002-2004: Vol. 10). The consequences of such a blatant bureaucratic warp affected the Meuansri family at an unfathomable level, personally and politically. Pornpet spent over forty years (1963-2004) committed not only to the recovery of her land but also in pursuit of justice. (In other words, she had spent many years of her life challenging, shaping and changing the state’s *vertical writing* with the subaltern’s ‘horizontal writing’). What she had done, in de Certeau’s terms, is not history, “... as a *redistribution in space* ...” but the replacing of “... ‘codes of recognition’ and ‘systems of expectation’ ...” (in Stoler, op.cit.: 100,italics mine) in her own terms. How the ‘new codes’ of history written by a subaltern could pass the ‘test of time’, can be touched upon, learned and interpreted from the interview below:

Q: Have you ever felt down [or discouraged] as this long struggle has yet to succeed?

A: No! Fighting gives me [a sense of] empowerment.

Q: [Do you think that] it will be won?

A: I have already used my life as the bet. That is the most I could offer. It’s no longer a matter of winning or losing” (*Lalana*, op.cit: 26).

3.3 Script, Space and the ‘State’ of Philosophy

Inspired by Duncan’s proposal that the archives are filled with subaltern voices (op.cit.: 122), in this section, the approach of ‘reading the voices’ will be presented as another ‘how’ to be employed in the process of assessing the Meuansri’s archives. Then from methodological challenge to the philosophical question, we will ask ‘why’ (are there archives?) and by ‘whom’ it was produced, linking Derrida’s critique of the role of the archon and its application to the concrete case of Pornpet and her fight for land and justice.

Firstly, as discussed by Duncan, in the domain of colonial studies, although there were various contents and forms of resistance challenging hegemonic power, there were no challenges in the form of ‘counter-archives’. This is because such venues were “... structured out in advance by illiteracy and the lack of narrative form which records ordinary individual’s voices”; or, in Spivak’s terms, the subaltern cannot be heard because they occupy “a site of structured silence” (ibid.: 121). Nonetheless, he also made the observation that “silence” might not be the right term to be used. His argument is that although the subaltern’s speech is “highly constrained”, they are “never fully silenced”. As he further elaborates

Ordinary individuals within a colonized population may be, in fact are, obliged to say certain types of things, in certain ways, on certain occasions. The archives are full of voices of the subaltern, answering questions posed by those who have power over them: “How many children do you have? What are the boundaries of your land? How much rice did you grow this year?” But, having said this, there is no question that their perspectives are distorted by the forms of power and the rhetorical structure of the archive. Their subjectivities mark a site that has been written over by others who objectify and homogenize them as the “native voice” (ibid.: 122).

His observation inspired me to practice ‘reading the voices’; particularly, of two men, Khoon Panomrokraksa, the surveyor and Pim, the surveyor’s guide, speaking firmly over the Meuansri’s paddy duty cover sheet:

Khoon Panomrokraksa: *Who is the owner of this land?*

Pim: *Nai Pim and Nang Nu*

KhoonPanomrokraksa: *Who is the user of this land?*

Pim: *Nai Pim and Nang Nu*

KhoonPanomrokraksa: *What are the boundaries of your land?*

Pim: [could not ‘hear’ - what is written on the receipt is blurred].

It appears that from the cover sheet the 1913 Family Name Act was not commonly used. While Pim provided only the first names, Khoon Panomrokraksa penned the answers he ‘heard’, “Nai Pim and Nang Nu”, on the form without bothering to ask further for their last name. This might signify that the wider practice of using last names did not occur until at least the early 1940s based on the observation that last names were included in the May 22, 1942, ox description ticket but not in the earlier documents from the 1930s.

Upon receiving the paddy duty cover sheet, Pim would pay the cashier the fees owed and obtain his paddy duty receipt. As all required information had already been provided on the cover sheet, the cashier would only need to fill out the form accordingly. The conversation that one might imagine taking place at the cashier counter might be simply, “Here you are: the receipt’ and ‘Thank you.’”

Within the context of internal colonisation, I have determined that Pim and the two government officers, surveyor and cashier, interactively played their respective roles at different stages. However, there is another who had been involved at every step of the archive making process: the *archon*. Who is he/she and where can we find him/her? To answer this question properly, we need to engage with Derrida's writings. Etymologically, it is recognised that unlike Foucault's 'discursive' approach, Derrida focused on deconstructing the juridical concept of "how the law becomes institutionalized *as law*" as well as the hegemonic role that archons play in interpreting archives. In this regard, based on his *Archive Fever*, Shetty and Bellamy elaborate that

...in the Greek *arkhe* as entailing the principle of "commandment": the law can be found "*there* where men and gods *command*, *there* where authority, social order are exercised, *in this place* from which *order* is given" Moreover, "... it is at their home, in that place which is their house [*arkheion* as 'house,' 'domicile,' 'address'] ... that official documents are filed." Derrida's archive involves actual *archons* who "exercise social order" not discursively but hermeneutically through the interpretation of texts... (op.cit.:27-28).

...

Derrida emphasises that "the archive takes place at the place of originary and structural breakdown of the said memory".... archival violence occurs... "at the home" of the *archons*—or as [he] would emphasize, "*there*" in the liminal space where the law meets writing, where the letter of the law "originates" in the trace of an earlier "said memory" (ibid.: 31).

Derrida's critique inspired me to peruse Pornpet's family's earliest document, the 1935 land duty cover sheet, with Khoon Phanomrokraksa's signature on the last line. As the head of a sub-district in a rural area, he was a low ranking 'scribe' in the bureaucratic system. In regard to the issue of land and related archives, my question is who are the 'commanders' or law generators? There is no 'concrete' name appearing anywhere to be seen, only the 'abstract' representation in the form of 'garuda' insignia on the top of the paper. From 'pre-Pornpet' to Pornpet's time, there has been much that has changed in the documents between periods. However, what remains the same is the abstract 'garuda'. This might be one of the reasons why in order to stop the archival violence, which profoundly ruined her and her family, Pornpet had learned bit by bit that there was no other choice. She had to trace back "*there* where men and gods *command* ..." (ibid.: 27) .

I had immersed myself in the 'top-down' public documents written by male public officers, such as the paddy duty cover sheet and paddy duty receipts issued to Pornpet's parents, for many long months. Then, in a significant reversal, I have been able to access the personal 'bottom-up' (grassroots) documents, such as the dressmaking course notebook and customer account records, passionately and professionally written by Pornpet herself. In the next chapter,

the theme and the tone of the archived materials I am working on radically change from 'phallic' to 'gynocentric', or from 'vertical' to 'horizontal', in which the 'decolonising' lens of reading 'in detail' and 'from below' will be employed.

4. Becoming a Writer

Pornpet's passage of becoming a writer was unique. The beginning of this process can be traced to the period she spent at Eiem Sam-Ang dressmaking school in Bangkok in 1959, which provided her an opportunity to immerse herself in dress pattern-making and drawing details copied into her *dressmaking course notebook* (1959). After graduating, Pornpet worked from her shop in Nong Bua. Besides drafting patterns, each debit and credit transaction of her customers was registered in her *customer account record* (1959-1962).

As the notebook is structured by two different 'languages'--text/alphabet and graphic--the intersecting disciplines of technical cartographic knowledge and its theoretical critique are employed as a framework. Additionally, I will detail the experiences and technical knowledge of two Thai dressmakers, Lamyong and Sumontra, as well as provide theoretical debates by Harley (1992), Blunt and Rose (1994) and the guidance of Buss and Kadar (2001) on the issues of women's archives.

Finally, Pornpet's customer account record offers an opportunity to demonstrate how her archive functions as an 'archive from below', that is, it presents a picture and texture of rural Thai life that would otherwise not be properly represented in official archives. In this regard, the frameworks of 'reading (in detail and) from below' as discussed by Ulrich (1990), reading 'as a woman' through an 'empathetic lens' as elaborated by Ellerby (2001), Culler (1982) and Braham (1996), and a critical (decolonising) reading of the 'hidden spaces' beyond the public/private dichotomy as offered by Blunt and Rose (op.cit.) and Blunt and Wills (2000) are employed in conversation with Pornpet's work.

4.1 Reading Pornpet's (Introduction to Writing Culture through Her) Dressmaking Course Notebook

"How did Pornpet become a writer?" To answer this question, we will delve into her dressmaking course notebook and autobiography. Literally, while the autobiography is the 'signature' or authoritative text of Pornpet's life, the notebook plays its crucial role as the chief evidence of her *introduction into writing culture* or the 'grounding stone' upon which she firmly stood and 'shifted' into another level of writing knowledge. In this regard, this chapter will provide an opportunity to read both pieces of her major work back and forth in parallel, in dialogue and in between the (disciplinary) intersection of postcolonial geography and feminist archival studies. As the core concept and practice of dressmaking is the art and science of 'pattern-making', the latter being the 'mapping' of (women's) bodies, this section is divided into three sub-topics, accordingly.

4.1.1 Reading the ‘Latitude and Longitude’ of the Female Figure: from Basics to Technique

Pornpet’s 50 year old notebook is a 10x15 inch blue hardcover with a brown spine and containing 97 pages (from a total of 157 pages) of notes and diagrams showing the step-by-step process of making skirts, blouses and pants. These notes were used as ‘textbook’ and reference both for her work and in teaching a new generation of dressmakers, from her hometown and neighbouring provinces, for over a decade. This notebook was compiled in 1959 for a dressmaking course she was enrolled in when she was in Bangkok. However, Pornpet’s formal education as a dressmaker began three years earlier in 1956 at the local shop in Tambon (Sub-district), Thap Krit. As she later recalled:

[My] mother strongly advocated that, as a woman, [I] should take dressmaking lessons. Therefore, at 18 after finishing my farm work, [I] was sent to the class run by Pee (older sister) Thongkham [I] attended for one year and a half after which [I] completed the course. [My] mother bought [me] a sewing machine and a closet to keep all cloth (2002–2004: Volumes 5, 7 and 8).

Unexpected circumstances took over and Pornpet’s story takes a turn when a senior relative came to search for her mother after 40 years of estrangement. Thereafter, her life changed:

In 1959 [I] was 22 years old. Life seemed like a fiction. Khun Paa (auntie) Manee ... had made a great effort to search for [my] mother. Once she found [us], she brought [my] mother to Bangkok to meet [her] other relatives.... Khun Loong [uncle] Laung Thep Senee Suwanwaree ... [He] had a daughter named Khun Pee (sister) Prapasi [My] mother asked her to take [me] to school to continue [my] studies on dressmaking and hairdressing. ... (2002-2004: Volumes 8, 10).

On the first page of her blue notebook is a section titled “Procedures for Taking Body Measurements”, listing 17 compulsory body points for measuring ie waist line, full bust line and shoulder width. There was also a suggestion for using a smaller increment measuring tape for more accurate measurements as well as a remark on the six different types of body figures. They are 1) straight back, 2) humpback, 3) stubby, 4) big-sided waist and protruding tummy, 5) asymmetrical bust, and 6) asymmetrical shoulder, where one side is higher than the other. Then in “Principles of Skirt Making”, Pornpet recorded as many as 12 different types of skirts: 1) a straight skirt, 2) a semi-circular skirt, 3) a circular skirt, 4) a 6-paneled skirt, 5) a 14-piece pleated skirt, 6) a pencil skirt, 7) a draped skirt, 8) a 2-draped skirt, 9) a full skirt with pockets, 10) a full skirt with a lined-pocket, 11) a skirt with a hemline in the back, and 12) a skirt with a hemline in the front.

The section on “Principles of Blouse Making” appeared to be even more complicated than the previous sections and was divided into 6 steps:

A, the starting point, is at the neck [line].

B is from the neckline to the waistline; it measures the front length.

C is the centre point of the bust starting from the neckline to the waistline.

D is the centre point of the upper bust starting from the neckline to the bust line.

E is the length of the lower hip starting from the waistline to the lower hip.

F is from the waistline to the lower hip, divided in half, to provide the length of the upper hip.

Once students had become familiar with making a blouse pattern, the next step was learning how to provide more ‘detail’, in three basic components: 1) to make a pleat and a smock, 2) to make different styles of collar, and 3) to make different designs of sleeves. These can be adjusted to make up to 30 different types of blouses. Finally, on the last few pages is the section “Principles of Pants Making”, which included ‘hot pants’, ‘skirt-pants’ and ‘bear pants’ (a loose-fitting, one-piece occupational garment, consisting of pants and a shirt).

Technical documents such as the dressmaking course notebook, which is mainly composed of pattern drawings with some explanatory text along the bottom, requires a certain background and a fundamental knowledge of dressmaking to be able to read it through with understanding. In this regard, professional dressmakers, Lamyong and Sumontra, whose knowledge has been passed on through both personal and published interviews, taught me how to read the language of the ‘graphic’ sections of the notebook, which comprised 70 percent of the notebook.

Lamyong (1927–2010) was one of the better known dressmaking instructors in Thailand. In one interview she was asked about the secret for her success whereupon she answered that it was all about experience.

Having worked on women’s wear for over 40 years, I could determine which part of each woman was the most beautiful and distinctive. So I made dresses which would bring out the beauty of each woman. For the one who had a beautiful body shape, I would not make her a round long skirt. Some, for example, who have broad shoulders, a long neck, and round, long arms, a long sleeve blouse will not fit her. That is all I could say...” (Nichana - Pipan, 1988: 77).

These comments brought to me an insight that *‘dressmakers’ are the ‘readers’ of women’s bodies through the lens and knowledge of designing and calculating* (utilising a measuring tape as a tool), a knowledge accumulated over the years. They would then transpose those ‘calculations’ into patterns or blueprints and ‘write’ it out on a piece of cloth. In other words, a dressmaker and I have similar professions — we both are ‘writers’: I compose my knowledge on

paper while they express their knowledge through clothes. It's a kind of writing that expresses women's bodies.

Furthermore, there seem to be some common feelings between the work of dressmakers and writers. Just as a good book can change the way we think, so can a well-designed and well-fitting outfit change the way we look and feel. Further while no two books are ever alike, no two bodies are exactly the same either. Some have tummies that stick out and very long back lines. Some have a long beautiful neck, and full shoulders and bust. Dressmakers must have an eye for every body type to be able to bring out the best in their customers, requiring exceptional talent!

Sumontra then elaborated on the practical step-by-step process of making a dress. She reinforced that the key and foundation of making a fine dress is nothing but

the proper measurement of the body. Next, it requires a drawing of 'two-dimensional' pattern out of a lifelike three-dimensional body shape (width x length x depth) and then cut and sew these patterns back into a 'three dimensional' dress which a dressmaker needs to adjust and re-calibrate between the actual size of the wearer (as determined by measurement) and modifying the standardized, or the ideal size, which is 36-24-36 inches (or 90-60-90 centimeters) (Interview 29 November 2009).

In reality, rarely does any one person have the 'perfect' bodyline. Each woman has her so-called 'flaws' ie too wide at the hips, too thick at the waist or too narrow at the shoulders. A skillful dressmaker must have the ability to make complex patterns that are specific to a certain body type by using all of their experience, expertise and imagination, and applying this to uniquely discover ways to cover up the "flaws" of the wearer and bring out their best in a fine dress. Each line they draw counts, whether it is a horizontal, curved or vertical line, before placing the pattern over the fabric and beginning the task of cutting.

In addition to basic measurement and pattern making, there are four main parts of the body --- shoulders, chest, waist and hips --- to be measured and calibrated through the use of an established formula to determine the exact figures for making an accurate pattern (as confirmed by Pornpet when she made the remark that "it must be carefully checked and double checked to make sure the measurement is accurate"). Then the figures are to be divided by two. The final figures are used in making patterns on a piece of (equally) half-folded paper, which translates into a perfect pattern of the whole body. Vertical lines placed on the right and the left of the pattern need to be drawn first, which is then followed by four horizontal lines for the neckline, chest, waist and hips.

Once the pattern has been made [Sumontra continued], a dressmaker needs a very sharp pair of scissors and a very precise cutting ability. If a dressmaker drew or cut a badly made curve, the dress would not be shapely or fit properly. Each fabric type has a different texture and quality that needs to be carefully assessed in order to "match" the pattern and dress style. Generally, it would take about a week to make one outfit as I

need to be very careful and apply all my skills in sewing sleeves and collars together to make a complete and perfect joint. For those who are more skilful and have a lot of experience, it would not take as long (ibid.)

With this basic and newly acquired knowledge and tools, I began to 'decode' Pornpet's dressmaking course notebook with an improved understanding of the practice of dressmaking.

On the second page of the notebook (following the section 'The Principles of Body Measurements'), Pornpet had written the title of the section at the centre of the page: The Principle of Skirt Making with double underline. On the next line was written "suppose ... the waist is 60 + 1 to 2 cm (from the waistline), the lower hip is 90–20 cm (20 cm is from the waistline to the lower hip), the upper hip is 85 -10 cm (10 cm is from the waistline to the upper hip), the length is 50 cm (from the waistline to the knee line)". These are all the standard figures for waist and hips and are used by student dressmakers for base measurement and calculation.

There are 10 different types of skirt elaborated in her notebook. Being somewhat chubby and short, I prefer skirt no. 6, the pencil skirt, which I never wear but I would like to learn how to draft it. The text and pattern (which are less complicated than the others) is adapted from pattern no. 1 [the straight skirt] and then calibrated to fit the actual shape of the body. To make this pattern, the dressmaker has to start at the bottom line and measure and mark 2 cm from the sides of both the front and the back pieces. A line is then drawn from the hip to these marks on the bottom line. This part needs to be cut off in order to make the skirt gradually narrower toward the bottom. In other words, 'tapering' is what the pencil skirt is all about (which is different from the straight skirt that has symmetrical upper and lower portions). A note is added at the end:

- *The front piece of the skirt: if a wearer has a big tummy, need to add 1 cm in the waistline. If she has a flat tummy, deduct 1 cm off the waistline.*
- *The back piece of the skirt: if the wearer is larger use the proportion of the waistline which is already measured. In some cases, an additional 1 cm may be required. For those with a flat bottom, deduct 1 cm off the waistline.*

There are only seven lines of description, leaving the rest of the page for sketching the pattern. Two vertical lines are drawn on the left and right sides of the page, with the main line drawn through the middle to divide the page into two equal halves. One half is for the front of the outfit and the other is for the back. There are three horizontal lines for the waistline, the upper hip and the lower hip with one line at the bottom of the page for the lower portion or length of the skirt.

I soon realised that this is like making a map: "a dressmaker is a mapmaker of the geography of the woman's body!" A dress pattern is a kind of map—the map of the actual sizes of the human body---whereas making geographical maps, the cartographer significantly reduces the actual land features. Both maps share something in common: a basic outline is first drawn and more accurate details are added.

However, just as maps ‘open up’ and reveal land for colonisation, patriarchy marks the woman’s body with its own desire. Furthermore, it is the female dressmaker herself who “internalises”, marks and “projects” the values of the patriarch’s desire onto women’s bodies to enhance their beauty and appeal to men’s desire (as well as for her own pleasure). In the process of attempting to emancipate themselves, many women started wearing trousers. However, the issue should not be simply to dichotomise to the level of either ‘skirt’ or ‘pants’ but how to decolonise the (almost only) one standard of body shape and dress, creating space for the diversity and flexibility of builds and styles to be valued and accepted.

4.1.2 Reading Body-Mapping (through Unmapping)

According to Blunt and Rose, “[M]aps, the mimetic representation [of the ‘so-called’ uninscribed and] transparent space ... were graphic tools of colonization ... [which] not only *describe* colonies: they also *discipline* them through the discursive grid of Western power and knowledge” (op.cit.: 8, 9 and 15, italics mine). Reading map-making critically and alongside Pornpet’s dressmaking course notebook, dressmakers’ interviews and relating it to my own experiences, I understand now how my body is *described* (through a system of measurement and pattern formatting) and *disciplined* by having the (standard) or ‘perfect bodyline’ as the centre or ‘ideal’ (from which most body forms deviate).

Moreover, a map, as the product of a process of constructing and revealing (making transparent) space, becomes “... an instrument of interrogation, a form of spatial interview which made nature answer the invader’s need of information [for colonization]” (Carter in Blunt and Rose, op.cit.: 13). In this regard, the concept and practice of ‘nature’ refers to both land and women as further elaborated by Blunt and Rose:

... [R]epresentations of women and landscapes as sites of colonization were often codified through mapping because “the map operates ... as a dual paradigm for the phallogocentric discourse which inscribes women, and the rationalistic discourse which inscribes the land as ‘Other.’” Theoretically parallels can be drawn between the disciplinary power and surveillance imposed on landscapes by mapping and imposed on the body by, for example, discourses of medicine and sexuality (ibid.: 13, 11).

Learning to ‘read’ the construction of ‘patterns’, or the ‘latitude’ and ‘longitude’ of the female body ‘map’, I discovered that the best approach to decoding the map is to ‘unmap’ or deconstruct (and then reconstruct) it. In addition, we need to appreciate other critical notions related to the concepts of gender and geography, which have an impact upon “gendered spaces”, as the latter should be “understood less as a geography imposed by patriarchal structures, and more as a social process of symbolic encoding and decoding that produces ‘a series of homologies between the spatial, symbolic and social orders” (Moore (1988) in Blunt and Rose, op.cit.: 3). The hundred year-old body of knowledge on dressmaking can be re-learned and re-

read in many different ways. Particularly, I agree with Harley that professionally, the approach of reading the ['body' as well as the] 'geographical' map by unframing it, has offered us a groundbreaking epistemological tool to defy the (hegemonic) myth of objective science's claim on (almost) the absolute demarcation of delineated reality. Politically, rival and alternative discourses generated by the concept and practice of intertextuality helps shift us to the much more innovative process of reviewing and redefining the socially constructed world order through cartographic representation. Philosophically, placing geographical cartography in the context of interdisciplinary study of text and knowledge, influenced by Foucauldian and/or Derridian schools of thought and shared by many other disciplines, has enlarged "the possibility of discovering new meanings in maps"; that is "... a challenge to read maps in ways that could reciprocally enrich the reading of other texts" (op.cit.: 247). With this approach I will re-read Pornpet's dressmaking course notebook (that is, Pornpet's knowledge on mapping the body) in relation to (or intertextually with) other texts in her life, especially the 'link' between (her) dressmaking (knowledge) and protesting (mission).

4.1.3 Reading the 'Linkage': From Dressmaking to Protesting

After reading Pornpet's dressmaking course notebook, technically and theoretically, we need to move to the step of translating it culturally and socially. According to her autobiography, the dressmaking school she attended and the three-storey teak house where she was living were both on Tee Thong Road. This house, which belonged to her uncle, Khun Laung Thep Senee, was not just a place to stay, but was considered a 'college of life'. As she expressed:

Living in Bangkok is an unforgettable experience. Though it was only for three months, [I] felt as if [I] had been living there for 3 years. Surrounded by all the noble people who had been very well brought up with proper manners, I had learned much from them on what a decent life was like. ... Khun Pee [Prapasri] and Khun Paa [Manee] were truly decent women. They lived [their] lives strictly under the proper tradition. Khun Paa Manee always practiced meditation at home. Khun Pee Prapasri spent most of [her] time in [her] own room. Rarely had [she] gone out except when [she] had to conduct business. Still, that did not happen very often. [She] always took me along, whenever [she] went out. ... Khun Pee Paung Nark also loved us [me] dearly Interestingly, [she] was a very conservative woman with a graceful movement: [she] spoke very slowly and spent hours having lunch and dinner....

In reflecting back on the incident that took place 43 years earlier, it appears that Pornpet highlighted the 'cultural' (and class) aspect; that is, the opportunity to live a 'noble' and peaceful life. I prefer though to appraise it differently by emphasising the 'scholastic' feature of Pornpet's life as the more significant. This is because the three-month study period was the only time in her life where she could fully enjoy her studentship without any burden or worries. There were

neither the daily responsibilities of farm work nor housework; she did not need to take care of parents and younger siblings, or even do miscellaneous housekeeping jobs for the family she stayed with as they had “four maids” working for them.¹ Her only major duty was to be a ‘chambermaid’ for her senior relatives whenever they went out, which was quite beneficial as it offered her many more opportunities to expose herself to Bangkok’s cosmopolitan culture, places and people at no cost to her.

As the school was in her neighbourhood, every morning Pornpet walked there with her notebook in hand, listening to every detail and tip that the teachers would pass on, taking notes, calculating and making corrections until she managed to reproduce an exact pattern. I had not previously considered the skill involved; however, as it turns out many precise and intricate measurements and calculations are required in making an outfit (even a simple one such as a skirt). Someone with poor arithmetic skills would perhaps be unsuccessful as a dressmaker. Pornpet, on the contrary, was greatly admired by her instructors in that they regarded her as being relatively “bright and sharp” (2002–2004: Vol.10) as well as very meticulous and tidy. She did use a neat style in keeping details organised with proper spacing, making it easy to follow. Each pattern had been drawn with sharp and clear lines exactly as was indicated in the rules. The thoroughness of the two different languages (graphic and text), orderly and consistent from one page to the next for a hundred pages, suggests to me how thorough Pornpet had been working at her studies. It is a piece of work that quite possibly had not only personal use but could be used to teach the next generation of dressmakers.

Gently putting her course notebook down, I recalled a question asked by my advisor: ‘*in becoming a writer, how did Pornpet then become a protester?*’ At the time I was unable to provide an adequate answer as to the connection. However, gradually I discovered the linkages in the jigsaw that seemed to bring together these two unparalleled acts.

In regards to her land, Pornpet knew that the land legally (as well as morally and spiritually) belonged to her family, despite the government’s efforts to formally usurp their legal right in 1968, twelve years after her parents had bought it directly from the previous owner in 1956. She and the other family members worked together to clear the land and turn it into a shady and successful farm. Like many other farmers, she could remember well which trees she had planted (as well as every anthill and watershed scattered throughout the farm). Additionally, according to an aerial photograph she managed to get from the Land Department, their farm was located well outside the area that was planned for conversion to public land (*Lalana*, op.cit.: 23–26). The bigger picture demonstrates that *the dispute between grassroots people and the government is actually a fight resisting the government’s abusive and corrosive power when they (mis)use ‘written’ laws combined with the ‘authority’ of maps legitimised by the science and technology of surveying and measuring land to rob people of their land-base*. Pornpet’s simple yet insightful archive, which reflects the process of learning how to make ‘patterns’ or map the latitude and longitude of the female shape, underscores this process as a ‘critical’ link in her

¹ Interview Chaowanee Tangsurat, Pornpet’s younger relative with whom she had stayed during her studies in Bangkok, January 19, 2010.

ability to read and resist the 'official' landscape map which brought profound conflict and suffering to villagers in that area. In this regard, I agree with Kaplan when she asserts "women have a history of reading and writing in the interstices of masculine culture, moving between use of the dominant language of form of expression and specific version of experience based on their marginality" (Kaplan, 1987: 187).

Basically, the official map is an *abstract* process of reducing and converting a three-dimensional land-base into a two-dimensional image, made 'official' when the government's logo is stamped along the top. As an experienced dressmaker, it seems that Pornpet would have equipped herself well with the ability to think *abstractly* as demonstrated by her proficient use of dressmaking methods and processes: that is, measuring three-dimensional bodies, translating the numbers into two-dimensional paper patterns, and then reversing the process by converting the two-dimensional pattern into a dress to fit a three-dimensional body. Therefore, it seems reasonable to assume that Pornpet had little difficulty in 'reading' and understanding maps regardless of their complexity as she had a solid background in 'reading' and making a 'body map' (or pattern). Therefore, we could further surmise that she would not be easily persuaded by government officials who attempted to convince her that their land was officially now 'public land' and that Pornpet's family had no right to it.

In summary, working through the substantive volumes of Pornpet's materials in the context of timelines, her dressmaking course notebook, simply but significantly, could be considered a major and 'must' read document for a number of reasons, literary, archival and biographical. Firstly and historically, her dressmaking course notebook is not only where we can find Pornpet's earliest handwriting, but also the piece which could be considered as the first milestone of her life-time work or the introductory piece to her writing culture, which was followed by many of other forms and contents (ie diary, petition and autobiography). Secondly, in terms of archives, the dressmaking course notebook produced by Pornpet herself played a crucial role in serving as a bridge between two distinctly separate groups of written documents kept by the Meuan Sri family. They are the 1934-1959 'classic' documents (ie the land tax receipts, death certificate etc) kept safe by Pornpet's parents and passed into her care years later, and the 1959-2004 'current' documents created (and/or kept) by the family's second generation. Thirdly and biographically, the dressmaking course notebook reflects a major 'transition' in its owner's life. Between the period of 'being just a farm girl', who was skillful in employing the hoe, shovel and sickle, and the latest period of 'becoming an effective protester', who could firmly hold a pen in her right hand and a loud speaker in her left hand, there was an 'interval' where, as a dressmaker, Pornpet's daily rhythm moved about with scissors and sewing machine. The big hardcover notebook stands as a witness to this critical transitional period. Therefore, any act attempting to 'biographise' Pornpet's life cannot take place accurately without taking her dressmaking course notebook into consideration. Additionally, however, in turning each page of her notebook, Pornpet's life story, in the context of Thailand in the 1960s, could be 'read' scattered throughout and between the lines along the way.

4.2 Pornpet's Customer Account Record: Reading Archives from Below

Pornpet's dressmaking course notebook has shed light on the transition period in her life and its linkage with her fight over land rights several years later. However, the question to which I could find no satisfactory answer until recently is regarding her customers. Who were they? Answering this question offers a challenging opportunity to demonstrate how Pornpet's customer account record functions as an 'archive from below' through the reading framework offered by scholars from interdisciplinary fields including Ulrich, Ellerby and Braham as well as Blunt, Rose and Wills.

4.2.1 Reading the Raw Facts from a 'Non-mainstream' Diary

After graduating, Pornpet opened a dressmaking/hairstyling shop in Nong Bua, which was nicknamed 'Siberia'² by the locals. It was a rural district where the majority of the population were farmers who wore oversized tops with big pockets for keeping cigarette packs and matches (for men) and seeds (for women). My question was who would need blouses with exquisitely designed sleeves, Filipino style sleeves, or tailored collars made by Pornpet?

In a 138-page, 4x6 inch notebook, the perfect size for the little drawer on the sewing machine, were the names of around 100 customers including *Kru* (teacher) Malinee, *Kru* Bunyong, *Kru* Noklek, *Pee* (older sister) Sid and *Pee* Nid, who appeared a 'frequent' 5 to 10 times within the 3-year period covering this document's life (1959 to 1962).³ This small notebook spoke humbly but vocally on the topic of fashion moods and trends in that remote district. Various styles of clothing were recorded, from the sophisticated to the common eg a doll-sleeve with a fluffy lace blouse, a blouse with a sailor-collar, a school uniform, brassieres and children's underwear.

Having read the customer account records several times, I have come to 'feel' that this record can function as a *non-mainstream* diary. The primary difference is that it does not flow chronologically, but is instead organised by client names. One client's record was regarded as one entry with details of one purchase with a paid or payable amount. Once the amount was paid, the record would be crossed out. Then Pornpet would write down a new entry for a new

² For more information regarding this nickname look at footnote 9 in chapter 1.

³ Usually Pornpet did not record dates. However, I was able to determine the time span within which the notebook was used to record transactions. First, I found a clue to an approximate start date of the notebook with an entry for *August 5, 1959 (the same year that Pornpet went to study dressmaking in Bangkok)* when a customer named Nid paid 137 baht for a skirt. Nid made a note dating it in her handwriting. Later, I found another date recorded by Pornpet: "*Pee Daun ... for the amount of 2,100 baht from the 5th month of the pig year [1959] with interest of 1,470 baht for a total of 3,570 baht up until the 6th month of the tiger year [1962]*". The evidence of these two entries brought me to conclude that this notebook was used (at least) within these three years.

customer. As for multi-purchase customers, the entry would often fill an entire page with details on dresses made, hairdos, and other purchases from the shop. With single purchase customers, only a few lines were used. Thus, one page could probably record as many as 5 to 6 entries. Such findings were confirmed by Paperno's study, which finds that the "...diary is not merely a genre, but a cultural artifact existing within a social cultural context." (in Beattie, op.cit.: 83).

Her critique helps me apprehend that it is valid to not only '*read beyond the boundary*' but also to realise that the diary comes in many different forms as well as approaching this in reverse; that is, that many forms (of writing) could also be considered as diary writing (for example, Pornpet's customer account records). However, to deal effectively with the 187(±) entries, Ulrich provides some observations. In her book, she explores Ballard's arduous work of attending 816 births in 27 years as well as her domestic life in Hallowell, Maine. Her style of meticulously 'combing' through and revisiting each of Ballard's entries is reinforced by her observation that "[Y]et it is the (...so unyielding in its...) very dailiness, the exhaustive, repetitious dailiness (...and its astonishing steadiness ...), that the real power of Martha Ballard's book lies" (ibid.: 9, 21, 31).

Inspired by Ulrich's critical approach not only of '*reading (in detail and) from below*' but also to write by considering "juxtaposing the raw diary and the interpretive essay... [in order to] ...remind readers of the complexity and subjectivity of historical reconstruction, to give them some sense of both the affinity and the distance between history and source" (1990: 34), I will approach Pornpet's raw material as follows:

Hia Jawh⁴ owes 9 baht, one pack of Kled Thong [a brand of cigarette], ... two packs of Prachan [another brand of cigarette], 2 shirts for 28 baht, ... borrowed 2 baht, bought 2 duck eggs, then 3 duck eggs, ... borrowed another 1 baht, ... (1)⁵.

Kru Malinee a piece of printed cloth for 8.75 baht, 1 bed-valance for 80 baht,... a bottle of shampoo,... total 159.75 baht (100 baht already paid), 1 yard border edging for a bed cover for 7 baht, a grey skirt for 38 baht, ... a piece of table cloth for 70 baht, ... 3 children's blouses for 45 baht, ... an elderly woman's brassiere for 7 baht, ... (3).

Uncle Reaung water delivery man ... 2.50 baht (6).

Pee Thongkham⁶ total 522.50 baht, 1 skirt for 10 baht, ... 1 wick for 1.50 baht ... (7).

Uncle Chan ...1 pack Kled Thong, 1 pack from **Roj** [Pornpet's brother], ... sent Nuay to get 2 packs from **my mother**, bought 1 pack from **Lek** [Pornpet's sister],... (31, bold mine).

Uncle Dum owes 6 baht for his paddy field working shirt (57).

Chormalee chemical hair perm for 15 baht, her sister got hot perm for 10 baht ... (64).

⁴ Pornpet wrote each customer's name at the centre of the page in either quotation marks or single or double underline. I, however, changed the format above to suit the format of A4 paper by shifting the name to the left and italicising.

⁵ Additionally, as there are no pre-printed page numbers, in order to refer to specific entries I added page numbers 1 to 138 in parentheses at the end of each quoted entry.

⁶ She was a resident of the district of Nong Bua (not to be confused with Thongkham Ketdecha, who was Pornpet's first dressmaking teacher).

