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Precarity and Social Mobilization among Migrant Workers from Myanmar in Thailand

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ABSTRACT

Abstract of thesis entitled "Precarity and Social Mobilization among Migrant Workers from Myanmar in Thailand"

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Fleeing state-sponsored violence and economic decline in their home country, hundreds of thousands of Myanmar émigrés have in recent years crossed the border into Thailand in search of a better life. For the estimated 2 million Myanmar migrants now living there, however, life in Thailand presents its own challenges. With insufficient legal provisions to handle the influx of migrants, the Thai government has largely turned a blind eye to abuse and exploitation suffered by migrant workers. Yet despite poor working conditions and exploitation, there does not appear to be much of a call to improve conditions through mobilization among the Myanmar migrant community.

The marked absence of mobilization on any level thus begs the question: why is the migrant population in Thailand so passive in the face of severe strain and exploitation? This thesis explores the issue of non-mobilization among migrant groups, using as a framework two core concepts: social mobilization and precarity. The long-standing discourse on social mobilization focuses on social and political action in response to societal strain, taking into account other factors such as access to resources and institutional opportunities. Precarity, a newer concept and compliment to the established social mobilization debates, has been used to describe a lifestyle characterized by critical social, economic, and political insecurity.

Based on an in-depth survey of 134 Myanmar migrant workers in Chiang Mai, Thailand, the findings of this study indicate that while the migrant experience shows all the signs of a high degree of precarity, migrants have reacted to precarious conditions with extreme passivity and heightened alienation from both politics and social life. I thus argue that precarity as a precondition may have some inhibitory effects on social mobilization outcomes.

While resource mobilization theory, political opportunity structures, and social influence theory among others provide at least a partial explanation for non-mobilization, in order to more fully explain instances of non-mobilization in complex modern contexts, the social mobilization discourse must look to a new theory. Precarity thus has the potential to be a useful and dynamic tool by which to understand social mobilization in modern contexts.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In this study, I examine the multifaceted experience of migrant workers from Myanmar* living in Thailand and the way in which the precarity of their situation affects social mobilization. Precarity as a societal condition is experienced by workers whose day-to-day existence is threatened by insecurity and instability, while mobilization is an action which may precipitate while society is in a precarious state. Social mobilization in this context encompasses a range of activity from the political to the psychosocial, taking the form of community building and political participation; either of which may be influenced by life under precarious circumstance.

In Thailand, illegal migrant workers from Myanmar occupy one of the lowest and most marginalized brackets of society. The steady inflow of labor from Myanmar over the past ten years has driven down wages and sent labor rights standards plummeting. Unfair treatment and harassment at the hands of employers and police alike make life in Thailand still more difficult. Both in and outside of the workplace, prevalent social stigmas alienate migrant workers from their environment. All of these factors contribute to the climate of precarity and insecurity that dominate the migrant experience. For a society under strain, mobilization is one possible

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* In light of recent controversy over the appellation of the country in question, a word should be said about the choice of the name 'Myanmar' for the purposes of this thesis. In 1989, the military government of Burma (as it was known at that time) began to encourage a name-change, instead referring to the country as the 'Union of Myanmar'. Today, the United Nations recognizes this latter appellation as current. However, some foreign governments (such as the United States) and institutions have abstained from adopting the new name, as it was never formally approved by any elected parliament (the military authorities having refused to seat the most recently elected parliament in 1990). I have chosen to use the term 'Myanmar' in this thesis because I believe it best reflects the country's current international status, particularly as an actor within Southeast Asia.

course of action. Indeed, we find examples of mobilization among exploited peoples throughout history. I find, however, that though Myanmar migrants in Thailand suffer a high degree of exploitation, they have remained passive and overwhelmingly disinterested in political goals. This finding suggests that precarity may deter social mobilization.

In consideration of the potential cause-and-effect relationship of precarity and social mobilization, I weigh the dimensions of precarity that migrant workers face (such as illegality, marginalization, harassment, and language/cultural barriers to assimilation) against the likelihood that workers experiencing these circumstances engage in political activity. I examine the impact of precarious conditions on mobilizing outcomes. Given a fixed level of political opportunities, precarity, defined in this study as tenuous and uncertain personal security, may affect a collective's ability to form a successful social movement. Within the overall concept of mobilization, there are two main strands under consideration: nature and extent. Herein I address two essential questions. First, how can precarity be used as a theoretical tool for analysis in the social mobilization discourse? And second, how does precarity affect mobilization in this case?

The question of how and by what means migrants entrench themselves in political activity is of great importance to any student of migration. If current immigration trends continue to parallel the advances of globalization, we may very well see a new urgency placed on grassroots mobilization among politically disposed groups; most critically, immigrants. Illegal migrant workers represent a growing segment of society that is on one hand highly productive, but on the other disenfranchised. As their numbers increase, the actions taken by migrant workers may have critical repercussions for the modern political scene as globalization redefines transnationalism, national identities, and border politics.

Yet while political mobilization continues to be a well-worn discipline, the extant literature on the subject focuses largely on the birth and dynamics of mobilizing forces within current and historical political movements. This

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literature has traditionally trained its eye on those members of society who identify politically with a mobilizing cause, whether they are active in its furtherance or not. Many marginalized communities today, however, are experiencing increasing alienation from political causes though they often fall among those most negatively affected by governmental policies or neglect. How is it that those with the most pressing need are so often the most silent about abuse? Political participation at the margins of society is a critical issue that is underrepresented in the current literature on mobilization.

Migrant workers experience precarity both in workplace and home life; a condition that is aggravated even further where undocumented or illegal migrants are concerned. Employers and authorities often exploit the fears initiated by illegality among migrant communities to achieve their own gains and ends. The informal relationship of employers and the Thai authority has often served to further entrap workers. Indeed, migrants who dare to challenge their employers on labor rights violations may be reported to the Thai authority and subject to fines, detainment, or deportation. The threat of legal action thus compels workers into silence and forces them to endure demeaning workplace conditions with little recourse in either the justice system or popular forums. Dubious liaisons and deal-making between abusive employers and corrupt authorities forms a catch-22 system that perpetuates a state of precarity.

In this thesis, I have adopted a theoretical framework that draws from both social-influence and structural theories of social mobilization. The structural argument was the first to emerge in response to the resource mobilization ideology that dominated the field at its inception. The structural argument for social movement success is based on the premise that institutions provide movements with access to resources through state-sponsored channels. Under the structural theory, the more resources a movement can access through legitimate channels, the more likely it is to achieve relative success in mobilization. By the same token, movements which emerge under non-representative, repressive regimes are less likely

to succeed in a shortage of resources. The repressive environment engendered by an authoritarian state, for example, fails to provide for opposition and therefore limits organizers' ability to mobilize a repressed populace.

Under the social-influence argument for mobilization, social movements are more likely to succeed in the presence of, not structural resource channels, but social and cultural assets. Thus, if a social movement arises in a community hostile to its goals and values, it is less likely to mobilize successfully. Social assets may vary from the support of religious groups to cultural education that values mobilization. The social-influence argument emphasizes the importance of communitarian sentiments in generating the popular support that underlies any social movement.

This study is set in the context of undocumented migrants who have left behind a repressive, non-representative state, only to find themselves again without rights or representation in their new host country. Non-representation thus forms the crux of the mobilization efforts under examination. Social movements occurring within non-representative or authoritarian states are not excluded from the aforementioned theories; however repressed movements are characterized by very scarce social or structural resource assets, thus making them difficult to understand to any great depth.

By the logic of both structural and social-influence theories, it follows that social mobilization in non-representative states is much more of an uphill battle with far lower yields. Taking a quick glance through contemporary history, this seems to be true of many movements originating in developing nations. However, it could be argued that understanding resource scarcity (whether institutional or socio-cultural) as the sole reason for movement failure in these countries may overlook several critical nuances. Aggregating all data from non-representative circumstances may generate a dataset and ensuing conclusions that are simply not dynamic enough to be useful in these contexts. While the literature posits "opportunity" as a

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varied and dynamic quality, it tends to view "lack of opportunity" as a much more straightforward quality (Goldstone & Tilly, 2001). Drawing on Goldstone and Tilly (2001), it is important that in this study I understand the absence of resources as equally multifaceted a quality as the presence of resources. On this point, I will draw upon a third theory; that of precarity, to generate the depth needed to fully understand mobilization in non-representative contexts.

The term "precarity" has been used to denote the lack of social, economic, and political security among laborers whose employment status is uncertain or unstable. Kalleberg (2009) argues that precarity must be understood at its foundations in the workplace where terms of employment, working conditions, and other structural factors generate precarious labor. Similarly, Paugam (1995) lauds precarity as a multidimensional concept that will help to bring a greater depth of understanding to the discourse on poverty and social exclusion. Neilson and Rossiter (2005) brought the term into political use when they argued that beyond understanding national poverty cycles, precarity may have wider academic relevance for political and labor mobilization. To this effect, they pose two important questions. First, can groups experiencing permanent insecurity identify and exploit a resource base leading to political organization? And second, how can precarity be used as a strategy for dissent (Neilson & Rossiter, 2005)?

Precarity has the potential to be a useful and dynamic tool to understand social mobilization in modern contexts. In recent years, the term has even been used to describe the situation of Myanmar migrants in Mae Sot, Thailand (Arnold & Hewison, 2005). By understanding the situations of migrant workers in the context of precarity, I hope to generate a richer view of the nature and depth of their resource shortage under an unrepresentative system.

Thus, given conditions of precarity amongst migrant workers from Myanmar in Chiang Mai, what is the nature and extent of political mobilization of the collective?

In order to build a dynamic dataset, I considered interview responses, personal narratives and stories of migrants employed in manufacturing industries in Thailand. I conducted a series of in-depth interviews with individuals who have migrated from Myanmar, with the aid of an interpreter/translator who was herself a Myanmar migrant. Together, we identified respondents using her previously-established connections in the Myanmar community as well as several local NGOs as gatekeepers.

In the chapters that follow, I examine the complicated relationship between precarity and social mobilization as posited within the theoretical discourse and the way in which it plays out in the context of migrant workers in Thailand. Chapter 2 will provide insight into the existing literature, reviewing relevant theoretical constructs for precarity and social mobilization in three stages. First, I look at several critical theories of social mobilization that have emerged with the discipline since the 1950s. I discuss the most relevant aspects of the literature, focusing on the contrasting perspectives of resource mobilization, political opportunity structures, and social influence theory. I then address the newer notion of precarity; its origins, definition, and role within the academic discourse. Lastly, I deal with the application of social mobilization and precarity in the migrant context, drawing on examples from contemporary Asia.

In Chapter 3, I take an in-depth look at the context of this study. I note significant events in the modern history of Myanmar that have created a hostile social and economic climate inside the country that has induced many to migrate to Thailand in search of a better life. I then assess Thailand's role as host country to Myanmar migrant workers, from its policies to its law enforcement in practice. Lastly, I explain the significance of the Myanmar-Thailand border situation and the reasons I have chosen this region as a focus for my work on social mobilization and precarity.

In Chapter 4, I set up the methodological framework and discuss key adaptations made due to the delicate ethical complications presented by the use of a migrant population as subjects. In Chapter 5, I introduce the

finding of this study that Myanmar migrants, though living under precarious circumstance in Thailand, remain largely disinterested in mobilization.

In Chapter 6, I analyze this finding within the theoretical framework I have adopted which draws specifically on social mobilization as a potential outcome of precarity. I attempt to understand my findings that a migrant society under serious threat has remained largely inactive, using the theoretical constructs previously discussed. I suggest that resource mobilization, political opportunity structures, and social influence theories provide at least partial explanations for the outcome demonstrated in this study. Realizing that a gap in the theoretical framework still remains, I explore how the theory of precarity might help to explain failure to mobilize among a vulnerable migrant population. Specifically, I look at precarity as a condition of extreme strain that, in resulting only in passivity, defies the traditional theory that strain leads to mobilization. Lastly, I compare the passive outcome among the migrant population I studied with the outcome of incidents among other Myanmar migrant groups.

By situating the findings of this study within two separate bodies of literature, and carrying these theoretical strands throughout, I seek to advance the idea that social mobilization faces significant new barriers in complex contexts.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

There are two key theoretical concepts in this study: precarity and social mobilization. Precarity represents the situation of the subject individual, while social mobilization represents the potential action subjects may take in order to address their situation. The literature on social mobilization is far more established than that on precarity, which is a much younger concept. I will therefore address social mobilization first; its theoretical precedents and the challenges the concept presents in the literature. I will then look at the emerging literature on precarity, and its transition into academic usage.

2.1   Social Mobilization

The broad scope of social movements makes it difficult to posit the study of mobilization within a precise academic discourse. In the past fifty years, social mobilization has become an academic sub-discipline within itself, with experts espousing definitions examined through historical, anthropological, sociological, and political lenses. The truly interdisciplinary nature of this discourse is a tribute to the dynamism of social movements. While protest and dissent have been an integral part of social relations throughout time, the means of their expression has evolved drastically. Within the past fifty years alone, collective action has undergone a massive shift from marginalization to legitimacy. In most representative states, contemporary movements have become just as much a recognized player in civil society as interest groups or citizens' advocacy organizations.

The study of social mobilization arose at a critical period. Scholars began discussing movements as early as the 1950s, when mass society and political consciousness were undergoing dramatic changes in the United States and Europe. Increasing political awareness and feelings of political effectualness

paved the way for popular movements and interest group partisanship. At this critical point, scholars began to follow fledgling movements such as the American Civil Rights Movement which later became one of the most influential in the field of mobilization studies.

Among the first to examine social mobilization was Charles Tilly. In 1965, Tilly published a study of political upheaval in which he identified social movements as mechanisms for political dissent. Movements were to become the unit of study in the wider discourse on mobilization that developed over the next half-century. Tilly's early work laid the foundations for later scholars McAdam and Zald to build upon. Early studies focused on the rise of participation and galvanizing stimuli of collective action and mass protest. Scholars delved into the qualities of mobilized groups, defining collectivity and understanding the interest group socialization process. They took a critical look at movements' assets and the process by which they gained support and issued change-oriented demands.

Just as Tilly was adopting the study of social movements, Mayer Zald and Roberta Ash (1966) identified what they called the social movement *organization*. A social movement organization was seen to differ from the social movement itself. A movement can be understood more as a linear chronology; first the existence of the ideology, then the adoption of goals by supporters, the growth of public awareness, the actions of participants, and finally the results produced at the end of the life cycle of its expression. A social movement organization, on the other hand, was understood more as the material manifestation or vehicle of the mobilization process. The predominant question of these early years was not *how* mobilization occurs but *when* and *why*. Before addressing these inquiries in detail, however, it is first important to discuss the definition of a social movement.

According to McAdam and Snow (1997), a social movement is a collectivity taking action to either promote or resist change to the status quo through some extra-institutional channel. There are two key aspects within this definition. The first is the notion that a collectivity is comprised of individuals who unite

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over a shared ideological value. The second aspect is that of a change-oriented goal stemming from the group's common ideological footing. The agendas they adopt and the means by which they intend to affect change may vary from basic reforms to institutional or systems overhaul (Smelser, 1962).

While social mobilization authors espouse different definitions, these two points are present in definitions across the literature. Fundamentally, social movements are borne of a group desire to further a collective cause. That cause may range from ideological (such as equal rights movements) to pragmatic (such as soliciting the government to adopt new healthcare policies). Some social movements may never extend beyond a small locality; while others may be nationwide or even international in scope with hundreds of thousands of participants.

Why the variance in definitions? While the central idea remains consistent across the literature, authors often choose to adapt their definitions to fit with the particular aspect within social mobilization studies that forms the crux of their argument. If a scholar is looking at the development of political ideology among individual participants, he may adopt a definition that looks at social movements through a psychological lens. If the research examines structural mechanisms, the scholar may note the role of resource availability in the mobilization process. Another interesting observation to consider is that mobilization research is a multidisciplinary study. While the subject often appears within political discourse, research is also posited within an ethnographic or historical framework.

Aberle (1966) segregates social movements into four distinct genres. In doing so, he uses two classifiers: a) whether a movement affects change to an individual or to a social system at large and b) whether that change is targeted at one aspect of the status quo or designed to exact complete system overhaul. Using these classifiers, Aberle (1966) argues, we find that there are four types of social movements: alternative, redemptive, reformative, and transformative. Among these, only reformative and

transformative movements occur within a social system or group of individuals. Political movements, such as McAdam and Snow (1997) describe, may refer to group mobilization (as opposed to redemption of the individual) but manifest in both reformative (partial change) and transformative (complete change) ways. This is perhaps an important distinction to make when analyzing social mobilization. Sharing a common cause is only one aspect of forming an effective collective. Individuals united in ideology must also espouse a similar dedication and vision for exacting their goals.

Collectivity is one of the central characteristics of a social movement. McAdam and Snow (1977) argue that in order to understand the nature of a movement, we must first look at what a social movement is *not*. They find that despite the acknowledgement of a common cause, a social movement is not the same as a public opinion pool, mass migration, or interest group. Collectivity is therefore not only a group united by a common cause, but also by a common action in support of that cause (McAdam & Snow, 1997). Social mobilization is thus a phenomenon that occurs outside of political or social institutions; unprompted by standard political process. Lofland (1996), like Zald and Ash, discusses social movements in terms of 'social movement organizations' (SMOs), a term which emphasizes collectivity. He argues that SMOs form among groups claiming disenfranchisement or underrepresentation in their present sociopolitical system. Under Lofland's (1996) construction of a social movement, the goal of an SMO is the insurgent reality, or new order of life.

The 'new order of life' is in keeping with the change-oriented manifest of a social movement. Social movement participants act upon their vision of an improved political system or civil society. It is interesting here to observe that Lofland (1996) uses the term 'insurgent reality'. This term would indicate that the ideal society shares qualities of insurgency and can be, in theory, the product of change-oriented revolutionary action. Insurgency is often thought of as action directed against the established order, and while

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it can at times enter in force with more virulent connotations, it is at its foundations, the pursuit of active change.

What, then, is the stimulus of a grassroots movement? Historical trends show that movements have traditionally emerged in response to discontentment provoked by sociopolitical or socioeconomic instability: economic crises, state-building activities, or industrialization (Tilly, 1978). If collectivities do indeed form around a common cause and desire to act on that cause, there must necessarily be a root dissatisfaction with the status quo. McAdam and Snow (1997) identify this motivating instability as 'strain' to the social system. Strain encompasses those factors identified by Tilly in 1978, as well as social instability and those sociopolitical factors that transgress political systems (such as migration). Interestingly, they note that though poverty alone does not pose sufficient strain to prompt a social movement, mobilization often occurs among less powerful groups within a population (McAdam & Snow, 1997).

Once formed, social movement organizations are often more dynamic than bureaucratic institutions. As a result, movements manifest through a variety of channels. Social movements may contribute to awareness and grievance-raising in society at large, they may form interest groups which operate within the political sphere or lobby the government, they may attempt to convince authorities to change policies by non-institutional means such as protests and boycotts, or they may take direct action against the authoritative system (Zald et al., 2005).

One of the most important questions arising in the study of social mobilization is how and why it occurs. Central to this debate are the numerous structural and cultural factors which influence the nature and extent of successful mobilization.

Structural factors, by definition, have institutional roots. They are those systematic channels established by law that enable dissenters to express their opinions through legal means. Often structural factors include specific

bureaucratic institutions and are shaped by precedents for direct interaction between the government and interest groups. For example, social movement organizations may benefit from government institutions such as the town meeting or public interest forum. Countries which guarantee the freedom of association often have many precedents which provide social movements with a secure forum for dissent. Such governments are required to defend the right of individuals to dissent. Social movements forming in countries under authoritarian rule may face far greater challenges as the penalties of dissent could be a significant deterrent to potential participants. Such governments may purposefully limit resources and censure social or communitarian gatherings.

Cultural factors are slightly more nebulous. Social movement momentum can be affected formally by cultural institutions such as religious associations, or informally by communitarian networks. For example, mobilized groups arising within religious institutions are what Aberle (1966) classifies as 'redemptive', or affecting complete change to individuals. Religious institutions are meeting grounds for people with similar moral and spiritual beliefs. Shared values build collectivity and may encourage mobilization in furtherance of moralistic or value-oriented goals. Historically, social movements have sought endorsement from religious groups in order to broaden their public appeal among people of common moral beliefs and to attract new participants.

Even basic sociological phenomena such as language, heritage, and artistic tradition may contribute or detract from mobilization. Groups tend to form along cultural lines. Individuals are united by shared experiences; similar upbringing, common language, and celebration of holidays and traditions. Often groups who identify as minorities (ethnic or religious minorities, for example) within mainstream society form collectives on the basis of ethnic origin or language. They are also, by virtue of their minority status, more likely to be dissatisfied with the status quo imposed by a government in which they may be underrepresented.

Explanations for the variation in the impact of social movements have thus been chiefly divided between two camps. Some contend that the success of movements is largely state-driven. They privilege structural factors while proponents of the second camp favor a cultural, community-driven explanation. When the study of social movements as a discipline first emerged in the 1970s, however, most leading theorists held a semi-structurally-driven view of social mobilization. Of their arguments, the most significant to emerge was resource mobilization theory, introduced by McCarthy and Zald in 1977.

Resource mobilization applies the economic relationship of resources and output to a political setting. McCarthy and Zald (1977) argue, thus, that resource *availability* is a key determiner of mobilization outcomes. Under this model, resources are said to include organizational, facilitator, and process structures originating within a movement itself. The root of these organizational resources, in this model, is largely economic. Therefore by McCarthy and Zald's (1977) analysis, the most mobilized groups are those with the greatest resource base and the means to exploit and maintain it. In so doing, social movement organizations compete with other organizations for limited resources and constituents.

It can be assumed that the supply of resources in one setting is a constant at any given point in time. Thus, in the presence of more than one movement, should one actor gain greater access, another may experience decreased assets. However, there are also some inexhaustible resources that can be shared between movements, such as structural elements like channels of dissent provided for under the laws of representative states. Even still, the dynamic between resource use and social movement assets is an interesting continuation of resource mobilization theories. In this way, resources can play into the potential asset of developing alliances between compatible movements.

Fireman and Gamson (1979) argue an alternative adaptation of resource mobilization that critiques the focus on utilitarian logic in resource

mobilization theory. They do not contest the validity of resource-based arguments for social mobilization, but rather contend that "collective action is often mediated more by changes in group interests than by changes in the provision of "selective incentives," more by assessments of collective efficacy than by assessments of individual efficacy, more by solidarity and principle than by individual self-interest" (Fireman & Gamson, 1979, 10). Collective goods result when individual goods align. Individual actors are still influenced by their own incentives and may thus have varying interpretations of collective good. Thus, selective incentives are the gains or losses an actor may face depending on his contribution to a collective action (Fireman & Gamson, 1979). From their perspective, these individual actors' interests cannot be overlooked in favor of pure resource mobilization. Fireman and Gamson (1979, 15) conclude that "one could assume a set of actors to be at risk to mobilization to the degree that they are a solidary group, to the degree that they face concrete opportunities and threats to their interests, and to the degree that some resourceful actors (inside or outside the group) are interested in having them mobilize".

While Fireman and Gamson's (1977) argument stands to reason, they use it to establish a relationship between urgency and collective action. By defining urgency as a product of necessity and opportunity, they state that mobilization is most likely when action is more urgent (Fireman & Gamson, 1979). However, urgency may be difficult to refine as a concept that can be applied across cultures and circumstances. This is where we again must look to draw upon additional theory in order to find a sufficiently complete explanation with which to understand mobilization in modern contexts.

In the same year, Gary Marx (1979) joined Fireman and Gamson (1979) in critiquing the idea of resource mobilization. Marx argues that more emphasis should be put on external factors affecting movement success. In so doing, he looks to things like the media and public image labeling, as well as external threats such as information gathering, espionage, and surveillance. These external factors may not be directly linked to a social movement's ability to mobilize resources, and yet they have the effect of

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damaging morale, threatening participants, or preventing the movement from gaining allies or donors (Marx, 1979). External actors can destroy supporters' confidence in leaders, encourage internal conflict, or even sabotage certain actions (Marx, 1979). According to Marx (1979), external actors may also help to advance social movements by acting in a supportive capacity and filling the gaps where resource channels are otherwise limited.

Two decades later, McAdam et al. (2001) revisited resource mobilization theory. While remaining loyal to McCarthy and Zald's general principles, they opt for a more politically-guided interpretation. They contend that social movements develop once a dissenting group gains an exploitable resource base and capable political organizers (McAdam et al, 2001). Mobilization, by this definition, thus depends less on economic means to resources than on the quality and nature of the resources themselves. This theory was later advanced by McAdam and Snow (1997), who argue three preconditions for mobilization: discontentment, political opportunities, and organization. The presence of organizational structures and the ability to identify facilitators within these structures are thus quite critical in helping a movement to attain the initial threshold for mobilization.

Despite these and other attempts to update resource mobilization theory, by the mid-80s it seemed that the semi-structural argument might not translate in an era of Cold War politics. In 1986, Foss and Larkin took a critical look at resource mobilization theory. They claimed that by McCarthy and Zald's definition, social movements could be understood only to mirror the political interactions of society at large rather than contest the status quo (Foss & Larkin, 1986). The use of economics-inspired trends and focus on social movement organizations (as opposed to movement collectives themselves) renders the theory too broad in scope and application to be useful (Foss & Larkin, 1986).

Resource mobilization theory may leave some significant holes to be filled. While a resource-driven explanation for social mobilization does prove useful in understanding the relationship of movement success and the structure of

the political environment in which the movement arises, its economic foundations may fail to translate effectively in more complex contemporary contexts.

The first theory of significance to break with resource mobilization analysis was the state-centric argument proposed by Kitschelt in the mid-1980s. Looking at anti-nuclear movements during the Cold War era in Europe, Kitschelt (1986) argued that resource mobilization theory is insufficient to explain the significant variance in mobilization outcomes between anti-nuclear movements in different countries despite access to similar organizational resources. Previous theories had focused on factors within social movements as the chief informants of mobilization. However, by the 1980s it became apparent that despite equal organizing forces within movements, some were far more successful at mobilizing their resource base than others.