Each page of Pornpet's customer account notebook is also filled with a variety of grocery items eg cucumbers, duck eggs and cigarettes. What did not surprise me, though, were the repetitions and many little details. She had noted every single item, even a single needle, blade, bracelet, and a single bobbin of thread. This is much like what Ulrich had pointed out: "the *trivia* that so annoyed earlier readers⁷ provided a consistent, daily record of the operation of a *female-managed economy*" (op.cit.: 33, italics mine). This will be elaborated upon in the following section.

4.2.2 A Female Managed Economy

Pornpet's shop not only functioned as a 'place to buy customised dresses' but also played many roles in that particular moment of local history eg a *community convenience store* which stocked and sold a variety of daily consumer items such as shampoo, cigarettes, cucumbers, duck eggs and rice. Cigarettes must have been supplied by the tobacco companies' local agents. Rice, cucumbers and duck eggs seemed to have been produced in-house. Basically, a daughter's dressmaking shop also operated as an outlet for her father's farm produce. Moreover, there was no need to hire any shop assistants since every family member took turns to serve the customers (particularly when Pornpet left to buy more supplies from Bangkok. Pornpet herself worked three roles: as an owner, a manager and an accountant, the latter requiring her to be both bookkeeper and debt collector).⁸

In order to accommodate the needs of the customers, the daily account was manually transacted under three different and flexible financial plans. These were cash, credit and money lending (or banking with no interest). For example, Sangvien, who owed in total 58 baht, "sent her child to pay 20 baht, with 38 baht remaining as debt" (95). Moreover, Pornpet's shop was not any different from today's convenience store where many now provide ATM service. At that time when ATM's did not exist, Pornpet's customers would often borrow petty cash from her. Therefore, notes such as "... 1.50 baht borrowed, another 10 baht borrowed ... 5 more baht borrowed (1)", would then be stated throughout her notebook. The borrowers repaid at their convenience *without any interest*. It was a kind of trustful financial relationship in a small community; the shop primarily served local needs (before regional, national and global business interests began to 'swallow' it to serve their own interests). The only time interest was charged

⁷ However, in the case of Pornpet's (unconventional) diary, the difference from Ballard's diary is that the former has not been read by any readers until now.

⁸ Handwriting other than Pornpet's was discovered in the customer account records. However, this appears to be almost entirely a result of a customer (ie Pee Nid) writing a few words under some of her accounts. There is no evidence that other family members had made entries into the customer account record, even while Pornpet was away buying supplies in Bangkok, as it appears that almost the entire notebook is in Pornpet's handwriting and there is no evidence of handwriting by either her mother, eldest sister or two younger brothers.

was when she lent money to Pee Daun: "... for the amount of 2,100 baht from the 5th month of the year of the pig [1959] with interest at 1,470 baht. Altogether the total is 3,570 baht as of the 6th month of the year of the tiger [1962] (45)." However, it seemed to be a lending practice among acquaintances rather than official business as it was the only entry showing interest within the three-year period covered by this notebook.

4.2.3 Women's Space: Beyond the Public/Private Dichotomy

The (classical) concept of the private and the public dichotomy, which according to Carole Pateman, "... is central to almost two centuries of feminist struggle; it is, ultimately, what the feminist movement is about" (1989: 118), is challenged by Blunt and Rose on its (traditional) assumption of 'whiteness' (as well as 'Western'-ness), as they elaborate:

...the geography of public/private division should be seen as mostly relevant to white, middle-class feminism. Attempts to universalize its neat distinction between two spaces and two genders erase its implicit race and class specificities. This development is clearly one consequence of the much wider critique made by black feminisms during the 1980s of the universalizing tendencies of white feminisms (op.cit.: 3-4).

While Patemen argues that the dichotomy between public and private fall along gender lines (ie women associated with the private sphere of home life and men with the public sphere of work and politics), Blunt and Rose assert that race and class are also significantly affected by this dichotomy as well (ie rather than there being a clear-cut separation there is instead interconnection and overlap between those two areas). In other words, despite the above critique regarding the process of interaction (and communication) between public and private, we discover a new space of 'in-betweeness' which has been created where the lower classes are associated with the private sphere of home life and whites and middle/ upper classes with the public sphere of work and politics. What I would like to advance is that white feminism's universalising concept of gender and space, as well as the exclusion of class from public space, reveals its own problems and limits, once it is applied to reading Pornpet's customer account records. This is essentially because class issues are not taken into consideration. According to Blunt and McEwan, there is an emerging debate in Postcolonial Geography which attempts to address "... the ongoing struggle over geography as both discourse and discipline and investigates the intersection of place, politics and identity in colonial and postcolonial contexts" (op.cit.: 1) with the multifaceted '*task*' of "...['recovering'] the 'hidden spaces' beyond the West while, at the same time, destabilising notions of 'West' and its centrality to the exercise of power and the production of knowledge" (Blunt and Wills, op.cit.: 168).

Utilising this perspective to look at Pornpet's shop, the 'hidden space' here reveals the concept and practice of public and private space as not something separated but integrated and imbricated in four different ways. They include the functions of the dressmaking shop as *home office*, *beauty centre* and *social club*. However, no matter how many functions Pornpet's shop

played, the first and foremost was as a special space ‘for, of and by’ women. Practically and professionally however, its services reached far beyond women to include other family and community members.

4.2.3.1 Home Office

Pornpet, like many of the other approximately 10,000 dressmakers⁹ in Thailand during that period, transformed her private house into a professional ‘home office’. (For married dressmakers, their home offices were often also ‘child care centres’ where their own and their customers’ children could play, under the sewing machines or outside in the courtyard where the mothers could easily keep an eye on them). Dressmakers made clothes for family members and their customers before the arrival of industrial ready-made wear when the government launched a campaign to phase out traditional costumes and adopt Western-style clothing (especially trousers and skirts). As Pornpet recalled

... 1957 was a transitional time. There were many changes taking place ... for senior people ... from wearing sarongs to trousers, from *sabengmarn* (a piece of long cloth wrapping the upper body) to brassiere. In 1958, Aroon Wilairat, the district chief, made an announcement that women were not allowed to wear only brassiere (in public). Since then, women had to also wear blouses ... (2002-2004: Vol. 10).

Because of the official and unofficial enforcement of the government policy (as well as many other reasons) customers from all walks of life, age, gender, occupation and economic status eg civil servant, vendor and technician (*Chang* in Thai), increasingly patronised her shop. For example, Chang San came with his wife to have shirts cut for each of them (22). Uncle Yong ordered a pair of Chinese style pants (22). Uncle Dum needed a big shirt for working in the fields (57). Kru Malinee stopped by to pick up her two new skirts, a child’s skirt and a blouse for an elderly person (3). On one trip to Pornpet’s shop, she bought clothes for each of three generations in her family: her daughter, herself and her mother.

4.2.3.2 Beauty Centre

However, overall the principle function of this space is as a ‘beauty centre’¹⁰ or a compact fashion mall with a dress and clothing store, hairdressing shop and other beauty-related

⁹ As the exact number of women who earned their living as dressmakers is unknown, I instead relied on the Department of Customs’ Monthly Reports of The Imports and Exports of Thailand (1956 - 1966). Within five years (1956-1960), the number of imported sewing machines was 168,635 which gives an approximate ratio of 1:155 sewing machines to people. (The population of Thailand was 17, 442, 689 in 1947 and 26, 257, 916 in 1960 (Wilson 1983: 30)).

¹⁰ As usual, it seems that this little notebook has brought me (and any interested academic) to a whole new area in gender and postcolonial geography, requiring further work to explore the geography and

activities, including home decorations for sale. Fifty years ago, there were not many dressmakers in Nakorn Sawan Province who had graduated from a dressmaking school in Bangkok. Particularly, in a remote area like Nong Bua District, Pornpet might have been the only dressmaker who had had the opportunity to receive an advanced knowledge of dressmaking and graduate from the capital city. Moreover, Pornpet's relatives (who she stayed with during her schooling and afterwards would often visit) lived in a strategic location which (during that period) was considered the 'heart of Bangkok'. It was located in the midst of the two largest shopping areas and clothing markets in the city, *Pahurat* and *Banglumpoo*. Therefore Pornpet's shop was a critical link between the capital's 'modern' mood and the slower moving rural area.

At her shop, a wide variety of cloths such as linen, voile, cashmere and orlon, were available for customers to have their clothing made in whatever trendy fashion they desired: for example, Samreung's sailor collar blouse, Payorm's lacy doll-sleeved blouse, Nit's three-quarter sleeved blouse, Malinee's three-layer skirt and Ampawan's eight-piece skirt. Additionally, dressmaking accessories such as lace, threads, zippers, buttons and border edgings were also available to supply other local dressmakers. On September 11 it was recorded that Boonyong stopped by to not only have a blouse made but to buy "... 3 pieces of cloth at 5 baht each or 15 baht, 1 bobbin of sewing machine thread for 3 baht, 1 sewing machine needle for 1 baht ..." (39). In regard to Boonlert, I assume that she must have been another dressmaker in that area as she regularly bought a variety of clothes such as "... orlon for 11 baht (paid 7 baht), a bobbin of white thread, 1½ yards of white-striped voile for 12 baht, 2½ yards of white plaid orlon-voile for 20 baht, a perm for 20 baht, 1 yard white linen for 7 baht, 1 yard of high quality lace for 3 baht ..." (90). Finally, for accessories fan club pearl necklace and bangles at affordable prices were on display.

Various types of costume were made to order at Pornpet's shop. However, there was one item which I couldn't find on any of the pages in her notebook. It was a pair of pants¹¹ which even Pornpet herself never had a chance to wear as she recalled:

... in 1963, [I] was 25 years old. [Although I] was a grown up, [my] parents still did not allow [me] to wear pants. Desperately want to wear it, [I] put them in a bag out of [my] mother's sight and [I] made an appointment with [my] friend to go to the photo shop. After taking the photo, [I] changed back into [my] sarong. [I] was deeply impressed with the photo print which created the impression that [I] was an active and trendy person. Taking the photo gave [me] a chance to feel a different character from what [I] performed in [my] routine daily life (2002–2004: Vol. 10).

history of 'beauty centers' (dressmaking shops, hairdressing salons, etc.) in Thailand in terms of philosophy and practice in 'constituting' modern Thai women according to a 'modern' (read - western) aesthetic (or standard of beauty), reinforcing women's role as desired object for men as well as providing space for women to empower themselves and to discover pleasure in their own way.

¹¹There was only one by Uncle Yong, who ordered "a pair of 'Chinese' style pants" (22) which means a kind of a loose and comfortable outfit worn by the working class. I could not find any ordered by her female customers.

Pornpet's comments could be interpreted in three different ways in terms of the (politics of) clothing and cosmopolitanism as well as clothing and class and gender. Firstly, between (the Western world's fashion industries and) Bangkok and the far provinces, Pornpet's 'beauty centre' could be 'read' as a place where urban-centrism penetrates and imposes its sensibilities onto (its satellites or) the rural areas while, inversely, her shop reflected the liveliness of the local response and adjustment to the cosmopolitan culture. In 1962, Pornpet, an agent of change and the town's key fashion consultant, might have been influenced through one (or many) of her trips to Bangkok by the idea that women's pants were 'newly hip'. As a young and creative dressmaker, Pornpet really wanted to jump on the wagon, join the trend and "wear pants". However, as her parents, like other parents in many (patriarchal) cultures around the world at that moment (or even now), maintained the belief and practice that 'decent' women should dress up properly and above all 'gender accordingly'; thus having a daughter wearing pants (ie male clothing) was prohibited in their family.¹² Pornpet strategically turned the table by not confronting them but clandestinely constructed her own chic and modern world by having herself photographed at the photo shop for her own pleasure. I couldn't help presuming that other families might share similar attitudes; therefore, (almost) none of her female customers ordered pants, just different styles of skirts eg a three-layered skirt for Kru Malinee and an eight-piece skirt for Ampawan. That skirts were strongly favoured went beyond a politics of gender, also involving one of class. Reading through Pornpet's customers' account records, in the context of clothing in that small town, within one gender, (at least) two 'classes' are found: the 'skirt' and 'sarong' class. The skirt appears to be the style of dress most favoured by 'middle class' women, working in the offices (in particular local schools and district offices), where skirts were legally and culturally required to be worn (as a part of their duty) in their workplaces. The sarong was the style of dress most favoured by the 'lower class' eg farmers and vendors in the market, who (economically and) practically continued wearing their (traditional) sarong and came to have their blouses (and their children's clothing) cut at Pornpet's shop. The relation between class and (Western) modern fashion is reflected in the clothing (and hair styles) chosen (with the lower classes continuing the more traditional style of dress and the middle classes, the more modern, Western styles).

Pornpet's account records reveal that, like in many other dressmakers' places, her dressmaking shop also provided hairdressing. Generally, the cost of a haircut for children and adults was between 7 and 10 baht. Regarding hair perms, surprisingly, I found the hidden history of hairdressing under the customer name 'Chormalee'. Pornpet wrote "*chemical perm for 15*

¹² Traditionally (and in summary), both Thai men and women wore 'loincloths' except in the north and northeast where women wore 'sarongs' (or 'pa sin'). Dressing up according to Western style and gender ie men wearing trousers and women skirts, was enforced and implemented by the nationalist government in the 1940s. To be able to break the gender rule of clothing and put on pants (as men do) in the 1960s seems to have been the revolutionary step of female clothing for many women. Pornpet's autobiography provides us not only with the 'text' but a 'feel' for the time when pants were introduced to Thai culture as well as the resistance to pants which is difficult to find in the dominant archives.

*baht, her sister received a **heat perm** for 10 baht*” (64, bold mine). It seems that in order to acquire long lasting waves, curls or other hair shaping, the hair is treated with either chemicals or heat depending upon the customers’ taste and economic status. Moreover, customers can set it themselves at home with a bottle of hair cream setting for 10 baht (as well as 6 hairpins for 2 baht and 1 shampoo bottle for 6 baht). Once the wave starts losing its shape, to get a ‘re-perm’ would cost 10 baht and a bottle of hair dye solution for grey hair was 5 baht. In conclusion, anyone who walked into Pornpet’s beauty shop would often walk out “looking pretty from head to toe” as they would quite likely have had their hair permed and perhaps left wearing a new pair of shoes or sandals for 5 to 10 baht (sandals) or more ie “*Pee Bunyong ... a pair of shoes - 35 baht paid*” (39).

Besides dressmaking and hairdressing services, Pornpet’s shop also offered a variety of home decorating items made from cloth such as table cloths, bed cover sheets, bed valances, window and door ‘café curtains’ as well as pillows and blankets for ‘dressing up’ homes to be pleasant places to live. In her own words forty years later, Pornpet reflected about the success of her beauty salon:

... [It] was very popular among the customers as they liked [my] skillful trendy hairdressing styles which fit perfectly to each of them. Moreover they relied on [my] creative designing ability and advice for [their] outfits. Most of the customers were civil servants and teachers ... (2002–2004: Vol. 10).

4.2.3.3 An Informal Social Gathering Place

There is a personal and political ‘spatial’ function of beauty salons as an informal social gathering place for local women. At this place, while having or waiting to get their hair done, customers would regularly talk to Pornpet and to each other, feeling relaxed and connected within their ‘women’s circle’. This could have a positive effect on both individuals and the communities as a whole, as hairdressing shops were places where issues were discussed and a kind of ‘healing’, through a horizontal therapeutic process, could take place. Stories, such as day-to-day socio-economic problems or sensationalised local sex scandals, were often brought up¹³ as recalled by Pornpet:

¹³Hairdressing salons and barber shops appear to be important social gathering places for men and women in small towns in many different cultural settings. For example, the popular TV sitcom from the USA in the 1960s, *The Andy Griffith Show*, would regularly have scenes at the local barbershop in the fictional town of Mayberry where the local townsmen “... would gather there not only to get their hair cut, but to play checkers, ... or... to ‘shoot the breeze’ and ‘carry on’”.(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Floyd_Lawson , retrieved August 3, 2012).

They [the customers] all liked [me] because [I] was a good listener who always paid attention to [their] talk and never interrupted them. Once there was gossip and angry criticism about a school teacher who was having an illicit affair with a man and [they] later ended up living together without properly getting married. The next day the school headmaster's wife showed up to have [her] hair done. As there were only the two of us, [we both] discussed the public judgment on this issue. We [I] honestly shared [our/my] opinion that 'I felt pity for her.' Since then, the teacher who was blamed for the affair would often show [her] appreciation to us [me] ..." (2002–2004: Vol. 10).

A teacher's private affair was publicly discussed in the salon. Pornpet later deduced that the teacher involved had been made aware of the conversation, as she always showed gratitude to Pornpet thereafter. In summary, a small dressmaking shop, which also operated as a *home office*, *beauty centre* and *social club*, demonstrates that the public and private realms are not separated but integrated spatially and socially.

4.2.4 Reading (History) from Below: Reading the 'Un-conventional Archives' to Reveal the 'Un-represented' in the Dominant Archives

There are many stories about Nong Bua, a three year-old newly established administrative district in 1956 (but a 200 year-old settlement), to be read in depth and breadth as Pornpet's small-sized notebook offers a variety of information on the town's transportation, infrastructure, its villagers' *occupations* as well as faces and *names* to be remembered and recalled. For example, regarding occupation, most of Pornpet's frequent customers worked in the public sector, particularly teachers (and teachers' wives). Liam, a police officer at the time, would make a short walk from his station to buy cigarettes (12), while Liam's wife, Yuu, "[credited a blouse for] ... 15 baht ..." (16). Pee Sid [land department staff], after finishing a long day at work, would stop by to "... get her hair permed for 25 baht..." (16). A daughter of the district office clerk made a long list of blouses, brassieres etc bought on credit for "... 25 baht ..." (35).

On the other hand, vendors, such as the Chinese pork vendor, or butcher, [asked Hia Jawh to buy him] "... 2 packs of Kled Thong..." (30). A Chinese vegetable vendor (and grandfather) "... owes 100 baht..." (130). Auntie Chun, a bean curd vendor, might often be very busy with her customers at the fresh or daily market. As she herself couldn't make it, her daughter was asked to pick "... a child's round collar blouse for 6 baht ..." (35). Uncle Dum must be a farmer as the record indicates that he had made a visit just to get his paddy field working shirt done. Uncle Rarn, a furniture maker, stopped by "... to get his first payment for a wooden cupboard for 70 baht ..." (131). San was a technician [Chang]; however, his area of expertise or field of work was not identified. What I could touch upon was his 'sweet' character as a family man who (often) came to the dressmaking shop together with his wife. He had his shirt made for 26 baht and "a blouse for Chang San's wife for 4 baht ..." (11). Pornpet owed

Uncle Rueang, a water delivery man, "... 2.50 baht ..." (6), a "... previous 28 loads for 34 baht" (88) and sold "... a **wick** for 1.50 baht ..." to Pee Thongkam (7, bold mine). This otherwise mundane information informs me about the early period of the district's public utilities prior to the availability of running water and electricity. Finally, in terms of transportation, carts still played a major role (before the introduction of motorised trucks to this area). As Pornpet had recorded, she "... paid 15 baht for wood carried by cart ..." (135). The cart man's name was grandpa See or Ta See in Thai.

What is revealed by these trivial details (ie villagers' class, occupations and names, as well as their dress styles and miscellaneous), not only tells us much about Pornpet and the villagers' lives but also about the village's dynamic. Moreover, it can also be critically linked to my research question, "can the subaltern write?" which Pornpet is able to affirm through what she is able to reveal about herself and rural life in her village during this period of time. Significantly, what is unique about what she wrote is that these intimate disclosures are not found within the official dominant archives. In this regard, and on the contrary, when turning the pages of the 'official' documents, what we discover is something more abstract and much less intimate: "... Nong Bua was administratively established as a pre-district to Chum Saeng. Its status was upgraded to be a [full] district [of Nakorn Sawan] on June 6, 1956..." (Royal Institute, 1983: 1704). However, even regarding this apparent official 'fact', we are told another and decidedly more complete (but unofficial) version which was offered by the local monks:

[I]n 1949, the pre-district administrative body did not have an office building. Wat [temple] Nong Klub was used as their office space and the civil servants stayed in the monks' 'cell' [cottage or hut residence for monks]. The newly-built district office was completed in 1956, and soon after [they] moved out [of the Wat] ... (Wat Nong Klub).

The character of Pornpet's customers account notebook is quite similar to Martha's diary where Ulrich elaborates that it shows [us] "... how women and men worked together to sustain ... [their] ... town" (1990: 34). Moreover, it helps fill in the missing pieces of local history. Nong Bua in Pornpet's notebook is a lively town with faces and the voices of people. Their interaction, movement and changes can be 'touched' upon and 'felt' by anyone reading Pornpet's customer account records.

As I had begun this section with 'names', this might also be the place to end with names. A few months ago, I contemplated a long while before reaching a very simple conclusion that if the most significant part of this archival record is the customer names found on each page then this would be the embarkation! By listing names from 1 to 100, roughly, I observed two different groups of names (as well as ages). First, the senior villagers always had one-syllable traditional Thai names eg See, Nid, Muang, Liam and Chun. The younger generation had longer names that originated in Pali-Sanskrit language eg Ampawan, Montienthip, Malinee and Saowanee, which also distinctly reflected the owner's gender. Such changes were rooted in and resulted from the government's 'nationalism' campaign in the 1940s, with emphasis on 'gender roles', one of its

major policies, and its implementation, especially on issues of duty and costume, as well as proper names (Suwadee, op.cit.: 97-8). Men's 'hard-core' duty to serve their country as soldiers (police, civil officers etc) was stressed, while the women's role as the 'mothers of the nation' whose contribution of quantitatively and qualitatively (re-)producing new generations, was highly promoted and valued. Wearing traditional clothing was legally and socially prohibited. Trousers were assigned to men and skirts for women. In particular, it was mandated that government staff were to wear their respective clothes properly in their workplace, otherwise they would be disciplined. Additionally, in terms of naming, the most significant aspect of one's identity must be given properly and gendered accordingly. One-syllable traditional names such as 'Muang', 'Liam' and 'Chun' would be discouraged as these names were (mostly) 'unisexual' or 'non-gendered' names which refer to either women or men. The more complexly structured names, derived from Pali-Sanskrit languages, emerged to serve the new social (and political) requirements. In both of these two ancient Indian languages there are many terms with similar meanings such as 'mighty, victory, power, wisdom and wealthy' for male names (eg Aroon means 'sun' and Jaroen means 'progress'), while for female names we get terms such as 'beauty, flower, jewel, tenderness and sweetness' (eg Malinee refers to a woman decorated with flowers and Saowanee means the Queen's order), respectively.

Regarding the issue of names, Ulrich proposes that "... [O]pen[ing] a diary for the first time is like walking into a room full of strangers. The reader is advised to enjoy the company without trying to remember every name" (op.cit.: 35). I have rarely attempted to remember names of people I meet for the first time. However, having immersed myself in this little notebook for many months, I began to feel acquainted with all the names contained therein and couldn't help imagining that I might have walked past Chormalee, Boonlert and Boonyong etc at the temple or at the crossroads without being able to recognise any of them. At Nong Bua market, where I really enjoyed walking around scrutinising the many different kinds of indigenous fish and vegetables, which are rarely found in Bangkok, I could not help but think that Auntie Chun's daughter might be in some corner of the market, having perhaps inherited her mother's bean curd business to serve their faithful customers. How about Uncle Charn who had bought the 11 packs of cigarettes in a single day? Had he been affected by the government's anti-smoking campaign launched in the 1980s? There is the 'movement' of a hundred lives in Pornpet's notebook. In return, in the near future, I wish I could bring this notebook to have its 'movement' back in these people's lives.

4.2.5 Reading Like a Women and Reading the Linkages: Why Is There Only One Customers Account Record?

It is time to answer the question regarding "what is the connection between her customer account notebook and her becoming a protester?" After the initial stage of deriving a list of 100 customer names, I then categorised the various styles of clothing ordered, made and their quantity. Later, I grouped these items along with their prices. Most items were noted along with

their specific price, except for cigarettes! At that moment, I did not have any idea regarding the link between her protesting and the cigarette sales commission (which was probably about 10 to 20 satang per pack). Cigarettes are cigarettes. Protests are protests. They are different in time, category and context. Five months have gone by and I gently close the notebook and suddenly realise that there is a critical link between this account record and her protesting. From the incremental accumulation of cigarette sales commission, pack by pack, from each 0.60 baht duck egg, from each dress, skirt and other clothing sewed and sold, was to be included in the total family income for daily expenses, her brothers' tuition fee, her father's farm tools and, of course, family and personal savings.

When Pornpet had to stop sewing so that she could travel to Bangkok in order to follow up on her land case, all of her savings, which should have been kept as a pension for her and her family members' retirement, was used to pay for her fight. The more I discover what the facts were, the more I could feel deep down in my heart as to the incalculable cost of her attempts to address the 'injustice' brought down on her. What is worse is it is a price that is borne by only one side --- those who had been damaged. The officers who knew how to (legally) violate the rules had never had to pay any price for the damages they created and could walk away without taking any responsibility. Instead they were able to maintain their secure government jobs, were regularly promoted, and continued to receive their monthly salary as well as a pension after their retirement (with free medical care) for the rest of their lives. Pornpet, a grassroots woman who had no position of authority and had never held a bureaucratic job, not only lost her land but had to pay dearly in terms of time, energy and money in her attempt to find justice. In addition, not only was Pornpet dispossessed of her wages but she had also completely lost her occupation which was her source of income generation. *This is quite likely the reason why there was only one customer account notebook.*

As mentioned earlier, the accounts notebook was being used for at least three years until (June) 1962. It was about a year later, on August 6, 1963, that a major crisis visited Pornpet's family when her father, Pim, was unjustly arrested while on his farm. She then had to put down her needle, thread and scissors and take a train to pay him a visit at the Nakorn Sawan's provincial prison as well as to travel to Bangkok to seek advice from lawyers. In such a moment, how could she have found the time for quiet concentration to draw patterns for the clothes she made for her customers? It seems she gradually withdrew from making dresses and teaching students, although she did continue to earn money as a hairdresser as this was less time consuming and required less concentration and effort (as completing a hairstyle probably required no more than half to one hour). However, what can be presumed is that Pornpet's occupation as a dressmaker or hairstylist after 1977 when her mother passed away was practically non-existent. Afterwards, Pornpet would come to Bangkok to hand her petitions to the Prime Minister at which time she became a full time protester.

There was an unequal balance of power between the land officer and Pornpet, a grassroots woman. The land officer was the representative of a large bureaucratic system equipped with official legal authority, while Pornpet, a mere commoner, did not have legal

authority. Once she chose ‘to rock the boat’, it cost her job and social status. What she had left was her own life, as she responded to the land officer in Bangkok who verbally harassed her: “... *you [civil servants] use your knowledge but I use my life ...*” (diary 1993). Flipping to any page, one will see the same repetition of numbers: 50 satang, 1 baht, 1 and 1 baht, 50 satang ... and a repetitive list of items: sewing machine needles, duck eggs, skirts, shampoo, sandals and cigarettes. In this regard, her customer account notebook is the major witness document of the rise and fall of Pornpet’s (and her family’s) financial history (during 1959-1962), which informs us not only of the movement of transactions of a dressmaking shop but also tells a story of injustice (by its absence) as experienced by a farmer’s family who were never compensated for their loss and torment. Additionally, it provided her a practical space to daily practice her writing skill, a skill she would need to later ‘write herself anew’ as someone re-inventing herself as a ‘resisting subjectivity’. As she had emphasised in her diary and later in her autobiography, she had consciously committed herself to a lifetime determination: “... *if the issue of justice is neglected, what will be left in this world? I don’t care whether I am dead or alive. I will fight for justice!*” (2002-2004: No. 9).

We might assume that considering the burden of working full time as a dressmaker (keeping to deadlines for making dresses etc) and having committed oneself to the demands of protesting the injustice visited upon her family, very few, if any, would be able to juggle the demands of both occupations. Having chosen the latter in order to fight for justice forced Pornpet to earn some money by selling off small pieces of her parents’ land that they still had in their possession, remortgaging her ‘two in one’ house and beauty salon and selling the household items for quick cash in an emergency. “[T]here is almost nothing left in this house; [we] sold it all”¹⁴ expresses the fact that their financial situation was critical.

In my reading journey, theoretical debates elaborated by feminist literary critics were employed. Ellerby straightforwardly asserts that “[R]ather than assuming the guise of the rational male critical reader that I had learned to don when reading as a scholar, I allowed myself to read like a woman --- emotionally, intuitively, and lovingly” (op.cit.: xv). Her solid theoretical position is inspired by Culler (1982: 63), who proposes that “[A] reader, who is reading as a woman, asserts the continuity between women’s experience of social and familial structures. Experience --- her own and others’ --- is set in a vital and productive relation to the text and becomes a firm ground for interpretation” (in Ellerby, op.cit.). In this regard, Culler has argued that to read like a woman is not essentialising but a radical act of textual interpretation based on one’s own experiences in connecting with others and with the social structure. Additionally, Braham suggests that there is no other magical lens in reading except a “lens of empathy”. As she concludes “...the essential transaction between reader and author is not in simply grasping the alternative script the author extends, but in using it as a ‘lens of empathy’ ... a window flooding our own lives with light” (op.cit.: 71).

¹⁴ As told by Arpa, Pornpet’s eldest sister, when she was interviewed by a reporter from *Lalana*, a leading women's magazine, in September 1988 (1988: 26).

What does reading as a woman in an empathetic way mean to me and how do I do that while reading Pornpet's archives? Such questions encouraged me to retrospectively trace my life path as a reader that might not be much different from other scholars. That is, I grew up reading textbooks for school, reading fiction and non-fiction for pleasure and reading archives for research. However, this was the first time that I had come across and had to seriously read a dressmaker's customer account notebook (and related documents). The more I read, the more I felt that if I wanted to read any text that was woven from one's flesh and blood, reading theories from many different schools of thought are invaluable tools but it would never be enough. If I wanted to read any 'life writing' text fluently, there are no shortcuts; I must 'read it with my life' as well.

Critically, 'life reading' should not mean that in order to be able to access or understand such writing, the reader needs to have his or her own direct experience (the same) as the writer had gone through eg having been raped or humiliated. Additionally, it should not be interpreted that such writing scarified from one's flesh and blood deserves only praise, that is, without criticism. The creative and effective way in getting access to life writing should be done through the process of questioning, critiquing and discovering it through the reader's life.

In practice one does not arrive overnight at the right approach. After a long trail of trial and error, I found that 'dialoguing' is the key. As a reader, I have to dialogue with myself (to question my assumptions, to critically question my 'positionality' etc) in parallel with a passionate attentiveness to what Pornpet had to communicate in order to make the connection between her stories and my background and begin the process of 'displacing' myself from the uncritical writings and reading system which ignores the value of life and pays little respect to finding new ways to open up new horizons of knowledge. For instance, once wearing a woman's empathetic lens to read, the customer account record is no longer physical pages full of numerical credit and debit transactions but a record of dedicated, detailed, time and energy consuming work by a young dressmaker who made an effort daily to earn income for her family. Additionally, moving further to explore 'between and behind the lines', I found that their tragic loss could be touched and felt throughout Pornpet's customer account records. For example, we can find no more customer names and debit and credit records after 1963, the year that her family was violated by the abuses of the land district officer and his party.

After the customer account record, there are apparently different styles of archives in her collection but no major piece written by Pornpet was found until 1965. This was when she began writing her first diary, another challenging 'life reading' piece that will be elaborated upon in the next chapter.

5. Becoming a Protester

The crisis of race, class or gender discrimination and objectification that is often experienced in one's life, may result, at different degrees and levels, in both (emotional and psychological) damage and experiential knowledge that can be learned, remembered and applied. In Pornpet's case, the process of learning, de-objectifying and 'becoming' a protester is rooted in her toil of inscribing, particularly, her 1965 diary, which is a vital link to her 1968 petition. To critically assess her work, the (decolonising) approach of Irigaray's 'reading *with*', Spivak's 'reading the *loss*' and Trinh's 'reading the *in-between*' is utilised in dialogue with Pornpet's 1965 diary (and other related documents).

5.1 The 1965 Diary: Displacement, Dialogue and Decolonising (or Bureaucracy, Buddhism and Becoming)

"Why did Pornpet write her diary? Who was her intended audience?" Realising that "[W]omen's diaries have been a rich source of information for historians and other scholars because they contain details of everyday life in different times and places that may otherwise have gone underrecorded," Heather Beattie, a Canadian archivist, offers a straightforward critique of the 'traditional' approach of narrow-based archival description and formation and calls for radicalising archival work through a 'postmodern' approach, which places its focus on examining "... the diarist's motivation for writing, the intended audience, the implication of the diary's custodian history, and the role of the archivist in the diary's representation ..." (2009: 83). Her proposal inspired me to learn more about the provenance of Pornpet's diaries and related issues which is discussed in the sections below:

5.1.1 "August 6, 1963': *Our Family Was Almost Broken into Pieces*": *Reading the Civil Service*

Pornpet's 1965 diary is not only the first but the most complete diary in which she regularly inscribed details of various topics as well as her feelings, thoughts and reflections. During the first eleven days of January, she consistently penned everyday issues such as the family's financial situation, New Year's gift preparations, and New Year's cards received from her mentors and friends. Then, the frequency of her writing abruptly changes from daily entries to a pattern where they are inscribed every other day or twice a week. On January 11 and 25, February 2, March 18 and April 5 in particular, Pornpet recalls and documents her family's 'monsoon' (= trouble) that took place in 1963-4. Therefore, the 1965 diary inscribes events that

occurred not only in 1965 and part of 1966, but also recalls past events from 1963 and 1964, at least in regards to the crisis.

January 11, 1965

*What happened in the past that we [I] can still remember is that on **August 6, 1963**, the date which our family was hit by a **bad karma** caused by the Nong Bua district officers. They had falsely accused [us] of cutting down trees without getting their permission.¹ Our family was almost broken into tiny pieces in the monsoon because of **unjust [exercise of] power**. What helped in saving [us] might be the power of **Dharma**. As far as we [I] have observed, the district officers in every department always show their aversion towards us. One time the district chief carried his gun in order to show his authority over us.... And around June 2507 [1964], [we] saw the head of the district police show his great malice towards us....*

*All of these incidents were carried out by an animal disguised in the shape of a human being because he always throws false accusations [against us]. As far as I am concerned, the **land officer** is the instigator who tries to destroy our [family's] future (bold mine).*

Firstly and personally, what immediately struck me was discovering that a rural woman could have such a high degree of writing competency, almost comparable to that of an experienced journalist. The '5 Wh' of *who, what, when, where, why* and *how* are completely and clearly covered. Particularly, the way she wrote about 'our family' reminds me of what has been discussed among Third World feminists on the notion of 'body', which refers not only to a woman's (individual) body but also her (collective) social/family body. Metaphorically speaking, there is a social/family body in her 'woman's' body and vice versa. Pornpet had grown up and became more and more the 'hub' of her family, economically, socially and spiritually (ie earning the family income, taking care of elderly parents and raising her three younger brothers). Arpa (or Lek---her nickname), the eldest sister, looked after the 'inside' or 'domestic' household chores (eg groceries shopping, cooking, cleaning and doing dishes). Pornpet (or Nid---her nickname) worked as a dressmaker and took care of the 'outside' or 'public' business (eg going to the post office, paying taxes and enrolling their brothers in school). Although the discrimination directly targeted Pornpet's father, Pim Meuansri, by having him arrested and jailed, it had in fact affected everyone.