The source of variance, Kitschelt (1986) claims, is what he terms *political opportunity structures*; including organizational resources, institutional channels, and historical precedents for political mobilization. Political opportunity structures thereby ultimately inform the political potential of an incipient movement. The political and institutional channels available in some countries are more encouraging of mobilization than in others – a condition that, he finds, has a very real impact on mobilizing outcomes. Kitschelt's (1986) theory was the first to posit social mobilization within a framework based solely on structural opportunities.

The nature and extent of structural channels for the expression of dissent ultimately inform the actions of social movement organizers. Thus, in contrast to resource mobilization theory, we see that even some of the most organized movements may fail to materialize when a lack of structural channels places real constraints on a movement's mobilizing potential. Political opportunity structures can either enrich or constrain social movements as they facilitate public access and interaction between the government and interest groups (Kitschelt, 1986). In addition, access to political opportunity structures may

increase a movement's ability to influence policy through participation in public dialogue.

While Kitschelt's (1986) theory of political opportunity structures marks a key advancement in the way students of politics approach mobilization, it seems that political opportunity structures may still fall short of a full explanation for mobilization in the modern context. Again, when one expands the frame of reference from Western Europe to the world at large, it becomes clear that movements do not always take place within a state-sponsored construct. One answer to this critique is the social-influence theory which rules out structural analyses in favor of a cultural argument.

The social-influence theory identifies several mobilization-influencing factors outside of political opportunity structures. Proponents of this theory criticize the state-centric explanation as too narrow in scope, arguing that it overlooks the influence of culture, emotions, and identity in determining the likelihood of mobilization (Goodwin & Jasper, 1999). Under a social construction of movement impact, communitarian structures significantly affect social movements; whether through direct participation, indirect support, sympathy with the cause, apathy, indirect disdain, or even active opposition.

Also integral to the rise and development of social movements is the movement's ability to attract participants and mobilize them to action. Anthony Orum (1972) takes a look at those factors galvanizing movement participants to action. He argues against several earlier theories, suggesting instead that there are four events that lead to participation: socialization, deprivation, development of psychopolitical ideals, and engagement in mass society (Orum, 1972). Through socialization, movement participants develop an affinity to a cause or ideology. They then go through the deprivation stage, which Orum (1972) defines as an aggregate of absolute and relative deprivation models as well as a sense of rising expectations. The third strand – that of pscyhopolitical development – involves individuals developing a sense of effectualness through which they feel their actions may influence actual policy outcomes. In the last component,

participants must have the time and physical ability to engage mass society. By combining these elements that lead to the rise of collective action involvement, Orum (1972) develops a pathway model of the antecedents of participation. In his model, participation in a movement is the end result of a chain of events through which each of the aforementioned elements arises. The psychological elements leading to participation may fall within a social influence construct of mobilization. We can thus use a pathway model to understand the impact of psychological criteria in creating social or cultural spaces and stimuli for participation in a movement.

Social-influence and political opportunity structures are not mutually exclusive. By the 1990s, it seemed that the most dynamic explanation for political mobilization took into account both arguments. Melucci (1989), and later Jasper (1977), claimed that both social and structural factors determine the outcome of social movements. McAdam and Scott (2005, 19) argue for what they see as "more static structural and more dynamic change-oriented concepts" which draw from the idea of mobilizing mechanisms: attribution of threat or opportunity, social appropriation, and innovative action. This construction, like those developed by Melucci (1989) and Jasper (1977), accommodate both social influences and structural factors.

Campbell takes McAdam and Scott's (2005) 'change-oriented concept' one step further. Within social mobilizing mechanisms, he identifies three classes: environmental mechanisms (those external factors influencing movement participants' capacity to participate), cognitive mechanisms (factors affecting how participants view their own limitations and prospects), and relational mechanisms (factors enabling or disabling cooperation between actors) (Campbell, 2005). This delineation enables a more detailed examination of the social-influence theory posited by Goodwin and Jasper (1999). Whereas previous discussions of social influence focused on the more vague aspects of culture and tradition, Campbell's (2005) social mechanisms provide a means of detailing the interaction of movement participants and their society.

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In selecting a theoretical construct for this research, I have considered both social-influence and structural explanations for mobilization. However, even the social-influence theory seems unable to keep up with the nature of modern political movements. While it is likely that both social and structural factors are significant informants of mobilization, as Melucci (1989) and Goodwin and Jasper (1999) suggest, it is impossible to ignore the fact that not only have the demands of movements changed, but so too has the demographic of mobilized groups.

Both Kitschelt's (1986) political opportunity structure theory and Goodwin and Jasper's (1999) social-influence theory were developed in the context of democratic countries with established social channels. With globalization on the rise in the past decade, however, these theories are really being put to the test as the study of social mobilization moves towards new contexts within undemocratic and developing societies. For example, social movements may form among groups such as stateless or internally-displaced persons, refugees, illegal migrants, disenfranchised groups, and the uneducated. For these populations, mobilization is especially complicated due to a marked lack of access to either structural or communitarian support systems.

That is not to say that the old social mobilization theories have somehow overlooked the developing world. On the contrary, undemocratic countries often provide a useful example of a society without the social channels or political opportunity structures which Kitschelt (1986) or Goodwin and Jasper (1999) detail. In this way, many potential social movements, or those that fail due to overwhelming risk or repression, may serve to demonstrate that the lack of political opportunity structures, for example, does indeed lead to repression of social movements.

These cases provide a useful contrast to instances where mobilization does occur, owing to the availability of these social or structural channels in the democratic societies described in mobilization literature. However, aggregating every case of social mobilization failure in undemocratic

societies into the null hypothesis may fall short of a complete understanding of the complex environments movement organizers face in undemocratic nations. After all, these cases (characterized mainly by "threat") have not been examined in as much detail as have the more well-known cases (those of "opportunity") in democratic societies (Goldstone & Tilly, 2001). Traditionally, the literature posits social movements in the context of opportunities and assets. Yet in undemocratic societies, it seems that the fate of social movements hinges more on the minimization of threat and hostility from the government.

The line between the haves and the have-nots of social movements may be far too distinct. Goldstone and Tilly (2001) suggest that in order to really understand social mobilization, we should look at threat not as the absence of opportunity, but as a condition in its own right. They ask: "does rising opportunity portend rising protests? In many cases yes, but that is too simple; if that is all that were involved, we would have a fairly linear and continuous response of protest to opportunity, and we should see protest move smoothly in arcs of rise and fall, in response to opportunities waxing and waning" (2001, 192).

Threat manifests in varying degrees and forms, as does opportunity. If we understand opportunity to be comprised of many different forms: political opportunity structures, exploitable resources, social channels, it would follow that we attempt to understand threat to the same level of complexity. Societies in which movements face threat are not simply lacking in opportunity channels; they may be facing active hostility and oppression. Goldstone and Tilly (2001) were the first to look at threat as a more complex, independent factor. In so doing, they develop an equation to define the expected gains (G) of a social movement. Opportunity (O) is defined as the probability that mobilization will be successful in achieving its desired outcome, while the value (V) of the gains from success is defined as either advantages gained or harms averted (Goldstone & Tilly, 2001).

$$G = (V \times O) - C$$

In this equation, gains are the product of opportunity and its value, minus C, where C is the relative costs of mobilization including time and resources used as well as repression suffered (Goldstone & Tilly, 2001, 184). Costs of course are relative, as movement participants involved at different levels will likely experience costs to varying extents. For example, movement leaders may suffer greater costs if the movement were to fail than people who are only minimally involved at the movement's periphery.

Whereas in a democratic society the state may be more passively involved in responding to protests, in authoritarian or undemocratic nations, the state may adopt a very active role. The state, in such a case, will select a measured strategy that mixes concessions and repression, thereby manipulating the value of success and costs suffered by those involved in social movements (Goldstone & Tilly, 2001). Adapting the previous equation to account for state response, Goldstone and Tilly posit a secondary equation:

$$G = [O \times (A + T_c)] - T_r$$

where A represents emerging advantages, T_c is the current threat, and T_r is the repressive threat (costs of repression) (Goldstone & Tilly, 2001, 185). O, the opportunity variable, is the sum of state weakness, popular support for the movement, and strength of non-state allies and enemies.

State response thus weighs heavily on movement outcomes. In fact, Sidney Tarrow (1994) argues that the structure of the state is perhaps the *best predictor* of mobilization. Though it may be easily seen that authoritarian states censure social movements and democratic states facilitate them, Tarrow (1994) suggests that there are also elements of authoritarian states that may encourage social movements, and vice versa.

The state will be constantly faced with the strategic management of repression versus concessions. Ideally, the state would aim to suppress the

movement completely without giving any concessions. However, if the state responds with severe or brutal repression, they run the risk that social movements will win sympathy from international allies and mounting popular support locally. Alternatively, concessions might curb protestor's enthusiasm and allow the state a façade of moderation and responsiveness. However, concessions could also initiate demands for greater changes. Such is the strategizing of states actively involved in responding to social movements (Goldstone & Tilly, 2001).

In addition, Tarrow (1994) calls our attention to repression at the hands of a representative state. Tarrow (1994) argues that representative states have historically exercised some forms of repression against popular movements which challenge the policies of the state, such as the domestic radicals in the 1950s or the American Civil Rights Movement in the 70s (Tarrow, 1994). Though in an ideal system representative states would always champion their civil liberty underpinnings in favor of popular movements, this is not always the case. While representative states do formally provide institutional channels (as discussed by Kitschelt) and encourage the formation of cultural support groups, the execution of a state's policies is not so black and white. In particular, when a liberal state is confronted with a movement fighting for fiercely illiberal ideas, it may turn to some repressive strategies (Tarrow, 1994).

Another phenomenon to consider is that of the rise of counter-movements. When a mobilized group engages in collective action, they create a public forum space which invites the formation of counter action. As Tarrow (1994) suggests, a movement that contradicts the sentiments of an already mobilized or influential group may incite mobilization on the other side of the issue. If a countermovement gains enough momentum and popular support, it may serve to diffuse the opportunities that were initially available to movement organizers. This phenomenon is also true in its reverse sense: movements may galvanize other groups to mobilize as allies which contribute to the assets of the movement (Tarrow, 1994).

Ultimately, we see that a state's strategic and measured response to mobilization can have tremendous effects on the success or failure of a social movement; and that this impact may not be entirely owing to the absence of social or structural opportunity channels.

2.2   Precarity

The social mobilization discourse appears to have room for a new concept that could better accommodate complex or emergency contexts. Previous theories have viewed societies under strain in an overly-simplistic light; however a new concept could provide a more multidimensional explanation of why social mobilization may not occur, even in the presence of strain to the social system. It is possible that a mobilization outcome may be hindered by unanticipated factors unique to particularly complicated social conditions. The notion of *precarity* could therefore prove useful in helping to better reflect the complexities of the prevailing social condition in a society within which mobilization is expected but not actualized.

Precarity is a preexisting social condition characterized by political insecurity, instability, and uncertainty. In modern society, precarity is expressed in legal status, job security, competition, physical safety, and communitarian security nets. According to Neilson and Rossiter (2005, 1): "the term refers to all possible shapes of unsure, not guaranteed, flexible exploitation: from illegalized, seasonal and temporary employment to homework, flex- and temp-work to subcontractors, freelancers or so-called self-employed persons. But its reference also extends beyond the world of work to encompass other aspects of intersubjective life, including housing, debt, and the ability to build affective social relations". It follows thus that mobilization is a potential reaction to the social condition.

Precarity has been used widely within discussions related to the 'new poverty' of the workforce, particularly in Europe. Paugam (1995) talks about precarity in relation to the phenomenon of social exclusion. He sees

in precarity a way to move away from the traditionally static definition of poverty which uses a quantitative construct to isolate groups who fall within the lowest brackets of society. Paugam (1995, 50) argues that in order to understand the risk of social exclusion, we must examine precarity in all its manifestations: "precarious employment, marital instability, economic poverty, inadequate social and family life, inadequate support networks and low levels of participation in social activities". He notes that modern social hierarchies have begun to take into account job security; with temporary and under-employed workers falling to the bottom. A precarious lifestyle in many cases also bears social consequences: precarity often corresponds with decreased social participation. Thus we see that the sociological welfare of a society is highly complex. Tenuous employment circumstance can develop into the isolation and social exclusion of individuals.

Degenerative social welfare is indeed one indicator of strain to a society; but within that state, there are many other push and pull factors. Kalleberg (2009) argues that a new focus on what generates precarious imbalance among the workforce is greatly needed, if we are to advance public policy.

Whenever we consider social mobilization arising within a society, it is important to reflect the complex dynamics of the preexisting state of social welfare. Precarity provides the means to understand social strain – which in many cases is indeed a precursor to mobilization – in its many dimensions. While precarity has not yet been applied within the social mobilization discourse, this seems to be a likely next step. The concept itself, having arisen within activist circles less than ten years ago, is still relatively new and unexplored within academic discourse.

The idea of 'precarity' arose in Europe, where it has been used by the European Union in reports on the labor force. It has also been adopted by labor rights movements across Europe, alongside the popular mascot "San Precario, Patron Saint of Precarious Workers". The theme of precarity played a significant role in a number of anti-globalization protests to

familiarize the public with the notion that workers around the world are unable to secure a stable existence, even despite hard work and long hours. The image of San Precario became a recognizable icon in these circles. While the icon seemed to slowly die out over the course of the next five years, the concept of precarity has largely remained in the vocabulary of activist Europe.