I couldn't help wonder as to whether her 'family body' had a link with the way she utilised the pronoun 'we' throughout her diary. Casually in speech many Thais, whether male or

¹ As mentioned earlier by Rai "... [T]he state is also largely unchecked ... in the scale of violence it operates against the people" (op.cit.: 35). This is largely true in the case of Thailand. The state officers (both military and civil) have abundant power over the grassroots/rural people. They are often harassed and intimidated through arbitrary arrest by the police officers on trumped-up charges (eg no ID cards, possession of or taking drugs, cutting down trees without permission).

female, would refer to themselves using the pronoun ‘we’ or ‘*rao*’ (instead of ‘I’ or ‘*pom*’ for male or ‘*chan*’ for female in Thai). However, in regards to Pornpet, there is a double meaning intertwined and embedded in her employment of the ‘we’. That is, she refers to herself as both an individual person and as belonging to a collective body.

Secondly and postcolonially, it was abstractly proposed (in chapter 1) that employing a de-bureaucratized lens to read Pornpet’s diary will be done through a process of thoroughly examining her text in order to reveal the domination of the ‘colonisation within’ which has been constructed, operated and legitimised through a hierarchical bureaucratic system of the centralised state organisation. Concretely speaking, the place she referred to in this entry was at a district office building located 300 kilometers away from the capital. However, the hegemonic centralised authority could be seen, touched and felt through their delegates from four different Departments (Provincial Administration, Lands, Police and Revenue) under two Ministries (Interior and Finance) in Bangkok. They were the district chief, the head of police, the revenue officer and the land officer, who were appointed by the central administration to oversee this district. Theoretically, each civil officer must perform his/her duty with “*honesty, integrity and justification*” according to section 75 under chapter 4 entitled “civil servant discipline” of the 1954 Civil Servant Act (*Royal Gazette*, 1954: 51). The rest of this section states that it “... prohibit[s] [civil servants] to utilize or allow others, to utilize their duty, directly or indirectly, in order to earn interest for themselves or for others” as well as “...prohibit[ing] falsely reporting to superiors” (ibid., 1954: 62). A professional ‘code of conduct’ was written up to personally and publicly regulate the civil officers and make them accountable for their actions. My question is, why was the code of conduct so easily ignored by the Nong Bua officers as if it were their own territory outside the enforcement of the Civil Servant Act? Secondly, if the accusation made against Pim, Pornpet’s father, was true, his case should have concluded once he was arrested and punished as was the case with so many other ‘wrong doers’. Why was Pim’s case prolonged and his family targeted and ‘harassed’ by “*the district officers in every department*”? (diary, January 11, 1965), as this was in dramatic contradiction to section 78:

[C]ivil servants must promptly welcome, make themselves available and provide fair treatment and support to the citizen who comes to them with issues related to their authority and duty. They are prohibited to despise anybody, must maintain good unity and be polite to the people (*Royal Gazette*, op.cit.: 62).

The more I explore “civil servant discipline”, the more puzzling is the gap between this ideal policy and the reality in practice which is frequently interspersed throughout Pornpet’s writings.

Lastly, assessing it through a philosophical perspective, I found that what happened to the Meunsri family is reinforced by what Rai had earlier noted at the local level: “... [T]he state is also largely unchecked ... in the scale of violence it operates against the people ...” (op.cit.: 35). However, my glasses are quite different from those worn by Pornpet. Forty-five years ago,

contemporary Western concepts and terms, such as *human rights*, *civil society*, *good governance* and *sexual discrimination*, had yet to emerge [into Thai society]. Remarkably I found that Pornpet read and interpreted her experience meticulously through a *Buddhist* lens, particularly, through the concepts of *Karma* and *Dharma*. Etymologically speaking, the latter has a prestigious and sophisticated (double) meaning in the Thai language. Firstly, it means ‘just’ or righteous. Secondly, it refers to Buddha’s teachings and is one among the three treasured gems of Buddhism; that is, Buddha, Dharma and Sanga (the monks). Additionally, the two words *unjust* and *undharma* have the same spelling in the Thai language. Therefore, when Pornpet wrote that “... *our family was almost broken into tiny pieces ... because of their unjust [exercise of] power*”, it does not only mean that authority exercises their power in an unfair manner but that it is also an unacceptable act as it is against Buddha’s teachings.

5.1.2 Re-reading and Learning to Read the ‘Silence’

I should have finished reading this entry as there are many more waiting to be interrogated. However, I was unable to move forward. The puzzled relation between the three dates ‘August 6, 1963’, ‘January 1’ and then ‘January 11, 1965’ begs the question as to why it took Pornpet almost two years to pen down in her diary the incident that resulted in the violation by the state and subsequent family crisis. Recently inspired by Irigaray’s concept of ‘re-reading’ (and reading) the silence, I took a detour to re-assess this time gap and found some critical points which will be presented following the section on my ‘first read.’

Initially, I started reading this entry in the life context of her childhood; I found that Pornpet was relatively literate owing to the fact that she was one among a few girls in the village who had an opportunity to go to school after World War II ended in the mid 1940s. Her personal wit and the mathematical knowledge that she had learned at elementary school proved very useful in her daily life to serve her community as a ‘neighbourhood mathematician’.² As she recalled, because of her “... intelligence and ‘skillfulness’, [my] mother asked [me] to run errands such as buying necessities. Other villagers did not attend school so [they are] not literate. When [I] went to purchase something with them, [they] asked me to calculate the change...” (2002-2004: Vol. 10). Then, in regard to her career as a young woman with two jobs, farming and dressmaking, Pornpet had a high competency in holding the hoe and shovel as well as holding the pen and pencil. However, Pornpet did not become a diarist when she was eight years old (as was the case with the first Crown Prince of Siam whose diary was the compulsory piece assigned to be read in the elementary school in my time). Born and raised in a rural setting, she had to help alleviate the burden of her parents’ overworked life both at home and on the farm. Pornpet also did not have an opportunity to start writing her diary during her teenage years as is the case for many white middle-class teenagers who often see (and follow) their mother’s path of ‘inscribing the daily’. Moreover, she did not write it at the ‘peak’ of her dressmaking career

² I borrow this term with slight variation from Toni Cade Bambara, who had a career as a “neighbourhood scribe” (in Trinh, 1989, op.cit.: 9-10).

when "... [my] life was quite smooth [and accomplished]. [I] had a lot of customers [re: dressmaking business] and became well-known all over the district" (2002–2004: Vol. 10). Pornpet wrote her first diary when she was twenty-eight. The event that brought her to this stage was the brutal crisis that took place one year and five months earlier on August 6, 1963. My initial interpretation was that like many others who have been violated, it often takes time to find a 'balance', adjust and 'stabilise' oneself, back to (what used to be) the 'normal' rhythm of life.

Later, I feel that the explanation above is essential but not enough to clarify why Pornpet started writing her diary in 1965 and not earlier. One year and five months have gone by since I first started reading and writing this entry; the puzzling relation between these two dates re-magnetises me to take a second journey into this entry, this time taking note of Irigaray's invitation for

... reconsideration or re-reading, where the reader is attentive to aspects which may not be immediately apparent or as expected. When discussing the interpretation of a dream, for example, Irigaray appeals for a recall of spaces that are 'fixed in oblivion and waiting to come to life. Turning everything upside down and back to front' (Bolton in Irigaray, 2008: 54).

Being brought back by her insightful invitation to re-focus on "6/8/63 ' ' 1/1/65", I unexpectedly found out that in the first round I missed reading something vital. That is to read ' ' or **silence**, which could be conceived as either the 'pre-diary writing period' or the 'transformative space' of the writer.

Traditionally, silence (passively) equates to acquiescence and submission to patriarchal rules; therefore, as elaborated by Wells, "[P]erhaps for this reason, contemporary feminists, wishing to express themselves and assert their power as individuals, feel they must [*break the silence and] speak* in order to establish their subjectivity" (in Irigaray, 2008: 27, italics mine). However, according to Irigaray, silence should not be perceived in the dichotomous manner of either breaking or keeping but the emerging of "a still virgin space-time for [one's] appearance and its expressions" (1996: 118), which needs to be valued by listening to, reading with and learning from.

The notion of silence as Irigaray understands it, is considered a constructive motion which would enable women not only "... to experience the world, themselves and the other without dissipation ..." but also "... to keep what is not yet manifest, as this is revealed by some Eastern traditions which talk about the sacred syllable *aum* (*Sex and genealogies*, p.100) ..." (Bolton in Irigaray, op.cit.: 57). Thus, remaining silent could imply the process of 'returning to self' or making a journey to one's own interiority in order to access becoming (and corresponding and connecting back to exteriority). Wearing her lens, I could now understand that the 'gap' located between "6/8/63 ' ' 1/1/65" is neither the state of emptiness or paralysis but the compulsory condition for "... maintaining the distance between oneself and the other ..." (Wells in Irigaray, op.cit.: 27). Such a 'virgin' space had provided Pornpet an opportunity to be

able to return to interiority as a home for healing and finding her own voice. As challenged by Irigaray “[W]omen have to discover their word(s), be faithful to it and, interweaving it with their bodies, make it a living and spiritual flesh” (2004: 151); in regard to Pornpet’s case, she not only discovered her own *words* but her own *way* to manifest it by ‘*becoming a diarist*’ finally as she elegantly and confidently inscribed on the first page of the first diary on the first day of 1965:

January 1, 1965

The first second of the first hour of New Year’s Day, while [praying and] recalling the kindness of Buddhism’s three gems [Buddha, dharma and sangha]; [suddenly I] heard the monk chanting [at the temple]. What a most delightful moment!

For this New Year we [I] want to make [our/my] affirmation in front of the Buddha [image] as follows:

- 1. We [I] will be most proud of [our/ my] prestige and dignity.*
- 2. We [I] will be most reserved to the person who looks down on [other people].*
- 3. We [I] will be most determined, prudent and calm.*
- 4. We [I] will never forget to count on the Buddha and will devote [our/my] life to the Buddha. It’s up to him to guide us [me] [in the proper] way of life to walk on.*

...

Usually, the ‘January 1st’ page(s) is the space (and time) which many diarists devote to drafting their compact annual plan(s), itemising what they want to accomplish in the next twelve months, making wishes or even manifesting their life determination. Though Pornpet’s earliest entry could be placed in the common category of the latter, its uniqueness and powerfulness challenge me to ‘re-read’ it in at least three different ways, personally, philosophically and politically.

Firstly and personally, Pornpet’s determination as affirmed on January 1, 1965, lasted thirty-nine years and five months up until her death on May 31, 2004. Secondly and philosophically, reading this entry gave me an opportunity to appreciate the critical link between Spivak’s ‘reading the *loss*’, Irigaray’s ‘reading the *silence*’ (as mentioned earlier in 1.2.3.2 and 5.1.2) and (in particular) Trinh’s ‘reading the *in between*’ and the concept of ‘displacement.’ Regarding the latter, as the process of (self) ‘displacing’ or transforming the self includes creating “new forms of subjectivities” (1995, op.cit.: 331), Pornpet’s new ‘I’ revealed itself once she affirmed in her earliest entry that “... *We [I] will be most proud of my prestige and dignity ...*” (Diary, January 1, 1965). Additionally, the way she simply but strongly weaved her belief in Buddhism into her diary writing and actively developed it as one of her ‘tools of resistance’, reminds me of what was pointed out by Trinh that “[A] woman narrates a displacement as she relentlessly shuttles between the center and the margin. The question is not so much that of loyalty versus betrayal, as that of practicing one’s own inventive loyalty toward oneself” (1995, op.cit.: 330).

Pornpet's resistance has also revealed the relation between the critical moment of 'de-positioning' and the emergence of the 'third space' (Bhabha, 1990, op.cit.: 211). However, what is unique about Pornpet's case is it is a kind of 'third space *within*' as she was (forced to be) displaced within her own 'land' and exiled within the familiar terrain of the Thai language as well as from among her acquaintances. Particularly with regard to the latter, her first and second affirmation "... *[W]e [I] will be most proud of [our/ my] prestige and dignity [and] most reserved to the person who looks down on [other people]*", tells us the hidden message, as someone displaced, of how she (and her family) had been treated by other people in her district. Having been empowered with enforcing the law, bureaucrats and their organisations have often been looked up to in terms of their authority and the credibility that this authority (uncritically) bestows on them. Therefore, fifty years ago (or even today) anyone involved in a dispute with bureaucrats like Pornpet's family had to pay 'double the price' as they would become not only the object of bureaucratic discrimination, but also a target who is endlessly questioned and alienated within their own community as other villagers would regard them (uncritically) as "having done something wrong" (rather than question the authority).

Thirdly and politically, in regard to the politics of research where the researcher takes full control of the research project (and the subject), it is he or she who has the power to make decisions to 'keep' or 'cut' data or information to be included or ignored, both in the process of compiling and analysing as well as presentation. Frankly (with some degree of embarrassment), I have to confess that in the first draft of my writing (almost) two years ago (when I was blind to the concept of 'reading the silence'), I intentionally deleted the January 1, 1965, entry. Though realising the prominent significance of its content, following many rounds of failure to find a way to present it properly and with scholastic rigor, bitterly I decided to 'skip' it, moving forward to the 'manageable' (or conventionally most obvious) entries instead. These 'manageable' entries (five in total) refer to the 'concrete' incident of 1963, which included the arrest of her father and related issues, and could easily be 'categorised' and 'labeled' under the same sub-topic for exploration and analysis.

I had made a second mammoth mistake! While developing a scholarly critique and strongly calling for a decolonising research process, in practice, I myself kept on (forgetting the critique and instead) utilising the traditional tool of positioning Pornpet as an 'object' of study rather than a subject in dialogue, which would allow "her character to develop and reflect upon her own situation and experiences as subject, [not only] through gesture and language, but also through silence" (Bolton in Irigaray, op.cit.: 57). Such a practice of reading the silence provides me a chance to review and re-approach Pornpet's text intersubjectively as well as to realise that in order to understand her effort in subjectivising herself and cultivating her interiority, "...it is important to note the way in which [her] identity was formed in relation to other subjects in her texts" (Wells in Irigaray, op.cit.: 27).

5.1.3 “My Heart Is in Terrible Pain and Suffers”: Learning to Read ‘Writing from the Womb’

Under this section the three entries of January 25, February 2 and April 5 will be read.

January 25, 1965

*Dad was arrested by the district officers [on his farm] and brought back [to town]. It was August 6, 1963, in the afternoon. It is still clear in our [my] memory and maybe for the remainder of life ... Dad in [his] work outfit walked frustratedly and distressingly [toward us]. The first sentence we [I] heard from him was “**dad was arrested by the district officer; find someone to bail [me] out.**” At that moment, [we] felt like someone had stabbed a knife directly into [our] heart. (diary, 25 January, 1965; bold mine).*

...
Since then [I have become] tough, unyielding [and] have courage in life. ... Honestly [my] dad did not even know what he was being accused of or on what grounds he was being charged. ... what [he] knew was only that land-forestry officers went [to his farm] to arrest [him].

During Pim’s two weeks in jail, Pornpet travelled back and forth to visit him. Each time Pornpet would travel by local bus from Nong Bua to Chum Saeng, the neighbouring district, then take the train (or another local bus) from there to Mueang District (or downtown Nakhorn Sawan province), and then finish her trip by taking a tricycle from the train (or bus) station to the prison, repeating the entire route on her return trip.³

Pornpet would later seek the help of her relatives in Bangkok, in particular, *Khun Pee* (elder sister) Prapasri’s husband, who was a lawyer, and then auntie Manee Pimsawad’s son, *Khun Pee* (elder brother) Prom, a high ranking civil servant at the Department of Lands. Her visit with her relatives was recorded much later in a diary entry dated January 25, 1965:

... We [I] can still remember his words. Khun Pee Prom once told [me] that “come to see me if you have any problems!” This is [the reason why] we [I] had made a great effort to go there in order to ask for his knowledge [and] advice. [Unfortunately], [I] did not meet him, [and instead I] met only [his wife] Khun Pee [sister-in-law] Saksri and told her all that had happened [to my family]. [She] showed her [in depth] understanding, gave some good advice and even made a strong comment: “[How come!] They acted like they were

³ I wrote this part regarding the route she took from my own experience traveling this same route in June 2005 when I accompanied Pornpet’s sister-in-law to the provincial court located next to the prison. We started the trip from the local bus station just as Pornpet had done earlier. From Nong Bua to Chum Saeng to Nakorn Sawan is about 60 kilometres each way. However, as the local bus stopped at many villages along the way to pick up and drop off their passengers at their requests, it took me over two hours to arrive downtown. Forty-two years earlier (in 1963), when the roads and the vehicles were not in as good condition as they are today, it might have taken Pornpet much longer to make her trip each way.

*in Texas!*⁴” “In conclusion, [we] don’t have to wait for Khun Prom. I, myself, will go there [with you and help you solve the problem]”. A glimpse of hope made [me] feel relief. ... Khun Pee Saksri brought us [me] to meet the head of the provincial land section at his house. We [I] learned from him that actually **“a plan [to arrest my dad] had already been set up just waiting for a strategy [to take action].”** He even reinforced [there was a plan when he] questioned that **“the problems [were] caused by conflict between children [from both families] ...?”** Khun Pee Saksri came to Nong Bua the following day. Alas! Once she arrived, her demeanour had unbelievably changed from white to black [meaning that there was a sudden reversal and change of heart]. [I am not quite sure whether] it was because of whisky or money or lust which totally transformed her. Her gesture was remarkably not the same [as the previous day] and she did not feel any guilt. We [noticed it and] were so worried since she had arrived. [We] felt that she did not maintain her prestige as an [honoured] senior should (bold mine).

There are three prominent aspects to be explored politically, personally and poetically. Politically and administratively, in relation to his position, the head of the provincial land section was responsible for overseeing the staff at the district level as clearly stated in the Civil Servant Act section 87-88:

... the superior officer [at each level] has responsibility in overseeing that his/her staff follows the code of conduct [In the case where] any superior officer does not discipline a subordinate who has violated the code of conduct or has withheld proper discipline relative to the violation, s/he her/himself must be considered as having violated the code of conduct as well (*Royal Gazette*, 1954: 66).

The so-called ‘superior officer’ fully realised that it was a clear-cut case of abuse between his subordinate and a farmer family, as he made clear when he responded to Pornpet with his observation that **“a plan [to arrest my dad] had already been set up just waiting for a strategy [to take action].”** In fact, he went as far as to emphasise that the root cause stemmed from their “*children’s conflict*”. There was no doubt that Pornpet’s father did not break the laws or rules that he was accused of. However, despite holding a high ranking position at the provincial level, the provincial head did not take any action to investigate the officer’s conduct and/or punish him for using his (publicly assigned) authority illegally in order to carry out a personal revenge. To make matters worse, the provincial head belittled the issue by reducing it to a mere personal conflict. Metaphorically speaking, a conflict (between boys) that is no larger than ‘a drop of honey’ should have been settled quickly and professionally. Instead, it became a prolonged

⁴ In Bangkok in the 1960s there were two TV stations which broadcast many popular American TV shows including many Westerns. Therefore, “[t]hey acted like they were in Texas!” refers to the ‘outlaw’ or ‘lawless’ mentality typical of the Wild West.

conflict that lasted for more than 40 years and caused incalculable loss in the government budget and immeasurable loss of life and suffering, pain and poverty. Personally, in assessing this entry, I was struck by the pain and sense of betrayal Pornpet must have felt when the head of the provincial land section ended the meeting, which would have intensified the next day with her relative's sudden change of heart.

Poetically, what I could discern from the text was how this 26-year-old woman was incredibly tough! Those tortured words would have been painfully inscribed into her (heart and) body where they lay buried for the next one and a half years, before she could convey and document them in her diary in her attempt to heal and give herself a constructive direction to take her fight. Additionally, they would wait patiently for another 40 years before I would come upon them and 'turn the page'. This process reminds me of Trinh's notion of women's writing as "[an] 'organic writing,' 'nurturing-writing' (*nour-ricriture*), resisting separation. It becomes a 'connoting material, kneading dough,' 'a linguistic flesh'" (1989, op.cit.: 38). Therefore, in my turn (and my term) as a reader, in order to creatively and critically access her text, it is compulsory to practice reading it not only faithfully but also 'flesh-fully'.

Moreover, inspired by Cixous's idea of having 'women's bodies to be heard' as well as to have them invent "... the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes and rhetorics, regulations and codes"; Trinh proposes the concept of "women's writing through their bodies" in particular through their wombs as she insists:

... writing as an "intrinsic" child/birth process takes on different qualities in women's contexts. No man claims to speak from the womb, women do. Their site of fertilization, they often insist, is the womb, not the mind. Their inner gestation is in the womb, not in the mind. The mind is therefore no longer opposed to the heart; it is, rather, perceived as part of the womb, being "englobed by it" (ibid.: 37).

Metaphorically speaking, words from Pornpet's womb reveal to me one of the most haunting moments in her life. That was the time when life lost its balance and reputation due to the misuse and abuse of an officer's position, thereby leading to misunderstanding and unnecessary and undeserved stigma. If there had been the unconditional support and trust from an inner circle of friends and relatives, it would have been an immeasurable help to her and her family in weathering the crisis. However, the opposite seemed to occur; abandoned, Pornpet's family was left nearly helpless, and then the betrayal by a close and respected relative (Khun Pee Saksri's sudden reversal and change of heart) occurred to deepen that hurt. As she recalled:

*... In 1963, we [I] were struck by a terrible monsoon [crisis], one that was most unjust. We [I] lost almost everything even my strong will to work. The only thing left was the **purity of [my] heart**. Our [my] heart is in the most terrible pain and suffers as it has been stamped on unjustly. ... Our family was misunderstood by the town leader [the district chief] whom we highly respected [for a long time] but [in this regard] he was very weak*

*in punishing the wrongdoer. He had been easily influenced by **an unjust man**, [one of] his district staff.*

The ‘manipulator’ is Mr ..., a third class⁵ civil officer - head of the district land section -, an evil man who tries to destroy our future all the time ...

Since 1963, [every one in] our family has lived under severe pressure. We [I] have to think in depth on many different issues. Our [my] freedom has been unjustly violated ... We [I] have been looked down on and brought into disrepute. Our [my] family has always been treated unfairly. We [I] lost our spirit and energy to conduct our work constructively ... (bold mine).

Aroon Wilairat, a pioneering leader who was committed to ‘develop’ and make Nong Bua a ‘modern’ district, was highly respected by the residents (interview Pra Kru Krai, 2 July 2010). Therefore, it was unfortunate and difficult to accept that a good leader like Aroon would misunderstand the events that led to the misfortunes and suffering of Pornpet’s family.

What is noticeable is that in the first entry regarding the land issue for January 11, 1965, the term ‘**unjust power**’ was used by Pornpet to (indirectly) define the civil authority’s actions of falsely accusing and arresting her father. However, ‘power’ is an abstract term. The proper exercise of power is only possible when undertaken by responsible officers at different levels. Three weeks later on February 2, Pornpet could no longer restrain herself from revealing the man who instigated the ‘violence’ against her family by documenting his name, position and rank as above.

5 April 1965

*August 6, 1963: the day that the district officer falsely accused and arrested [my] father. Since then we [I] have been very depressed. [My] freedom has been unfairly violated. [They] unfairly trampled on [my] heart. Feeling desperately frustrated, we [I] went to see Khun Pee Prom. [I] did not meet him. [I] met only Khun Pee Saksri [his wife]. **First, [we both] came to the resolution that at least we [I] should be treated justly by getting clarification and an explanation** (bold mine).*

Pornpet’s straightforward demand to “be treated justly” reflects and reinforces the darker side of the state’s bureaucracy, the (almost) absolute top-down power to conduct any act violating the underclass, without having to give any explanation (or, as in this case, simply by lying). Generally, the ‘grassroots’ always already realise that their position is at the lowest rung of the ladder. Therefore, often, having to conform and follow the ‘rules’ is the best strategy for

⁵ During this period there were three classes of the civil officers ranking status. That is, first, second and third. Generally, the (senior) first class civil officers were appointed to work as the ‘head’ of each ministerial or departmental section (eg education, public health, land and revenue) at the provincial level. Each province is composed of several districts and it is at the district level where the second and third class civil officers were stationed.

them (to avoid any difficulties that may be severe and last a lifetime). However, where there is guilt, the conduct of authorities should be such that power is exercised transparently and according to (and within the boundary of) the law. But, in regard to Pornpet's father, there were no facts that could prove that he had done anything wrong. So why was he arrested and on what grounds? It seems that what desperately haunted Pornpet was to witness *not only the jailing of her father but also the jailing of 'justice'* in that his arrest was arbitrary and without explanation. That is the way the state bureaucracy has been designed and operated. The more power the officers have, the fewer words they need to say, having only to say a few lines to give their 'orders'. There is no need to 'listen' to those who you are supposed to serve (which, at least in theory, would include the common good derived by listening to the diversity of voices, tones and perspectives).

This issue of speaking, listening and hearing reminds me of two other February entries on the 'meetings' with the district chief, which failed to resolve the problem, deepening the wounds when no action was forthcoming. These 'wounds' continued to haunt and affect Pornpet for quite some time after.⁶

5.1.4 Can a Grassroots Woman Speak with a Government Officer?

18 February 1965

Today [I] feel desperately worried. It already took [me] several days [to prepare for] the meeting with the district chief. [I] feel confident in my pure heart and for a certain understanding. We [I] received his good manner and welcome and a self-interested [narrow-minded] clarification and explanation. It's a terrible pity that we [I] lacked awareness and wisdom in conducting the conversation. [I] have no idea why we [I] were so baffled and forgot the many messages we [I] wanted to convey to him. Or was it because of my bashfulness.

Forty years ago there were very few 28 year-old grassroots women who had the strength, courage and 'purity of heart' to knock on the district head's door and ask for a face-to-face meeting. However, from the side of the bureaucrats, they preferred to deal with the older rural folks as they were easier to manipulate. As Pornpet recalled:

⁶ Although five months had already passed, Pornpet still felt frightened whenever she met anyone whose figure resembled the district chief. For example:

July 12, 1965

... Today [I] brought food to offer to the monk at the temple. [I] did have mixed feelings of excitement and appreciated his kindness. ... At first sight, [I] was very afraid of him as he looks similar to the district chief. ([I] think that he might not earn [my] faith). Later, [I] had seen his concentration and goodwill; ... then, [I] finally respected [him] with high regard.

... the district officers always say that you are too young, let the adults speak. It means that to talk to my parents is easier as they [farmers] don't understand the complications of the [legal] issue. It is easier to persuade them [to agree to the resolution that the officers want]. We [I] try to insert my opinion here and there during the negotiation but the officers try to exclude [me]" (2002-2004: Vol. 10).

For the marginalised, what is of concern when approaching the hierarchical bureaucracy is not only the issue of age but also of gender. Pornpet's courage was a gesture that reflected the double meaning that women encountered when they walked into the 'male' world. Firstly, it is the world of the bureaucratic system, one of the strongest patriarchal institutions. Secondly, it is the world of district chiefs, a government position and career reserved for men only (until 1996)⁷. Moreover, in Thai culture, the most complicated borderland to cross is not only gender but class. In the relation between the rulers and ruled, the latter is expected to be docile, quiet and ready to follow the orders handed down by the (patriarchal) authorities. Pornpet had crossed many boundaries only to find at the end that all she could get was "... selfish [narrow-minded] clarification".

The district chief was assigned, as a representative of the Ministry of Interior, with the mission to "minimise misery and create better living conditions for people" (Laung Thamrongnawasawat, 1965: 46-49). Theoretically, this process can take place only if and when the government officers are able to 'listen' to and understand the differing interests, needs and problems of the so-called 'ruled' in order to avoid a self-interested judgment that might serve only to aggravate the problem further. However, in practice, once one achieves a position of authority, the role of being a 'listener' is (usually) the first role to be forgotten. As for the 'ruled', they continue to internalise their disempowerment (as 'victims') as evidenced by their continuous questioning of themselves when they ask "*Why did I forget to say what I intended?*" "*Why am I unable to speak clearly and make the officer understand me?*" Generally, the victim begins by impugning themselves rather than questioning the authority's ability and desire to listen. It takes much time, effort and many painful moments to come to the conclusion that the problem is not 'us' (the speaker) but 'them' (the listener who no longer knows how to listen). However, it did not take too long for Pornpet to reach that conclusion as she presented in the entry in the subsection below.

5.1.5 "Why Is the Government Officer Unable to Listen to a Grassroots Woman?"

Physically, through reading her diary, we found that Pornpet could speak to the officer. Philosophically though, she cannot speak. This is because there was no one 'listening' from the side of authority/power; "the subaltern woman will be as mute as ever" (Spivak, 1988, op.cit.:

⁷ <http://www.women-family.go.th/women2/menu801.html>. Accessed August 31, 2012.

295). At this stage, it might be helpful to approach this question differently and re-formulate it as “why is the government officer unable to listen to a grassroots woman?” and search for the answer in the context of history and public administration in relation to the critiques by Tej, Thongchai as well as Spivak and related scholars.

February 20, 1965

*Why do we [I] always blame ourselves [myself]? [I] should give it proper consideration as [I] have [my] **purity**, both physically and mentally. ... [I am] always aware that [I] have no knowledge [and] education. If there is any advice or warning from the higher educated people, [I am] very willing to follow it. However, [I] have never gotten anything from them except rough, thorny and wounded words, “**we are the ones who maintain the law**”. We [I] wish we [I] could respond back that it is a wild law.*

Though living in the ‘wild’ [in the rural area], [I] am not too wild [too stupid] to understand what should be understood. Why are we [am I] overlooked? (bold mine).

One of the most deep-seated prejudices that the so-called ‘ruling elites’ have regarding rural and lower class Thais is their uncritical contempt toward those with little or no (formal) education. The ideology of class discrimination has been strategically planted and passed on from generation to generation through compulsory Thai textbooks taught in elementary schools (Nujaree, 2008). For instance, *Good Citizen (Beginning Level)*, was written by Chaopraya Prasadetsuraintrathipbordee, a high ranking bureaucrat who had close connections with the Royal Court. The story unfolds around the principal character “Mr. Wild”, an ignorant rural orphan who came to live with his ‘higher’ class relatives in Bangkok. Under their patronage and with the aim to ‘groom’ Mr. Wild to be a good citizen, they provided him with the opportunity to learn proper manners, literacy, geography, history, politics and, in particular, to acknowledge “his indebtedness to the government and the king(s)” by demonstrating his gratitude and contributing to the country” (ibid.: 28). Before ending, the main character’s name had been changed from “Mr Wild” to “Mr City” in recognition of his success in the proper grooming of his new self. What can be read between the lines of “(from) Mr. Wild (to) Mr City” is that ‘education’ (that is, the formal education provided by the state) is not only a powerful tool to upgrade an individual’s status but also provides a binary dichotomy that sets apart the ‘good’ (urban and educated) from the ‘no-good’ (rural and uneducated) citizen. Finally, Nujaree concludes that the myth [misrepresentation] of the rural poor as “an illiterate, ignorant and evil person that has been rigidly and continuously reproduced [by elite Bangkokians] has created some problems [regarding the issue of class prejudice by urban Thais] up to now” (ibid.: 29).

As the *Good Citizen* was published in 1931, six years before Ponpet was born, there is little doubt that a classist ideology surrounding the issue of education in school textbooks existed as elaborated above. It may be assumed that Ponpet and many other children throughout Thailand would have read these textbooks. As a result, with only a grade four education, Ponpet

would have considered herself ‘un-educated’ and therefore most likely expected educated government officers to share their wisdom and knowledge (or, in her words, ‘to give her advice’). However, having participated in one meeting with the district chief, Pornpet realised that an educated officer did not (want to or) have the skills to provide constructive advice nor the capacity to communicate reasonably and effectively. Instead, what they were able to do is further intimidate the (formally) uneducated by arrogantly emphasising their greater position of power as ‘maintainers of the law’ (ie justice).

In asking the question “Why are (wild) rural people neglected [that is] why are we outside of the ruler’s eyes?” Pornpet got to the heart of the geographical and administrative hierarchical structure of centre and periphery. This geographical hierarchy between Bangkok and its (internal) colony dates back to the reign of King Rama V (1868-1910) as discussed by Thongchai in “The Others Within: Travel and Photo Ethnography in Siam 1880 – 1920”:

Discursively formulated through travelogues and ethnographic notes, it [ethnographic classification] was an abstract scheme which differentiated Siamese subjects spatially within the geo-body ... in relation to the superior space of Bangkok. The two principal categories of people, of ‘Others Within’, are the *chao pa*, the forest, wild people, and the *chao bannok*, the multi-ethnic villagers under the supremacy of Bangkok (2000: 41).

In this regard, Pornpet was considered a *chao bannok* or the multi-ethnic villager who was governed by the district chief. The latter was assigned by and sent directly from the ‘civilised’ capital to represent the central government in the remote area. This process also conveyed a hidden meaning whereby it was assumed that the ‘uncivilised’ (‘wild’ ie rural), unsophisticated and uneducated villagers often do things incorrectly, regularly violating the rules. Therefore, it is necessary to appoint ‘maintainers of the law’ to control, inspect and make sure they do not ‘stray’ from the law.

Unlike other countries that were subjugated to colonial rule by an outside (Western) occupier, Thailand’s recent history exemplifies ‘colonialism within’, wherein colonial rule was undertaken by Thai elites themselves through a highly centralised bureaucracy. The administrative model used to run the bureaucracy, however, was borrowed from examples of Western colonial rule of neighbouring countries. So, unlike Spivak’s example of colonial rule described as “White men are saving brown women from brown men”, for Thailand, we find a variation to this colonial formula; that is, “(Elite) brown men (and women) saving (rural and poor) brown women”. It is in this context that we need to understand Pornpet’s struggle to break through the silence imposed by the Thai state. We begin with the following chart⁸ in order to

⁸ The drafting of this chart was adapted from graphic Ministry of Interior’s “Provinces and Bangkok” (<http://www.moi.go.th/province.htm>. Accessed April 4, 2007.) and my own understanding and interpretation of Piyon Kanchanadul’s “Local Administration in Thailand” (2002: 20-39).

explore the question, “How does the process underlying ‘colonialism within’ work and why couldn’t Pornpet be heard?”