Precarity has played an important role in the labor movement since its inception due to its ability to unite dissenters whose personal circumstance has in some way prevented access to social and structural channels. Such individuals may be deterred by time constraints, financial insecurity, or debt even when structural opportunities are available. Others may be completely excluded from structural and social opportunities due to government-sponsored disenfranchisement, marginalization, migration, or insecurity.

In 2005, Neilson and Rossiter (2005) were the first to posit precarity within an academic discussion and to suggest that precarity may have a practical political application. In so doing, they ask two important questions. First, can groups experiencing permanent insecurity identify and exploit a resource base leading to political organization? And second, how can precarity be used as a strategy for dissent?

It seems that the answer to these questions lies, in part, within the political mobilization discourse. In this, precarity may be the next logical step in the story of mobilization. While both structural and social arguments for mobilization present valid and interesting points, precarity is the inevitable trump card. Despite seminal social conditions or even a political sphere with many available institutional channels, if conditions of precarity exist, structural and social opportunities lose relevance. For example, fear precludes participation in community mobilization just as illegality or lack of citizenship prevents participation in political institutions. Thus it seems that precarity is an even more basic inhibitor of mobilization than lack of political or social opportunities. In this, freedom from precarity must first

be established before opportunities at the community or state-level can be considered.

Precarity as a concept has an additional layer of interest because despite its ability to curb access to social and political opportunities, precarity may serve to further discontentment and motivate mobilization (Neilson & Rossiter, 2005). While precarity may limit access to resources, in doing so it may also fuel an even stronger sense of dissent. Indeed, activists motivated by deprivation perhaps experience an even more fearsome drive to mobilize than those who have social and institutional channels at hand. By the same token, however, increased passion for dissent may be limited to individuals and collectives whose basic understanding of rights and representation is above a requisite threshold. Those experiencing extreme deprivation may be unable to sense or understand their own relative social condition, let alone manifest indignation through mobilizing means. Neilson and Rossiter (2005, 4) suggest that, "precarity supplies the precondition for new forms of creative organization that seek to accept and exploit the flexibility inherent in networked modes of sociality and production". In such an instance, it is very possible that increased passion for dissent may provide what is necessary for a movement to override institutional constraints and limitations. By contrast however, living in precarious situations may mean little education, oppression, and preoccupation with living a hand-to-mouth existence. Hence for those who are ignorant of their rights or potential, precarity may inspire even further alienation and indifference.

Understanding precarity and its effects on workers is thus a monumental task; even in Europe, where most studies of precarious labor over the past decade have been based. When considering developing countries or authoritarian states, however, there are a multitude more dimensions of precarity to be considered.

Precarity has the potential to be a useful and dynamic tool to understand social mobilization in modern contexts. Social movements have, in the past

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fifty years, gained new legitimacy as vehicles for political change through their increasing presence in academic study. Much of the body of knowledge on this subject, however, is skewed in favor of historical social movements. Additionally, we find that most of the extant literature on contemporary movements involves contentious movements emerging only within the mainstream.

2.3   Social Mobilization and Precarity in Complex Contexts

The variety and demographic of social movements under the academic eye have duly expanded since the 1960s and 70s. The globalizing of economies, politics, and social relations has in recent years brought to light many non-traditional movements. It is thus of great importance that the framework used to analyze social mobilization be able to accommodate new social contexts and increasingly complex relations between individuals, collectives, and governments. For example, marginalized groups are using social mobilization as a means to confront issues such as illegality and precarity. Yet mobilization among marginalized groups is still largely at the fringes of current research.

Social mobilization literature is, as of 2009, quite rich in the study of more visible political mobilization in countries of the West. In general, the existing literature extends a rather comprehensive analysis of movements in countries where political opportunity structures and communitarian institutions are both available and encouraged by the state. Though Kitschelt (1986) developed his theory of structural influence by scrutinizing both opportunity-rich and opportunity-poor countries in Europe, when compared with some violent authoritarian regimes in the rest of the world, all Western European countries could be considered quite rich in political opportunities. It is these countries that have been neglected in the literature, despite the numerous movements which have arisen under such circumstances within just the past few decades.

Those authors who have studied social movements among populations in more developed countries often focus more on the issue's linkages to governance and society in developing nations. For example, there are several critical studies of mobilization among Vietnamese refugees living in the United States, but very little research on social movements arising in contemporary Vietnam.

Though minority and dissenting groups in more developed countries may very well experience marginalization within their social systems, the nature and extent of their marginalization is likely to be far milder than that of their counterparts in poor or unstable societies in developing nations. The effects of marginalization can, to some extent, be summed up as precarity. Thus, if social movements among the most marginalized groups continue to go largely under-researched, we will continue to fall short of understanding the real nature of mobilization in contemporary contexts.

Migration in particular is one critical issue within the larger umbrella of marginalization. While most professional class migrants are readily embraced in new societies, unskilled and semi-skilled workers have been a traditional target for regulation and repression (Hewison & Young, 2006). Within the lowest bracket of society, unskilled migrant workers face many legal complications that may thus interfere with their ability to find and maintain decent employment. Yet migrant groups experiencing this kind of strain seem to be only thinly studied in the context of social mobilization. Those studies which have been conducted on the subject to date have introduced several very interesting and critical findings, however. In review of the literature, three studies in particular stand out.

One of the first studies to unite migration and mobilization was Verba, Nie and Kim (1978) which examines a relationship between socioeconomic status and political participation. Crucially, Verba et al (1978) suggest that poverty leads to both structural (fewer resources) and social/precarious (fear) factors that may deter or limit political participation.

Two decades later, Leal (2002) expanded the Verba (1978) thesis in a study of non-citizens and political participation. The results of this study indicate that non-citizens are significantly less likely to participate in political activity than those with legal citizenship status (Leal, 2002). Leal suggests that there are many obstacles to participation facing non-citizens including limited resources and lack of social or communitarian supports. Additionally, he notes that "undocumented residents may be particularly anxious to avoid contact with the government, however tangential" (Leal, 2002, 357). This finding is particularly important because it underscores the fact that fear can be highly inhibitory. Even given some degree of access to social and structural opportunities, as were those non-citizens in Leal's study, fear and anxiety (or precarity) can trump any potential participation.

Busza and Schunter (2001) add a third dimension to the study of political mobilization among migrants in finding that competition between migrants for jobs impedes the formation of collectives. Examining the case of Vietnamese migrants in Cambodia, they argue that fear relating to job insecurity can significantly impair communitarian activity. This study is perhaps one of the only of its kind to establish a relationship between community-building (social-influence factors) and mobilization.

Migration has, outside of the mobilization literature, however, been the subject of several important studies on the development of communitarian structures and its value for participant groups. In addition to more general findings that community participation increases an individual's well-being, several studies have shown that migrants benefit from community structures. As early as 1968, Bar-Yosef contended that the establishment of community aided in the resocialization process among émigrés and ultimately influenced individual and group identity. This finding alone has important implications for social mobilization, yet has not been readily applied in the discipline.

Several years later, Haines et al (1981) revisited the subject, finding that family and communitarian structures provide critical psychological and logistical support to members of migrant and refugee communities. Van Tran

(1987) argues similarly that participation in a local social network is directly related to the well-being of migrants and refugees, and can significantly reduce the pressures and stress brought on by migration. Again, the psychological well-being of migrants has massive implications for social mobilization, and could be applied under the social-influence theory posited by Goodwin and Jasper (1999). However, these two bodies of literature remain only loosely connected.

A social-influence analysis of social mobilization among marginalized populations must consider that communitarian structures seem to incite the formation of collectives. Scott established this link in finding that community affiliation within migrant populations encourages individuals to retain ethnic identity while participating also in mainstream society in a host country (Scott, 1982). It would follow then that community development may provide both resources and motivation for mobilization. Such potential linkages require further study.

I intend to address this gap in the literature by examining precarity in the context of mobilization among one marginalized population of increasing concern – migrant workers. The current milieu of societies transformed from decades of migration poses a challenge to the traditional construction of a social movement. Émigrés straddle two national orders: that of their origin and that of their host country. Due to tenuous status within a legal system, migrant workers face fewer political opportunities, no access to resource channels, and social options limited by competition within their community. These factors, in addition to fear, poverty, and cultural barriers create a real experience of precarity that may trump potential social mobilization altogether.

Examining precarity in a modern context may at this point prove a useful exercise, as I will later draw on parallels to explain the concept as it emerges in this study of Myanmar migrants in Thailand. This will not be the first study applying the term 'precarity' to the Myanmar migrant worker experience in Thailand. To this effect in 2005, Arnold and Hewison (2005)

examined migrant workers' response to precarious working conditions in Mae Sot, Thailand. I will return to look in greater depth at this study later in Chapter 6.

While in this paper, I focus on issues arising in migration from Myanmar to Thailand, I want to first explore another example from contemporary Asia. The situation of North Korean migrants in China is perhaps the best parallel to draw, as it is most widely documented and analyzed.

Several benefits may be derived in comparing migration from North Korea to China and migration from Myanmar to Thailand. First, a critical look at the similarities between two otherwise distinct populations of migrants may offer insight into trends which appear in the results of this study. Second, an examination into the case of North Koreans may prove to be a useful exercise in applying the theory of precarity to operational circumstance. Third, any outstanding differences between the two contexts may suggest holes in the theoretical application deserving of further inquiry.

Though the flow of individuals migrating from North Korea to China had been relatively steady since the period directly following the Korean War, the number of permanent migrants entering China prior to the 1990s was somewhat insignificant. However, with the advent of a massive famine in 1995, conditions in North Korea reached a level dire enough to trigger a dramatic spike in cross-border traffic into China. Though the quality of life had been deteriorating over a number of years in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), a number of crippling events coincided around the mid-1990s. Foremost was a sudden severe food shortage which necessitated the instatement of a food rationing and distribution system whose logistical requirements well surpassed the DPRK's capacity. Indeed, although both the UN World Food Program and the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) contributed direct food aid, it is likely that much of the incoming food was siphoned off disproportionately to supply the DPRK military and government officials.

At about the same time, a number of natural disasters swept the country leaving destruction in both agrarian and urban areas. Additionally, a critical political alliance with Russia had been dissolved in 1991, leaving the DPRK mired in a failing Stalinist system that was no longer current (Seymour, 2005). The social system was also deteriorating with the rise of the black market and breakdown in governmental controls. Thus, the convergence of all these problems in the mid-1990s shifted the situation in the DPRK from bad to acute. Not only did the impetus to migrate to China become more real, but the actual process of migration became easier with the disintegration of policing and border security (Seymour, 2005).

In a 2008 study, the majority of North Korean migrants interviewed cited primarily economic reasons for having fled the DPRK (Chang et al., 2008). However, further analysis shows that economic, social, and political motivations are largely mixed (Seymour, 2005). In the case of North Koreans in particular, economic hardships are frequently a result of unequal application of the food distribution system, arbitrary enforcement of the law, and inconsistent prescription of penalties. Therefore whereas a migrant may indicate that it was economic hardship that finally led them to emigrate, the root causes of that hardship are very frequently politically-driven. In the UNHCR Handbook on Procedures and Criteria for Determining Refugee Status under the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, the UN states that: "The distinction between an economic migrant and a refugee is ... sometimes blurred in the same way as the distinction between economic and political measures in an applicant's country of origin is not always clear. Behind economic measures affecting a person's livelihood there may be racial, religious or political aims or intentions directed against a particular group" (UNHCR, 1967).

The PRC's official position is that all North Korean migrants in China are there illegally. Though China is signatory to the UN Refugee Convention and Protocol, the PRC claims they are not obligated by these laws to provide asylum as none of the North Korean migrants qualify as refugees. Instead, the PRC sees its primary obligation as being to its bilateral

agreements with the DPRK set forth in 1961 in the form of a still-secret treaty (Seymour, 2005). Under this and a similar 1986 bilateral protocol, China is obliged to return all North Korean migrants to North Korea immediately upon discovery. Under DPRK law, seeking asylum outside of North Korea may equate to treason and therefore be punishable by a number of penalties including fines, incarceration, imprisonment in forced labor camps, or in some cases even capital punishment (Margesson et al., 2007). These penalties, however, are somewhat arbitrarily served (Margesson et al., 2007).

Efforts by the UNHCR to assess the issues in China have been largely handicapped by the PRC's refusal to cooperate and insistence that honoring its secret agreements with the DPRK preclude the UN. In addition, the PRC has been unwilling to allow the UNHCR access to migrant populations, thus seriously undermining both fact-finding and aid efforts (Margesson et al., 2007).

As a result, even the size of the migrant population in question is difficult to know. Current estimates for the number of North Korean migrants living in China range from 10,000 (the official PRC figure) to 300,000 or more (a figure widely accepted among NGOs). The United Nations figured the North Korean population in China at between 20,000 and 50,000 in 2002; a number based only on the Yanbian region of China directly bordering the DPRK. However, it is unlikely that many migrants reside outside of this region where the current population is 40% ethnically Korean (Seymour, 2005).

Though succinct information may be rather difficult to come by, the few studies and surveys that have been done generally conclude that North Koreans migrants in China live under highly volatile, precarious conditions (Seymour, 2005; Margesson et al., 2007; Chang et al., 2008). In a 2008 study, Chang et al. find that a shockingly high percentage of North Korean migrants suffer from severe psychological stress similar to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) likely resulting from hardships in both North Korea

and China. Chang et al. (2008, 2) argue that: "this distress is caused in part by the precariousness of refugee life in China" where conditions for North Korean migrants are highly inhospitable.

Many North Korean women in China become victims of trafficking, yet another indication of the thorough vulnerability of their position (Margesson et al., 2007). Indeed, data prepared by CRS for a US Congressional inquiry indicated that 80 to 90% of North Korean migrants in China may be victims of trafficking (Margesson et al., 2007). The same report found that up to 75% of migrants may be female. Women are typically at higher risk to trafficking in these circumstances; and the situation for North Korean women in China is no exception. Numerous cases of women sold into marriage with Chinese men and/or prostitution have been documented (Margesson et al., 2007; Harden, 2009). When the State Department issued its seventh Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report in 2007, North Korea was ranked in the lowest grouping (Tier 3) of countries refusing to cooperate with international anti-trafficking efforts.

Despite the harsh conditions of life in China for migrants, many do not return to North Korea voluntarily. Even as bad as things may get for illegal migrants, many indicate that life in China is still preferable to oppressive conditions in North Korea. According to a Washington Post interview with Seoul-based human rights researcher Lee Hae-young; "nearly all of the defectors she tracked down said the material circumstances of their lives 'are much, much better' in China than they were in North Korea. If the women stayed with their 'husbands' and bore children, they received abundant food, had secure shelter and were rarely bothered by Chinese police" (Harden, 2009, 1).

As illegal migrants in China, North Koreans are not protected under the laws of the PRC. A lack of official identification documents makes them vulnerable to abuse from not only authorities but also employers and members of society at large. The threat of being forcibly deported back to North Korea upon discovery, exacerbated by China's policy of incentives

for Chinese citizens who report illegal migrants, makes absolute secrecy essential. Chang et al. (2008, 3) write: "this human dimension of the refugees' plight is a recurrent theme in refugee testimony, and we find, not surprisingly, that refugees suffer from fear, anxiety, and other psychological problems associated with the uncertainty of their circumstances".

"Fear, anxiety, and psychological problems" among North Korean migrants, as noted by Chang et al. (2008, 3), are qualities likely to be mirrored in the lives of the Myanmar migrants in Thailand. Fear and worry are core repercussions of a life of uncertainty for individuals living outside of the protection of the law.

Migrants must necessarily fear deportation in order to preserve their existence in a host country. Migrants from North Korea and Myanmar alike face deportation upon their discovery by authorities in China and Thailand, respectively. Both the DPRK and Myanmar authorities systematically sentence returnees to punishments of varying nature; though arguably this threat may be more easily avoided in Myanmar where border authorities are less vigilant. As a result, illegal migrants live in the shadow of that potential repercussion of discovery.

Maintaining ultimate secrecy is made even more difficult over long periods. Migrants very frequently enter recipient countries with little cash or resources. Therefore it is necessary for them to find employment or some means of financial support in order to sustain their daily existence. As workers, migrants necessarily expose themselves to employers; in the vague hope that they can trust their employer not to expose them. In addition, many migrant laborers actually interact with the public on a daily basis while at work. Thus in the months following arrival, migrants must construct a more permanent invisibility screen behind which they can work, live, and transit without attracting attention. The urgent need for secrecy, in the case of migrants, does not lessen over time – they are just as likely to be deported after three years residence in a host country as three weeks residence.

It goes without saying that the constant need to be on one's guard would naturally become a major source of stress and anxiety. Regardless of the real degree of the threat of discovery and deportation, the perception of this threat would likely deter them from investing their full trust in non-migrants, particularly employers or co-workers. For fear of discovery, migrants would probably never be able to fully disclose the details of their life story to anyone.

Not only are migrants on constant alert, worrying for their own safety; but they are also faced with the possibility that the security of their family members, friends, and loved ones may be compromised as well. In the case of the Myanmar authorities, police may harass or even imprison family members of illegal migrants identified in Thailand. Such guilt-by-association tactics are also common in North Korea, where there have been cases in which innocent family members are forced to serve sentences in place of their migrant relative (Margesson et al., 2007).

Another important aspect of precarity is that of uncertainty. North Korean migrants live in daily uncertainty about their safety and future. They may be apprehended by the Chinese police and deported, or they may simply be fired or refused payment by their employer. Without legal recourse, workplace abuses are very real and damaging. With no promise of permanent employment to rely on, migrants maintain a very day-to-day kind of existence. Plans for the future may never be realized; plans for tomorrow may be interrupted.

2.4   Summary

I have considered a number of theories which seek to explain why and when social mobilization occurs. However, there are two key arguments to focus on for the purposes of this study: political opportunity structures and

social-influence theory. In 1986, Kitschelt proposed that political opportunity structures (i.e. state-sponsored channels) were the enabling factor of social mobilization. Later, Goodwin and Jasper (1999) opposed this view with their own postulate that socio-cultural factors within a community determine whether social mobilization does or does not occur.

The former of these arguments is state-driven, while the latter is socially-driven. Of course when the many additional factors – such as non-representative government or racial segregation – are considered, the reality is likely to be a combination of both social and state influence. In fact, it is precisely the presence of additional factors such as these that make the root causes of social mobilization so difficult to identify in complex settings.

The complex context I consider in this study involves international migration. Myanmar migrants in Thailand face daily insecurity and a lifestyle fraught with the fear of abuse, exploitation, deportation, and loss of sustenance. All of these factors are likely components of precarity.

I have introduced and discussed the theory of precarity, as this literature offers a new means of addressing the complexities of migrant society. I turn especially to Neilson and Rossiter's (2005) definition of precarity as the experience of non-guaranteed, temporary work in which workers are easily exploited, a condition which then seeps into other aspects of life such as family relations and social participation. Precarity is the tenuous condition of migrant workers. It is insecurity in all of its manifestations.

I have discussed an example of precarity in the lives of North Korean migrant workers in China because it is likely that the desperation, anxiety, and stress observed in this social group may also be characteristic of Myanmar migrants in Thailand. I have intended for this example to demonstrate the key issue at hand: that precarity is a part of the migrant experience in contemporary Asia. At the very least, through this example

we see that there are significant foundations for developing precarity as a concept under the umbrella of migration studies.

The ultimate goal of this study is to better understand the relationship of precarity (a preexisting condition) to social mobilization (a potential outcome). The first task therefore will be to examine the current life conditions of Myanmar migrant workers. I draw on Kitschelt's (1986) political opportunity structures by asking subjects if they have any legal channels through which they are able to pursue change. Similarly, I recall Goodwin and Jasper's (1999) social-influence theory by asking subjects to discuss any societal or cultural pressures they experience.

Once I ascertain the degree to which mobilization is accepted or rejected, I can test these theoretical constructs by applying them in turn to my case scenario. I expect, however, that due to the complicated nature of migrant society, there will be gaps that remain in the explanation. In this case, I will look to the concept of precarity, as defined by Neilson and Rossiter (2005), for a supplemental solution.

Over the course of this study, I expect to see a clear relationship emerge between precarity, a condition; and social mobilization, a response. While structural and social-influence theories provide a partial explanation of mobilization outcomes, I look to precarity to fill the gaps. Before proceeding into the study itself, however, it is first necessary to provide some background information on the context of this study by examining the current socio-political climate along the Myanmar-Thailand border.

CHAPTER 3: BORDER CONTEXT

In this chapter, I will introduce a number of issues related to Myanmar migrants in Thailand. I will first take a brief look at Myanmar's complex past and the tumultuous events which, in the past two decades, have helped to institute the widespread climate of unrest that pervades the country today. I will then examine the effects of economic mismanagement and the growth of a military regime ever-looking to further entrench its power and authoritarian control over the state. Fleeing the violence of an oppressive regime and seeking better economic opportunities, hundreds of thousands of Myanmar émigrés have crossed the border into Western and Northwestern Thailand. This exodus has been especially amplified since the late 1980s when the military junta staged a coup in response to growing support for the democracy movement and the National League for Democracy (NLD) that emerged from it.

Many Myanmar émigrés in Thailand now face an uncertain future due to their displacement. Once in Thailand, Myanmar migrants also face hostility and government regulation at the hands of the Thai authorities. In the second section of this chapter, I will look at Thailand's treatment of migrant workers, its non-participation in core international legislation, and its substandard national migrant registration system. For the past two decades, the Royal Thai Government has levied numerous restrictions on émigré movement, and refugee camp conditions have deteriorated in the wake of consolidation efforts in the mid-1990s. These and other factors contribute to rising discontent – a necessary precursor of emergent social movements.

In the last section, I will focus on Myanmar migrant life in Thailand, as reported by other studies. I will discuss the aspects of the migrant experience that are the product of suffering in Myanmar and abusive restrictions at the hands of the Thai government. Lastly, I will introduce my subject

population: migrant workers in Chiang Mai, most of whom are ethnically Shan. This subject group is a significant choice for a number of reasons. Among these, the group's heightened need for invisibility has deepened their experience of precarity. Similarly, their exclusion from refugee camps has increased their presence in the workplace, which may serve as a potential meeting ground for fledgling social movements.

3.1 Myanmar and Triggers to Migration

There are several important historically-rooted factors that have together triggered the wave of migration from Myanmar to Thailand (Appendix 1.1 & 1.2). First, the rise of the military and its subsequent perpetration of widespread violence has led to endemic humanitarian abuses (i.e. forced portering, forced labor, use of child soldiers, and mass resettlement). Second, the question of ethnic self-rule left unresolved at independence has perpetuated tense relations with the ethnic states, exacerbated by repeated military incursions into ethnic territories. Third, the regime's tightening grip over all aspects of society, alongside the military's destructive campaigns into agriculturally productive regions, has devastated the economy, leaving widespread hardship to be felt around the country. Lastly, on a political level, the regime continues to wage a campaign of repression, with the imprisonment of political dissidents and suppression of all forms of public voice and expression.

Though these migration-inducing forces can be understood as separate triggers, they are largely interrelated. For example, as one of the major forces in the country, the military enforces the regime's policies of domestic repression. Economic demise has hit ethnic areas especially hard, in combination with harassment from the military. In fact, most migrants cite a combination of all of these factors as their reason for moving to Thailand.

The first significant trigger, the rise and rule of the military, is a product of the tenuous political landscape in the first decades of independence from Britain.

The British Empire first took an interest in the Burmese territories in 1824. In the 62 years that followed, the full territory of modern-day Burma was officially absorbed into the British Empire. Burma since the British intervention during the middle decades of the 19th century has been immensely complex. While these complexities cannot be fully captured in a brief survey, I will discuss the key points.

The country of Burma, now known as Myanmar, was left in turmoil after gaining post World War II independence. British colonial rule ended in 1948, leaving a newly independent government with the task of uniting the country's ethnically and ideologically diverse population under a democratic republic system. Many of those chosen to lead this new government had already gained experience during the war as activists, insurgents, and soldiers; where they had also become adherents to the nationalist philosophies that would inform the first years of Burma's independence. However, lingering strategic and ideological alliances proved highly divisive and threatened the young government's ability to exact an effective unification program. Ethnic rifts that had been exacerbated by colonialism lingered, deepening ongoing uncertainty over how the federal question would be resolved.

The years that followed saw the rise of the armed forces, or *Tatmadaw*. Concern in the 1950s that warring foreign and internal forces would soon splinter Burma's ethnic states, the regime deployed the *Tatmadaw* to counter threats to national security (Callahan, 2003). Furthermore, the country was awash with guns and artillery leftover from the war, making it much easier for the country to descend into widespread violence and chaos. Once the *Tatmadaw* had emerged as a significant force, however, it failed to relinquish power even after security was restored and the conflict had subsided. The *Tatmadaw* had become the preeminent institution within the state, a position it still holds today (Callahan, 2003).

The newly independent government, under the leadership of Prime Minister U Nu and President Sao Shwe Thaik, sustained democracy for fourteen years until a military coup d'etat in 1962 brought General Ne Win to power. It is

worth stating that this event came after a significant amount of fighting between the state and insurgent communists, backed by China. Subsequently, China decided to throw its support behind splinter insurgent groups in the wake of the military takeover, thereby fortifying support for communism and bolstering the opposition (Lintner, 1989).

For just over a decade, Burma was governed by a revolutionary council which only dissolved in 1974 upon the adoption of the new constitution and official transformation of the state into the so-called Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma. During the time of the revolutionary council, the Burmese Socialist Programme Party under Ne Win claimed to be ushering in a new policy scheme under the moniker 'The Burmese Way to Socialism', which was progressive only in name. At that time, insurgency within Central Burma had been nearly eliminated (Lintner, 1989). With the dispersal of opposition groups to the border regions, the climate in Rangoon looked far more encouraging for BSPP program reforms. The resultant police state perpetuated under Ne Win from 1962 to 1988, though the period was rife with dissent and factionalism.