Fig. 7: Thailand’s Central and Provincial Administration

What I could see is that geographically, although Pornpet (and other villagers) live their lives (roof to roof on the same road) in the same district as the officers, the ‘voices’ of the former are hardly heard by the latter. This deafness is in accord with the **line of command**, the district officers have to ‘listen to’ and follow the policies as directed by their superior at each level and as far up as the respective Minister in Bangkok as stated in chapter 4 section 71 of the 1954 Civil Servant Act:

Civil Servant must be polite, obey and not show [any] insubordination to his superior. The subordinate must perform their duty according to the superior’s directive which has been legislated into the law and regulation of the civil service. Defying or avoiding [a superior’s directives] is prohibited. (*Royal Gazette*, *ibid.*: 50).

Superiors from the governor and minister levels have the authority to reward and punish their inferiors. Discipline varies accordingly from probation, salary suspension or reduction to

outright dismissal (ibid.: 53-54). Therefore it is a ‘must’ for the district chief to ‘listen’ to the governor, then they in turn to the director of the Department of Public Administration and to the Minister of Interior. While villagers do not have ‘direct’ authority over the civil officers in their area, they do have (at least in theory) ‘indirect’ authority through their representatives in parliament to oversee the cabinet and the operation of the overall bureaucratic system. My observation is that, firstly and politically, there must be something terribly dysfunctional in this linear process of oversight in the relation between parliament and the day-to-day functioning of the bureaucracy, resulting in the latter establishing hegemony over its own ‘so-called’ territory and autonomy, without accountability to the voters.⁹ In this regard, the latter have learned that in order to make their voices heard, they have to utilise the ‘strategy of numbers’ to build up and strengthen their negotiating power. Pornpet’s case was quite exclusive. As only one family was violated by the bureaucracy, it was not only difficult to organise other villagers but the former was also readily misunderstood in that their situation was easily dismissed as *bad karma* rather than as the unjust outcome of arbitrary decisions by bureaucrats.

Secondly and administratively, it was critically observed by Gerald M. Britan that “the most basic goal of any bureaucrat or bureaucracy is not rational efficiency, but individual and organisational survival” (1981: 11); once there is an objection, the line of command as mentioned above is often simply (and quickly) transformed to a **line of (patronising) support**. This general observation may also account for the district chief’s ability to “hear” his subordinate but not Pornpet’s voice, as well as offer an explanation as to why the head of the provincial land section did not take any action, even though he recognised that his staff, the head of the district land section, did not follow up on disciplining his subordinate in accordance with the Civil Service Act.

February 24, 1965

... After the meeting [with the district chief] took place, it seems that we [I] lack the patience to deal with [my] frustration. ... As far as [I have] observed, such weakness seems to take place only when it is related to the one who had earned [my] high respect.

.... [I] feel pity for myself as [I] tried to do everything [to solve this problem].

One can surely intuit how devastating it might be when the principal means for redress (aside from the courts) of an injustice callously closes the door to any constructive outcome, leaving the villager feeling lost, confused, helpless and perhaps broken. Almost a week had gone by (February 18 to 24) during which the wounds that were inflicted repeatedly roared through her mind. It is understandable that Pornpet considered her initial meeting with the district head a ‘failure’. However, in my view February 18, 1965, was a historical milestone. It was an event

⁹ When Pornpet’s case started in 1963, Thailand was under the rule of the military juntas, which ended on October 14, 1973, as a result of the very effective student democratic movement. Within 41 years (1963-2004) since the first incident, which was the arbitrary arrest of her father, and later the land rights case, Pornpet had to deal with the government bureaucracy under 31 Prime Ministers (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Prime_Ministers_of_Thailand). Retrieved April 27, 2012.

where the ‘first brick’ was laid: a mile marker in her long journey of confronting---which included multi-strategic acts such as meetings, discussions, negotiations and petitions—the inertia of bureaucratic authority at many different levels, from the district head to the governor, the head of the petitioning department, the permanent secretary of the Prime Minister’s Affairs Bureau and then the Prime Minister himself.

5.1.6 “Unjust Power, Unjust Man and Unjust Knowledge”

This section covers four entries. They are April 16, June 22 and July 6 and 13 respectively.

April 16, 1965

Today we [I] felt badly frustrated. It pushed [me] to speak out assertively with [my] Thai blood and Thai nationality [as a person] who received unjust treatment from the one [the officer] who used unjust knowledge

We [I] know well that the revenue department is prejudiced against [us]. [It was] proven that whenever we [our family] are in better condition, they will try to find a way to abuse us.

We [I] realize that there is yet to be an announcement regarding the vehicle tax law. However, [we] feel robbed when they suddenly demand that [we] needed to pay 3000 baht without any explanation. Since [I] did not have any knowledge, [I] did not know how to object. [I] refused to pay and informed them that the tractor had been terminated. [They] decreased the amount to one thousand, [then] six hundred, [and finally] three hundred [baht]. ... All of this proved that there was no principle at all. ...

Is it appropriate for us [me] to say that “as a Thai, we should support the Thai nation [and therefore pay this tax out of patriotism]” [I] feel bored with such a system where human-beings eat another human-being’s blood.

The way Pornpet read, conceptualised and ‘named’ the crisis was strongly embedded in Buddhism. Her father was falsely arrested because [the bureaucratic] **power** was **unjustly** manipulated by an **unjust man**. Then, the revenue officer’s deceptiveness in manipulating the law in order to fraudulently charge the vehicle tax was identified as an act of utilising **unjust knowledge**. In “Writing is Re-naming” (1979: 43), Rich argues that the process of struggling to name and re-name helps create new knowledge. Struggling to subjectivise her ‘self’ through the act of (diary) writing (as well as dialoguing, negotiating, resisting etc), Pornpet not only gradually detached and decolonised herself from the ‘provided’ (or pre-given) definition of a woman farmer but also created and re-created a language to suit her own meanings.

From local to national, what is notable is the way she was able to discern a pattern and place the repeated events of state violence against her family at the local level into the bigger picture of the state violence at the national level. Pornpet was critically able to apprehend how

the government's policy on 'nationalism' (during the Cold War) was not only hypocritical but also harmful. The Thai state, while seriously conducting an anti-communism campaign by throwing much of the blame for the insurgency on the spread of communist ideology manipulated by 'foreign' powers who have a harmful plan to ruin Thailand's national security (Tamthai, 2002), was in fact responsible for 'ruining our country'. Violence against Thai citizens like Pornpet and her family was not caused by foreign powers (read: 'Red China') but by Thai state officers themselves. As she documented:

July 13, 1965

*... [I] feel very depressed as [I] face a lot of difficulties. [I] feel bored with my faith. However, [I] will fight until the end for the dignity of being [a] Thai. [I] will live my life for my family and to prove the facts. It is because currently [my] family has been insulted and abused by the **foreigner** with "prejudice", especially those who we [I] used to pay high respect to. They might not know how much we [I] do feel sincerity toward them ... (bold mine).*

Apart from appropriating the government's nationalist 'Thai' discourse to confirm her own 'Thai-ness', Pornpet further re-defined the concept of foreigner. In regard to the issue of national security, it was not the outsiders or communists from 'Red China' who would harm Thailand's sovereignty. Instead, those who should be considered Thai-less or 'non-Thai' (ie foreigners) and who were much more dangerous than the outside enemies, were the 'insiders' or the government bureaucrats themselves. This group of 'Thais' took advantage of and benefited from their positions through the harassment and oppression of the commoners without paying any care or attention to the honest loyalty they received from them (eg Pornpet's great respect for the district chief).

While perusing a few entries on her critique of the issue of nationalism, I found the following significant information:

July 6, 1965

*[I] am so desperately worried about [our] farm. How can [I] find a way to return to work on the farm in order to earn our living as we did before? We [I] heard that it would be extremely difficult unless [we] take serious action [against those who harassed us] by **suing** [them] for damage cost. How could [I] take such action? The district officers who are involved [in this case] are mixed; [some are] evil and [some are] virtuous. Although we are [I am] committed to fight to the end, how could the good ones be segregated [from the bad ones]?*

All the time, I am thinking about what's going on at Wat [temple] Rai King. [I] have a terrible headache resulting from thinking too much. ... [I'm] very frustrated, what

should we [I] do ... [I] profoundly miss my brothers¹⁰ ... Hope they both can live peacefully over there (bold mine).

The above three entries (16 April, 13 July and 6 July 1965) and Pornpet's creative use of the terms "unjust power, unjust man and unjust knowledge", reveal the 'hidden space' of bureaucracy, that is, its unaccountability with no cost on their part which is instead born by the victims. Theoretically, first and foremost, the fundamental mandate of any 'public' operation is its assurance on accountability to discourage arbitrariness. However, in practice the manipulation of rules by breaking, changing or adjusting them for the sake of the officer(s)'s 'personal' agenda is tactically undertaken in the name of 'public interest'. Furthermore, through this process the officers could strategically manage to "disguise" and "disappear" the personal nature of this tactic, while the victim is left vulnerable and exposed when the 'nature' and character of the case(s) are publicly projected as necessary for the public good.

"[E]veryone, it seems, has a bureaucratic horror story to tell, and few will challenge the conventions such stories demand" (Herzfeld, 1992: 4). In regard to Thailand, this observation appears to be true. It is commonly known that the Thai bureaucracy is often unaccountable despite the legal requirement for accountability;¹¹ however, rarely has this issue been touched upon. Factually speaking, while the head of the district land section who "broke" Pornpet's family "into little pieces", could go on with his life normally, Pornpet could no longer regularly work at her dress-making shop as she had to take many days off and make several trips to visit her father in jail as well as travel to Bangkok to seek help from the lawyer and her relatives, and later, the head of the provincial land section, in order to have her father released and returned to his farm.

The phenomenon of the *bureaucracy's unaccountability with no cost on their part which is instead born by the victims* is perhaps one of the principal reasons why the state bureaucracy is often able to play a role of 'indifference'. There appears to be only a small number of 'violated' clients who would be able to afford, intellectually, emotionally, spiritually and above all financially, to battle the bureaucracy's abuses and attempt to force them to be accountable by going through the process of achieving some measure of justice. Pornpet is exceptional in that despite her lack of resources and the enormous hurdles that lay in her path, she was still able to achieve some measure of justice. After 31 years of being displaced and wrestling with

¹⁰ As a result of their problems with the district land officers, Samrit and Saroj, Pornpet's two younger brothers, were both expelled from school. They had to move out, find a place to stay at the temple and enroll in a high school in another province (Nakhon Pathom), about 400 kilometres from home. Pornpet often had to travel this barely manageable distance to visit them. Many obstacles and difficulties occurred, more than the young men could shoulder, so that unfortunately, one of them ended up quitting high school. (2002–2004: Vol. 4 and 14).

¹¹ In other words, theoretically the Thai bureaucracy is to serve ordinary people but in reality they serve those who already have influence and power ie the bureaucracy serves the elites and their interests; therefore the problem of Thai bureaucracy is a political and not a technical problem.

bureaucracy at every level, from local to national, in her interview in 1994 she concluded without hesitation that:

... The bureaucracy is that root cause. The people's problem will never be solved unless we change how our bureaucratic system works. ...

You can't imagine how much effort I have made to push them into doing something at all. ...

But that is relatively minor. The horror is how far they are willing to go in order to abort my case. (Sanitsuda, 1994, op.cit.: 97-8).

5.2 From a (diary) Writer to a Petitioner

Pornpet wrote the entries for 1966 in the 1965 diary, and the 1967 diary¹² included the sole entry for 1968 as recorded below:

March 30, 1968

*Today we [I] feel most agitated [shocked] to learn that **he ... got married.** We [I] can't believe what [I] just heard. Am I dreaming? How could it be like this? What is on his mind? Why does he easily make a decision like this? We [I] don't understand you. We [I] couldn't think about anything more... (bold mine).*

During that summer, what Pornpet tragically lost was not only the one who stole her heart but her own land. Five weeks later, on May 7 1968, while Pornpet's mother, Nu, was working on her farm, officers came to measure her land.

*"The head of the district land section ordered us to do it. This area has been officially declared a 'public' grazing tract. If you want to object, go to the district office," the officers arrogantly announced.*¹³

¹² Most of the entries from the 1966 and 1967 diaries are about her encounters with a tall, dark and handsome mining engineer, one of the turning points in Pornpet's life where she had found herself not only in a battle over land rights but also in love. Many women in her small district competed with each other to win the heart of the young Bangkokian graduate. Recognising, in her terms, her 'lower status' as a woman from a poor farmer family, dwelling in a whirlpool of difficulties and crisis in comparison to other better off and 'higher classed' women, Pornpet tried to suppress her own heart by holding her feelings inside and forcing herself to forget him. During the long months of hidden longing, the diary was her most loyal friend and a counsellor that she could rely on.

¹³ This information was based on Pornpet's interview in *Lalana*, a popular women's magazine (Sept. 25, 1988) as well as her 'memoir' [1968-1972].

The first petition from the Meuansri family to the district office objecting to the expropriation of their land was sent out one week later and was signed by Pornpet's mother and her five children.

17 Moo 3 Tambon Nong Klub Amphur Nong Bua¹⁴

May 14, 1968

To the District Chief of Nong Bua,

As kapachao--- [I] Mrs. Nuui Meuansri ... bought the land from the ex-owner B.E 2500 (1957) and have been working on it ever since. Kapachao [I] planted many trees, including fruit trees, which have yielded some income to help care for [my] children and family.

Later, the provincial authorities announced that landowners must pay the land tax, which kapachao [I] have been paying regularly. Now, the land officers have come to measure [my] land and declared it as public land. Kapachao [I] am desperately distressed as kapachao [I] have invested a lot of [my] energy and money into it. Kapachao [I] don't have capital or any other piece of land to earn [my] living in order to feed [my] children and take care of many other people in [my] family whom kapachao [I] am responsible for. Kapachao [I] beg for your mercy. Please consider giving kapachao [me] your mercy.

Nuui Meuansri Supa Meuansri Sopit Meuansri¹⁵
Jaroon Meuansri Samrit Meuansri Saroj Meuansri (bold mine).

Regarding **Pornpet's first petition** written under her mother's name, there are two main points to be discussed in terms of language. Firstly and grammatically, 'kapachao', the personal pronoun Pornpet utilised to represent herself in this letter, is primarily used in official written documents and correspondences. Forty years ago, it seems that there were not many (women) farmers who would stand up and pen a petition asking for justice from the officer in charge, but Pornpet did and used 'kapachao' to represent herself in her official writing. Secondly and philosophically, the way she disguised herself, writing in her mother's name, reminds me of what Trinh challenges when she asserts that "[W]omen writers are both prompt to hide in (their) writing(s) and feel prompted to do so. As *language stealers*, they must yet learn to steal without being seen, and with no pretense of being a stealer, for fear of 'exposing the father'" (1989, op.cit.: 19, italics mine). They have been named and framed that way because historically and

¹⁴ *Moo* means village, *Tambon* is sub-district and *Amphur* means district.

¹⁵ Pornpet's previous or nothing at all name when she was younger. Later, it was changed to 'Pornpit'; and then, Pornpet, which means a 'diamond blessing'.

culturally “[L]earned women have often been described in terms one might use in describing a thief. Being able to read and write, a learned woman robs man of his creativity, his activity, his culture, his language. Learning ‘unfeminizes’” (ibid.). Pornpet had the same chance as boys in the village to go to school openly. However, she still had to ‘rob’, not in the context of gender but class and age. To be able to accomplish her ‘theft’ in the big ‘Master’s house’ (of bureaucracy), Pornpet managed to disguise herself by using her mother’s name (which would relegate seniority and therefore credibility) and by using the official language and the use of the pronoun ‘kapachao.’

Next, let’s recover, using Blunt and Wills’ term, the ‘hidden space’. Placing the 1965 land case entries next to each other, and followed by her first petition, I suddenly and finally was able to recognise a vital **link!** That is, metaphorically, the **petition finds its birth in the womb of the diary** or conversely, the **diary is the ‘mother’ of the petition**. The stage of her becoming and then being a committed petitioner did not ‘come out of the blue’, but was rooted in the process and cocoon of diary writing. Once the crisis reached the stage where her ‘personal’ land was (for political purposes) surveyed and (graphically written or) mapped out to become a part of the ‘public grazing tract’, her unofficial diary writing could no longer address the issue. Pornpet’s diary provided a strong ground for the practice of conceptualising and writing skills that she could develop into other forms. Attempts to untangle the bureaucratic fiasco demanded that the writer shift to another level and form of communication; that is, to officially inscribe it in the form of a petition appealing to the upper level government officer in charge. The unexpected discovery of this ‘hidden’ point also helped me understand my long struggle to read Pornpet’s diary. If someone wants to access a Third World grassroots woman’s diary, they need to ‘displace’ themselves from the traditional lens and wear a new pair of ‘*decolonising*’ spectacles to read the diaries, petitions and other relevant documents from other angles to give a more constructive and critical reading.

Practically, I began a new chapter on Pornpet’s **diary** by (doubling back to) conventionally dwelling on the ‘whirlpool’ of research on *Western* women’s diaries in order to find some guidelines. Later, I found that the more I read, the more I felt alienated from those diaries.¹⁶ The diaries by Pornpet, a so-called ‘Third World’ grassroots woman, are entirely different. In the smallest of ‘private’ spaces (of the diary) the ‘public’ issues of state violence and the political, economic and social consequences experienced by a farmer family are all compressed into the entries. Additionally, discovering the link between Pornpet’s diary and her petition motivated me to re-assess her land rights case and related entries. Through a decolonising lens, I have witnessed the emergence of the process of an ‘autobiographical act’ whereby a grassroots woman moves from “‘*silence into self-narrative*’ (Smith, op.cit.: 4). Therefore, this piece of archival document in my hand is both a diary and an autobiography.

¹⁶ For example, in *Space of Her Day*, a study on 16 Australian women’s diaries during the inter-war period (1920s-1930s), Holmes elaborates that many of these dairies “... capture the art of the everyday. The weather, the shopping, the housework, the mail, are all compressed into entries which reveal the fabric of the writer’s daily existence” (op.cit.: 13).

Moreover, it is also the ‘womb’ of the ‘conventional’ autobiography that followed thirty-seven years later.

Such complexities are ‘delightful’ rather than difficult as it helps provide further questions from different fields to dialogue with Pornpet’s diary. The earlier questions by Beattie, which I slightly rewrite to fit Pornpet’s story, “*Why did Pornpet write her diary? Who is her intended audience?*” followed by Smith’s “*What kind of subject speaks throughout the autobiographical text?*” (1993, op.cit.: 22) and finally, Holmes’s inquiry into “the journal’s role in the lives of their creators” (Berzins, 1998: 132), will help develop a greater understanding for the larger question of *what is the 1965 diary’s role in the history of Thai archives?*

5.3 A Grassroots’ Diary: Provenance, Subjectivity and Roles

The above four questions will be addressed from the perspective of three different realms: personally, philosophically and politically.

Personally, there are four major aspects to be discussed. Firstly, in her own words, Pornpet documented that writing a diary helped “pouring the pain out of my heart” (2002-2004: Vol. 10). The tragic incident of August 6, 1963, caused by an unjust civil officer, had taken place almost one and a half years before Pornpet began the process of *naming the moment, questioning authority and testifying against the violator*: “... Mr ..., the head of the district land officers ... an evil man who tries to destroy our future all the time ...”. This process is not only the act of transferring and transforming ‘*from violence into text*’ but also reveals the beginning of the moment ‘*when a subaltern can’t speak, she begins writing*’; that is, the moment when Pornpet attempted to initiate a meeting and discuss with the district chief a solution for her family’s problem that ended instead with his failure to hear what she had to say. Such writings are significant in that they establish a strong ground for future remembering, reviewing and re-conceptualising.

Secondly, the incident both haunted and motivated her to communicate by other means. Realising the difficulty in accessing the bureaucratic state by **voicing** one’s concerns and issues (for them to hear anything other than their own agenda is something all of us should already be familiar with), she instead shifts her strategy by communicating (first to herself through her diary and then by petitioning the bureaucratic state) through the **written word**. Therefore, to ‘*resist her erasure*’ is quite likely another motivating factor for Pornpet to take up the diary. As emphasised by Anzaldúa, “*I write to record what others erase when I speak, to rewrite the stories others have miswritten about me ...*” (1983: 169).

Thirdly, for Pornpet the shift *from the ‘other’ to the ‘author’* means that writing a diary is much more than a daily ritual of finding ‘a space of her own’, becoming instead a process of strategically acting to ‘re-position’ herself. Being suddenly hit by and living in ‘the monsoon’ of having her father unjustly jailed, losing her occupation and financial security, and being denied

justice by the highly respected district chief, community and relatives brought Pornpet to the stage of desperate disorder and de-stabilisation. Living one day at a time, Pornpet, with her 5x7 inch diary in hand, sat down and inscribed her anger, anxiety, doubts and thoughts. This daily process assisted her in finding order among the disorder and re-stabilising what had become destabilised. In each step of ‘taking back control’, the process of reestablishing her subjectivity through stitching and re-stitching with bits and pieces of her broken and scattered subjectivity, was gradually developed. It is, as Blunt and Rose point out using a postcolonial geographical lens, “the effort made through a politics of location to locate an author(ity) in terms of her position in a complex and shifting matrix of power relations involves a fluid and fragmented sense of both identity and space”(op.cit.: 14). Pornpet’s diary showed me how the effort of an ‘embedded’ thinking, questioning, recalling, reflecting and writing takes place within a shifting and negotiated location in a process of re-positioning oneself *from (objectified) other to author(ity)*.

Fourthly, *Pornpet’s journey also takes her from (being) a ‘writing that is fabricated’ to ‘writing the facts and feelings’ as well as ‘writing that is fighting’*. Officers in positions of authority hounded Pornpet’s family with falsely written and unjust orders, leading to the arrest of her father, arbitrary charging of vehicle tax and efforts to take away their land, which brought tremendous tragedy to Pornpet’s family economically, politically and socially. These orders were written in such a way as to be not only one-way and top-down but also to occur within a ‘closed’ system that prevented any ‘writing back’. Finding herself objectified in a situation where her family was falsely written without any recourse or authoritative/legal power to write back (eg to arrest the land officer in return), there was no better alternative for Pornpet than the creation of her own space for writing, space that she was in charge of and over which she exercised full command.

Philosophically, we need to examine the issue of the **subject** and its relation to the act of writing. The autobiographical approach, or the politics of writing from the position of the ‘I’, is a process whereby subalterns (especially women) struggle “to become [a] subject’ as she simultaneously ‘resist[s] *provided subjectivities* in relation to the regulative power of modern social apparatus” (Smith, 1993 op.cit.: 4). Therefore, the answer to “*What kind of subject speaks throughout the autobiographical text?*” is that there are at least two subjectivities: a civil subjectivity and a Buddhist subjectivity. In regard to the latter, such a ‘**Subject**’ would be one **who refuses to be unjustly (undharma or adharmā/अधर्म) written and instead to justly (dharma/धर्म) rewrite a ‘Subject’ of her own.**

Justice (or **dharma**) and **writing** are the two sides of the same coin or the most ‘doubly’ significant aspect of Pornpet’s subjectivity (woven throughout with multiple threads ie her female subjectivity as a dutiful daughter and the (in)formal ‘head’ of her family). The first aspect of her subjectivity, the notion of ‘**dharma**’ or ‘**justice**’, may be examined in terms of three different components: concept, standpoint and approach. What is surprising regarding the concept of dharma is how a grassroots Buddhist woman utilises the lens of Buddhism (=Buddha’s teaching=**dharma**) to ‘read’ the state’s violence and to conceptualise it in a few

words clearly, concisely, critically and powerfully: “**our family was hit by a bad karma by an unjust man [who exercised his] unjust power [on] unjust grounds**”.

Etymologically, as already mentioned, the two words **unjust** and **undharma** have the same spelling in Thai. The word **undharma** (or unjust) in English is spelled **adharma** or อธรรม in Thai (or roughly ‘un’ = ‘a’). More accurately, in the Thai language, when **a** (or **๑**) is placed as a prefix in the front of a word, it means ‘bad’ or ‘the state of malignancy’. What had been happening to Pornpet is that the process (and product) by *power* (by the state and its staff) in *exercising their adharma writing* in an attempt to *inscribe and neutralise* her; therefore, what she fights for is the **dharma writing** (or being written **dharma**[ly]). Metaphorically, her aim (and act) to **erase just one letter**, ie the ‘a’ from the word **adharma** to return to be **dharma**, cost her ... **her life**. Let me repeat one more time, when Pornpet writes that “... *our family was almost broken into ... pieces ... because of their unjust power*” it does not only mean that authority exercises their power in an unfair manner, but that it is also an unacceptable act as it is against Buddha’s teachings. Therefore, Pornpet’s burden is a two-in-one task to fix the state authorities unjust/undharma act against her family (ie arresting her father on false grounds and attempting to prevent the Meuansris from working on their farm) and to shame them by emphasising that they violate Buddha’s teachings. As Pornpet reinforces, addressing “the unjust problems in society must be the priority of the government. It is unacceptable to use the notion of poverty as an excuse to do [development] project(s). First and foremost, it should be **justice** ...” (Sukanya, op.cit.: 37).

The more I (read and) write about her diary, the more I feel so clear as to why she often said “*I am committed to fight to the end*” (and she did it without feeling ‘defeated’ over the next forty years). In comparison, I struggle to find a theory from the many different schools and thinkers to build up an appropriate ‘conceptual framework’ as a map to write my PhD thesis, but *Pornpet already has a clear conceptual Buddhist¹⁷ framework* to work from when it comes to her life-writing thesis. Furthermore, she translates, interprets, develops, challenges and changes what she experiences and writes it in response to the difficulties caused by the state bureaucracy which “is not only inefficient, it is extremely dangerous” (Sanitsuda, 1994, op.cit.: 98).

¹⁷ In Bhuddist culture, it is always already understood that the privilege of being ‘male’ provides a chance to be ordained as a monk in order to represent and succeed the continuation of Buddhism. The monkhood status offers men both space and time to study and practice Buddha’s philosophy without any worries (even to make his own meals as it will be offered to him by other Buddhists every morning). The rigid ‘frame’ of forbidding women access to Buddhism through ordination (immediately) makes women a second class Buddhist. Pornpet’s life and writings have shown me the groundbreaking act of ‘de-framing’ the forbidden frame of not allowing women to enter the monkhood. Being ‘framed’ in the temple and ordained as a monk in order to have a chance to dwell, study and practice Buddhism, is not that important. Staying at home, though, and as a woman, Pornpet was still able to commit to her studies and practice everyday in her daily life (as monks do in the temples). Above all, the way she critically and radically interprets and applies her knowledge into action of protecting and succeeding the (Buddha’s teachings on) **dharma/justice** by correcting the **adharma/unjust** actions helped enrich Buddhist philosophy to be lively rather than rigid and closed.

Pornpet's significance as a subject of critical Buddhism is also a reflecting on (and reflection of) *what (has written and) writes her*. Born to a committed Buddhist family in the early 1940s, Pornpet was told Buddha tales by her father at bedtime and woke up in the morning to help her older sister cook and "... offer alms to the monks everyday ..." (2002–2004: Vol. 6 and 10). Again, we are very different from each other. I went to the temple once a year on my birthday. However, for Pornpet, like many others in rural areas, the temple was the only place and space to maintain and advance her intellectual interests after completing compulsory grade four education. Besides documenting the state violence, one significant portion of her 1965 diary is dedicated to entries on 'Buddhism and related affairs', including documenting her interpretation of Buddha's teachings, discussing dharma issues at the temple, and corresponding with a senior monk in another province. Re-reading these entries helped me understand the reason why Pornpet often repeatedly got upset and consistently required advice, explanation and clarification. (For example, she records "... [S]uddenly, [the law that was] passed robbed us of 3000 baht without **any explanation**.) This is because through the many long years, Pornpet had furnished herself with the philosophy of Buddhism through a critical *approach* of dialoguing and discussing with the monks (despite their being very senior and highly respected). However, in the space of state authority there is no speaking, just ordering and enforcing the law. As the district chief arrogantly told Pornpet, "... **we are ... the maintainers of the law**" (diary, February 20, 1965). There is no further discussion, no debating with reason and no giving of any advice, clarification or explanation, in stark contrast to the horizontal and communicative approach Pornpet experienced in the domain of Dharma.

Philosophically and practically, following the Buddha's path and living her life on the ground in such a way as to make good karma, physically, verbally and mentally, brought Pornpet to a point in her life where she had confidence in her status as a virtuous person with '**a pure heart**' [the stage of having a clean and enlightened mind]. As she observes, "*We [I] lost almost everything even my strong will to work. The only thing left is the purity of [my] heart ...*" (February 2, 1965).

In the 'monsoon' of being assaulted by the dirtiness and ugliness of state violence, a dharma practice in the context of disengaging with the bad karma and purifying one's own mind and spirit in order to intellectually search for wisdom, provided Pornpet with a firm ground on which to stand. From this *standpoint*, a grassroots Buddhist with a 'pure heart' is committed to "... *live my life for my family and to prove the facts ...*" (July 6, 1965).

There is a saying "*the pen is mightier than the sword*." As a Dharma student, Pornpet had both: her knowledge and a mighty pen. Beginning as a *basic note-taker* in elementary school, she moved on to become an *advanced note-taker* and *pattern (body-map) maker* at the dressmaking school. As the owner of a dressmaking shop, she had to furnish herself with the skills of *recording customer accounts*, which provided a solid ground for her transformation to *diary writer* able to record the unjust acts of the land officer and his staff. Later, Pornpet became a *petitioner*, whereby she petitioned all manner of related government offices demanding justice, finally becoming an *autobiographer* who looks back retrospectively to rethink, review and

theorise her experiences. As pointed out by James Baldwin “[T]o accept one’s past --- one’s history --- is not the same thing as drowning in it; it is learning how to use it” (in Smith, 1993,op.cit.).

Fig. 8: Pornpet’s becoming a writer chart

Graphically drawn in the form of a chart in a way that emphasises the relationship between the various stages of her life-writing, I found that, firstly, the (1965) diary, which we find in the middle of the graph, is a crucial link between the earlier two stages and the later two stages. Moreover, it is the most insightful archive in regards to discovering and understanding her subjectivity as a Buddhist or Dharma/Justice activist (while the petitions give details on the land cases and the autobiography presents a reflective and retrospective panoramic view of her whole life). Secondly, though each ‘stage’ serves as soil for rooting (ie provides solid ground) from which to conduct her writing (and sharpen her critical thinking), it is also a ‘displacing’ space or stage of ‘living in between’ filled with “a passion named wonder” (Trinh, 1995, op.cit.: 333). Trinh refers to ‘wonder’ as an attitude of open acceptance of the ‘other’ as mystery. In other words, to approach the ‘other’ in wonder and mystery (without prejudgment) is the (intersubjective) act of letting the ‘other’ be the subject of one’s own. In contrast, the objectification process forces the other to be an object that can be (actually or potentially) known or (abstractly) possessed in advance through many different methods of measurement with the (potential) purpose of manipulation to serve the manipulator’s self interest. What I describe earlier as Pornpet’s ‘seamly knowledge’ can be related to Trinh’s concept of ‘wonder’: while the former refers to the source or well-spring for diversity and variation, and therefore of creation, the latter is a preparation of and way to approach the ‘other’ that allows ‘diversity, variation and creation’ to emerge.

Through the process of (self) writing and re-writing, Pornpet had gradually resisted and liberated (or de-colonised) herself from the ‘colonised’ subjectivity constructed by the dominant socio-political apparatus. Additionally, and in particular to her case, such an apparatus constitutes itself as the postcolonial state’s unjust/adharma authority. Lastly, the process of writing, or “the filling and shifting space of creation” (Trinh, 1995,op.cit.:333), helped Pornpet

“to become [a] subject’ as she simultaneously ‘resist[s] *provided subjectivities in relation to the regulative power of modern social apparatus*” (Smith, 1994, op.cit.: 4). Therefore, the process of her new self-creation also lends itself to revealing the operation of internal colonialism that permeates Thai society. Moreover, it also reflects Pornpet’s course of cultivating herself as a critical ‘civil’ subject. Throughout her 1965 diary, its double layers of being ‘a civil subject and a Buddhist’ speaks clearly and critically along the way.

Like many others in her district, Pornpet (passively) lived her life civilly by paying taxes, respecting the law etc. It was not until the incident of bureaucratic violation that took place on August 6, 1963, which brought her to face the other side of the state and changed her way of viewing it. She had learned that based on his personal anger, a land officer (and his colleagues) could tactically utilise the ‘public’ mechanism to arrest and jail her father with false accusations, prohibit her family from working on their farm as well as arbitrarily charge vehicle tax on their tractor. Then, from the simple physical forms of abuse at the practical day-to-day level, it evolved into the more complicated situation of discrimination at the policy level. On April 22, 1968, through the state’s authority (and advanced technology) of surveying and mapping, Pornpet’s land (and the land of 28 other families) were (‘re-written’ to be) included as a ‘public gazing tract’.

Pornpet questioned and analysed the above incidents through the Buddhist lens of “bad karma” (diary, January 11, 1965). However, the way she insisted on “getting clarification and explanation” regarding the bureaucrats’ decisions and operations in many of her entries (diary, April 5 and 16, 1965) reflected her critical understanding of the concept of civility. That is, first and foremost, civil officers and their organisation need to be reliable, responsible and above all *accountable*. Moreover, her initiative regarding opening the floor for dialogue with the district chief (diary, February 18, 1965) shows us as to *how* she wanted the working and communication process between the bureaucrat and the client to be conducted: that is, as an *intersubjective* rather than a hierarchical and objectified relationship. Such an interpretation reminds me of Patricia Williams, a black law professor, who “wants to change how the law of property, rights, and tracts are read...” (in Perrault 1995: 100–101). What I found in Pornpet’s text is not much different, in that she wanted to change the writing of (and of being written by) the Thai bureaucracy, as she boldly confirmed 23 years later that “ [W]e have to go trying to solve each individual’s problems. We have to solve the problems at their root cause. The bureaucracy is that root cause. The people’s problem will never be solved unless we change how our bureaucratic system works. ...” (Sanitsuda, 1994, op.cit.: 97).

For Pornpet (and many other Third World men and women), it seems that the basic civil rights to be obtained is the right to work and live their life civilly and peacefully (that is, not to be violated by any state bureaucratic mechanism or the bureaucrats themselves), as well as the right to have full accountability and intersubjectivity in any kind of communicative relation and connection as proposed by Irigaray: “[T]he state would become a servant or administrator at the service of citizens. It would never be their master, their lord, he who imposes on them his law, his word” (2001: 66).

Politically, and finally, we come to the question “*what role does this diary play in the history of archives in Thailand?*” One role that Pornpet’s 1965 diary provides is a witness to and evidence of a **50 year-old incident** which honestly but powerfully testifies to how the head district land officer exercised his ‘personal’ anger and revenge through the ‘public’ mechanism of a bureaucratic system which he oversaw and (ab)used in order to violate Pornpet’s family. Why? When? With whose support? And what were the consequences? Over the next 50 or 100 years, this brutal fact will not change or disappear from her diary.

In regard to the issue of time, in her interview with *Sarakadee*, a monthly magazine, Pornpet emphasised that “[in this situation where] we have very little power [and very few people] in the battle with government officers; *if we don’t [plan for a long struggle] as we have done*, what other [tool] could we use to pressure them to speed up the case?” (1988: 84, italics mine). I understand that she means (patience and) **‘time’ is the golden weapon of the weak**. Never give up in writing, fighting, waiting and pursuing the case. Pornpet had devoted her (wisdom, energy, money and) TIME to fight for truth and justice until her very last breath. Although her life has ended, (I’d like to further elaborate that) this little diary is still alive. Its prestigious status as a ‘*test of time*’ archival document will keep on telling the ‘facts’ which would not have been discovered in any other document. It is as “... Mallon confidently asserts to all diary writers, ‘an audience will turn up. In fact you’re counting on it. Someone will be reading and you’ll be talking. And if you’re talking, it means you’re alive’” (in Holmes, op.cit.: xv). His assertion is supported by Pornpet’s own statement that “I fight to make justice (Dharma) happen in my society. Initially, I do it for my family. Later, I think about other [suffering] people all over the country. It doesn’t matter if I die. Let the lessons pass on to the **next generation**” (*Sarakadee*, op.cit.: 74, bold mine). These final words are also a reply to the last question: “who is her intended audience?” She writes and fights for the next generation.¹⁸

5.4 Reflection: I am not a comprador (but an archon)

Personally and politically, I often feel very uncomfortable whenever I hear white feminists give a simple analysis for any obstacles by blaming the ‘old boys club.’ I don’t deny that in the real world patriarchal ideology plays a dominant role in almost all aspects of institutional and individual life. However, giving blame to ‘the old boys’ without having a feminist ‘self-critique’ (that is, how feminists often uncritically continue to disseminate relations of hegemonic power)

¹⁸ In comparison, in the Western context there are many pieces of work written by survivors of sexual violence that have been published and broadly disseminated. There are very few in the Thai context and fewer still of experiences of being violated by the state’s bureaucratic system. In the future, when Pornpet’s diaries are published, they will be considered pioneering pieces of work in this area.

will only bring Feminism that much sooner to a dead-end. This lesson learned has taught and warned me, a Third World feminist, that I should not and would not follow the same path by pointing an accusing finger at the ‘compradors’ club by accusing them of usurping the production of knowledge by grassroots women in Thailand without first entering my own process of self-critique.

Let me confess that this is the most difficult chapter that I have worked on. Since what is written here are not the **things** that one would expect to find on a list eg 1 sewing needle 1 baht, 5 duck eggs 3 baht, 1 shirt 7 baht, in Pornpet’s customer account records, which requires the skills of counting and categorising, but a **TEXT** filled with meaning and feeling, personally and politically, historically and geographically. Even in Thai, I have to contextualise my reading again and again in order to find the most practical or the closest meaning that reflects Pornpet’s intent as I interpret it. Then, I need to find a way to translate this ‘text’ into English, a language which often has clusters of words having similar meanings but with different usages eg *operate* could be substituted by *activate*, *run*, *drive*, *manage*, and then having to decide which word would be the most appropriate or be the best choice. For example, Pornpet says that the district chief gave her “*selfish* advice.” She uses exactly the word ‘selfish’ (which means ‘self-centred’ or ‘egotistical’). However, by placing it in context, I determined ‘narrow-minded’ rather than ‘self-centred’ would be more appropriate. Moreover, when she emphasises that “the only thing left in my life is my **purity** of mind”, purity is not a technical term but gets its highly in-depth meaning from Buddhism. I am not a Buddhist scholar (despite being raised in a Buddhist household). Therefore, how could I appropriately translate it to embrace the whole meaning in a religious context? In this regard, although am I not an actual comprador who plays a hegemonic role in silencing subaltern women’s voices and knowledge, I cannot deny that, at some level, I am an archon.

However, I am not a socially and politically prestigious archon as understood by Derrida.¹⁹ I am only a researcher who is interested in reading what Pornpet inscribes. I interpret her thought, translate the text from Thai to English and write it out within the context of a research framework and my background without any intention of erring. However, big or small, I cannot deny that I have full responsibility over my interpretation which could bring both more understanding or misunderstanding to Pornpet’s work. In conclusion, according to Spivak, in order to ‘unlearn my privilege’, the process of self-critiquing (sharing and dialoguing with the readers) is the answer. Additionally, the effort to institutionalise her archives so that they can be

¹⁹On this point Shetty and Bellamy assert “[U]nlike Foucault’s archive of the law, as “what can be said” (that is, the law as an anonymous, indeed trans-human, discursive formation), Derrida’s archive involves actual *archons* who “exercise social order” not discursively but hermeneutically through the interpretation of texts” (op.cit.: 28). In this regard, the role of archon that I perform is to interpret Pornpet’s texts (in the many forms of her writing) from my perspective and background. There is no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ conclusion as it is the process of disclosing ‘hidden’ space round after round while dialoguing with other’s ideas and thoughts from different perspectives, through which a possible opening of new understanding and new knowledge may emerge.

readily accessible to a wider group of readers from diverse levels and different layers of interpretation would be the challenge.

6. Before Closing

In this chapter two (of four) principles that make this PhD study unique in the field of postcolonial feminist geography and archives studies will be elaborated. The first principle, politically, offers and elaborates upon the concept of ‘*colonialism within*’, and its critique of the traditional (and limited) method utilised in postcolonial studies, which has not been touched upon by postcolonial-feminist thinkers (ie Spivak, Trinh, Blunt and Rose as well as Blunt and Wills). Three case studies based on and (or) related to Pornpet's archives will be presented chronologically in order to demonstrate how this concept can be used to critique what has been missed by scholars working in the domain of postcolonial studies. Secondly, and philosophically, as far as I am aware, this is the only research in which a (female Thai) *subaltern's archives and her writings* has been critically taken into consideration. This enables me to extend the practice of postcolonialism and archives studies to ‘*subalternity into crisis*’ (Spivak, September 4, 2012). I have found this exercise to be exceptionally rewarding as it has enabled me, through Pornpet, to address Spivak's question "Can the subaltern speak?" and answer it with a resounding "Yes!" In this regard, the term ‘Subalternity into Crisis’ will be ‘read’ in relation to Pornpet’s archives and in ‘dialogue’ with the work of Spivak and Irigaray to show what has not been touch upon by either scholar as well as explore the condition of subalternity from a feminist perspective.

6.1 On the Concept of ‘*Colonialism Within*’ and Its Critique of Postcolonial Studies

This section demonstrates how the concept of ‘colonialism within’ is employed to critique missing scholarship in the current discursive debates of postcolonial studies. A summary discussion by postcolonial thinkers will be presented. Then, an argument supporting the critique and contribution of the term ‘colonialism within’ through the concrete case--- of the (border)land and body(land)--- highlighted in Pornpet’s archives as well as the problems of administrative bureaucracy and the (bureaucratic) feminist movement that profoundly affected her life directly and indirectly. In terms of presentation and structure, this section will be divided into three sub-topics, respectively: 6.1.1 Postcolonialism: ‘What’s the Matter?’, 6.1.2 Postcolonialism: ‘What’s Missing?’, and 6.1.3 ‘Colonisation Within’: (Some) Cases (Studies) in Chronology.

6.1.1 Postcolonialism: ‘What’s the Matter?’

At its broadest, while “postcolonialism” can be simply and succinctly defined in two words by Blunt and Wills as “*anti-colonial*” (op.cit: 168), Ashcroft et al. offer a double layered definition in which *postcolonialism* not only “... deals with the effect of colonization on cultures and societies” but also emphasises its continuing mission of “... resistance and

reconstruction” (ibid.: 169). In this regard, the persistent challenging of neo-colonial domination is unavoidable as the world’s inequalities today are largely the result of colonial heritage and neo-colonial power relations in which wealthier countries take advantage of poorer countries to gain access to their resources and labour (ibid.).

Such a concept, the two geographers continue, reflects disciplinary practice through (at least) three major themes “... *exploring* the impact of colonialism in the past and in the present; *investigating* the links between colonial forms of power and knowledge; and *resisting* colonialism and colonial representations of the world” (ibid.: 167, italics mine). Within the discursive domain, as discussed by Louise Johnson, there are four different genres to be taken into consideration. They are, firstly, the analysis of and resistance to the process of having been subjugated and subordinated to ‘White’ colonisation by colonial societies. Then, there are “... the views of indigenous and settler peoples, the voices of migrants displaced from their homelands by imperialism, war, poverty and enforced labour” as well as “of those who have reflected on this process from within western societies” (2000: 155).

Chronologically and politically, despite being employed after the Second World War to address conditions in the ‘post-independence era’ and subsequent process of decolonisation through to the late 1970s, the term was subsequently adopted by academics as part of their interest in the Commonwealth literary tradition, “... a canon which came into being after ‘English’ had been broadened to include firstly American, and then other national and regional literatures” (ibid.). From the centre to the margin, Third World scholars and activists described their experience of colonisation. One remarkable group was the Subaltern Studies Group in India who, starting in 1982, published five volumes of *Subaltern Studies*. The group, led by Ranajit Guha, aimed to reveal the history ‘from below’ through anti-imperialist struggles and experiences of marginalised or subaltern groups as well as to rewrite the imperial colonial history from non-elite colonial subjects’ point of view rather than from the colonisers’ perspective.

Then, in between margin and centre, there are migrant populations, in Stuart Hall’s terms, living in hybrid and diasporic communities whose experiences could be viewed as a significant characteristic of the era. It is because the on-going process of their unclear and temporary personal identities has brought them to the position where the “... notions of race and ethnicity emerge to create new identities and politics and to raise fundamental questions about the decline of the West and the marginalisation of all those who live within it” (1987 in Johnson, ibid.: 156). After all, the phenomenon of flourishing literature by those living ‘in between’ in the countries of the West aim to articulated the perspective of “... the displaced, [who] write of their migratory experiences, their ambivalent identities and the racism in their new countries” (Hall 1990, 1992; 1993 in Johnson, ibid.).

Postcolonialism covers a wide range of articulated ‘resistances’, from the ‘voices’ of indigenes in colonised nations and migrants ‘forced to move within empires’ to critical discourses from the centre of the imperium and applied to academic knowledge, especially those disciplines that have made empire possible, such as anthropology and geography (regarding ‘acts of discovery, mapping and colonisation’), political science and sociology (regarding ‘ongoing regulations of colonised populations’), and history (regarding ‘the erasure of horrors of ongoing colonisation in the creation of

national histories and identities'). However, according to Johnson, she would rather pay attention to the cultural dimension of "way(s) of thinking" (ibid.: 155).

Nonetheless, as Spivak has shown through her study on the discourse of 'Sati', the practice of burning Hindu widows on the funeral pyre of their husbands, the notion of 'voice' is problematic. By tracing back to two ancient literatures, she demonstrates how the practice of *double colonisation* to silence Indian women was undertaken first by local elites and much later by 'White' colonisers. Additionally, it is not only the process of silencing people but of *places* that have been imposed by the practices of colonisation. As philosophically argued by Irigaray,

[O]ur [Western] manner of reasoning ... corresponds to an appropriation. ... our cultural formation want[s] it this way: to learn, to know, is to make one's own instruments of knowledge capable, we believe, of seizing, of taking, of dominating all of reality, all that exists, all that we perceive and beyond (2004, op.cit.: 23).

This is where the imperial ideology of *transparency* takes place, followed by its legitimacy in drafting all (virgin) land in connection to European knowledge and power. The assertion that the world is homogenous and differences must be negated has properly been disrupted by different schools of feminists. For example, Adrienne Rich articulated the notion of a "politics of location" in order to re-imagine a more fluid space which is "... fragmented, multi-dimensional, contradictory, and provisional" (Blunt and Rose, op.cit.: 7). Additionally, Trinh coins the term "territorialized knowledge", which insists that the hegemonic power of claiming and conquering "... is never guaranteed: there is always a space of some kind of resistance" (ibid.: 15). Therefore, through the notion of territory, several possibilities of position de-stabilising are provided. Firstly, there is the realisation that the uncertainty and instability in the interaction between hegemony and its opposite is complex and contradictory. Moreover, as this space is unable to be plainly polarised (as eg East and West or 'self' and 'other'), Bhabha suggests that it be approached as (borrowed from Fanon) 'ambivalence' (the relationship between the colonisers and colonised). Instead of presenting "... the colonised subjects as simply *either* complicit *or* opposed to the coloniser", he proposes "... the *coexistence* of complicity and resistance" or 'hybridity' (in Blunt and Wills, op.cit.: 187-8). The concept of ambivalence is described by Bhabha in his essay series, *The Location of Culture*, in which he argues that dominant cultural narratives "can be *displaced to reveal* a 'third space' (1994, italics mine). Broadly speaking, as interpreted by Blunt and Wills, the explicitly spatial term 'hybridity' can be referred to as "a contradictory and ambivalent 'Third Space' that disrupts the binary opposition between 'self' and 'other'". In other words, it is the 'in-between space' emerging 'within and between' the fracture of colonial rule, where the uttering of resistance intersects with the shaken hierarchies of the colonisers and colonised culture. In consequence, what is offered is a critical approach to re-imagine "cultural difference that contrasts with representations of an exotic and usually inferior 'other' to a western 'self'" (op.cit.: 178).

In brief, there are a numbers of thinkers who offer their critique to not only challenge but enrich postcolonial scholarship. For instance, while Bhabha 're-locates' Western culture from a postcolonial perspective, Trinh (politically and) philosophically re-vision the

‘transparent’ space through the concept of ‘territorialised knowledge’ and Spivak argues from the ‘double colonisation’ point of view, using the discourse on ‘Sati’ during the British-India colonial period as an example. Additionally, in the discursive domain, there is a burgeoning array of narratives produced by Commonwealth writers, representatives of migrant populations as well as the South Asian Subaltern Studies historiographers and alternative individuals. Taking an intellectual trip across the terrain of postcolonial studies, I have furnished myself with a number of critical concepts and terminology such as ‘the West and the Rest’ (or the ‘non-West’), ‘empire and colony’, displacement, migration and last but not least the ‘Third Space’. Nonetheless, the more I travel, the more I find myself ‘getting lost’, unable to find the place to ‘fit’ my research subject, Pornpet, and my country. In other words, in either the ‘politics of postcolonial location’ or the ‘location of postcolonial culture’, where can I locate myself and my study?

6.1.2 Postcolonialism: ‘What’s Missing?’

In brief, if the term ‘postcolonialism’, according to Ashcroft *et al*, is broadly employed to refer to “the political, linguistic and cultural experience of societies that were former European colonies” and the subsequent effects of colonisation and decolonisation (1998, op.cit.: 186), the above problem of where should my study be located could perhaps be examined along three different dimensions, which are related to and reflected in each other. Firstly and politically (as well as geographically), what is problematic from a postcolonial perspective about Thailand is that it is a country that has never been physically (and fully) colonised by the West. Secondly and personally, in regard to my status, I am a ‘Third World’ scholar (with a ‘First World’ education and all the privileges that this bestows). Despite sharing a similar training discipline in history, as had some members in the South Asian Subaltern Study Group, I have never had any direct or indirect experience of (growing up or) living in any former European colony other than colonies of settlement, including Canada and New Zealand. Thirdly and practically, Pornpet, my research subject, was not a Third World migrant who left her family (and country) behind seeking a better life and new fortune by migrating to and settling in the ‘Empire’s’ home country. Her ‘forced migration’ cannot be framed according to the concept and practice of colonisation or decolonisation but rather is different in content and form, what we’ll name “colonisation within”. This is because Pornpet’s displacement took place on her own land in her hometown of Nong Bua, which resulted from the effects of the mal-practice of the local administrative bureaucracy as an extended part of the centralised state bureaucracy of Thailand, an effect of European colonisation. It seems that the notion of ‘colonisation within’ is a major missing topic in the field of postcolonial studies. My observation on this theoretical gap is confirmed by Herzfeld, who argues that because “Thailand lacks a colonial history”, this places it in “theoretical isolation ... (from) Thai studies within the Western academy (where) critical analysis has been built (on events in) former colonies but largely overlooks the society over which western domination was more ambiguous” (in Jackson, 2010: 43).

Moreover, Herzfeld continues, “... rather than seeing this in negative terms ...” he believes that “... Thailand’s exclusion from western theory provides opportunities for the field to make a critical contribution.” (ibid.: 48). In response to Herzfeld’s critical call,

Thongchai's "The Others Within: Travel and Ethno-Spatial Differentiation of Siamese Subjects 1885-1910" is an outstanding instance. In his study Thongchai has elaborated on how the European practice of ethnographic construction to formulate and control Others was adopted and adapted by the Siamese rulers and applied to their own subjects through travelogues and ethnographic notes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Such a project, the author summarises, "... gave the Siamese élite a sense of its superior place within Siam and in relation to the world beyond. In other words, since its inception Siam has always been a hierarchical domain, differentiated not only by class and status, but by ethno-geography as well" (op.cit.: 41).

Employing the concept of "the Others 'Within'" to re-read the postcolonial-feminist studies literature, I found that Spivak, Trinh, Blunt and Rose, Blunt and Wills did not directly address the issue of "*colonisation within*". The practice of controlling and naming the so-called transparent space has been undertaken by 'White' men, but also by 'Brown' elites (well-equipped with Western knowledge and technology of rule), who played a crucial role in implementing 'colonialism' domestically. At this point it is useful to examine (Bhabha's (1994) and) Trinh's (1995) philosophical concept of 'reading the third space' with an eye toward a creative application; that is, to access a displaced rural Thai woman subaltern's narrative using the concept of 'the third space *within*.' In conclusion and in return, the debates on Thai studies (in the postcolonial context), elaborated by Herzfeld and Thongchai for example, could well be sharpened and enriched by including a consideration of feminist methodology and critique.

6.1.3 'Colonisation Within': (Some) Cases (Studies) in Chronology

How employing the concept of '*colonisation within*' from a feminist perspective yields more insightful results for postcolonial studies will be elaborated through four different cases. They are 6.1.3.1 The Politics of Gender on Official Paddy Duty Receipts, 6.1.3.2 'Western Dress Codes' and 'Colonisation Within' and 6.1.3.3 Borrowing from the West: Toward Greater Domestic Consolidation of Power and Control

6.1.3.1 The Politics of Gender on Official Paddy Duty Receipts

While working on chapter 3, Behind the Archival Grain, I remember the surprise I felt when I discovered the Meuansri's 1935 paddy duty cover sheet and paddy duty receipt with Pornpet's parents' first names, Nai [Mr] Pim and Nang [Mrs] Nu, appearing side by side on the form without a last name. What I had encountered differed from what I had known. Generally, on official documents relating to a couple's matters, the husband's first and last name comes first; what follows (as an appendix) in the next section is the wife's first and last name (not her maiden name but the last name of her husband). I had never before come across an official document showing the husband's and wife's names together without last names. Such a finding encouraged me to take an historical tour on the issue of land and gender as it pertains to land related documents.

I found that the practice of issuing land documents started in 1901. According to Noparat (op.cit.: 3-32)¹, for centuries there had been some form of record keeping but during the reign of King Rama V, a critical shift in land administration took place under which the ‘Torrens system’ was adopted and the Department of Land established (ibid.). It was in this department’s archives that Noparat found documents related to land disputes between the Siamese (nobles and commoners) as well as the government’s policies restricting land ownership by foreigners. Additionally, there is a very interesting 1909 archival file entitled, “Department of Lands Registration seeks consultation on the issue of title deeds regarding the wife’s name appearing in front of [her] husband’s name in which the agricultural commissioner interprets it differently” (ibid.: 243, italics mine). This reference inspired me to search for the original document in the National Archives of Thailand (NAT), where I eventually located them along with correspondences submitted by two agricultural commissioners, seeking the Director’s advice regarding land ownership ie should a couple have equal ownership over the land or only the wife (whose name came first). The Director in turn passed the matter on to the Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture (MA), for a final decision.

This particular case was quite complicated. It was in regards to a Siamese woman’s husband who was of Indian descent. Despite having his name on the title deed, would he be eligible for land ownership? There were two opposing opinions, with one side in favour (ie eligible) and the other against (ie ineligible). It is not so much the specific details of the case itself that interested me but the tranche of related correspondence in which the issue of whose name could appear was also implicitly a discussion on the position of women. In a note from a Director to the Secretary, dated June 25, 1909, the Director pointed out that there were “many cases” of title deeds with the wives’ names appearing prior to their husbands names (that is, in what would typically be a dominant and superior position in most if not all official documents). Additionally, there was a letter dated June 22, 1909, by the agricultural governor of Nakorn Chai Si, who further clarified that

Conventionally, what has been done is that once any piece of land is investigated and the officers gain information, that is when they determine who acquired the property before marriage regardless of whether it is the wife or husband, the name of the original owner must be placed first in order to indicate original ownership (ibid.).

The records show that eight years after the Torrens system was established this remained the practice. As a result there were many cases in which both the wife’s and husband’s names were placed together on documents as co-owners. What is even more significant is that if the wife brought the land into the marriage then her name was placed in front of her husband’s. Twenty-six years later, on the Meuansri’s 1935 paddy duty cover sheet, Pornpet’s mother’s name, Nu, was beside that of her husband, but then as if it by some quirk

¹It is a system of registration of titles to land originally introduced to South Australia by Sir Robert Torrens in 1858. Its successful practice in the British’s Straights [Singapore] inspired King Rama V’s senior land officer to apply its principles to draft the Thai version. (Noparat, op.cit.: 106-107).

of nature the name disappears from all subsequent documents. I am reminded of Van Esterik's anthropological observation that in contrast to other regions of the world, women in Southeast Asia have always played a prominent role in cultivating land and managing farms. Until recently it was the youngest daughter who stayed on the family farm to look after her aging parents while her older siblings, especially her brothers, were expected to find their own way in the world. Custom gave precedence to "... bilateral kinship ... with substantial matrilineal residence ... [as well as the] inheritance of land by daughters" (op.cit.: 249). We can assume that Nu's name on the paddy duty cover sheet reflects not only the legal but cultural practice of the society at that time and it was right and proper that women's names appeared on the official land and land related documents.

However, regardless of what the agricultural governor of Nakorn Chai Si wrote and what the anthropological literature confirms, the full legal and customary rights fell away because of a gender bias against women introduced by the authorities. In his September 1900 lecture on marital law mentioned earlier, Prince Phatthanasak, the 'founding father' of the modern Thai legal system, asserted that although both "husband and wife, seen under the law as the same person, might have both of their names appear on the title deed, the husband has the right to sell/ exchange it as he has authority [over his wife] under marital law" (op.cit.). Such inconsistency between the land law and marital law on the issue of women's rights in relation to land made me rethink the notion of 'colonisation within' from a much more critical perspective. For instance, although certain practices had been borrowed from Europeans (and their colonies), such as the ethnographic project (Thongchai) or the Torrens system of land administration, and adopted and imposed by the indigenous elite, the latter had also, within their own land and their own culture, deliberately changed a range of customs. One such example of the latter is the casual and cynical jettisoning of women's customary rights thereby constituting a violence for which Westerners cannot be held responsible.

6.1.3.2. 'Westernised Dress Codes' and 'Colonisation Within'

Subsequently, this earlier example of 'colonisation within' would later involve other aspects of domestic life, including Western dress codes. We will approach this issue from a feminist perspective in reference to two documents from Pornpet's archives: the *dressmaking course notebook* (1959) and the *customer account records* (1959-1962).

Following the 1932 coup, which replaced absolute monarchy with a constitutional monarchy, the imposition of 'colonisation within' was transferred to a new elite made of those from commoner origins who came to power not by birth but by education and (theoretically) through a process of democratic elections. The new government, led by the young Field Marshal Plaek Pibunsongkram, a French military cadet graduate, introduced many critical changes to the country, politically, economically and culturally. He set out to rid the country of its traditional or 'feudal' past with the intention of ensuring that his country be internationally recognised as a civilised and progressive nation. Between 1939 and 1942 the Pibun's government, as it came to be known, announced 12 edicts or "Cultural Mandates or State Decrees" (literally, in Thai, 'State fashion' or 'State customs') covering a wide range of issues such as: changing the name of the country (from Siam to Thailand); changing the

national flag and anthem; and establishing ‘proper’ daily activities. In particular, Decree no. 10 regarding the “Thai dress code” proclaimed on January 21, 1941 (four years after Pornpet was born) that:

1. Thai citizens should not appear in gatherings or public spaces in municipal areas without being appropriately dressed. Inappropriate dress includes wearing only underpants, wearing no shirt, or wearing a wrap around cloth.
2. What is considered proper wear for Thais is according to the following categories: ... wearing uniforms as position and opportunity permits; ... wearing polite international-style attire; ... wearing polite traditional attire (*Royal Gazette*, 1941: 113).

Three months later the Prime Minister made a ‘special request’ directly to Thai women asking them to wear “long hair” as well as “... stop using a loincloth and change to wearing a sarong instead ... no more topless or using a wraparound cloth for the upper body ... the wearing of a blouse is now required....” (*Department of Advertisement News* in Suwadee, op.cit.: 101).

The move to encourage and enforce Thais to “wear ‘international’ (ie ‘Western’) dress” (and rid oneself of traditional clothing), radically changed the way Thai bodies were presented in public, both practically and theoretically. ‘Western’ modern dress became the exemplar by which native Thais were now obliged to ‘map’ (and wrap) themselves. This edict did not just ‘colonise’ the body with a Western sensibility, the radical behavioral implication demanded a shift in their ‘collective consciousness’, identity, and the social, political and economic relations. It created a negative self-consciousness --- feeling shame at being topless or caught wearing what was now classified as underwear meant little until the new criteria was put in place. It encouraged those who dressed in a Western style and affected modern attitudes to look down on those ‘others’ who still wore traditional dress as ‘backward’ rural bumpkins. This was particularly applied to rural Thai women whose activities and duties tended to restrict them to the home. Since the 1940s, policies rooted in a context of ‘colonisation within’ implemented not only an aesthetic of modernity but also culturally displaced millions of Thai women².

Nonetheless, Suwadee (politically) interpreted this cultural phenomenon as the state’s ‘symbolic code’ by making a distinction between traditional (ie the wearing of ‘loincloths’) and progressive. It might be reasonable to assume that the new regime was much more promising and efficient than the old regime in shifting the country to a stage of prosperity and modernity comparable to any other internationally (ibid.: 99).

Additionally, it also created an opportunity for women like Pornpet to clothe people in the outfits mandated by the state, what Spivak has called the making of a cultural hybrid, “the condition ... of mimicry: to be different yet the same ... a mixture of difference and sameness” (2000, 18). According to Pornpet’s autobiography in 1958 the district chief, in

² My mother was one of many internal migrants who had to find creative ways to live, dress and travel between the two lands of traditional sarong and modern skirt until her last days.

response to government policy, "... made an announcement that women were not allowed to wear only brassieres (in public). Since then, women had to also wear blouses ..." (2002-2004: Vol. 10). Pornpet had already accepted the change and had earlier traveled to Bangkok in order to learn the art and science of dressmaking at the centre before returning to her relatively remote home in Nong Bua with skills to both serve customers and teach students with her newly acquired knowledge.

6.1.3.3 Borrowing from the West: Toward Greater Domestic Consolidation of Power and Control

In order to get a better understanding of how (the subaltern, in particular) Pornpet was 'administered' by a highly centralised bureaucracy in the 1960s – a bureaucracy whose modern features and highly centralised character dates back to the early 20th century – I will briefly outline two aspects of 'colonialism within': Semicolonialism and Cultural Assimilation and Administrative Bureaucracy as reported in Pornpet's Memoirs.

6.1.3.3.1 Semicolonialism and Cultural Assimilation

There is a significant difference between former European colonial countries (ie Egypt, Brazil and Cambodia), settler colonies (ie Australia, Canada, and USA) and the experience of Siam/Thailand. The first and second groupings stand on strong academic ground from which to develop their own postcolonial theories. For countries such as Thailand, a national formation historiography asserts a conservative discourse centred on the view that they have never been colonised. Proponents argue Thailand has never been colonised and, as has already been mentioned, formally this is true but this also tends to ignore the influence that has been exercised over Thai affairs first by Great Britain in the 19th century and then by the USA in the 20th. To take account of this disjunction Jackson argues a case for the use of the term semicolonialism in order to "open a dialogue with postcolonial studies while recognizing the ambiguity of Western power in the Thai context" (op.cit.: 39). The term, adopted by Marxists in the 1970s, neatly encompasses the distinctly dual and ambiguous character of Thai postcolonialism: societal autonomy from European imperialism and subordination to both local elites and 'European' economic and geopolitical imperialism. Outwardly, Thai elites were able to secure an autonomous (but subordinate) position to the Western world order. However, inwardly, the Siamese monarchy were also able to establish new forms of control to subordinate its local population (ibid.: 50-54) to which Kasian Tejapira and Van Esterik (ibid.: 45) add modifications that need not concern us here. This is because my interest is to use the term as a heuristic device to explore profound influences on Thai culture and society rather than to mount a fully documented political critique.

The most noticeable feature of subjugation imposed by Siam's ruling elites on their newly reformed provinces was heavy taxation that was not accepted without protest. In 1902 and 1906 Phrae and Phuket complained about taxes flowing out and nothing being done in return (Tej, op.cit.: 346-347). At some level, the social, political and economic relations (either previously or currently) between Bangkok and its internal colony was similar to the

process of state formation in Europe and the British Isles or in the age of European imperialism between (European) empires and their external colonies with regard to the way in which wealth flowed to the ‘mother country’. On a much smaller scale, Bangkok served as the ‘mother country’, the centre into which flowed capital acquired from the provinces and the people ‘out there.’

Western imperialism helped “strength[en] rather than undermin[e] the domestic power of Siam’s ruling elites”; the relationship they cultivated with “geopolitically powerful and prestigious Others (was) central to the legitimation of local political rule” (Jackson, op.cit.: 191). By selectively taking up aspects of Western sensibilities and culture, administrative systems, military templates and the like allowed the Siamese ruling elites to gain legitimacy not only in the eyes of the West but also locally as has been particularly well documented by Tamara Loos and others (ibid.: 192). Semicolonialism left local elites free to deepen and strengthen their control by borrowing new tools and techniques of rule from the West.

Reflecting on history helps us to understand how the elites were able to advantageously position themselves by cultivating a manageable relationship with powerful outsiders. However, it is the highhanded legacy of authoritarian rule institutionalised within the bureaucracy that remains the primary issue; that is, in my judgment, the **bureaucracy and its culture that continues to reproduce the practices of ‘colonialism within’**. As a result, the administrative system has profoundly and negatively affected Thai people’s lives for over a century. As Pornpet astutely observed: “[T]he **bureaucracy is the root cause**. The people’s problems will never be solved unless we change how our bureaucratic system works.” (in Sanitsuda, 1994, op.cit.: 97; bold mine).

A great deal could be written as critique of the Thai administrative system but let us be brief. While generally in other countries the term ‘administrative bureaucracy’ (roughly) refers to ‘government’s affairs’, in Thailand, it means the King’s affairs. The conflation grants civil servants a flattering image on which to contemplate their own importance. Let us look at this a little closer. In the Siamese/Thai context, the term bureaucrat or ‘ข้าราชการ’ (*‘kharatchakan’*, the official Thai equivalent of ‘civil servant’ in English) literally refers to ‘servant of **the King’s affairs**’ (kha=servant, ratcha or raj(a)=king and kan=affairs). Only recently in 2002 has this term been changed to ‘พนักงานราชการ’³ (*‘phanaknganratchakan’* or ‘government employee’ in official English), which means ‘employee of the King’s affairs’ (*phanakngan*=employee, ratcha or raj(a)=king and kan=affairs.). Only the first syllable is changed (from *kha*=servant to *phanakngan*=employee) but the rest, ‘ratchakan’ or the King’s affairs, remains in place.

In terms of privilege and prestige, once one is recruited to work as a ‘ข้าราชการ’ or a ‘servant of the King’s affairs’, it means s/he improves their social standing in terms of ‘class’, with life-time security not only for him/herself but the entire family. There are many other privileges enjoyed by this special in-group, therefore it is unsurprising to learn from Pornpet’s diary that when the district chief chose to humiliate her, he called loudly, “Go hand

³ The first syllable of both words is in italics to indicate the change from *kha* (= servant) to *phanakngan* (= employee) but the rest ‘ratchakan’ or the King’s affairs is in normal case.

in petitions wherever you want! But you will never win. Any office you go, I have my friends who work there” (diary, August 16, 1993).

6.1.3.3.2 On ‘Administrative Bureaucracy’ in Pornpet’s Memoir

Pornpet used a 4.5 x 8 inch scrapbook as her memoir to document her first five years (1968-1972) of conflict with the administrative bureaucracy at the district and provincial levels. After a few lines of summary introduction, she then delved into the details of the conflict:

May 7, 1968, the land surveyor came to measure [our] land and cut it off to become part of the public grazing tract. I objected. He said that he was ordered by the district land officer. ...

...

May 9, went to see the district land officer. He said that since they did not have authority at the district level, [we] should go to the provincial level....

May 10, went to see the district chief.... He suggested [to us] to place a petition with the district office.

...

May 23, 23 other villagers handed in petitions to the district chief. He did not take them into any consideration ... he said that the report had already been sent to the provincial level.

June 5, [I] went to see the provincial land officer He said that the district report had not arrived yet

...

July 8, 1968, [I] and [my] mother went to see the provincial land officer. At first, he disagreed [with us] and said that it is public land. Once we challenged that [we] would bring the case to the next level, he told us to wait a while as all the reports are now at the provincial office. ...

October 29, 1968, we are all together 15 people who have sent [our] petition to the Ministry of Interior.

Starting 7 May 1968 the situation developed very quickly. On that day a surveyor visited to map the farm and arbitrarily cut off part of it, in order he said, to make a public grazing tract. Pornpet objected and the next day went to see the sub-district headman who knew nothing about it. She was sent to the district land officer who advised her to go to the

provincial authority. She went instead to the district chief and he advised her to prepare a petition and by the time this was received along with 23 other petitions, an official survey peg was already in the ground (22 May) and the district chief had already sent the results of the land survey to the provincial office. Despite continual visits to the authorities, May passed into June and July over which period the matter became increasingly opaque. Petitions and letters had not arrived, somebody else was always responsible and they could not be found. By October 15 people joined Pornpet to send a petition to the Ministry of the Interior.

There are three distinguishing features of Pornpet's text: (relatively) absolute autonomy of the administrative officers, advantaged subordination (a lower official always referred to an authority further up the hierarchy) and an emerging unaccountability (nobody would give an honest answer). The survey that authorised the inclusion of Pornpet's land into a public grazing tract took place without advance notice as if the land owner had no rights and the land involved could be taken by an arbitrary authority at any moment. The surveyor apparently did not have to be cleared by his superior, the district chief, or to contact the sub-district headman responsible for local administration⁴. The subordinating line of command between the district land officer and his superior at the provincial level seems not to be an obstacle but rather an advantage. For instance, the geographical distance and different status could be strategically used to avoid responsibility by passing the matter between lower and higher levels of administration. This explains why Pornpet was told to seek help at the provincial level because there was no "... *authority at the district level. [The report had already been sent.]*" At the provincial level, the provincial officer plainly employed the same justification in return when he asserted that "*the report hadn't arrived yet*". As a result, Pornpet lost three days of work and had to make three trips before officials were able to find the district report sent to the provincial office.