In addition to the *Tatmadaw*'s colonization of the state, several other events were significant in leading up to the mass protests that would follow in 1988. In 1987, General Ne Win, in an unprecedented move for the regime, issued a statement admitting that there was a growing need for political, economic, and constitutional change to lead Burma in a new direction. Less than one month later, the regime announced the liberalization of trade in grains, its most significant reform since the coup of 1962; only to follow it by a devastating demonetization scheme soon thereafter (Steinberg, 2001a). Against the underbelly of fear that prevailed in the expectation of more bad economic policies, internal debt was on the rise, and external debt had massively expanded (Steinberg, 2001a).

On August 8, 1988, massive pro-democracy protests erupted in the Myanmar capital city of Rangoon (now Yangon), following five months of unrest and smaller strands of protest in the region. By August, thousands of monks and civilians joined the 8888 Uprising in opposition to the Burmese Way to

Socialism. Government forces massacred thousands of protestors after several weeks as a military coup led by General Saw Maung formed the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). The SLORC declared martial law in advance of an election to take place in May 1990, which did later occur but was never implemented. Even though the SLORC followed through in its promises to eliminate the one-party system of government, it did so only nominally. Soon it was all too obvious that the SLORC would be no more democratic than the regime under Ne Win (Lintner, 1994). In the years that followed, the SLORC demonstrated again and again its preference for violence and repression; believing a heavy-handed strategy to be the most effective means of consolidating and securing political power (Lintner, 1994).

The Election of 1990 brought the country no nearer to democracy. Though the National League for Democracy (NLD) won the election in a clear victory for party leader Aung San Suu Kyi (who remained at that time under house arrest), the SLORC refused to recognize the election results. The military and so-called 'interim' government did not step down; instead using the opportunity to imprison much of the opposition and forcibly close down NLD offices around the country. In April 1992, General Than Shwe replaced Ne Win as Commander-in-Chief of the *Tatmadaw* and in 1997, the SLORC was renamed the 'State Peace and Development Council (SPDC)'.

Despite years of attempts at destroying the democracy movement altogether in the wake of the 1990 election, the regime has not been able to fully silence the movement. Though the NLD has largely retreated to the background since the 1990 general election, it has survived (Smith, 2001). The main problem threatening the NLD's potential in recent years has been factionalism and disagreements over both ideology and tactics (Smith, 2001). Lingering popular support for the NLD and other opposition groups driven underground after the 1990 election is generally assumed, but remains in practice largely without hard evidence. The NLD continues to call for dialogue with the regime; a request that has been flatly denied along with calls to release leader Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest. In the late 1990s, the NLD suffered increase censure and branch closings under the regime just as some internal

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disagreements over Aung San Suu Kyi's role were beginning to further divide the party (Smith, 2001). Unable to play a much-desired part in the democratization process as some had hoped with the drafting of the 2008 constitution, the NLD continues to survive with much civilian support, though progress has reached somewhat of a standstill.

Though Myanmar continues to be controlled by an authoritarian regime, the constitutional foundations for this government are based (albeit loosely) in English common law. Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) is Senior General Than Shwe, who has served as the chief of state since April 1992. The head of government is Prime Minister Lieutenant General Thein Sein, who presides over a Cabinet appointed and overseen by the SPDC. According to Freedom House (2007), the SPDC "rules by decree; controls all executive, legislative, and judicial powers; suppresses nearly all basic rights; and commits human rights abuses with impunity. Military officers hold most cabinet positions, and active or retired officers hold most top posts in all ministries, as well as key positions in the private sector." All of these factors contribute to Freedom House's (2007) finding that Myanmar's junta is one of the world's most repressive regimes – a conclusion echoed by many scholars, charities, and advocacy organizations.

In May 2004, the junta reconvened the National Convention, after an 8-year hiatus, in ostensible pursuit of the "road map to democracy". The National Convention, the SPDC claimed, was an integral part of democratization wherein deliberative processes would be restored and a new constitution drafted (Tin Maung Maung Than, 2006). However, the Convention was largely a sham: debate was heavily censured, participation limited, and delegates handpicked by the junta; eliciting a refusal to participate from key political opposition parties. A similar situation stalled progress when the National Convention was convened in 2005, and again in 2006. The Convention of October 2006 coincided with a fresh military crackdown on opposition groups, again causing opposition parties to walk out in protest (Freedom House, 2007).

In August and September 2007, thousands of Buddhist monks turned out en masse in the streets of Yangon to protest the government's cancellation of fuel subsidies. The sudden, sharp rise in fuel prices had triggered a number of devastating economic and social consequences that together constituted a serious threat to already tenuous human security in the country (CNTSSA, 2007). Protests mounted until the regime responded with a bloody military crackdown similar to the massacre of student protesters in 1988. In the days that followed, the government hunted down unarmed demonstrators and attempted to defrock thousands of monks and opposition leaders (HRW, 2007). In an unprecedented crackdown on the press, the regime kept foreign journalists out of the country, arresting local journalists and shutting down internet and mobile phone networks. Even once the events of the so-called 'Saffron Revolution' had subsided, the regime maintained strict censorship and control over communication channels instituted during the crisis (HRW, 2007).

A new constitution was approved on May 10, 2008. This constitution includes provisions for a bicameral People's Assembly similar to the unicameral assembly that was elected in the contentious 1990 election yet never seated. However, as argued by Human Rights Watch, this constitution will not bring Myanmar any closer to a democratic government that will protect human rights or advocate for the freedom of its citizens (HRW, 2008).

In 2006, the UN Security Council put Myanmar on its permanent agenda. During the ensuing debate, many argued that the country's history of internal repression and sponsorship of the drug trade qualified Myanmar as a threat to international security (Freedom House, 2007). The National Convention's lack of legitimacy had been an issue of contention within ASEAN's member states, with increasing calls for the junta to improve its track record in the so-called pursuit of democracy (Tin Maung Maung Than, 2006).

According to a census carried out at the time of the 2008 referendum, Myanmar is today a country of approximately 57 million. One third of its population lives in urban areas. The city of Yangon (formerly Rangoon) was

considered to be the capital city of Myanmar until November 6, 2005 when it was officially moved to Naypyidaw, an undeveloped greenfield site in the Mandalay Division over 200 miles north of Yangon. The country is divided into 7 administrative divisions: Sagaing, Taninthayi, Bago, Magway, Mandalay, Yangon, and Ayeyawady; and 7 states: Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Chin, Mon, Rakhine, and Shan (Appendix 1.3). It is important to note that administrative divisions are composed predominantly of the Bamar ethnic group, while states are delineated between ethnic minority group territories.

Lingering ethnic divisions are one of the most critical root causes of migration, with an especially high percentage of migrants to Thailand coming from an ethnic minority background. With such an ethnically-diverse landscape, Myanmar has a long history of internal ethnic conflict (Appendix 1.4). Even prior to independence, a strong sense of nationalism informed Burma's goals as a transitional democracy; however Burmese nationalism proved to be not a uniting force, but a highly divisive one. Holliday (2008, 1046) argues that "the process of partial democratization sponsored by the British was discriminatory in its effects, as were associated developments in mass political culture". The pursuit of nationalism in transition transformed ethnic tensions into full-scale ethnic conflict only a few years after independence (Holliday, 2008).

Six decades later, compromises reached in regard to ethnic self-rule at a meeting of General Aung San and Shan leaders in 1947 remain largely unrecognized. The Panglong Agreement that came out of this meeting was intended to pave the way for the incorporation of ethnic groups' demands into the future national policies. Instead, however, the legacy of Panglong is one of unrest and uncertainty among Myanmar's ethnic states (Walton, 2008). In the 1980s, all of the major ethnic groups expressed willingness to engage in the democratization process, and to hold talks with the SPDC (O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986). However, by the 1993 National Convention tasked with drafting a new constitution, the majority of delegates came directly from the SLORC, overshadowing even the most nominal participation by ethnic group leadership (Steinberg, 1993).

Successive meetings of the Convention have been equally unsuccessful, and ethnic groups and their leadership continue to have little say in national politics.

Burma Campaign UK (2007) issued a strong warning that the regime's move to ignore the issues raised by ceasefire groups and ethnic organizations would end in a constitution that threatened their very culture and identity. It is yet unclear how these groups will respond under the new constitution. Expert speculation has indicated that many ceasefire groups may return to arms or splinter into factions; the result of which could represent a significant escalation in the humanitarian crisis and breakdown of societies in the ethnic states (Burma Campaign UK, 2007).

The gathering storm surrounding this return to arms drew considerable international attention as early as 2006. However the gravity of the situation was only truly realized when China, perhaps the regime's closest ally, went so far as to organize meetings with ceasefire groups in 2007 prior to the National Convention (Burma Campaign UK, 2007). Despite international pressure on a number of counts, however, Myanmar appeared increasingly defiant and more determined to continue its efforts to entrench the military in total governmental control (Ardeth Maung Thawnghmung & Maung Aung Myoe, 2007). Overwhelmingly, the government's actions indicate its need to control information and prevent its dissemination as a means to safeguard power (Steinberg, 2001b).

While the government continues to pour all of its efforts into solidifying control, the people of Myanmar suffer from deteriorating human security. Academic Tin Maung Maung Than (2000) documents these threats by compartmentalizing them between environmental, personal, community, health, and food security. He argues that while the official government view is that Myanmar is at peace, internal conflicts and rampant relative economic deprivation indicate little internal security (Tin Maung Maung Than, 2000). Additionally, he notes that the government continues to privilege the pursuit of unity over insuring the welfare and security of its people (Tin Maung

Maung Than, 2000). This hard-line state-centric model of security has resulted in the degradation of both human rights and economic opportunities within Myanmar.

The economy has also been in characteristic decline over two decades; yet another important instigator to migration. Though Myanmar is rich in natural resources, it suffers from serious economic and environmental mismanagement (CIA World Factbook, 2009). The severity of its situation becomes even more evident in comparison to Myanmar's neighbors like Thailand, India, and China who have adopted a globalist approach to development and progress (Taylor, 2001). According to CIA accounts, the economy of Myanmar is plagued by macroeconomic imbalances such as "rising inflation, fiscal deficits, multiple official exchange rates that overvalue the Burmese kyat, a distorted interest rate regime, unreliable statistics, and an inability to reconcile national accounts to determine a realistic GDP figure" (CIA World Factbook, 2009). Most of the country's overseas development assistance was halted in the wake of unrest between 1988 and 1990; with the US renewing heavy economic and political sanctions against Myanmar in 2003 followed by further sanctions from the European Union in 2007. Due to widespread instability, corruption, and inefficiencies in Myanmar, foreign investors have been largely deterred, apart from those in the natural gas and hydropower industries, since 1990 (CIA World Factbook, 2009).

Even within the country, the regime's policy has been one of mistrust. Its attempts to restrict and sanction the private sector are further indicators of mounting suspicion (Steinberg 2001b). However, as Steinberg suggests, this mistrust could have roots in a legacy of foreign control over the economy, and culturally-embedded beliefs that profit motive is anathema to Buddhist traditions (Steinberg, 2001b). The regime's reluctance to privatize state-owned enterprises is just one example.

In addition, a number of other economic problems have inhibited growth over the past two decades. Despite increases in the current-account deficit, the state arbitrarily closed off border trade which had represented a significant flow of

money into the country (Steinberg, 2001b). Rice exports had also dropped exponentially between 1994 and 1997 (Steinberg, 2001b). In 2003, a major banking crisis proved another serious setback to the economy when 20 private banks were closed. Further restrictive measures against the private banks that remained severely curtailed the private sector's access to formal credit (CIA World Factbook, 2009).

It is also important to emphasize the tremendous damage the regime has inflicted on its own human capital, and to observe the severe impacts state strategies have had on the state's own labor force (Mya Maung, 1992). In view of these damages and the repression of much-needed innovation, the economic prospects of Myanmar are bleak at best (Mya Maung 1992). The government has built a policy around destroying those incentives that promote a healthy economy such as creativity, technological advancement, communications, and the dissemination of knowledge. In essence, entrepreneurship is discouraged. In removing property security and work ethic, the regime in Myanmar has almost entirely cut off society's capacity for progress (Mya Maung, 1992).

According to a 2008 figure, Myanmar's GDP per capita of $1,200 affords it a ranking within the bottom 20 countries in the world. In 2008, the country's real GDP growth rate was estimated at 0.9%, affording it a similarly low ranking. An inflation rate of 27.3% in 2008 marked Myanmar with the 7th highest inflation rate in the world (CIA Factbook, 2009). At this rate, inflation poses a serious threat to economic security as wage rates fail to match the increase in inflation (Tin Maung Maung Than, 2000).

In the country's hinterlands, forced resettlement and heightened violence across many of the chiefly-agrarian ethnic states disrupt harvests and delay food production. However, the fragmentation of the economy into more self-contained areas also provides some hope of staving off economic collapse. The border regions and most non-urban areas are self-sufficient where rural economy is not disrupted by conflict (Steinberg, 2001b).

Myanmar is a resource-rich nation with the potential to develop effective means to manage its resources and best utilize its revenues towards projects that will improve internal conditions (Akimoto, 2006). However, the most effective route may be in dealing with international financial institutions (IFIs) such as the International Monetary Fund, the Asian Development Bank, and the World Bank. While Myanmar must advance economic development considerably before IFIs show interest in engagement with the state, this process may begin before democratization takes place (Akimoto, 2006).