From the chart below, it is possible to see how and where the practice of non-responsiveness and unaccountability can become embedded in the system somewhere between the 'abstract' space of subordination and autonomy of the 'concrete' relation between district and provincial [and then provincial--departmental--ministerial levels], respectively. In this regard, Pornpet's memoir both reveals and reinforces that the notion of administrative bureaucracy is not plainly the politics and practice of public administration but that the *bureaucracy itself is the content and form of 'colonialism within'* (with its own autonomy and subordination).

⁴ It is based on information they both told Pornpet that they "did not know anything about "[*the land surveying order by the district land officer*]". If the district chief was not lying, then this could be seen as quite unusual (as well as a startling confession) in that a major public project which affected many villagers' rights and livelihood in that area could have been undertaken without any knowledge of it from the most important administrator in the district.

Fig. 9: Public Administration Chart

As argued in my earlier chapter (Chapter 5) regarding the significance (hegemonic, prominence) of the administrative bureaucracy's practices, the lack of accountability imposed no cost on the side of the administrators, which instead, in such a hierarchical system, is carried entirely by the victims. There is also another task the petitioners needed to perform: even though the problem was created by the district chief he failed to take any measures to correct the situation. As Irigaray asserts, the state should ensure that it remains "a servant or administrator at the service of citizens ... never be their master, their lord, he who imposes on them his law, his word" (2001, op.cit.: 66). In this case the nature of the Siamese/Thai royal-centric legacy of administrative bureaucracy did not serve citizens; instead, it protected its own interests, even if this meant obscuring malpractice when staff failed to perform their duties properly.

Pornpet was forced by the bureaucrats to pay a very high price for their malpractice and her refusal to be silenced. The cost of time, effort and money can be gleaned from her writings. For example, Pornpet spent almost three months traveling back and forth on several occasions to find out whether relevant documents had arrived. Once she mailed her petition to the Ministry of Interior, there was no doubt that it would take a while for it to find its way down to the district level: ie Ministry---Department---Province---District. After more than 15 months since her last entry on October 29, 1968, Pornpet was finally told there would be an investigation (February 18, 1970).

The next day Pornpet met the district land officer and was told the irregularity had been acknowledged but nearly another year had to pass before the land was resurveyed (February 3, 1971). It was going to take even longer for the matter to be finally settled. Although at this time the district chief acknowledged the inaccuracy of the earlier survey, he took no disciplinary proceedings against the surveyor who had caused the problem in the first place and left the matter unresolved. The district chief and the land officer simply faded from the scene and no disciplinary action was taken. Pornpet's comment on the situation written 31 years later (Statement no. 4/202), two years before she was killed, says it all:

Administrative bureaucracy is a failure. It lacks efficiency, uses catastrophic and crooked power against the state's policies ... violated people's rights and freedoms. In particular, the "Toong Kao Pra" public land case dispute was prolonged for 30 years without any resolution. Despite starting off as a small issue, the officers' malpractice was extended to be a case to be heard at the national level

Administrators as well as political bureaucrats [like MPs, ministers] protect corrupted acts undertaken by officers. That is, the changing and amending of the original map of the "Toong Kao Pra" public grazing tract through three major official surveys ... [in 1968, 1980 and 1986, respectively] ... (February 18, 2002).

Apart from the major investigating surveys (mentioned earlier in her statement above), several minor investigations were carried out. One of the most significant, the resurvey on February 3, 1971, lasted for three days. All the petitioners followed what was done and verbally agreed that the surveyor now had established the facts of the case but when the work came to an end on the 5th February:

*... the surveyor asked the petitioners to sign their names on a blank sheet of paper. **There wasn't a single word written on it.** The excuse given was that he was in a hurry to leave (bold mine).*

Then began another cycle of repeated trips from the district to the province. The authorities would again request clarification from the district land officer, "Why are the villagers' signatures on a blank piece of paper?" and the district chief would receive the same old answer: "*I don't know about it*" (ibid.). In sum, Pornpet spent a decade (1968-1978) traveling back and forth between Nong Bua and Nakhorn Sawan to follow up on her case (and once in a while to the Minister of Interior) before coming to the conclusion that "... if

our suffering could not be solved by either the district, provincial or ministerial levels, we should head off to ask the government to solve it” (Sarakadee, op.cit.: 77).

A few months after her mother passed away (because of heart failure exacerbated by the suffering she experienced over the land case), Pornpet made a decision to go to Bangkok.

In 1978 exactly three years after the UN 1975 International Women’s Year and four years prior to the Thai Government’s announcement of the *Five Year Plan on Woman and Development (1982-1987)*, Pornpet shifted the focus of her struggle from the provincial to the national level. Over the next decade, Pornpet traveled back and forth between Nong Bua and Bangkok and frequently camped out in front of Government House.⁵ It is something of an irony that behind the gate a group of feminist bureaucrats were busy formulating the national policy and plan to ‘develop’ the poor, illiterate, rural (and urban) Thai women by transforming them into modern (and efficient) women (as a national resource) in response to the United Nation and World Bank’s urgent, global agenda to improve the lot of women in developing countries. Pornpet would often occupy the space in front of the gate, sitting under a tamarind tree patiently inscribing petitions, banners, posters and leaflets asking the Prime Minister to intervene and solve her land case problem.

Despite the poor way in which she was treated she remained committed, writing and fighting not only for her land but also for justice (read=Dharma or Buddha’s teachings) for over three decades. It was through this persistence that Pornpet brought (herself as well as) “her subalternity into crisis”.

6.2 On the Challenge of ‘Subalternity into Crisis’

The distinctiveness of my research is that it is rooted in the ground of the (unexpected) availability of a rural woman subaltern’s archives and her writings in terms of both quality and quantity. This unusual find introduces us to a new chapter in postcolonialism and archives studies that we can name as ‘subalternity into crisis’ for two reasons. Firstly, Spivak asserts in her groundbreaking and controversial article “Can the subaltern speak?” that the subaltern “...cannot speak” and further that “... the subaltern as female cannot be heard or read” (op.cit.: 308). Pornpet’s case proves the exception. Secondly, Pornpet’s archives provide a further challenge to Spivak’s question, but this time the question is asked differently as “Can the subaltern write? And how do we begin to read their writing?” which helps create a number of critical approaches for accessing the subaltern’s archives from a feminist perspective as elaborated in the following chapter.

Here I will review Spivak’s argument regarding the way the subaltern is silenced. I will then explore the phrase ‘Subalternity into Crisis’ in relation to Pornpet’s writing and discuss how we can best understand the condition of subalternity in dialogue with the work of both Spivak and Irigaray. The structure of presentation will be divided into three sub-topics. They are 6.2.1 Why Can’t the Subaltern Speak?, 6.2.2 ‘Subalternity into Crisis’: Definition

⁵ Her longest camp out in front of the Government House with her buffalo, ‘Choei’, was from September 12, 1984, to October 16, 1985, or approximately 400 days.

and Discussion, and 6.2.3 Overcoming the Condition of Subalternity: Reading What Is 'Missing' in Spivak and Irigaray, respectively.

6.2.1 Why Can't the Subaltern Speak?

In her essay, "Can the subaltern speak?" Spivak, using a deconstructionist Marxist analysis, argues that there are (at least) two major factors that impede the subaltern's voice from being heard. Firstly, it is the unavailability of records by and about the subaltern themselves that adds to this silence. For Spivak this is particularly salient in regard to the practice of Sati, the widow's supposed self-sacrifice on her husband's pyre, abolished by the British in 1829. In order to listen to these buried voices, Spivak had to etymologically trace back to the archaic origins of two major Hindu literary classics, the Dharmasastra (the sustaining scriptures) and the Rig-Veda (Praise Knowledge), and deconstruct the discourse on "... sanctioned suicides and the nature of the rites for the dead ..." (1988, op.cit.: 299) and consider their philosophical and political significance.

Secondly, as Spivak later explains, the mere unavailability of records by and about the subalterns themselves is not enough to explain the condition of subalternity. In fact, Spivak argues, even with written and unwritten evidence, the subaltern **as subaltern** will still not be heard. Why? Because, for hegemonic, patriarchal discourse, 'hearing' is 'structured' into silence. She then elaborates on the significance of 'structured silence' with a story about her grandmother's sister, Bhuvanewari Bhadhuri. In 1926 when she was just sixteen years old she hanged herself in her North Calcutta apartment. Bhadhuri's letter, opened almost a decade later, revealed that her suicide was the result of her involvement in an unsuccessful political assassination mandated by the independence movement, an assassination entrusted to her to carry out but one that she realised she was unable to go through with (interview with Spivak in Winant, 1990: 89). To protect the independence movement and to ensure that her suicide would not be misinterpreted by her family as stemming from an illicit love affair (ie a pregnancy out of wedlock), she waited until she menstruated before taking her own life. However, despite the letter explaining why she took her life and the fact that she was menstruating at the time of her suicide, her family (in particular, Spivak's nieces) still could not hear what the letter said because it conflicted with the hegemonic discourse that 'structured' their hearing, that is, 'unmarried women take their life as a result of an illicit love affair (ie pregnancy out of wedlock)' (ibid.: 84).

This is what Spivak means by her answer to the question 'Can the subaltern speak?' and employs the example of Bhadhuri to underscore her assertion that "[T]he subaltern female cannot be heard or read" (op.cit.: 308). Technically, Bhadhuri could speak and write and even say it clearly in her actions of waiting for menstruation which emphasised that she was not pregnant. Therefore, there were no grounds for interpreting her suicide as a result of an illegitimate passion. However, she could not be heard!

6.2.2 'Subalternity into Crisis': Definition and Discussion

Similar to Bhadhuri, Pornpet could speak and write fluently. Moreover, she left us a significantly large volume of archives. The availability of Pornpet's texts (which is beyond

any scholar's capacity to adequately work through in a lifetime) has, in Spivak's terms, "...brought her own subalternity into crisis". The question is, firstly, *what does this concept mean?* And secondly, *how to move to a space and place where the condition of subalternity can be overcome*, if, as I have asserted, this is indeed possible?

Historically the word "subaltern" relates to military matters and was first used by Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist, who was obliged to self-censor his writings while in prison. Over more recent years its meaning has been extended to describe the standing of the political inferior in the face of a more powerful superior as this applies in international politics to the "north/superior – south/subaltern" configuration. Its derivation and the definition of who is or is not subaltern was elaborated by Spivak in an interview with Leon de Kock in which she acknowledges the Gramsci origin as it applies to a range of people in different situations, focusing on a definition in which those who have "limited or no access to the (benefits of) cultural imperialism (namely that you) cannot speak... (and) if speaking involves speaking and listening, this possibility of response, responsibility, does not exist in the subaltern's sphere" (1992: 45-6).

Almost by definition those who can access a discourse that enables them to talk about their subordination and can find somebody to listen to a description of their plight are automatically excluded from her definition of subalternity. The condition of subalternity is rooted in the failure to speak and to be heard. Therefore, in practice, a working definition of the subaltern might be a person who 'accepts her wretchedness as normal' (Spivak, September 4, 2012). But what does this all mean? Who exactly can be considered subaltern? To answer these questions we need to problematise language and discourse, which can only be attempted in a very abbreviated form here.

Without going into an extended explanation, dominant or hegemonic discourse is a totalising codified language structured by binary hierarchical opposites (man-woman, culture-nature, civilised-uncivilised etc) where one term is subordinate (as 'lacking' the positive values of its opposite). Such discourse is internalised and therefore assumed to be 'natural' and to reveal the world as it really is. So, if for instance, Thai elites internalise a discourse (embodied in such popular stories as 'Mr. Wild' as elaborated in Chapter 5) about rural and poor Thais as uncivilised and uneducated, they assume these judgments to be true (naturalised) and they are then most likely to adopt a behaviour considered to be consistent with this put-down. The power of such a discourse is very difficult to correct or off set. Internalisation structures what can be heard (it filters and distorts what is spoken or acted out). We can then imagine what Thai bureaucrats (ie the district officers) might have thought about the Meuansri family, that is, as inferior, uneducated and ignorant. Within the context of (class-based) 'colonisation within', we might then be able to understand how Pornpet, once she found herself outside the prevailing language, was 'marginalised and structurally silenced' by the dominant discourse internalised, disseminated and acted upon by Thai bureaucrats: they could only hear and respond to what was structured by their values and beliefs as an integral part of the dominant discourse.

The other condition for subalternity, 'accepting one's wretchedness as normal', is related to being marginalised and structurally silenced in that it can be seen as the material

consequence of the latter. For example, land theft and displacement for farmer families can be very devastating as well as lend itself to a precarious and survivalist mode of existence. Without a language of emancipation, for example (in a Western context) a language rooted in Marxist thought and critical theory, the ‘wretched’ life of a precarious existence would become normalised.

We can consider Pornpet subaltern within Spivak’s terms because on one hand, she was “marginalised and structurally-silenced” within the domain of the centralised state bureaucracy. On the other hand, because her story could not be articulated within mainstream Thai feminist or political protest discourses she could not find a voice. What sets Pornpet apart from other subalterns is that she did not accept her wretched condition ‘as normal’ and took action against it by writing, protesting and attempting to negotiate with Thai bureaucrats and elites. This ‘break’ from the general condition of subalternity is what pushed her ‘subalternity into crisis’, where ‘crisis’ etymologically refers to an insight that made it necessary for her to make a life altering decision. This process of crisis, insight and subsequent decision is revealed in Pornpet’s diary:

January 11, 1965

*What happened in the past that we [I] can still remember is that on **August 6, 1963**, the date which our family was hit by a **bad karma** caused by the Nong Bua district officers. They had falsely accused [us] of cutting down trees without getting their permission. Our family was almost broken into tiny pieces in the monsoon because of **unjust [exercise of] power**. What helped in saving [us] might be the power of **Dharma**.⁶*

Looking back on her position one and a half years later, Pornpet retrospectively saw the drastic incident as ‘bad karma’. As Spivak reminds us this is consistent with the view that the “subaltern accepts wretchedness as normal” (op.cit.: September 4, 2012). However, this belief neither immobilised her, nor lasted very long. Through her writing, we discover that Pornpet did not (essentially) accept it as inevitable, something always there (‘wretchedness’ as ‘normal’) but came to understand her situation from a constructive Buddhist perspective. As mentioned earlier, etymologically the term ‘Dharma’ has both a philosophical and practical dimension in the Thai language. It means ‘just’ or righteous and it also refers to Buddha’s teachings. What is more, the two words ‘unjust’ and ‘undharma’ have similar spelling in the Thai language. Therefore, when Pornpet wrote that “... our family was almost broken into tiny pieces ... because of their **unjust [exercise of] power**”, it refers not only to abusive bureaucratic power but a violation of the Buddha’s teaching. Determining to live her life under Buddhist guidance, Pornpet inscribes her New Year affirmation on the first page of her earliest diary (1965) “... 1. *[W]e [I] will be most proud of [our/my] prestige and dignity.* 2. *We [I] will be most reserved to the person who looks down on [other people].*” And then,

⁶ It could be argued that the moral discourse of Buddhism served as a way in which Pornpet could speak. My understanding is that this did not directly help her to either articulate her complaint or make herself heard and therefore does not disqualify her from subaltern status in Spivak’s terms.

despite her struggles in the whirlpool of wretchedness, on July 13, 1965, Pornpet moved to make a stronger commitment:

July 13, 1965

... [I] feel very depressed as [I] face a lot of difficulties. [I] feel bored with my faith. However, [I] will fight until the end for the dignity of being [a] Thai. [I] will live my life for my family and to prove the facts.

Pornpet not only refused to “accept wretchedness as normal” but as she records in her diary, started to analyse her situation using a Buddhist framework by naming the moment and finally making a commitment to change the situation for the best. Her action changes the working definition of subaltern (as an inferior without human agency, for example), she will speak though she cannot be heard, challenge though it seems again and again to lead nowhere and not give up. Through sheer determination she enters into an on-going process of de- and re-constructing her subjectivity to bring her own subalternity into crisis, even though her voice remains unheard and cannot overcome the ‘colonisation within’.

It took until 1988, after a 20 year struggle for justice, for the Cabinet to finally rule that “... her farmland was indeed illegally expropriated, and her family, along with other villagers ... will be able to get their land back.” The newspaper headlines announced “[G]overnment tries to bolster image by returning 3,000 rai [to Phornphet, the marathon protestor].” Despite the ruling, four years later, in 1992, “Phornphet is still waiting for hers [land]” (Sanitsuda, 1994, op.cit.: 92, 95, spelling as original). Even after the Cabinet decision had been taken, it only brought her into a situation in which she had to confront another level of bureaucrats, resulting in further complications and violations. In order to get her title deeds, she herself had to chase off those farmers who had moved onto her land during this controversial period.

This is sheer irresponsibility on the authorities’ part,” said Phornphet, 55, older and angrier. They take our land at will and then make us poor people literally kill one another afterwards” (ibid.).

In seeking justice and legal recognition of ownership, Pornpet spent the next 16 years (1988-2004) registering regular complaints at the police station, defending her case at the provincial court and occasionally coming to Bangkok to protest. Newspaper reporters paid less attention to her case than they had in the past, demonstrating their boredom and irritation by describing her as an ‘old auntie repeating the same old story’. The press made a habit of dismissing Pornpet, for instance, when she conducted her ‘symbolic protest’ in front of Parliament by placing at its entrance a large funeral wreath with a banner along the bottom that read “A Pity to the Irresponsible Politicians” in an attempt to shame Members of Parliament who ignored the problems and sufferings of their constituents. Newspapers referred to her as “[A] **rigid woman** ... who was made a legend through her marathon protests against the government in seeking justice when her land was unjustly expropriate to become a ‘public’ grazing tract ... returned to protest” (*Siam Post*, November 12, 1994). In

the following years this became the standard response (*Khao Sod*, December 26, 1996; *Mathichon*, December 31, 1998).

When she reached the age of 61 Pornpet continued to travel the 350 kilometres (each way) to the same destination, climbing to the top branch of the tree across from Government House and spend hours making statements demanding that the government resolve the unjust judgement over her land case. By this time her voice was louder than usual as it was amplified by a hand-held battery-charged loud speaker. However, the reporters could not ‘hear’ in the sense they could listen and understand and be able to respond intelligently to what she had to say. When they bothered to report on her appearance it was with a dismissive ‘business as usual’ tone. Some of them could not remember her name and often spelt it incorrectly as ‘Chuanpit’. Did they never wonder or consider asking the simple question that if the 1988 Cabinet resolution had already addressed the injustice of her land claim, why did she not stay at home and work her farm instead of protesting? Instead she was the person who was dismissed, blamed, rejected and unwelcomed and was well aware of what reporters thought of her:

[W]henver the reporters at the Government House saw me, they said “[O]h! Old story” with boredom on their faces and no longer paid attention [to my issue]. It is because they *listen* to the government officers. This is the problem which I must keep on fighting with *facts*, despite [my] isolation. (2002-2004: Vol. 12, italics mine).

Pornpet was also aware that otherwise well-informed journalists believed that her problem “had already been solved”, even though as Pornpet elaborates in her autobiography, it was only “superficially solved” (2002-2004: Vol.12) and that her fight was against overwhelming odds: “the whole compact bureaucratic system from the head of the village to [the head of the Government eg] the Prime Minister” (ibid.). In this fight she not only brought her subalternity into crisis but her persistence challenges us with a further complicated question: *how to move to a space and place where the condition of subalternity can be overcome*, if it is indeed possible?

6.2.3 Overcoming the Condition of Subalternity: Reading What is Missing from Spivak and Irigaray

Spivak’s apparent conclusion that “the subaltern cannot speak” has been widely read and misunderstood as an expression of “terminal epistemological and political pessimism...” rather than, as she elaborated in her interview with Winant, “... a challenge to articulate *a discursive space in which we can meet finally the subaltern on her own terms*” (op.cit.: 83, italics mine). While she has creatively shown us how hegemonic discourse silences the subaltern, she has not shown us how to take the next step, how we can meet the subaltern on their own terms. Perhaps Irigaray’s working concept of intersubjectivity can bridge the gap. I will first summarise my experience of engaging this concept in dialogue with Irigaray’s work elaborated in chapter 2 and follow it up with a brief discussion of Irigaray’s notion of “approaching the Other as Other”.

In chapter 2, in the process of reflecting upon my fieldwork on the theme of “Reading Pornpet - Reading Irigaray and On the Way to Writing ‘Intersubjectively’”, I discovered that in the effort to write intersubjectively one first needs to begin by radically *re-locating* or *re-positioning* oneself in relation to the other in such a way as to allow for the transformation of a vertical relationship into one that is horizontal. This transformation necessarily requires engaging in an on-going process of *listening* and *dialoguing* that entails an appreciation of the notions of 'difference' and 'silence'. In my case, it is the transforming of the hierarchical subject-object relation between myself and Pornpet (which is expressed as the unequal power relationship between the researcher and researched) into the ‘possibility’ that a non-hierarchical relationship can be established between myself, as a reader, and Pornpet, as a writer. In other words, it is the challenging task of bringing the meaning of one’s singularity and identity into a sharing relationship of open exchange in a way that is non-appropriative or non-possessive of the 'other'. Pornpet can only exist through her words and the impression they leave in my mind; to negotiate a relationship with the person I must embrace a ‘silence’, an ‘unknowable’ space to allow for each of us to return to their interiority. For me this means finding my own *de-objectified language* in order to define my own subjectivity and within this reflect on Pornpet. When a state of non-appropriative exchange is achieved and dichotomous and hierarchical active/passive (male/female, researcher/researched, centre/periphery) constructs and binary oppositions disappear, it is then that the notion of intersubjectivity emerges.

For me as a researcher this has become a reliable path of reflections which ensure that Pornpet will neither be spoken for nor objectified, in either the written sentence or research process. Where subjectivisation may have taken place discomfort remains; whatever is involved needs (re)imagining to achieve sufficient proximity and intimacy. The process requires subtle consideration at various points: listening, dialoguing, as well as "approaching the other as other", whereby “the irreducible transcendence of the you” is appreciated as elaborated by Irigaray

The totality of the other, like that of springtime, like that of the surrounding world sometimes, touches us beyond all knowledges, all judgement, all reduction to ourselves, to our own, to what is in some manner proper to us. In somewhat learned terms, I would say that the other, the other as other, remains beyond all that we can predicate of him or her (2004, op.cit.: 24).

In the process of reading and re-reading Pornpet’s text I sense my understanding reaching a point that exemplifies Irigaray’s notion of “the irreducible transcendence of the you”. When I read her 1965 diary I sense her presence in the ‘unknown’ space located between two important dates, “6/8/63 ‘ ’ 1/1/65” (ie the date that her father was unjustly arrested and the date she started writing her diary). By struggling to read Pornpet’s 16 months of ‘silence’, the ‘transformative space’, provides me with not only the opportunity to approach Pornpet as the irreducibly transcendent subject (one not reduced to a simple formula or attribute), but also allows me to appreciate the unattributed status of the other who over this period could escape placing herself in a position in which she would avoid “all

judgement on our part that he or she emerges as *you*, always other and non-appropriated by *I*" (ibid. as elaborated in Chapter 5.1.2 and 7.1.5, respectively).

In order to avoid the problem of meeting the stranger on their own terms, Irigaray points out that the Westerner has invented the strategic tool of (inclusion and) integration as a key and through rigorous political correctness "... make the Black equal to the White ... [as well as] the woman equal to man..." (ibid.). Her approach is not to homogenise but celebrate and accentuate the difference to liberate ourselves "... be moved, questioned, modified, enriched by the other as such" (ibid.: 24-25) but not extend this where the process becomes at all forced.

In this regard, in my own attempt at engaging with Pornpet intersubjectively, I found that what works is, on the one hand and for example, the acceptance of my own limits by learning to stop and step back from reading Pornpet's petitions (in the first round) when I found the experience too painful to continue. This moment of 'pausing' provided me with the unexpected 'time and space' to return to my own interiority and remain myself while welcoming the stranger (ie Pornpet) and letting her be 'the other' without any act of possessing. On the other hand and contrarily, what did not work was when I used the traditional research method of 'fact finding' to investigate Pornpet's life and land through her earlier petitions (1968-1986). The attempt in Irigaray's terms of "... seizing, of taking, of dominating all of reality" (ibid.: 23) entirely destroyed any sense of who Pornpet was; she became another version of myself, attributed, appropriated, a temporarily captured shadow.

My understanding of the theoretical journey of Pornpet's attempt to overcome the condition of subalternity gave me the critical opportunity to uncover the hidden space of '*going beyond both Spivak and Irigaray*'. I found it is possible to address the shortcomings of Spivak's discussion on how to meet the subaltern on their own terms in a manner suggested by Irigaray's concept and practice of intersubjectivity, in particular, the way of 'approaching the other as other'. For me this was a moment of 'going beyond Spivak'. The limitation of Irigaray's concept of intersubjectively meeting the other on his/her own terms could however be justified by using Spivak's argument on the dual character of subalternity: marginalised by structured hearing and accepting their wretchedness as normal. This takes us 'beyond Irigaray'. Last but not least, the moment of arriving at the destination of '*going beyond both Spivak and Irigaray*' is also a departure for further unknowns and matters yet to be considered.

This unique contribution of my study in the manner of '*going beyond Spivak and Irigaray*' will be demonstrated in the following Chapter through the process of accessing the subaltern's writing using the approach of 'reading the other as other' (or in my words, the act of revelatory reading) as well as presenting it through the novel style of narration.

7. (and) Beyond (the Ending)

This chapter consolidates the remaining two (of four) features that make this PhD study unique in the field of postcolonial feminist geography and archives studies. Methodologically, the first of these two remaining features provides a critical approach characterised as '*revelatory reading*' (and *writing autobiographically-in-between*), which advances beyond Irigaray's concept of intersubjectivity between *living* (as face-to-face) 'sexuate' or racial 'others', as revelatory reading is better suited to reading texts of (*deceased*) others, in particular, the subaltern(ity into crisis). Successes and failures in the process of engaging with Pornpet's archives will be discussed through different topics ie reading 'becoming', reading '(silence and) perception' as well as reading 'listening'. This chapter also provides a grassroots' interpretation of the concept of *de-bureaucratisation*¹ and its critique of mainstream Thai feminist scholarship's neglect of the issue of patriarchal state 'violence' (through writing) against (men and) women. In this regard, the six categories of (rural/ poor) Thai women's representations as constructed by (middle class) researchers will be critically assessed. Then, within the framework of 'women and language', a review of Pornpet's multiple forms of inscription conducted during her struggle with the state bureaucracy will be undertaken, as well as concluding discussions and suggestions for future research.

7.1 The Practice of 'Revelatory Reading' and 'Writing Auto/biographically-In-Between': A Methodological Challenge

The third distinct feature of my thesis is the elaboration of the methodology of 'revelatory reading' and 'writing auto/biographically in-between'. The former privileges a slow unfolding of insight with an element of surprise through the process of intersubjectively engaging with Pornpet's texts as they relate to the movement and rhythms of her life, the circular and violent rhythm of state bureaucracy and conversely the attempted rhythm to find balance and calm in her confrontation and struggle with the state. This is an indirect and intersubjective approach to Pornpet that attempts to avoid placing her within the reductive confines of a dominant binary language. It is an attempt also to approach Pornpet by 'reading nearby' rather than to (directly) 'read about', in Trinh's terms (1992: 96). While the latter aims at "...

¹ This term refers to the process of de-constructing and 'overcoming the modern (Western) patriarchal state and its bureaucratic administration' that was implemented under 'colonialism within'. Further, the centralised patriarchal state bureaucracy referred to here is one that serves to consolidate the power of the elites while serving little, if any, of the interests of ordinary Thais and Thai subalterns. In fact, subalternity intensifies under such a bureaucratic administration in that it radically marginalises groups such as rural women, while having an immense impact on their daily lives. So to overcome subalternity one also needs to overcome the conditions that give rise to it.

the finite and dwells in the realm of fixed oppositions (subject/object difference; man/woman sexual difference)” (Trinh 1989, op.cit.:101), the former tries to convey the idea of proximity with an appreciation respecting distance and differentiation between each subject, while avoiding any gesture of (discursive) possession and control over the other. It is the concept and practice of “‘approaching’ rather than ‘knowing’ an Other” (Kaplan in Er, 2011: 19).

Then, the method of ‘*writing auto/biographically in-between*’ refers to the innovative process of writing Pornpet’s biography from her archival materials side-by-side, nearby or neighbouring the process of writing my own autobiography in the (de)constructed site of the postcolonial Thai bureaucracy. It is termed ‘*auto/biography-in-between*’ as it is not merely an autobiography (of myself) or a biography (of Pornpet), but something that is both and in between.

Both the obstacles and accomplishments resulting from the process of attempting to intersubjectively engage with Pornpet utilising the approaches of ‘revelatory reading’ and ‘writing autobiographically-in-between’ will be rethought and reflected upon according to six sub-topics. The first of these sub-topics, 7.1.1, will provide a summary discussion of Irigaray’s grounding concept ie the notion of ‘sexuate difference’. This concept will be critically elaborated and its differential application to approaching Pornpet’s text (as what remains of the deceased other) will be argued. This is followed by Reading (and Reaching) the ‘Limit’, discussing my first (failed) attempt to access Pornpet’s petitions in 7.1.2. It refers to the moment that I stopped reading Pornpet’s petitions and stepped back, a gesture that, retrospectively, brought me to appreciate not only the experience of dispossession but also the act of pausing or returning to my own interiority and valuing the experience of silence that undermines any notion of discursive mastery over Pornpet. 7.1.3 traces this failure that resulted in a regressive move back to the academic mainstream tradition of (discursively) possessing the ‘other’ and the difficulty of removing the ‘expert’ self at the centre of the binary relation between the ‘us and them’, or privileged academic and subaltern, respectively. 7.1.4, summarises my experience in cultivating a critical self-awareness that minimises and questions my privileged ‘positionality’, contributing to the lessons learned in reading Pornpet’s stage of becoming a writer through her dressmaking course notebook and her customers account record. Then, highlights arising from the process of reading Pornpet’s first diary from 1965 will be the focus of 7.1.5. Finally, realising that “the act of writing, like that of living, is ‘round’”, we will return to rethink the starting point as we approach the end (Sinith, 1996: 10). This will include taking a trip back to re-read Pornpet’s petitions. My struggles to re-read not only her original pages but also to come to terms with my own pain through which I was unable to proceed effectively with reading her archives and writing the current thesis over the previous seven years, will be elaborated in 7.1.6.

7.1.1 (Re-) reading Irigaray’s (Limitation on the) Concept of “Approaching the Other as Other”

Irigaray’s concept of “approaching the Other as Other” is based on the notion of sexuate difference, the most basic and universal of all human differences as it is the difference that first articulates nature and culture (of which our own being is its intertwined expression). By

sexuate difference, Irigaray means that man and woman do not belong to one and the same subjectivity; therefore these subjectivities are neither neutral nor universal. The forgetting of the existence of subjectivity in the feminine is Irigaray's main critique of Western philosophy: a philosophy that presupposes a neutral and universal (masculine) subjectivity, which then establishes the main parameters for an explanation of its cultures and societies. Therefore, what she challenges is not only a mono subjective (male) culture but that there is an additional need to construct two cultures ie a culture appropriate to feminine subjectivity and a culture concerning the relation between two different subjects. In other words, Irigaray calls for discovering "... a new way of differing as humans by entering into communication as two different subjectivities" (2004, op.cit.: 12). Such a task, however, is riddled with difficulties as it requires

not only making demands, but the capacity of withdrawing from a universe which does not correspond to oneself, for taking time to experience what or who one is, for inventing ways of expressing oneself, for thinking and acting according to one's own values, and also for entering into relation with the other, respecting both oneself and this other (ibid: 9).

Additionally, apart from the 'sexuate' other, what globalisation has significantly brought with it is the racial or 'migrant' other who is

too often ... reduced to an object of study, to what is at stake in diverse socio-political strategies aiming in some manner to integrate the other into us, into our world. Thus we avoid the problem of meeting with the stranger, with the other. ... We flee dialogue with a *you* irreducible to us, with the man or woman who will never be *I*, nor *me*, nor *mine*. And who, for this very reason, can be a *you*, someone with whom I exchange without reducing *him* or *her* to myself, or reducing *myself* to *him* or *her* (ibid.: 24-25).

Nonetheless, there is something missing in Irigaray's notion of "approaching the Other as Other" as it seems to be attentive solely to face-to-face interaction (either between sexuate or racial others). In regard to the possibility of intersubjectivity between myself, a privileged Thai academic, and Pornpet, a Thai subaltern (into crisis), due to the fact that the 'other' presents herself solely in her writings and texts as she is no longer here with us, I have a window of opportunity to explore another way to dialogue, while advancing the theoretical debate which will be presented in the following subtopics.

7.1.2 Reading (and Reaching) the 'Limit'

As mentioned in chapter 2, a few months after Pornpet was killed in 2005, I unexpectedly had a chance to access her archives. However, I was unable to continue reading them and needed to put them away in storage – where they remained ... *silent*. This was because each time I went to read her words, particularly her petitions, they would, metaphorically speaking, open

old wounds that I had suffered in the past (as a petitioner myself) in an attempt to alleviate a grave injustice; I found myself, therefore, having to step back and *pause*.

Seven years have elapsed and looking back at that period of difficulty, firstly, brings to mind what Culler refers to as 'reading like a woman', which he defines as "... the continuity between women's experience of social and familial structures. Experience – her own and others' – is set in a vital and productive relation to the text and becomes a firm ground for interpretation" (in Ellerby, op.cit.: xv). The way Culler challenges the Western hegemonic tradition of rationalisation by emphasising the value of reading through women's experiences in the context of social relations inspires me to review my previous practice. There are a few simple things that I have learnt from engaging in the radical act of textual interpretation based on my experience of attempting to connect with Pornpet in the context of the Thai state bureaucracy's humiliating and harassing behaviour through the administrative mechanisms of the Ministry of Education (in my case) and Department of Lands (in Pornpet's case). They include, for example, an unresolved trauma that I had earlier gone through and that had unexpectedly returned upon reading Pornpet's text, especially her writings describing the pain and trauma which had been borne by her and her family. This resulted in a period of 'pausing' (or 'silence' according to Irigaray), a process in which I myself (and many other survivors) experienced at different levels, either of short or long duration, quantitatively and/or qualitatively. Additionally, after several rounds of stepping back (to heal) and moving forward (only to re-open the same old wounds), a new kind of understanding (and feeling) gradually emerged. In such a situation little can be revealed if this process of experience-based interpretative reading is pushed or forced, as knowledge shows itself in its own timely way.

Secondly, when viewing the pausing and silence from the perspective of "approaching the Other as Other", I discovered that this experience can be appreciated when we are willing to go beyond the reductive dichotomy of success or failure – ie that stepping back (pause/silence) is often mistakenly understood as the failure to proceed (linearly). That is, the pausing, stepping back or silence does not imply a gesture of passivity, collapse, or lack of progress but rather the very active gesture of acknowledging one's own boundary or limit. Such a practice has been de-valued because in the domain of Western culture, as challenged by Irigaray, "[D]ominating, controlling has been taught to us as the realm of reason more than accepting our limits, in order to live together, to coexist, to co-create even, with who or what exceeds us, extends beyond us, remains irreducibly exterior and foreign to us" (op.cit.: 25). In my case, the physical and emotional response to another's pain (naturally and) accidentally brought me to accept my own limit (then, stepping back and finding a way to coexist with the new found 'irreducible foreigner'). Nonetheless, at that moment, I was unable to read it thoughtfully and intersubjectively as a relation of discovery with a different 'other' while remaining true to my own self. As argued by Irigaray, "[W]hat can assist the women in becoming subject is the discovery of the other, the masculine, as horizontally transcendent, and not vertically transcendent, to her" (ibid.: 27). In this regard, the notion of masculinity and femininity discussed in her work of --- *sexuate difference* --- would be applicable to other relational differences (eg racial, cultural and classist). As Irigaray asserts

[T]wo events of our time compel us to rethink our relation to the other as other: 1. The blending of races and ethnicities that is now a part of our daily landscapes; 2. The recognition of the importance of gender from a cultural point of view. One could add here a certain coexistence of generations that does not allow genealogy to retain its past function (ibid.).

In my case, the dominant and therefore top-down and unequal relation between myself – a privileged academic who is able to effectively use the dominant male discourse to her benefit – and Pornpet – a subaltern into crisis who is outside of the dominant discourse – has critically (but gradually) helped move us closer toward a transformed relationship from a vertical to a horizontal relation through the discovery of our (literal) relation as a reader and a writer.

However, there is more to discover in the above relation as the line (or overlapping space) *between* the domain of the reader and the writer (myself and Pornpet, respectively) as well as *within* the reader's own domain — as I am both a reader and (an aggrieved) writer myself — is blurred. Engaging with a first hand account of trauma experienced by another (aggrieved) writer (Pornpet), has woken my own suppressed trauma ie the 'broken' 'I' (as an aggrieved writer) which slept quietly for quite sometime. Her words went deep and aroused with astounding suddenness the suffering that I had all but forgotten. Once it was awoken, it blurred momentarily whose pain was being felt – did I feel her pain or mine? The way the unknowable and uncontrollable body memory arose clouded my thoughts and made me realise as to how we are 'penetrated' by an 'other' in a diffuse or non-rational way that lends itself to a 'dispossession' of the 'other' as opposed to a process of possession that a vertical binary dichotomy undertakes. In this regard, dispossession is horizontal because it allows both sides to come nearby with respect and without taking ownership of the other. As poetically elaborated by Trinh, "you and I are close, we intertwine; you may stand on the other side of the hill once in a while, but you may also be me, while remaining what you are and what I am not" (1989,op.cit.: 90).

The process of looking back to 'read the limit', the moment that I withdrew from reading Pornpet's petitions and stepped back, brought me to appreciate not only the notion of dispossession but also the act of pausing or returning to oneself. According to Irigaray, in an intersubjective relationship in which an irreducible difference between the two subjects is required to be preserved through the embodiment of silence, to be able to return to one's own 'home' (or interiority) is compulsory. It is because "[S]ilence can be a means of fecund being, particularly in the same sex environment, in that it helps to once again define the boundaries between the self and an exterior other" (in Wells, op. cit.: 33).

In this regard, I have learned that (once overcome by pain) silence often emerges, where words fail us; that is, where discourse finds its limit. The incident of feeling pain, stepping back and pausing reflected a limit to my expert academic and privileged position that arose from the critical lived experience of re-living my pain through reading her words of pain, an experience that undermined (momentarily) the dichotomy between 'us and them'

(or me and Pornpet, respectively). It is not only the blurring of space and time between myself and Pornpet (ie the pain I felt when reading her words) but also a ‘blurring’ (momentarily) between a reader and a writer (or a privileged academic and a subaltern), especially as the pain’s source was similar – bureaucratic violence. This provides an entry point in which to open up a mode of talking/writing acknowledging the claim by the subaltern ‘other’ on those who are in a place of privilege to begin the process of critically questioning that privilege and to respond to what is demanded by the subaltern (to find justice).

If I were asked where and why engaging with Pornpet intersubjectively was difficult (a, b, c) and where and how it worked (x, y, z), my first answer would be, metaphorically speaking, at the stage of accepting my own limit (read: my own wound). In realising this, co-existing with the unknowable other is therefore not a problem requiring a calculated solution, but a process of dispossession requiring a stepping back from an outlook or attitude of discursive possessiveness rooted in a binary relation of a privileged academic expert (‘us’) and the subaltern ‘other’ (‘them’). However, the process of dispossession is difficult in that we must unlearn the deeply internalised language of privilege. As asserted by Spivak, the reason why postcolonial theorists are incapable of hearing the subaltern is because they “have been trained to listen in the language of **hegemonic**, white, **androcentric**, **Eurocentric** discourse ...” (McHugh, op.cit.: 137).

7.1.3 Reading ‘Appropriation’

[O]ur [Western] manner of reasoning, even our manner of loving, corresponds to an appropriation. Our culture, our school education, our cultural formation want it this way: to learn, to know, is to make one’s own instruments of knowledge capable, we believe, of seizing, of taking, of dominating all of reality, all that exists, all that we perceive and beyond (Irigaray 2004, op.cit.: 23).

Theoretically, at some level, the act of non-appropriation and creating the condition for and equivalence of cohabitation between different subjects can be undertaken only once one critically acknowledges “... a *you*, someone with whom I exchange without reducing *him* or *her* to myself, or reducing *myself* to *him* or *her*” (ibid.: 25). Nonetheless, in practice, five years ago, I found myself starting off by having gone in the opposite direction; that is, attempting to master the domain of the familiar and dominant disciplines that are grounded in the belief of “... seizing, of taking, of dominating all of reality” (ibid: 23). As a result, what took place was not only the possession and appropriation of Pornpet, the researched, but also of me, the researcher (in an attempt at self-possession that arises from ‘mastering’ as ‘seizing, taking and dominating all of reality’). This later insight arising upon reaching the ‘dead-end of the road’ is reflected in the following four paragraphs.

My ‘*first pause*’, lasting almost a year, reached its conclusion in the fall of 2006. An invitation for a Research Fellowship position from Five College Women’s Studies Research Center based at Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley, Massachusetts, physically brought

me back from the remembered (but emotionally debilitating) injury to the practicality of doing research in a professional atmosphere. In my luggage, apart from the photocopies of Pornpet's key documents such as her diaries and autobiography, there were 34 files containing petitions (and related documents) submitted from 1968 to 2004. The amount of primary and original documentation in hand provided a reasonably strong ground of expectation that a first draft of a chapter of at least 30 to 40 pages would materialise while at Mount Holyoke College. However, as often occurs, expectations are not always realised. Despite the persistent effort to meet these expectations, I left Mount Holyoke the following summer thoroughly disappointed as I had managed to write only a few pages of hand-written notes and not the chapter originally anticipated.

Roughly speaking, during the fall and winter at Mount Holyoke, in an effort to 'discover the facts' of what was going on in Pornpet's land rights case ie why her (and other villagers') land was mismeasured and included as part of the public grazing tract by the district land officer in 1968, I interrogated in great detail, in both content and form, the relevant documents. As a result, I was able to provide a summary for each year's petitions using the following format consisting of two columns: date in the left hand column and highlights of its content in the right hand column along with remarks eg 14-5-68: handwritten grievance signed by 15 villagers; 12-2-73: found Nuu's signature; 8-10-84: the petitioner was not allowed to attend the meeting in order to defend her case; 24-3-86: an article from the constitutional law is quoted and used to back up Pornpet's argument. However, I managed only to go through and make notes on the petitions covering the 18 years from 1968-1986, and before the end of spring, a draft of the introductory chapter was completed as written below:

Pornpet Meuansri, a farmer woman who resided in Nakhorn Sawan province, had persisted in a marathon protest against the Thai government administration for over 36 years (1968-2004). What she fought for was not only to reclaim her land rights but also to reveal the malpractice of bureaucrats when they (illegally) surveyed, expropriated and proclaimed her land, as well as the land of neighbouring villagers, as public grazing land. However, what was worse was instead of correcting their wrongful actions and sincerely healing the damage, the administrative bureaucrats remained unrepentant and unaccountable. Instead, all the burden was borne by the victims in that they had to pursue at their own expense the resolution of illegal actions created by others; that is, to battle for the return of their land as well as to seek the return of balance and justice to their own lives. Pornpet spent an inordinate amount of time and resources to fight, write (as well as archive), question, tell and re-tell the story of malpractice by government bureaucratic administrators (regarding the land dispute case) and the severe impact it had on her and her family's lives. On May 31, 2004, she was murdered on the way back home from her farm leaving behind her diaries, letters, petitions, court and other documents to be read and learned.

The time line corresponding to the events of her life was divided into four periods: 1) from a farmer to a fighter (1943-1968), 2) the first ten years at the district and provincial

levels (1968-1978), 3) the next ten years in front of the government house (1978-1988), and 4) the remaining 16 years at the provincial court (1988-2004). I had planned to fill in each period with the ‘facts’ found in her archival records, which were primarily the petitions and court documents (as she fought for her land), after I left Five College. Nonetheless, I was unable to complete this task. Further, my first inadequate efforts at writing remains untouched in my files. I then succumbed to another *long pause*.

Re-visiting the initial draft written in 2007, what is found in the text is that rather than ‘speaking with’ Pornpet, I ‘speak about’ her (ie who is she? what had she done?). In other words instead of making space for Pornpet to have her own voice within her experience of bureaucratic injustice, I myself tried to (compile and) explain Pornpet’s experience through academic expertise. In this regard, Pornpet’s knowledge and her effort to ‘write herself’ was appropriated and marginalised by the structured ‘hearing’ (a hearing structured by a universalising binary dichotomy) of a so-called academic expert. Such a notion of ‘re-writing you’ is elaborated by hooks:

[There is] no need to hear your voice, when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you, I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still [the] coloniser, the speaking subject, and you are now at the center of my talk (1995:363).

Traditionally, this is where and when the epistemic violence takes place. Academics, equipping themselves with the dominant European discourse, play their respective role as the experts at the centre in the (dominant binary) relation of ‘Us-and-Them’, a relation where the subaltern other is not only unable to speak but is also (structurally) silenced. As elaborated by Trinh,

[A] conversation of ‘us’ with ‘us’ about ‘them’ is a conversation in which ‘them’ is silenced. ‘Them’ always stands on the other side of the hill, naked and speechless, barely present in its absence. Subject of discussion, ‘them’ is only admitted among ‘us’, the discussing subjects, when accompanied or introduced by an ‘us’, member, hence the dependency of ‘them’ and its need to acquire good manners for the membership standing. The privilege to sit at table with ‘us’, however, proves both uplifting and demeaning. It impels ‘them’ to partake in the reduction of itself and the appropriation of its otherness by a detached ‘us’ discourse (1989, op.cit.: 67).

In order to ‘step-back’ from the internalised dominant binary between the (academic) expert and subaltern and to learn to ‘speak with’ (and ‘listening to’ rather than the paternalistic ‘speaking for’), Spivak’s notion of ‘unlearning privilege’ (which I would argue necessitates unlearning the internalised structured hearing that silences) must be taken into consideration. One way to unlearn structured hearing is to learn to listen: that is, listen to the

silences in speech and writing, the anomalies, and what does not seem to fit in the ready-made structures of the dominant binary frameworks. As discussed by McHugh, “the intellectual has to learn to be critical of her own roles in patriarchal culture and postcolonial theory and unlearn her approach to her subject. This task of ‘unlearning’ and learning to ‘speak to’² is a responsibility the female intellectual ‘must not disown with a flourish’ (308)” (op.cit.: 143). Nonetheless, what I have learned is that the act of de-colonising (in this case, unlearning both privilege and the internalised hegemonic binary structures of thought) does not take place overnight. In my second round of reading Pornpet’s petitions at Five College, I found myself falling back to the traditional way of appropriating the subject through the approach of ‘discovering the facts’ to answer the questions regarding land disputes. As a result, Pornpet’s experience is re-written through the framework and expertise of my academic training. Fortunately, such efforts at appropriation did not progress any further than the one paragraph originally written as I ran into a *long pause*. In the mainstream academic world where the concept of productivity is highly valued and set as a primary parameter, the output (for the whole semester) of only one paragraph would be considered a failure.

I packed and took the bus from Amherst to New York, then flew via Bangkok back to Wellington. It took me five years to view it neither as success nor failure but as a stage in the process of learning to not appropriate the subject, Pornpet, by working toward relating with her intersubjectively. The second pause provided me the space and time to step back into, in Irigaray’s terms, my interiority. As a result, what I gradually found out was that in order to avoid appropriating the other, the process of positioning oneself is the key.

7.1.4 Reading (My) ‘Positionality’ and (Pornpet’s Process of) ‘Becoming’ (a Writer)

As mentioned earlier, being able to *position* myself as a reader provided me with a firm ground not only to stand on but also to shift to the next step of (employing the autoethnographic approach to conduct the research and) sharing (with readers) the stories from the ‘field of (people in Pornpet’s) lives’ as well as the ‘field of archives’ kept by the Meuansri family. Further, my supervisors’ inquiries about (when and) how had Pornpet *become* a writer challenged me not only to ‘free’ myself from the ‘product-oriented’ study approach but also to critically shift to the more radical direction of ‘process-oriented’ learning. Perceiving Pornpet as a land rights activist, left me fixated on placing my entire focus on reading her three works of writing related to her land case (ie petitions, diary and autobiography); I have since re-oriented myself to be open to the more fluid character of the process of her becoming a writer through engaging myself with the other documents detailing her life, in particular the dressmaking course notebook and customers account record as presented below.

² I agree with her in principle but disagree with the specific language i.e. the notion of ‘speak[ing] to’, as this still implies a top-down or authoritative voice over the other. Instead I prefer the term ‘speaking with’ as it suggests a more respectful and horizontal way of relating and communicating with an other.

7.1.4.1 Reading (Pornpet's Process of) '*Becoming*' (a Writer): Learning to Read Her Dressmaking Course Notebook and Customers Account Record

In this section, the reflections articulated in chapter 4, 'Becoming a Writer', will be shared in relation to the question "what is 'becoming'?" (as it relates to Irigaray's work) and the discussion on why do we need to read these works prior to 1965?

In her writings Irigaray aims, firstly, to critique "... a monosubjective, monosexual, patriarchal and phallographic philosophy and culture..." Secondly, she seeks "... to define the characteristics of the feminine subject, characteristics which are indispensable to her affirmation as such, to avoid falling back into a lack of differentiation or into subjection to a singular subject" as well as to "... discuss the characteristics of a world in the feminine, a world different from that of man as regards relationships with language, with the body (age, health, beauty and, obviously, maternity), and relationships with work, nature, culture" (2001: 130-131). In this regard, two concrete examples are given to support her argument. Firstly, in the context of work, there is a problem regarding the notion of socio-economic justice in which its application is restricted to the rule of equal work for equal pay [for both sexes]. Secondly, and significantly, the phase of women's unfolding life occurs differently to that of men. It is that "... her physical becoming is marked by more crucial stages — puberty, loss of virginity, maternity, menopause, — stages requiring a more complex becoming than that of men" (ibid.: 132). Therefore, in conclusion, what Irigaray calls for is the necessity of giving "... woman, women, a language, images and representations which were appropriate to them: on a cultural, and also on a religious, level" (ibid.: 131), as well as the constructing of a culture of two subjects in which each [sexuate subject] does not have greater authority over the other. However, prior to entering into an intersubjective relationship, what is required for (a) woman/women is "the realization of a becoming of her own" (Wells in Irigaray, op cit.: 26). That is, to engage in "... the process which involves the cultivation of interiority through a return to the self. Once this interiority has begun to be established, only then is it possible to aim towards a full-feminine becoming" (ibid.).

Irigaray's notion of 'becoming', at some level, refers to an ongoing process of maturation or realisation that cannot be defined beforehand. Though her recent work focuses on encouraging the re-discovering of women's culture as well as cultivating intersubjective relations between two subjects in which an irreducible difference remains, Irigaray has not proposed what these cultures might look like, nor developed a well-thought out plan to undergo the process. Contrarily, the masculine dominant culture always presents itself through the character of 'saying it' in advance (either in terms of an 'always already' articulated idea, concept or explanation). That is, for example, a human being is, by definition, determined 'in advance' to be a 'rational' being. In this regard, while the concept of 'being' offers the impression of being something fixed, frozen and identifiable, the term 'becoming' strongly suggests fluidity and flexibility. Moreover, 'becoming' can also be perceived (following Heidegger) as a state of 'being' in the process of change, of cultivating and producing, as well as even (in Buddhist terms) 'calling into existence'³ and greater

³ In Buddhism **becoming** refers to:

maturation. It is the state of being open to what is unknowable and unidentifiable but which always critically works out (or reveals itself) as we go along.

Reading ‘becoming’ is not a matter of accessing (or penetrating) in a static ‘masculine’ way. Rather it is a (learning) approach that would help in the building and understanding of (marginalised) women’s culture (and language); particularly, in my case, to understand the writer’s (ie Pornpet’s) culture (and context). It is the (slow) process of reading the cultivation of her interiority, which in Pornpet’s case is not limited to a traditional convent’s quiet retreat (as in the case of Clara in *Frost in May*⁴) but could be advanced to cover the tranquil time of the ‘learning’ and ‘working’ period in Pornpet’s early twenties. They are, firstly, the three months of study at the dressmaking school in Bangkok followed by three years of working at her dressmaking shop in Nong Bua (before the incident of Pim’s unjust arrest in 1963). These two periods appear as stepping stones in her path toward self-returning and cultivating her interiority. In other words, they occupy a special place and time in which Pornpet *was able to be with and by herself (as well as to be on her own) in order to focus on practicing writing consistently and fruitfully through the act of note-taking, pattern making as well as recording the customer accounts*, respectively.

Theoretically and practically, the process of (fully) self-returning and cultivating interiority, which refers to the event of spiritual awakening or a similar level of profundity and self-revelation, occurred later in the midst of her family’s crisis. We can interpret Pornpet’s decision to write a diary as evidence of writing in a more intensely self-reflective and critical way; it’s as if she were writing herself into a new person, a person who is then able to meet the demands of a long and intense struggle while remaining balanced. As she had written in her January 1, 1965, diary: “[F]or this New Year we [I] want to make [our/my] affirmation in front of the Buddha [image] as follows: 1. We [I] will be most proud of [our/my] prestige and dignity. 2. We [I] will be most reserved to the person who looks down on [other people]”.

Although the process of writing a dressmaking course notebook and customer account records does not seem to have accomplished the task of self-returning and cultivating interiority as her diary was able to do, it did present both critical and creative opportunities for Pornpet to develop her writing. At the dressmaking school Pornpet was well recognised and highly admired by her instructors for being relatively “bright and sharp” (2002–2004: Vol.10). From the reader’s point of view, as I discussed earlier (in chapter 5), these precious few months in 1959 was the only time in Pornpet’s life “where she could fully enjoy her

Bhavana *Bhāvanā* (Pali; Sanskrit, also *bhāvana*) literally means “development” or “cultivating” or “producing” in the sense of “calling into existence.” It is an important concept in Buddhist praxis (*Patipatti*). The word *bhavana* normally appears in conjunction with another word forming a compound phrase such as *citta-bhavana* (the development or cultivation of the heart/mind) or *metta-bhavana* (the development/cultivation of loving kindness). When used on its own *bhavana* signifies ‘spiritual cultivation’ generally (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhavana>. Accessed Feb 4, 2013).

⁴ As elaborated by Wells “[T]here seemed to be a new creature growing up inside her, something still unformed and skinless that could not bear to be exposed to the light ...” (in Irigaray, 2008, op.cit.: 33)

studentship without burden and worries”. The following three years (1959-1962) brought another period in which Pornpet could entirely ‘focus’ on her dressmaking and hairdressing job and record all customer names and their accounts in her notebook. In this regard, a ‘creature’ (or the capacity for writing she had developed), which had begun to grow inside her (through the act of note-taking in the classroom and writing detailed customer account records at the salon), could be read as “a representation of something which occupies the space of what Irigaray calls ‘the not yet manifest’” (Wells in Irigaray, *ibid.*: 33). In this regard, I decided instead of beginning with the state of her ‘being’ a diarist, to step back and learn to read the process of her ‘*becoming*’ (a writer) through two major pieces of her archives ie the dressmaking course notebook and customers account record.

Learning not to read through the static ‘masculine’ perspective but rather through the moving and changing rhythm of her ‘becoming’ a writer gave me a chance to appreciate Pornpet’s dressmaking course notebook in many critical and creative ways behind the lines. For example, firstly it took me quite a while to conceptualise that, metaphorically speaking, drawing a map of the body and the earth hold the same principle; that is, the middle part of the body or the ‘waistline’ can be compared to the ‘equator’. I noted this as an observation of what I had read, then, I continued:

creating a skirt pattern requires the drawing of the latitude and longitude between the waistline to the knee-line with a specific (concern and) calculation of the upper and lower hips. Next, what is required for the blouse pattern is the drawing of the ‘latitude’ and ‘longitude’ between the shoulder and the waistline with consideration of the bust size.

Later and in summary, several years of engaging with Pornpet’s dressmaking course notebook has brought me to appreciate another critical observation regarding archives. That is, it is not only “a complex and incomplete site of feminist knowledge” (Kadar, *op.cit.*: 1), but also a record which could be accessed in order to learn the state of ‘becoming’ in regards to one’s life.

7.1.5 Reading (‘Silence and) Perception’

As discussed in chapter 5, the concept and practice of ‘reading silence’ is the key to ‘unlock’ the earlier ‘unread’ entry of January 1, 1965. Nonetheless, it could not be properly employed to access the text of November 1, 1965, in which Pornpet elaborated in a few lines the Buddhist term ‘karma’. It took me over a year to discover that in order to unlock this entry, another new key, the innovative method of ‘reading perception’, is needed.

In this section, I will engage with Pornpet’s particular entry on Buddhism’s interpretation of karma (in her 1965 diary and related documents) in dialogue with Irigaray’s critique on Western culture as well as my own background and experience as a Buddhist, respectively.

Pornpet inscribed in the November 1, 1965, entry that "... we [I] might have a lot of bad karma? Since we [I] have suffering and pain in [our] heart which comes from whatever causes. May that karma vanish". These words weighed upon me over several years; finding a way to comprehend it was a significant challenge. Frankly speaking, despite the fact that I had been born and raised as a Buddhist, what I felt most uncomfortable and hesitant with was interpreting and writing on the topic of Pornpet and her study of Buddhism. In reading either Pornpet's or other authors' works, rarely have I attempted to assess their works through a Buddhist lens. For example, once (in chapter1), I (simply) interpreted Pornpet's paragraph this way: "[N]oticeably, Pornpet's standpoint was not rooted in or influenced by any fascinating school of thought such as Marxism, socialism or anarchism. Her principles are not only sincere but also straightforward in that if there is something wrong, make it right".

The process of re-visiting makes me realise how intensely I have been conceptually colonised by Western thought. Additionally, what I often seem to overlook is perhaps one of the more important '-isms', that is, Buddhism. My weakness is, conversely, Pornpet's strength. Like many other committed Buddhists, Pornpet was taught to read and look at the world through the lens of karma and Dharma. Etymologically, the latter has a prestigious and sophisticated (double) meaning in the Thai language. The term "unjust world" could be referred to not only in terms of the secularly corrupt but also in terms of a world without Dharma (or the 'undharma' world). It seems that what Pornpet fought for was both civility and a religious way of life, a just society where Dharma is valued, not violated.

Pornpet was deeply rooted in the soil of Buddhism. It profoundly affected the way she lived her daily life and guided her soul, as well as offering a lens through which to interpret the world and find a balanced way to change it accordingly. As she confirmed in her interview in 1988:

What [I] embrace is Dharma and holiness [others might think it is nonsense but] I think that holiness is the truth, ie the Buddha. I do have a strong faith in him. Such holiness must [know and] see our actions.

I deeply suffered during the period of protest [in front of the government house]. The only thing [I] could do was to pour the pain out of my heart in the diary. One night I had a dream. ... After paying my respects to the Buddha image and sitting in front of him in distress, unexpectedly the Buddha image started talking to me. He told me "Nid [her nickname], you have a lot of [bad] karma." I suddenly came to a state of mindfulness. ... Amen! If I do have a lot of [bad] karma, may it vanish along with all my suffering and distress. Miraculously, since then the suffering could no longer catch and eat my heart. It is clear and calm. Whatever problems happen ... [I] just accept it." (Sarakadee, op.cit. : 83).

I have 'read' this part of her interview (as well as her November 1, 1965, entry) many times and on different occasions, but I could never find the way to 'reach' these words. I understand that dreams are ways to work out our issues and problems when we pay attention; however, as a learner influenced by Western rationality, it is quite hard to accept that a brass

icon, a symbol representing the Buddha who passed away 2,556 years ago, is an object that can speak. During the days and nights of protest, Pornpet might have been deeply preoccupied by the notions of ‘karma and suffering’, which ran through her mind like a stream that was then reflected back as a voice from somewhere. It could not have been from the metal image.

However, such a blind and ignorant interpretation at a superficial level (by reducing this interpretation to a dichotomous framework of true-false or rational-irrational) was challenged when I ran into Irigaray’s critique on the culture of the West in relation to the East. As she asserted: “... the culture of **perception** ... is very important in Far Eastern cultures ... it is accepted as, and is part of, the highest wisdom. It seems irrational to have forgotten these lessons and to hold on to an abstract rationality that stands in contrast to an immediate, still uncultivated, sensibility” (2000, op.cit.: 73, bold mine).

Both Irigaray and Pornpet’s works brought me back ‘home’. Lately, I have begun to learn the philosophy and practice of Buddhism, particularly the practice of ‘meditation’ which, roughly speaking, is the reiterated concentration upon an image or a word in order to quiet the mind and think thoroughly about the meaning of that image or word as well as “to more fully understand the nature of the mind.” Practically, meditation can be conducted either through the course of daily activities or in the act of sitting still in one specific place and concentrating either on “the movement of the body, the physical feelings that arise, or the thoughts and moods that flow through the mind” (Bodhinyanarama Buddhist Monastery, Wellington, New Zealand). Such mobile attentiveness, which is termed ‘mindfulness’, was explained by Buddha:

...through mindfulness one realises an attentiveness that is serene. Although it is centred on the body and mind, it is dispassionate and not bound up with any particular physical or mental experience. This detachment is ... call[ed] Nibbana ... --- a state of peace and happiness independent of circumstance [I]t is the way the mind is when it is free from pressure and confused habits. Just as waking up dispels the dream state naturally, the mind that has become clear through mindfulness is no longer overshadowed by obsessive thoughts, doubts and worries (ibid.).

Twenty years (more or less) after 1965, during one distressful night when Pornpet was camped out in protest in front of the government house in Bangkok, words similar to those she wrote in her November 1, 1965 entry, arose in her mind through the speaking image of the Buddha and helped calm her and brought her to a state of mindfulness. Since then, according to Pornpet, her mind is no longer shadowed by any worries; it is clear and calm, “[W]hatever happens, I just accept it.” Theoretically, through her radical critique of the foundations of Western rationality, Irigaray has also revealed and reinforced the value of Eastern wisdom rooted in the culture of sensual experience and the culture of perception. Practically, Pornpet had shown me her ‘feminine non-rational’ path to approach intellectual serenity through her body’s experience. Additionally, both Pornpet and Irigaray have brought me to the conclusion that “[T]he distinction between the rational and irrational is ancient. In the West, the irrational was not always defined in a negative way. It became negative when men defined affectivity, corporeity, perception as obscurity and attributed it to the feminine

value” (Rossana Rossanda in Irigaray, 2000, op.cit.: 73). According to my own observations, in the East, although the irrational is not treated negatively, under the influence of Western colonisation, civilisation and rationality, it no longer receives full recognition and value even in its own home.

Finally, through the approach of ‘reading perception’ and applying it to the works of Pornpet and Irigaray, I have come to realise one of the most precious aspects of an intersubjective literary relation; that is, the decolonising process of reading ‘in between’ East and West requires that we critically inscribe in our critique of Western rationality a rediscovery and restoration of an alternative intelligibility or sensibility from the East.

Having accomplished returning to read the ‘unreached’ entries (ie the entries for January 1 and November 1, 1965), I am encouraged to return to Pornpet’s petitions, which remain untouched because of firstly, the re-emergence of the memory of my trauma evoked when I first attempted to read the petitions. Secondly, in my second attempt to read the petitions they were chronologically accessed only at the outline level. In my third attempt, I will undertake the practice of ‘reading listening’, which is another aspect of ‘revelatory reading’.

7.1.6 Reading Listening

In this section I will share my ‘re-reading’ of Pornpet’s petitions which I was originally unable to do due to (the awakening of) my traumatic memory that such a reading invoked. To accomplish this three subtopics will be discussed as follows: reading Pornpet’s (and other farmers’) petitions and their responses; reading the employment of the ‘Master’s’ language and forms in petition writing; and reading Pornpet’s petitions in dialogue with Irigaray’s notion of listening.

While patiently flipping through Pornpet’s (and other farmers’) petitions and responses, Lorde’s astutely critical quote subtly inserted itself into my stream of thought: “... [A]n old and primary tool of all oppressors [is] to keep the oppressed occupied with the master's concerns” (1984: 113). In searching for the facts as to why Pornpet (and other villagers’) land was illegally re-measured to be included as part of the public grazing tract by the district land officer in 1968, I interrogated both the content and form of the petitions. That is, I noted the address, date, to whom the petition is addressed (ie whether the district chief of Nong Bua, the Director of Department of Land, or the Minister of the Interior), signed by whom (ie Pornpet on her own or with her siblings, or with other villagers as co-signers) as well as responses from each office.

One of the few responses was from the Grievance Committee addressed to Pim Meuansri, and dated January 15, 1973, reinforcing that

Based on the report and evidence from Nakhorn Sawan province and the Department of Land, it is concluded that this disputed land had been used as public grazing tract for about 50 years and was *registered as a restricted area since 1949* by the district’s authority, and not by decree proclamation. It had been undertaken

without an objection from anybody as [at that time] it was virgin land, not yet cleared by any villagers to earn their living...

The Prime Minister's order was to "dismiss the case" (letter dated March 7, 1973) and the file was closed. What is (or actually should not be) surprising is 'how' the villagers' case was handled by the committee. Generally, disputes involve the accuser and the accused, and require that they verbally and in writing present and defend their cases equally, openly and transparently under the eyes of the committee, who would ask for more clarification and information before making a sound decision for the sake of justice. However, conversely, what transpired with the Meuansri land dispute was that the investigative process (as well as outcome) was unfairly *one-sided* in favour of the accused, a government bureaucrat, while the accusers, ie the villagers, were dismissed outright and ignored. The committee exclusively worked on the 'report' in hierarchical fashion with details submitted from below and accepted without question by those at the top (eg district-provincial-department-ministry). That is, their decision was uncritically grounded on the accused's denial of harassing Pim, arguing instead that his survey was undertaken in accordance with the 1949 district's restricted area register document. However, evidence supporting Sanit's assertions were never presented nor attached as proof in reply to the accusers. What lies between the lines in this letter is that under the rulers's eyes (whether 'white' or 'brown') the land 'out there' is often argued as being "wild, going to waste, naked, empty or virgin". The argument is meant to assert that no one was living on and working the land and was regularly evoked by colonisers (in the 18th and 19th centuries) or developers (in the 21st century) to justify taking the land. In this particular case, the announcement of the 1954 Land Act was used as a mile-marker regarding the disputed area. In their arguments, all actions related to the utilisation of the land, such as clearing, farming, selling etc., came after the proclamation of the 1954 land law.

On January 29, 1973, Pornpet wrote a letter (her first), on behalf of herself and another 16 villagers, addressed directly to the Prime Minister with her argument as presented below:

*...Regarding the disputed area, it is not a public grazing tract [as mentioned in the committee's letter]. Prior to 1949, which was before the establishment of [the Nong Bua] district, the former owners were already working on this land and had obtained their initial certified land occupation documents in accordance with the 1955 official announcement granting rights over the occupied land [to the pioneers]. The current group of villagers who had moved to the above mentioned land to earn a living [ie Pornpet's family] bought the rights of ownership from the former villagers. The process of agreements for buying and selling the lands, with copies attached, openly took place at the village or the subdistrict headman's house. The [land] officer acknowledged what was going on without any objection and even asked the land owners to pay local area maintenance tax, which we had done, as the copies attached verify. We [are not invaders as we] did not **arbitrarily** move to work on this land (bold mine).*

Later, in order to prove that the villagers cleared and occupied this area prior to the 1949 district's restricted area registration, Pornpet managed to find the 1955 'Sor. Kor.1' (ส.ก.1) or the initial certified land occupation document, which the ex-owners had obtained before selling to Pornpet's family in 1957. *On that official paper, there was information indicating that this particular area had already been occupied by the ex-owners for nine years; that is since 1946 or three years prior to its registration as a restricted area by the district authority in 1949 as claimed by the grievance committee.*

Pornpet strengthened her argument by attaching a copy of the 'Sor. Kor.1' (ส.ก.1) as a supporting document with her letter, dated June 14, 1982, and providing a witness to support her case. He was Choen Nuan-la-ong, the ex-subdistrict headman of Nong Bua, who asserted in his letter, dated December 15, 1978, that "that piece of land was used by the petitioners to earn their living for a long time. It was not previously included in the public grazing tract." Three additional documents were attached to support his letter: the inspector appointment (1931), the village headman appointment certificate (1940), and the subdistrict headman appointment certificate (1944). Choen could be considered the most knowledgeable local administrator at the grassroots level in that area with his long term experience beginning in 1931 as the inspector, then as a village headman and finally as the subdistrict headman.

Secondly, in politically reading the employment of the 'Master's' language and form in petition writing, I would like to reinforce that the process of compiling supporting documents for each petition was punitively time-consuming. Some were on hand at home, but several official document(s) required a request for copies of the original at the government offices.