Over the years, it has become increasingly apparent that the persistence of economic stagnation, mounting poverty, and underdevelopment will continue to inhibit any potential for political reform (Taylor, 2001). Economic stasis is also a continuing enabler of human rights abuses within the country (Collignon, 2001). Indeed, the seeds of political change are inevitably linked with Myanmar's economic future. However, if the country's current economic climate is any indicator, the potential for any real political change would seem to be very minimal (Taylor, 2001). Change, both political and economic, has, after all, been one of the chief targets of a regime which seeks to further entrench itself at the controls. Weighing the significance of this last point, Taylor argues that the current regime's program involves systematically and routinely undermining the nation's potential for change as stagnation allows it to maintain ultimate power over the people (Taylor, 2001).

Since the 8888 Uprising, the regime has continued its repressive strategies. In a 2009 study, the International Human Rights Clinic (IHRC) at Harvard Law School found the government of Myanmar guilty of both crimes against humanity and war crimes as established under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which came into force in July 2002 (IHRC, 2009). Though Myanmar is not a party to this statute, the UN Security Council can mandate a Commission of Inquiry to investigate, so long as the issue is not being addressed by the country's own judiciary. The IHRC compared the government's history of systematic sexual violence, extrajudicial killings, torture, and forced displacement of large numbers of civilians against an international criminal law framework to arrive at its conclusions (IHRC, 2009).

Other organizations, such as the National Council of the Union of Burma, have corroborated this argument, strongly advocating that the SPDC be held accountable for its actions which, in the opinion of the NCUB, constitute crimes against humanity (MPU & NCUB, 2008). These findings, if anything, should be a clear indicator of the gravity of the situation in Myanmar today.

Throughout the 1990s, the junta pursued programs against the Karen National Union and Shan State Army in the eastern states. Increasing international awareness led to economic and diplomatic sanctions against Myanmar from abroad and wider media coverage of human rights abuses in both the interior and borderlands. Though the junta has claimed to be following a supposed "roadmap to democracy", much of the official verbiage to come out of Yangon in the past decade has proven little more than empty rhetoric. Indeed, it seems that the junta's chief goal is to create institutional justification for sustained military rule (Ardeth Maung Thawnghmung & Maung Aung Myoe, 2007).

In November 2007, Transparency International released a strong condemnation of corruption and human rights abuses perpetrated by the government in Myanmar (Transparency International, 2007). No time was the government's active neglect and abuse of its people more apparent than with its handling of the events surrounding Cylone Nargis in Myanmar's delta region in 2008 (EAT & JHU CPHHR, 2009). In the wake of a massive cyclone that claimed some 140,000 lives and affected more than 3.4 million, the government of Myanmar chose to exploit the situation in the furtherance of political gains by limiting and misusing humanitarian assistance, as well as failing to respond outright (EAT & JHU CPHHR, 2009).

Social institutions deteriorated sharply in the 1990s. Press freedom continued to be a thing unheard of. The state-sponsored *New Light of Myanmar*, first nationalized in 1969, remains the chief national daily, while all international media is heavily censored by the Myanmar News Agency prior to distribution. All daily newspapers and news media programs are owned or controlled by the junta (Freedom House, 2007). During the Saffron Revolution, the regime cut off all access to internet sites containing news or

information about Myanmar, and shut down nearly all media outlets not controlled by the state (AFP, 2007). Numerous journalists, photographers, business people, and civil servants have been imprisoned for violation of the junta's many restrictive laws.

Academic freedom is also subject to severe restrictions and censure (Freedom House, 2007). According to researcher Christina Fink, "many factors have combined to keep Burma under military rule, including fear, a tradition of political passivity, and successful propaganda by the regime, particularly with regard to ethnic minority political demands" (Fink, 2001, 4). Funding for education is just over 1% of GDP, which puts Myanmar in the bottom ten in a worldwide ranking of country expenditure on education (CIA World Factbook, 2009).

Since 1988, the junta has exercised its ability to arbitrarily close universities for long periods of time without warning, and many campuses have been relocated in efforts to disperse student populations across larger distances. Teachers and professors are often targeted for the political activities of their students. Many tutors and teachers have lost their license and/or served prison sentences for discussion or possession of historical texts. As a result, a whole generation of young people has lost their chance to receive higher education opportunities (Freedom House, 2007).

The judiciary in Myanmar is not independent of the executive branch. The new constitution features some provisions left over from the colonial-era judicial system, however there is no provision of a guaranteed fair public trial (CIA World Factbook, 2009). The Myanmar government has, over the past two decades, sought to systematically silence dissent and eliminate all political opposition by imprisoning journalists, political dissidents, and human rights advocates (AAPP, 2006). In a 2007 report, international watchdog Freedom House gave Myanmar its lowest rating for widespread and systematic abuse of political rights and civil liberties. The report identified Myanmar as "not free", finding the Myanmar junta to be "one of the world's most repressive regimes" (Freedom House, 2007).

There are currently 44 prisons and at least 50 labor camps in Myanmar, reportedly holding 2,100 political prisoners (AAPP, 2009). Of the permanent prison facilities, at least 12 do not have a doctor and many do not have attached medical facilities (AAPP, 2009). In 2006, the International Committee of the Red Cross suspended its prison visitation program after the junta's repeated interference forced them to conclude that they could not carry out the impartiality mandate of their charter. Since 1988, the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) has published evidence that at least 139 political prisoners have died in prison as a direct result of torture and/or denial of medical treatment (AAPP, 2009).

According to a report of the AAPP, more than 350 activists in Myanmar have received heavy sentences, including imprisonment for up to 104 years, since October 2008 (AAPP, 2009). The AAPP has stated that the regime has adopted a program to disperse prisoners to various prisons around the country, far from their families and community networks. This policy has introduced even greater stress and problems into the penitentiary system, as family members were wholly responsible for prisoners' health provisions and nutrition. As of spring 2009, the AAPP found that at least 127 of the 357 recently imprisoned activists were suffering from rapidly deteriorating health conditions with at least 19 in urgent need of proper medical care (AAPP, 2009). The AAPP has also stated that many prisoners experience scabies, cholera, malaria, hemorrhoids, anemia, tuberculosis, eye problems and dysentery as a result of unhygienic conditions and poor nutrition. Also, many who have been subjected to torture continue to suffer from paralysis and nerve damage as well as stress-induced heart disease, hypertension and stroke (AAPP, 2009).

In 2004, a government purge targeted moderates within their own ranks when prime minister and head of military intelligence Khin Nyunt was placed under house arrest. This move was apparently linked to Khin Nyunt's history of advocating limited dialogue with the NLD and some of Myanmar's ethnic insurgent groups, for which he gained a reputation as a moderate (Freedom House, 2007).

In the wake of the 1990 election, many leaders of the National League for Democracy were jailed and thousands of members detained. Those who remained were pressured to resign, while the government forced the closure of NLD offices throughout the country. In 2006, the junta threatened to dissolve the National League for Democracy, stating that it had uncovered evidence of the NLD's ties to terrorist cells.

In 2005, the junta introduced a major crackdown on Shan activists with the arrest of President Major-General Sao Hso Ten of the Shan State Peace Council, SNLD Chairman Hkun Htun Oo, and General Secretary Sai Nyunt Lwin following a meeting of the Shan State Intellectual Advisory Council (Tin Maung Maung Than, 2006). All received multiple life sentences. In the months that followed, numerous other key leaders were also arrested. In April, a group of relatively-unknown Shan leaders, under the guidance of Sao Hkam Hpa, son of Myanmar's first late President, declared independence for the Federated Shan States. However, this action did not garner sufficient support (Tin Maung Maung Than, 2006).

Aung San Suu Kyi remains under house arrest and her contact with the National League for Democarcy (NLD) has been largely cut off by government authorities (Freedom House, 2007). Suu Kyi has been held under arrest in both her home and in prison for 13 out of the past 19 years (AAPP, 2009). While on house arrest, she has several times been denied medical treatment, and her family doctor was arrested on May 7, 2009 after appealing for permission to enter her house (AAPP, 2009). Several months before her house arrest sentence was due to expire in 2009, Suu Kyi was brought to trial for breaching the terms of her arrest. In August 2009, she was convicted and sentenced to 3 more years of house arrest, though this tem was later commuted to 18 months. Many believe this incident was intended to ensure that Suu Kyi would be under house arrest at the time of next year's election (BBC, 2009).

As of 2008, Myanmar is considered a Tier 3 (lowest ranking) country in that it does not comply or make any significant effort to comply with the minimum

requirements towards the elimination of human trafficking (CIA World Factbook, 2009). Also, it has been noted that both military personnel and civil service officials continue to be directly involved in orchestrating forced labor and recruitment of child soldiers (CIA World Factbook, 2009). Forced labor has contributed a significant amount of manpower in the junta's rapid infrastructure development scheme to increase tourism, despite a tourism slowdown since the international media put Myanmar in the limelight over violent upheaval in 2007 (Parnwell, 2000).

Under the heavy hand of the ruling junta, violation of human rights is rampant. The *Tatmadaw*, menaces villagers in Myanmar's border regions and often clashes violently with the ethnic armies stationed there. The *Tatmadaw* itself forcibly recruits children and requires villagers to join in forced labor activities for days at a time. Not only are forced labor and child soldiering widespread; forced resettlement, incarceration, and torture are relatively common practices, especially in the frontier states of Myanmar. Even in times of relative peace, inhabitants of these regions live under a looming threat of bullying and persecution by the *Tatmadaw*. There have been many reports and allegations of the use of targeted acts of sexual violence by the *Tatmadaw* against civilians. In 2007, the Women's League of Chinland (WLC) published a report documenting a number of rapes and instances of sexual abuse of women sanctioned by the state. The position of the WLC, and that of many other international and national advocacy groups, is that women and children are at constant risk of state-sanctioned abuses in conflict areas (WLC, 2007). Violence such as this is not limited only to the Chin State but is widespread across the ethnic areas of Myanmar (WLC, 2007).

The *Tatmadaw* has been engaged in multiple military campaigns against insurgent militias, ethnic and religious minority groups, journalists, and political dissidents alike for several decades. Despite multiple ceasefire talks, the violence largely continues. Even in most recent years, the situation has not improved despite increases in international pressure. For example, in 2007, the military led a massive offensive against ethnic Karen rebels in the largest

military campaign in ten years. Thousands were displaced within the Karen state, and many human rights abuses were reported (Freedom House, 2007).

Additionally, the *Tatmadaw* has made use of forced labor and forced portering to bolster its ranks and extend protracted campaigns into the border regions. Many children have been forcefully recruited and forced to enlist with the *Tatmadaw* in its effort to nearly double its numbers in the past five years (HREIB, 2006). Despite nominal efforts by the SPDC to halt the practice, the regime's Committee for the Prevention of Military Recruitment of Under-age Children spends all of its time staving off allegations of child soldiering from the UN and other human rights groups rather than actually preventing its practice (HREIB, 2006).

In the face of continuing efforts to extract natural resources and to support on-going military anti-insurgency campaigns, the regime has introduced systematic forced resettlement and land confiscation programs. Forced land confiscation without compensation is common in Myanmar, particularly in areas where development or resource extraction programs are being conducted by the regime and/or foreign corporations (AASYC, PYO & MYPO, 2009). Military campaigns also are responsible for resettlements, with the regime claiming land for strategic positioning or to dislodge a group it perceives to be supporting some insurgency.

Additionally, the *Tatmadaw* often confiscates food and resources in order to supply its troops (AASYC, PYO & MYPO, 2009). Upon confiscation of their land, thousands of people are left displaced with no home, no land, and no income. The Thailand Burma Border Consortium issued a report in late 2008 documenting the destruction, over a period of ten years, of more than 3,200 settlements resulting in forced relocation and abandonment in the eastern part of the country (TBBC, 2008). Even those villages within conflict zones that are not forcibly evacuated are often placed under severe restrictions to their mobility, including restricted access to fields and markets (TBBC, 2008). According to a 2007 CIA figure, there are more than half a million people internally displaced within Myanmar (CIA World Factbook, 2009).

Poverty and the loss of farmland are one of the direct outcomes of the regime's extraction and military campaigns. For example, it has been documented that one of the biggest root causes of migration from the Kachin State is the fall-out from the regime's pursuit of economic resources including its large-scale mining and extraction programs, as well as logging and damming (KWAT, 2008). These efforts have had a massive human and environmental impact including widespread displacement, military confiscation of farmlands, and forced labor (KWAT, 2008). With these practices, the regime has effectively destroyed much of the region's agricultural income as well as their means of subsistence. The Kachin Women's Association: Thailand (KWAT) has documented a significant drop in population across the Kachin State as increasing numbers migrate to Thailand in search of a more reliable source of income (KWAT, 2008). This phenomenon in the Kachin State serves to further highlight the crucial interconnectedness of migration for economic purposes and asylum seeking.

These many factors and others paint a grim picture of social, economic, and political conditions in Myanmar. Hardship is a common experience among Myanmar people, heightened especially in the case of ethnic minorities who are singled out by the regime for targeted repression. With so many aspects of life threatened by insecurity and violence, it is no small wonder that so many Myanmar people have migrated to Thailand in search of a better life. Unfortunately, the life that greets them in Thailand is also fraught with precarity; however many see this move as their only hope for creating a future for themselves and their family.