Further to this, Pornpet made additional efforts such as traveling to the ex-sub-district headman's house, asking him for a letter of support and related documents, bringing them to town for photocopying and traveling back to return the originals. The punitive character of her efforts is further revealed by the amount of time and energy expended each day having to sit and handwrite draft arguments based on the insufficient information she was able to acquire. Above all, this had to be written in the difficult and depersonalised style, in content and form, of the 'Master's' language:

*Subject Additional [documents]—Objection to the "Toong Kao Pra" Public
Grazing Tract*

To His Excellency Prime Minister General PremTinasulanonda

Refer to Letter OPM.0905/7097 dated November 26, 1986

Attached: 4 pages of copied documents

Listed below are the names of kapachao [I, we] who are owners of the lands located [neighbouring each other] in the same area. We have made use of these lands to earn our living for such a long time prior to the dispute and don't want to have any problems with administrative bureaucracy [or in the Thai word used 'ราชการ'=the King's affairs]. For the sake of peace, [we wish] the committee would consider [our] claims as stated in the protest.... (letter dated December 15, 1986)

Pornpet elaborated on the issue in three more paragraphs and signed her name as “a petitioner, representative of the petitioners and as authorised person”, followed by the 36 signatures of the other petitioners.

The way Pornpet and the villagers had to speak the ‘Master’s’ language is also discussed by Joanne Sharp on the particular notion of postcolonialism: the approach “... in which peoples can be known and how this knowledge can be communicated...” with its theoretical aim of critiquing conventional ways of knowing as well as the presentation of alternatives (2009: 110). Currently, the domination by Western countries has significantly shifted from the political and economic realms to the epistemic domain: Western ways of knowing (ie religion, science, philosophy, governance and etc) “... are often seen as *the only way to know*. Other forms of understanding are then marginalised and seen as superstition, folklore or mythology” (ibid., italics mine). In order to be heard and to be taken into consideration, the subaltern does not only have to discard their own indigenous intellectual practice and ways of knowing but also has to employ the ‘Master’s’ language. As a result, their authentic voices are distorted by the dominant intellectual and cultural strains.

Aside from the Western epistemic hegemony at the global level, locally, in the Thai context, the concept of “colonialism within” is reflected in the state’s practice of centralised bureaucracy. The government’s administration is the dominant ‘way of knowing’ and operating, which affects almost every aspect of the subaltern’s (and other commoners’) lives from birth to death ie registering for birth certificate, enrolling children in school and applying for title deed etc. Through the many years, Pornpet learned not only ‘their’ language but also administrative conventions. One simple but imperative fact is that the grievances needed to be **typed**. A ‘hand-written’ petition is viewed as an informal and unofficial piece of work. The common but compulsory tools for farmers are hoes, shovels and spades, not a typewriter. Pornpet herself owned a sewing machine but no typewriter. In remote areas like Nong Bua a few typewriters might be found in government offices such as the district or police offices. It seemed that Pornpet used the services of a typing shop. Despite the cost in terms of money, there was the cost of time ie waiting for the job to get done or having to return the next day and doing this numerous times per year (at least 30 times in 1986), which again underscores the punitive character of having to relentlessly pursue her goal to have justice. Further, Pornpet would need to proofread or re-write her petitions before completing the final version (as well as having to track down and have the signatories sign the petition). To hire a professional typist was practical but *costly*. Lastly,

having a petition *typed* meant not only getting it ‘formalised’ but also the ‘upgrade’ of the petitioner him/herself, demonstrating that s/he could conform and communicate back in the same language and form.

Another cost borne by Pornpet is the cost of having to send these petitions by registered mail. Further, there was the emotional and psychological stress of having to wait, sometimes endlessly, for a reply. After a long period enduring many years of submitting grievances with little or no progress, Pornpet changed her tactics from handwriting (and typing) to ‘body writing’, in one instance by attempting to burn herself alive (on June 9, 1987), which resulted in her being arrested and sent to a mental health hospital (as mentioned earlier in chapter 1).

Lastly, we need to read Pornpet’s petitions in dialogue with Irigaray’s notion of listening. At this point, we are returning to the question “why can’t Pornpet be heard (or rather why her petition cannot be read)?” within not only the domain of state bureaucracy but also the mainstream women’s movement, especially considering that her campaign took place during the ‘hide tide’ of the global and local women’s movement under the dictates of the UN’s International Decade of Women (1975-1985). Metaphorically, the reason why Pornpet’s voice cannot be heard either within the domain of the mainstream women’s movement or the state bureaucracy is because the comprador feminists as well as the bureaucrats (from the local to national levels) could not hear her as their ability to listen was structured by the hegemonic binary language perceptually framing and limiting what they could hear. Therefore, such a framing of the relation between privilege and the subaltern allows the former to assume they can ‘speak for’ the latter. However, philosophically, in this regard, the hegemonic concept and practice of ‘speaking for’ has been radically challenged by Irigaray:

[The] Western philosopher wonders very little about the relation of speaking between subjects. It is the relation between a subject and an object or a thing that he tries to say or to analyze, hardly caring about speaking to the other, in particular starting from a listening to the other (2002, op.cit.: 15).

...

Our rational tradition has been much concerned with “speaking about” but has reduced “speaking with” to a speaking together about the same thing. Which supposes a common universe and conversations about a third without real exchange between ourselves. The conversations can even take as an object speech itself, in its cultural specificity for example. But it is not yet then a matter of an exchange between subjects, even if diversity supplies them with an object about which to begin to dialogue (ibid.: 7-8).

I’d like to advance Irigaray’s critique of Western rationality with the question “why does the act of ‘speaking for’ or ‘speaking on’ at the expense of the other (Third World) women (and the subaltern) (easily) take place?” Surprisingly, the answer, “because *they are*

unable to listen”, is a mixture of contradictions in itself. It is simple and straight-forward but at the same time complicated as it instigates the more convoluted query “*why are they unable to listen?*” Philosophically and politically, what is the major cause rendering this state of their inability to listen?

Coming to understand that listening is not just (merely) hearing (words) but a crucial aspect of the thinking process, has allowed me to ask another series of questions: “What is *thinking*? Realising that such problematic terms have different meanings in different cultures, in the Western context, however, thinking, which is traditionally considered a process for constructing logic for truth, has been challenged by Irigaray regarding the notion of its disputed rationality in comparison with what has taken place in other cultures, in particular, the Far Eastern cultures wherein the values and practices of sensual experience and perception are predominant (2000, op.cit.: 73).

In regard to Western rationality, which is founded on the ground of the domination by masculine subjectivity, its main character is reflected in at least two significant dimensions. They are, firstly, the expression of a rootless culture as it is uprooted “from natural origin and belonging”. Secondly, man is precluded from self-understanding when he is “... mediated by exteriority without the cultivation of the interiority of the self” (2008, op.cit.: 119). As Irigaray elaborates:

... man is not ‘at home’. The familiarity or intimacy that he feels is a web of habits or customs, and not a real nearness. Wanting to master the alternation between near and remote through his *logos*, notably by transforming spatial distance into temporality, man has lost the possibility of approaching [listening to] --- the things, the other(s), in particular the other of a different sex or gender (ibid.: 225).

Losing the capacity to listen resulting from embedding themselves in a mode of logical thinking that is beyond the touch of nature, confines Western men to a double trap. They not only assume they can speak for ‘the other’ but also assume that these ‘others’ are incapable of speaking, feeling and thinking in their own ways. Moreover, the culture of exteriority has pushed these men to plan outside themselves in order to conquer and control “... and then [they] become, in some way, merely the consequence of the events which take place outside [them]” (ibid.: 219). In other words, while these (Western masculine) colonisers attempt to colonise the ‘others’ ‘out there’, in their own home they themselves become mired in their concepts and constructs, losing their way since for them there is no ‘other’ as ‘other’.

In an effort to ‘decolonise’ oneself and learn how to listen, we must, as Irigaray suggests, undertake a process of “*I am listening to you*”, which does not mean either “... to expect or hear some information from you ...” (1996, op.cit.: 116) or “...to grasp something in order to integrate and order it into our own world” (2008, op.cit.: 232). Fundamentally, listening is not about “shutting in”; instead

[listening is opening]--- to open one's old world to something or someone external and strange to it. Listening-to is a way of opening ourselves to the other and of welcoming this other, its truth and its world as different from us, from ours (ibid).

...

I am listening to you not on the basis of what I know, I feel, I already am, nor in terms of what the world and language already are I am listening to you rather as the revelation of truth that has yet to manifest itself --- yours and that of the world revealed through and by you (1996: ibid).

...

Taking up Irigaray's 'listening as opening' to (re-)read Pornpet's words, which until now remained closed, I 'hear' a different tone and 'touch'. In particular, her 1988 interview in which she challenged that, "[W]e have to go beyond trying to solve each individual's problems. We have to solve the problems at their root cause. *The bureaucracy is that root cause*. The people's problem will never be solved unless we change how our bureaucratic system works. ..." (Sanitsuda, op.cit.: 97-8, italics mine). Pornpet's astute observation and insight has, in turn, brought me to another place, politically and philosophically.

Politically, what I have 'heard' is that although being displaced (by law and bureaucratic language) from her own land, Pornpet's strong intention to go beyond "*trying to solve each individual's problems*" clearly tells us she understood well how the system works. After a long fight, she might have gotten her land back but that would have been only the tip of the iceberg. There was no guarantee that the government's appropriation of a farmer's land would not affect her family or other farmers' families in other provinces in the future. Therefore, if "the root cause of the problem... [and the injustice of] the bureaucracy" has not been resolved, the problems remain. Pornpet would relentlessly pursue justice (at her own expense), despite being stonewalled by an arrogant (Kafkaesque) bureaucracy acting with impunity and indifference to her. To Pornpet's credit she failed to be intimidated and instead demonstrated a single-minded strength and resilient drive that was unrelenting for almost 40 years (1965-2004), (wherein her writing IS in large part her activism). What Pornpet considered to be the most difficult issue to overcome was the bureaucracy's endless efforts and forms undertaken "in order to *abort* my case" (ibid.), if not to frustrate her into giving up. As there was no other way to stop their efforts at attempting to undermine the truth, Pornpet used her "*own life as the bet ... [T]hat is the most I could offer. It's no longer a matter of winning or losing,*" as she had confided to a reporter (Lalana, 1988: 26).

Philosophically, Pornpet's interview prompts a reminder of her first letter (in her life which was addressed directly) to the Prime Minister fifteen years earlier on January 29, 1973. Her simple words, "[P]rior to 1949, which was before the establishment of [the Nong Bua] district, the former owners had already worked on this land," straightforwardly tells us that the farmers had been on this land for some time already. It was the district land officers

(and their Nong Bua office building) who came later in 1956. However, once they arrived (with their law and enforcement), they ruled (read: colonised). Thereafter, much changed. In particular, other versions of local history and practice ie the set of facts that the land had been worked and occupied for some time already, was not officially accepted. What was provided to be reviewed by the rulers' eyes no longer mattered as evidence if it did not conform to official narrative ie personal witness or official documents no longer were accepted as proof. According to their (established) authority, they held the (absolute and) final say. Pornpet's voice was unable to be heard as she fought with one of the most authoritarian and hegemonic institutions; that is, with the bureaucratic system of the centralised state government (effectively operating as 'colonisation within') whose structured hearing (of a hermetically sealed and reductive character) is unable and unavailable to (interact and) receive a differing and open discourse.

As the act of listening (to you) requires "... that I make myself available..." (1996, op.cit.: 16), Pornpet in this regard had made herself available for listening. "[T]hat I be once more and always capable of silence. To a certain extent this gesture *frees* me, too" (ibid, italics mine). Recognising that 'bureaucracy is the root cause', Pornpet could not place her focus only at the primary level of taking back (her own land and) her own right to speak but also at the deeper level of changing 'the root cause'. That is, to *free* the bureaucracy from its inability to listen. To be able to read what Pornpet had undergone and accomplished reminds me of not only what was written in the published diary of Patricia Williams, a black law professor, where she asserts that she "... *wants to change how the laws of property, rights and contracts are read*. She interprets the texts that control, influence, and reflect U.S. culture. And she reads what writes her. From student evaluations to the contract of sale of her great-great-grandmother, Sophie ..." (in Perreault, 1995: 100-101, italics mine), but also what is inscribed in my own mind. That is, that I realise more in depth and breadth the reason (and feeling) as to why I remained badly injured in my initial engagement with Pornpet's grievances seven years ago. Slowly flipping through each page of her documents reminded me of a recent incident of being unjustly "written" by an authoritarian bureaucracy in my own workplace. Further, having undergone the process of submitting petitions one after another for several years, brought me to accept the bitter fact that in battling the (hegemonically) structured hearing system of government bureaucracy, one (in particular myself) could not expect to see significant changes (and gain justice back) in one's lifetime. However, Pornpet invested both her *life* and her *time* in her endless effort to negotiate, challenge, change and above all to attempt to *free* the bureaucracy from its inability to listen (while in my case, I had to pack and leave for abroad).

Having re-visited Pornpet's petition brought me to understand the various layers of reading listening and what it means to me. Primarily speaking, as listening does not refer only to the act of 'hearing words' but also to responding to what is said properly (and intersubjectively if one employs the concept and practice of approaching the other as other). In this regard (and particularly in my case), I have come to the conclusion that reading listening is the (slow) process of learning to unlearn my own privilege in order to make myself available to hear what Pornpet says (ie wrote) and respond to her thought through a

process of dialogue and sharing with a wider community. As a result, Pornpet's text (and thought) is comprehended. Once she is comprehended, once she is affirmed (not necessarily by the authorities, but even if it is just by others who do not accept wretchedness as normal), she is no longer subaltern. In other words, reading/listening is a critical act of the (possibility⁵ of) de-colonisation and de-subalternisation of myself and Pornpet, respectively.

In this regard, what Pornpet (had fought and) aimed for, the practice of *de-bureaucratising* or *freeing up* (Thai) bureaucracy from its inability to listen, will be elaborated in the following section.

7.2 The (Grassroots') Concept of *De-bureaucratisation* and Its critique of Mainstream Thai Feminist Scholarship

Lastly, the fourth aspect which makes my PhD thesis unique in terms of scholarship is that it offers an interpretation of the concept of *de-bureaucratisation*: that is, a grassroots woman's groundbreaking (oblique) critique of mainstream Thai feminist scholarship, the dominant body of knowledge that had neglected the issue of patriarchal state 'violence' (through writing) against (men and) women from all walks of life. In terms of structure, this chapter is divided into three parts: 7.2.1 (From) 'Re-writing You': the Representation of Thai Women as Constructed by Mainstream Studies, and 7.2.2 (To) Writing Selves-Writing De-bureaucratisation: A Woman's Challenge of the Patriarchal State's Violence of Writing. The former reviews representations of (poor) Thai women as constructed by (middle class) researchers and will be 'classified' into six groups, respectively. The latter highlights the multiple forms of inscription that Pornpet undertook through the process of de-bureaucratisation and will be reviewed under the theme of 'women and language'. Finally,

⁵ I qualify the process of de-colonisation and de-subalternisation with the term 'possibility' as these are tentative approaches without established guidelines or the certainty of success: in other words, it is an approach without a roadmap. In fact, what I have been able to accomplish so far is to provide the initial steps in the process of de-subalternisation and de-colonisation (processes that are implicated in each other); that is, to propose and elaborate upon the overcoming of the condition of both subalternity and subalternity into crisis (and by implication, to overcome the process of internalising the discourse of semi/colonisation or system of rule from which we think, act and speak).

If we agree that subalternity is a result of a hierarchical power relationship, the concept and practice of de-subalternisation would be expected to occur when the power relation is overcome. In this regard, the relationship that allows for power over the subaltern – not only the academic but also the bureaucrat, and elites – changes to a non-hierarchical relationship. In regard to Pornpet, such a relationship did not take place. The changes that did occur happened only from her efforts in which she had managed to bring her own 'subalternity into crisis'. Such a crisis was a turning point in her condition of subalternity. Although it was not overcome, her endless attempts to overcome it by struggling to be heard and to not accept her wretchedness as normal is written and *read* from her writings.

the chapter will end with section 7.2.3 Re-thinking the Notion of ‘Women’s Movement’: What is Left Behind for a Future Re-visit.

7.2.1 (From) ‘Re-writing You’: the Representation of Thai Women as Constructed by Mainstream Studies

Through the global hegemony of Western scholarship, Third World women’s representations have been constructed in many ‘interesting’ ways but always within the homogenising framework of ‘sisterhood’ or objectifying women as a category of analysis. For example, what Perdita Huston argued in *Third World Women Speak Out*, is “... women in the third world countries have ‘needs’ and ‘problems’ but few if any have choices or the freedom to act ...” (in Mohanty, 1984, op.cit.: 344). In this regard, the ‘needs’ and ‘problems’ referred to by Huston are not the real needs and problems identified by Third World women but are instead hegemonically imposed on them by Western scholarship. The most significant of these ‘problems’ identified by Fran Hosken is physical violence against women or their victimisation at the hands of male control through “... rape, sexual assault, excision, infibulations, etc. ...” (in Mohanty, *ibid*: 339). Apart from the problems of sexual assault/ harassment and oppression, the assumption that Third World women are always–already constituted as a “powerless” and “exploited” group as held by many feminists in the scientific, economic and sociological disciplines has revealed a crucial problem along two different vectors. For instance, firstly, “... it assumes a historical universal unity between women based on a generalised notion of their subordination” (*ibid*: 344). Secondly, it “... limits definition of the female subject to gender identity, completely by passing social classes and ethnic identities” as it does not provide an “...[analytical demonstration of] the production of women as socio–economic political groups *within* particular local contexts” (*ibid.*).

Secondly, the process of ‘rewriting (you)’ the *female subject* in terms of *gender identity* in Third World countries, particularly Thailand, has been done along two major vectors. They are, first, the ‘other’ (read: poor ‘rural’) Thai women who have been re-written by Thai feminist bureaucrats through the country’s national economic and development plans and related government reports and documents. Secondly, they have been studied, researched (ie interviewed, variously approached through fieldwork and ethnographic methodologies, and diversely analysed) and inscribed into theses, reports, articles, and books. Quantitatively, among the 1,068 publication titles, published between 1968-1999, half (49.88%) of them were published between 1992 and 1999, 36.42% between 1986 and 1991, and 13.7% between 1968 and 1973 (Sumana In-kumnoi et al in Taweeluck, op.cit.: 98). Qualitatively, utilising Mohanty (1984) as a framework of analysis, Taweeluck proposes that the representation of Thai women constructed through these studies can be categorised into six groups as follows:

1) Women utilised as a ‘target’ group and formulaic ‘variable’ in research for the purpose of establishing a particular direction for the country’s development.

- 2) Women as a group receiving both positive and negative impacts from development projects utilising economic factors as the measuring indicator for gender equality.
- 3) 'Deviant' women as one category under the binary dichotomy of 'Good and Bad' women refers to sociological studies on 'special' women groups (ie masseuse, experienced the violence of rape, lesbians etc) that explore the process of their becoming 'deviant'.
- 4) Further, women as a conscious coherent group [struggling] under male subordination is an assumption held by research in this cluster (1981-2002) that aims to analyse the (shared) oppression of women's lives under patriarchal society (domestically and internationally).
- 5) In order to break away from the conventional approach of studying women as 'victims' (of male violence) or the 'object' (of patriarchal oppression), some researchers attempted to explain the researched subject as an 'actor' under the concept and practice of sexuality.
- 6) Lastly, a recent trend is the shift from issues of deviance or sexuality to the struggles of grassroots women in the Third World context (ie those who fight for justice for their family, community as well as to protect the environment in their local neighbourhoods) (op.cit.: 105-142).

Regarding the topic of 'violence', it is interesting to learn that while a number of researchers place their focus on 'sexual violence' or the issue of (poor) women victimised by (a lone male perpetrator) rape, sexual assault, battering etc, the reality is that the violence most often encountered by Pornpet and many other rural women is the violence originating with the patriarchal state through different layers and levels of its bureaucratic operations. In Pornpet's own terms, bureaucracy, which is "not only inefficient but also extremely dangerous", is the "root cause" (of much suffering), therefore "people's problems will never be solved unless we change how our bureaucratic system works" (Sanitsuda, op.cit.: 97-8). In other words, a female subaltern's concept and practice of 'de-bureaucratisation' is a groundbreaking critique of mainstream Thai feminist scholarship, the body of knowledge which has yet to touch upon the issue of patriarchal state and the violence enacted by their particular way of writing (as it is in itself a part of that practice).

7.2.2 (To) Writing Selves-Writing De-bureaucratising: A Woman's Challenge of the Patriarchal State's Violence of Writing

According to Ogborn, "[P]art of the operation of the state apparatuses is the production of statements — in reports, policy documents, speeches, press releases and parliamentary debates — about the situation they are dealing with and about what they are doing" (op.cit.: 10). In other words, as summarised by Ashforth, "'the real seat of power' in modern states is 'the bureau, the locus of writing'" (in Stoler, op.cit.: 86), because here the politics of "paper empires" of filing and classifying is "a part of their technologies of rule" (ibid.: 90). In this regard, I reveal the Thai state's technologies of rule through the process of critically 'reading along (and against the grain) or 'tracing back' the dominant act of 'vertical' writing in which state power is manifested and shapes ordinary people's lives and land in the modern era by

‘re-reading’ 70 year-old *paddy-duty receipts* and related documents belonging to Pornpet’s family. Politically, such work brought me to understand the relation between ‘state’ and ‘writing’ in terms of “the state being a sovereign that has hegemonic ‘writing power’ over its citizens within its territory through the exercise of its bureaucracy” (as I elaborated in chapter 4). However, philosophically, Derrida challenges us to trace back this relation to its ‘origin’. That is, unlike Foucault’s ‘discursive’ approach, Derrida focuses on etymologically deconstructing the juridical concept of “how the law becomes institutionalized *as law*.” Based on his *Archive Fever*, Shetty and Bellamy elaborate that “... in the Greek *arkhe* as entailing the principle of ‘commandment’: the law can be found ‘*there* where men and gods *command*, *there* where authority, social order are exercised, *in this place* from which order is given” (op.cit.: 27-28). Moreover, regarding the notion of violence, they further elaborate that “... [T]o be sure, archival violence⁶ occurs ... ‘at the home’ of the *archons* --- or as Derrida would emphasize, ‘there’ in the liminal space where the law meets writing, where the letter of the law ‘originates’ in the trace of an earlier ‘said memory’” (ibid.: 31).

While Derrida pays attention to etymologically deconstructing the originary concept of “how the law becomes institutionalized *as law*”, Pornpet, who directly experienced its commandment and exercise through the government mechanism, came up with her own conclusion (and conceptualisation) regarding de-bureaucratisation. As she elaborated, “people’s problems will never be solved unless we change how our bureaucratic system works” (Sanitsuda, op.cit.: 97-8). In order to challenge the system (and their ‘way’ of writing), Pornpet started to write her body of work (that is, her petitions, statements, leaflets, banners, memoir, diary and autobiography).

In the context of (state) violence and writing, generally and implicitly, the Meuansri family, as well as many other farmers, experienced it (violence through writing) annually through the process of issuing land tax receipts. Particularly and explicitly, Pornpet and her family were doubly violated through the authority of bureaucratic ‘legal’ writing in the form of a *warrant* to arrest her father and, later, a *fraudulent land-measuring map* declaring the expropriation of their private land, illegally converting it to public grazing land. Having gone through her cache of archives and writing, it is of interest to learn that Pornpet did not only defy these attempts of objectification but also re-constructed herself as a subject through the process of ‘writing back’ personally, publicly and professionally. *Personally*, she utilised her capacity for writing to disclose in her diary and autobiography the ‘facts and feelings’ of traumatic moments. Moreover, wherever she was, whether at her shelter in front of the government house, at the ‘mad house’ or even in jail, she jotted down daily activities, events

⁶In his article, “On Violence, Justice and Deconstruction”, Chung-Hsiung Lai elaborates that according to Derrida, there are three levels (tertiary structure) of violence of writing:

first, the “*arche-violence*”: the “originary violence of language which “consists in inscribing within the difference, in classifying, in suspending the vocative absolute” (1976: 112); second, the totalizing violence: the force which organizes and assimilates the first violence into effects of propriety; and, third, the resistant violence: the returning force of what is excluded and repressed in the disciplinary system of language. As effects of *arche-writing*, these three levels of violence together constitute the endless cycle of the violence *against* violence phenomena or what Derrida calls an “economy of violence” (1978: 117) (2003: 25).

and conversations between herself, the police, civil officers, doctors and reporters etc in her notebook, writing pad and on pieces of paper (or whatever other materials she could find at that moment). *Publicly*, she wrote petitions to authoritative departments at all administrative levels from the local to the national level, asking for justice and for them to fix her problems. Additionally, banners, posters and statement leaflets disseminated to a wider audience were other forms of ‘resistance writing’ during these days of protest. *Professionally*, by making daily ‘police complaints’ at the police station, she was able to record the daily harassment which she had experienced. This was a very ‘simple’ but smart strategy of utilising ‘their’ mechanism and ‘form’ of writing but putting ‘her’ own ‘content’ in and getting it officially certified.

Pornpet kept the large number of ‘police complaints’ separately in several files. This is what makes Pornpet special. She was not only good at writing but also archiving. For Pornpet this was because “... I know how the system works ... I always have the documents to back me up ... I never use violence ...” (ibid: 99). The materials she kept were not only a monument to subaltern knowledge but also a powerful ‘witness’ to social injustice that had taken place in a Thai context in the years from 1963 to 2004.

In terms of the politics of writing, bureaucrats utilised their written legislation not only to enforce and strengthen the mechanism of their system but also to make ‘invisible’ or erase the subaltern’s subjecthood. The latter becomes a mere ‘object’, which can be *spoken* or *written* for as well as having decisions made on their behalf (for example, in the form of building dams on their rivers or evacuating their slums to build new condominiums). Through her writings, the tables had been turned and Pornpet’s existence as a living person confirmed as someone who had the ability to inform her own decisions and could not be *spoken* or *written* for by any authority.

The process of tracing Pornpet’s writing (back) has brought me to think further in two critical directions, politically and philosophically. Politically, as discussed by Anne Else, what stands at the heart of feminist theory is “... how women may come to understand themselves as speaking subjects located within historically specific, discursive social structures, to question the structures aloud, and to seek to change them” (2006: 1). In this regard, the way Pornpet uses her writing to bring about self-understanding as a speaking subject as well as to question the (patriarchal bureaucratic) structure aloud and seek to change them through different ways of writing personally, publicly and professionally, reflects a scholarly feminist politics by a Third World grassroots woman that has been ignored by mainstream feminist discourse in Thailand. However, philosophically, and particularly in relation to the issue of language (and as mentioned in chapter 7), employing the ‘Master’s’ language in order to be ‘read’ (and ‘heard’), there is no doubt that Pornpet’s authentic voice is distorted by the structural dominant stress in terms of class as well as gender. In regards to the latter, Irigaray points out that “[M]en and women do not generate language and structure discourses in the same way. And they cannot understand one another, nor even listen the one to the other, without first becoming conscious of such difference (2004, op.cit.: 35). Moreover, she challenges that “... cultural representation entails a culture in the feminine, that has been repressed or tainted by the masculine subject, and would be able to offer the signs and symbols that avoid misrecognition of feminine subjectivity and, in this way, allows the safeguarding of the two cultures” (Zaplana in

Irigaray 2008, op.cit.: 40). Then, in order for women to develop their own culture, “they need a discursive space from which to articulate their voice, a space that is not tainted by the dominant discourse” (ibid.: 42).

The way Irigaray clearly points out that women do not have their own culture or language and, therefore, they need to develop it, seems to suggest a very critical concept that *women are also subaltern*. It is because they try to use patriarchal language embodying male values to communicate or, in other words, women cannot be heard and cannot hear themselves as long as they speak/ write the Master’s language. Nonetheless, if looking from the perspective of ‘unlearned privilege’ initiated by Spivak, women who use the (male culture or) Master’s language are still privileged and thus not subaltern (read: not the silent wretched). As a result, it seems that *women of ‘privilege’ are and are not subaltern* on the grounds that, firstly, they are subaltern as they cannot be heard in their own voice as they have yet to cultivate this voice (as well as develop the capacity to listen to what is other). Secondly, they are not subaltern because they are privileged and not ‘wretched’, and have the opportunity to change their conditions. For example, Irigaray and Spivak are both in a position whereby they can become aware of their lack of (authentic) voice and begin to cultivate the capacity to speak in their own voice and develop the capacity to listen to the ‘other’.

Metaphorically, ‘language’ is the ‘house’ we live in and in which we should feel at home (and by extending this metaphor, we find that patriarchal language is a house that leaves women homeless and feeling ‘not at home’). In this regard, the three different critiques offered by Irigaray, Spivak and Pornpet provide some insights. Firstly, the house that dominates all others is the Western, one-sided masculinist narratives that serve to consolidate power at the expense of women (and non-Westerners) by articulating a male subjectivity and then projecting this subjectivity onto all people as the natural subjectivity that we should all strive for. Moreover, it is a kind of subjectivity which assumes it is stripped of superstition (the so-called ‘illogical’ and ‘irrational’ ways of relating to the world), tradition and emotion. It is also a patriarchal discourse in which women not only gain little or no room for their own language, but also have to learn to speak (in order to be heard) according to the terms and structure of men’s language. While Irigaray places her focus on critiquing the ‘sexuate’ aspect of Western (imperial) narratives, Spivak challenges it from the perspective of ‘double colonisation’. In this regard, Spivak refers to a second ‘house’ not as dominating but patriarchal nonetheless as with the Western ‘house’. For Spivak, both the patriarchal houses of Hindis and the West have marginalised and silenced the subaltern woman’s language. Both of their narratives on ‘Sati’, the practice of burning the Hindi widow on the funeral pyre of her husband (Shetty and Bellamy, op.cit.: 285), are cited as an example of silencing subaltern women. Lastly, in the ‘house’ of Thailand’s semi-colonisation within which the centralised bureaucracy is the hegemonic discourse, there was a subaltern woman who spent 40 years of her life challenging the patriarchal state violence of writing through the concept and practice of de-bureaucratisation. Furthermore, Pornpet utilised multiple forms of inscribing to record, document, negotiate, change, challenge (as well as archive) the practice of bureaucracy. Additionally, realising that its prominent aspect is the (arbitrary and) unjust performance, Pornpet had also made a significant effort to incorporate the (Buddhist) language of justice into her everyday practices. As she reinforced

poverty (eradication) should not be used as an excuse by the government and development planners to do any project they want. If we are really looking forward to achieving prosperity and peace ... justice must be first and foremost taken into consideration (Sukanya, op.cit.: 37).

The process of ‘de-bureaucratising’ that she undertook not only challenges previous studies on Thai women within a ‘colonial within’ context, but also helps create space for meaningful dialogue and conceptualising new perspectives helpful in understanding women’s lives from our own standpoint and in our own locations. Moreover, the writing mission she conducted has brought us to ‘re-think’ the notion of the women’s movement differently.

7.2.3 Re-thinking the Notion of ‘Women’s Movement’: What is Left for a Future Re-visit

Lastly, Pornpet’s mission and its relation to the women’s movement as well as its critique needs to be included. At the starting point, I remember well how I was regularly questioned by academics acquaintances (mostly sociologists). For example, Pornpet is “just a lone (marathon) protestor; how could you consider it as a movement? Is Pornpet a feminist? What does the term ‘women’s movement’ mean to you? etc” I would try to answer some of their questions and leave the remainder for a future re-visit.

Traditionally, the term ‘*movement*’ refers to a group often defined by keywords such as *solidarity*, *unite* and ‘*getting organised*’. However, Pornpet’s crusade has brought the conventional definition to its limit, offering another dimension of the term where only one woman had taken part, taking sole charge of the movement, and thereby making a tremendous contribution in order to facilitate change for the benefit of future generations.

Realising that making long trips to demonstrate in Bangkok was a failure as the villagers “... couldn’t bear the hardship” (diary: December 31, 1988), Pornpet began her ‘lone marathon’ protest through various activities eg *literacy*, *hands on activities*, *body protest* and *pursuing bureaucratic channels*, respectively.⁷ In regard to what should be considered as a ‘women’s movement’, Raka Ray offers a critical argument:

[T]he narrowing of the definition of what constitutes women’s movement and their authentic interests and the accompanying belief that only autonomous groups can be the legitimate vehicles for these interests thus results in throwing out a range of

⁷ First of all, resistance through ‘*literacy*’ was the most outstanding and had become her identity for those long years. Besides highlighting *writing*, *documenting* and *archiving*, Pornpet would regularly *read* law books related to her case, *listened to* and *recorded* radio news programs as well as *spoke* at meetings and interviews. Secondly, as a farmer woman, she was also very capable of utilising her rural ‘*hands on*’ skills of *climbing trees*, *riding her buffalo* and *burning straw effigies*. Thirdly, her *body protests* such as her acts of *hanging*, *slitting* and *burning* herself, reflect a highly spiritual scarification. Lastly, the mandatory acts of going through *bureaucratic channels* included the handing in of petitions from the local to national levels, following up on cases and meeting with the Prime Minister, his secretary and officers.

actions taken by women, particularly poor women, to increase the control they have over their lives (2000: 18).

There are some commonalities on the issues of poverty, environmental degradation, domestic violence, sexual health and reproductive rights etc that might be shared and which could lead to an organised movement among subaltern women. However, there are various kinds of structural and non-structural violence which take place and affect women's daily life differently. On this point, Mohanty offers her analysis:

... not all feminist struggles can be understood within the framework of "*organized*" movements. Questions of political consciousness and self-identity are a crucial aspect of defining Third World women's engagement with feminism. And while these questions have to be addressed at the level of organized movements, they also have to be addressed at the level of everyday life in times of revolutionary upheaval as well as in times of "peace" ... (2003: 76-77, italics mine).

Lastly, on the particular issue of state violence against women, it seems that 'physical' violence is a major concern to be taken into consideration. For example, according to Rai, police brutality in terms of rape, murder and beatings is a fact of life experienced by many rural Indian women [and other Third World women] (1996: 35). I feel grateful to Pornpet, who experienced different contents and forms of 'non-physical' state violence through its (il)legal and unjust process of writing and enforcement. Although she was only one person, and the one who was representing her family's interests as well, her endless efforts for 39 years (1965-2004) of writing back and fighting for justice proved a fact in itself as well as reflected the state's brutality at an immeasurable level. In order to end the violence of state writing, Pornpet 'organised' herself through her mission of inscribing, archiving and above all 'dismantling' the 'root cause' (ie the unjust bureaucracy). Other obstacles that Pornpet may have encountered could not defeat, change or shape her commitment and strong will. As she firmly replied to the land officer's insults "I will fight to the end. It doesn't matter whether I am dead or alive. **I will let the world know that there is injustice going on here**" (diary, May 4, 1994).

Literally, 'world' could be defined in many different ways by many different people. It can mean 'globe' or earth for physical geologists. It can refer to a 'planet' in the solar system. However, in terms of language, the 'world' that dominates can refer to the (spoken and written) world of **English**. My long years of research have been undertaken in English not only for the professional fulfillment of the requirements for a PhD at a New Zealand university, but also as political passage in order to get Pornpet's message disseminated on a global scale. Additionally, it is a piece of writing which will interweave as a part (and path) of a one woman movement, enabling her *fight* for justice to continue, thereby having an impact and inspiring many others, young and old, near and far, locally and globally.

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