3.2   Policies and Standards for Migrant Workers in Thailand

It is important to note that while Myanmar is a militant authoritarian state, the government of Thailand is both parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy. Migrants who leave Myanmar for Thailand are essentially moving

from a non-representative state to a representative one; a move that would *in theory* improve their access to structural resources. However, their legal status; whether that be refugee, undocumented (illegal) migrant worker, or documented migrant worker in possession of a work permit; will determine which state protections they will have access to. By migrating illegally, undocumented workers forfeit the protections of Thailand's democratic system. Without documentation, they cannot be legally represented under a governmental system that applies only to Thai citizens. However, those who obtain work permits gain some legal entitlement to protections of the law.

Thailand is a member of the United Nations and signatory to a number of international conventions on human and labor rights. Critically, however, Thailand has not ratified the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol. The Convention outlines the definition of a refugee, their rights, and relevant state obligations. Article 1 of the Convention states that a refugee is any person:

> *…who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.*

As Thailand is not party to the 1951 Convention, it has implemented its own definition of a refugee, which is far more limited in scope.

According to reports by the Thai Burma Border Consortium (TBBC), there are approximately 150,000 Myanmar migrants living in official refugee camps in Thailand, set up through collaborative efforts between the Royal Thai Government (RTG) and international organizations (TBBC, 2007). Outside of the camps, however, there are hundreds of thousands of Myanmar migrants

who would have legitimate claims to refugee status under the 1951 Convention, but who are denied this status by the RTG which does not make much distinction between refugees and economic migrants (BUNSO, 2002). With an estimated more than 2 million migrants in Thailand, those recognized as refugees represent only a small percentage; the remainder of which must face the harsh reality of life as an 'economic migrant'.

As a member of the United Nations, Thailand has a responsibility to uphold the prescriptions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which sets forth a kind of customary international law to protect all people from discrimination, degrading treatment, and arbitrary detention; and to bestow upon them the right to a livable quality of life, among others. However, Thailand's compliance with these provisions is questionable. Most notably, Thailand has been charged with ignoring the principle of *non-refoulement* enshrined in customary international law (BUNSO, 2002). Under this principle, a government cannot deport any persons to a country where their lives or freedoms may be threatened or where they may be subject to persecution.

Noncompliance by the RTG in regard to this principle is in part due to the multifold weaknesses in Thai policy as in regards\ to refugees. The definition of a refugee used by the RTG to determine whether deportation would constitute *refoulement* limits consideration only to persons directly fleeing from fighting; and not from forced labor, forced relocation, rape, torture, or forced resettlement (BUNSO, 2002). The UNHCR has issued numerous statements indicating that many Myanmar migrants facing deportation by Thai authorities have legitimate fear of persecution upon return to Myanmar (BUNSO, 2002). By RTG standards, however, this finding is insufficient justification for halting deportations.

Thailand is also a state party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), which calls for states to provide labor and human rights guarantees to non-citizens. Specifically, General Comment 30 of the CERD states: "Recognize that, while States parties may

refuse to offer jobs to non-citizens without a work permit, all individuals are entitled to the enjoyment of labor and employment rights, including the freedom of assembly and association, once an employment relationship has been initiated until it is terminated" (cited in Amnesty International 2005).

In addition, Thailand is state party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) in which Article 2.2 guarantees equality of human and labor rights between nationals and non-nationals. The ICESCR also contains guarantees of fair and equal remuneration for all work, safe working conditions, and the right to a work day of reasonable length.

As state party to these and other international agreements, Thailand is legally required to provide protection for both citizens and non-citizens (i.e. migrants from Myanmar) against human and labor rights abuses. Thus, under these conventions, the RTG must guarantee migrants from Myanmar an acceptable standard of living and working in which they do not fall prey to abuse by their employers or by the authorities. Though they can be legally denied employment if they have no documentation, migrants are still entitled to basic human rights provisions by those conventions cited above, among others.

In addition, there are a number of Conventions which the RTG has not yet ratified that might further strengthen the mandate for Thailand to protect the rights of its non-citizens. Of the eight core Conventions of the International Labor Organization (ILO), Thailand has only ratified five. Among those omitted are: Convention Number 87: Concerning Freedom of Association and Protection for the Right to Organise; Convention Number 98: Concerning the Application of the Principles of the Right to Organize and to Bargain Collectively; and Convention Number 111 on discrimination (Amnesty International, 2005). According to the ILO Fundamental Declaration of Rights and Principles, however, even ILO members who have not ratified these eight core Conventions are required to uphold them in full (Arnold & Hewison, 2005).

Amnesty International and other international advocates have encouraged the RTG to ratify the remaining conventions. The RTG has also been encouraged to adopt six other crucial ILO conventions on racial discrimination, sexual harassment, and minimum working age; as well as Conventions Number 97 on Migration for Employment and Number 143 on Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) (Amnesty International, 2005).

Additionally, Amnesty International has advocated, with special emphasis, that the RTG become state party to the United Nations International Convention on the Protection of Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families which became effective in July 2003.

Thailand is not alone in its nonparticipation in many of these international conventions. Many non-signatory countries have, however, incorporated the essential parts of these conventions into domestic law. Thailand has largely failed to do so, though at times Thai law has hinted vaguely at provisions for equal protection against discrimination (Arnold & Hewison, 2005). Also under Thai labor law, migrant workers are entitled to a number of labor protections including 8-hour work days, one day off per week, and pre-approved overtime provisions. However, as Arnold & Hewison observed in a 2005 study in Mae Sot, Thailand, most employers ignored these standards.

The RTG first set up a registration system in August 2001, in view of the problems of undocumented workers and potential benefits of enacting some regulatory measures over the migration process. At this time, a little over half a million migrant workers were registered. The next year in 2002, they were required to re-register, though only half chose to do so. In 2003, a new policy extended consideration only to those who had been previously registered (excluding those who had never before applied), and enacted new specifications for which sectors those registrants would be permitted to work in (Amnesty International, 2005). At this time, further restrictions

provided for the termination of the permit should a migrant lose their job, which was inherently problematic as many of those registered at that time were employed in seasonal labor. In addition, any minimal protection migrants received from their work permit status was not transferable to their family members who would in theory still be liable for deportation.

The registration process was again changed in 2004 in the wake of a Memorandum of Understanding signed by the RTG and State Peace and Development Council of Myanmar. Under the new system, migrants were required to pay a total of 3,800 THB including a 1,900 THB fee for mandatory health examinations. Upon issuance, the permit would be valid for a period of one year. Family members of permit-holders would also be eligible for temporary permission to remain in Thailand for one year. The final section of the Memorandum of Understanding specifically states that permit-holders will be granted equal protection under labor laws as Thai workers.

In practice, however, permit-holders do not seem to receive the same labor protections as Thai workers, as documented by this study and others (see: Amnesty International, 2005; Arnold & Hewison, 2005). As indicated in countless interviews, migrant workers continue to receive less than minimum wage, work longer hours in worse conditions, and are prohibited from organizing.

The registration process changes each year. In 2006, the window for registration was between the 1st and 30th of June. If migrants failed to make application within this period, they would have to wait until registration again opened the following year, under what could be a completely different system.

The complexities and complications inherent in the registration process, together with its steep fees, can easily dissuade migrants from making application for a work permit. Yet, as of 2005, there were around 600,000 registered migrant workers from Myanmar living in Thailand (Amnesty

International, 2005). Such large numbers indicate that there is a significant demand for work permits, even in spite of the difficulty and expense at maintaining them.

Even documented migrant workers are still prohibited by law from organizing labor unions. While Section 45 of the 1997 Constitution protects the individual's right to form a union, Article 87 of the 1975 Labor Relations Act restricts the right of union formation only to Thais. As a result, migrant workers must look to either Thai unions or NGOs for legal aid, though the effectiveness of NGO channels are also limited by uncertain legal status and pressure from the authorities (Arnold & Hewison, 2005).

Despite the adversity that awaits them in Thailand, Myanmar migrants continue to cross the border. The lack of legal provisions to accommodate them is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to migrant life. However, for those migrants who seek it out, there are opportunities available in Thailand for not only economic gains, but also social networking and community building.

3.3 The Work and Daily Life of Myanmar Migrant Workers

With a healthy economy in recent years, Thailand is one of the most prosperous in the region. As a result of its economic successes, Thai citizens have become less willing to work in the so-called "3-D" (dirty, dangerous, and demeaning) jobs; thus leaving many of these job opportunities to incoming migrant workers (Amnesty International, 2005). Of all of the migrants who come to Thailand for work, approximately 80% come from Myanmar (Amnesty International, 2005). This phenomenon has been recognized by the RTG which has enacted a number of policy provisions for migrant registration. Though the RTG has made progress in its efforts to regularize migration across the Thai-Myanmar border, there are many flaws with both implementation strategies and the policy itself (Amnesty International, 2005).

Some migrants come for economic reasons; some come to escape brutality. But both groups of people come to seek greater security for themselves and their families. During a 2004 study, Amnesty International found that the vast majority of migrant workers whom they were able to contact had not been trafficked across the border but rather had paid an agent voluntarily to help them enter Thailand, or had crossed by themselves (Amnesty International, 2005). Once they have reached their destination, most migrants then hire another agent to help them find a job if they do not have any relatives or friends already living there who can help them. Many work in rural areas as manual laborers in orchards and farms, but most congregate around towns and cities in the hopes of procuring jobs in construction, factories, or food services.

Amnesty International puts the number of migrant workers from Myanmar employed in Thailand in the tens of thousands. Among these, most come from the Eastern regions of Myanmar including Kayin, Kayah, Mon, and Shan states; and the Bago and Tanintharyi Divisions (Amnesty International, 2005).

In 2004, Mahidol University conducted a study of migrant domestic workers from Myanmar in two regions of Thailand: Chiang Mai, a major city in the North and Mae Sot, a border town further south. The findings of this study indicate that migrant domestic workers from Myanmar continue to suffer an extreme alienation and general disregard for the labor and human rights, even despite growing awareness of their condition in Thailand (Punpuing, S. et al, 2004).

Researchers focused on three major themes: reasons for migration, workplace experiences, and hopes for the future. Findings supported the push-pull theory that economic and political hardships in Myanmar are driving individuals over the border to seek new opportunities in Thailand (Punpuing, S. et al, 2004). In their work life, domestic workers face great adversity, from having no written contract, to being expected to work on demand, to facing physical abuse from their employers. Yet, migrants appeared to remain hopeful that a better future was at hand, and that they

might some day move back to their homes in Myanmar (Punpuing, S. et al, 2004).

The Mahidol study focused on the precarious work and home life of Myanmar migrants in Thailand; however it was limited only to domestic workers. This study will pose a similar question to a slightly larger group within the migrant community, focusing instead on those migrants who are working in more visible industries such as construction, restaurant work, factory work, and others. The possibility of exposure to social mobilization and political ideals among workers in these industries is far more likely than it is among those migrants who are employed in solitary domestic positions. The critical difference between those working in private homes and those working in a public setting is the opportunities afforded by a multi-employee workplace for interaction and socializing. With more and more migrants finding work in these industries, it is important to understand their experiences and how they cope with exploitation together with other migrants in a shared workplace.

While the Mahidol study drew from two geographical areas, I intend to home in on just one. There seems to be much literature already in existence dealing with the Karen migrant experience in the border town of Mae Sot, Thailand; whereas comparatively little has been written about Chiang Mai.

Mae Sot, Thailand in Tak Province lies on the border with Myanmar's Karen State. Also nearby are a number of official refugee camps. As one of the few ethnic groups to be officially conferred refugee status by the RTG, Karen migrants have been able to settle in refugee camps set up with international aid. Those who remain outside of the camps have settled in Mae Sot where ethnic Karens comprise a large percentage of the town's population. With official estimates at around 200,000 migrants in the area, the Thai authorities have been forced to turn a blind eye to many cases of illegal migration to Mae Sot. As a result, Karen migrants have been able to be much more visible in Thai society, even retaining the Karen national dress and Karen language.

Around 700km north of Bangkok, Chiang Mai is a provincial capital and major economic center for the northern part of the country. The population of its metropolitan area is just under one million. The city, in recent years, has emerged as a center of trade, business, and industry second only to Bangkok. As a result, there are an increasing number of jobs to be had in the city, making it a prime destination for economic migrants from Myanmar.

Historically, the linkages between Myanmar and Chiang Mai date back to as early as 1558 when Chiang Mai first fell to Burmese control. The Burmese garrisoned the city as a strategic vantage point from whence to wage a protracted military campaign against the Thai government in Ayutthaya. When at last the Burmese abandoned Chiang Mai in 1774, the local people were left with a greatly weakened economy after a century of resource exploitation and warring. The newly liberated city soon allied itself with the Siamese Thai. At that time, Prince Chao Kawila of Lampang brought thousands of newcomers, including many Tai Yai (Shan), to settle and rebuild the city of Chiang Mai and its greater province.

The Tai Yai (Shan) peoples are part of a larger linguistic family which includes Tai Isaan (Lao) and Tai Pak Klang (Siamese), as well as Khon Muang (People of the Principalities) which today constitutes the majority of Chiang Mai's population. The Tai Yai and Khon Muang are close ethno-linguistic relatives, and even today share many of the same cultural traditions and customs.

With the growth of trade and mobility in the mid-nineteenth century, the Tai Yai (Shan) peoples spread across the Golden Triangle, from the Shan State in modern-day Myanmar to Chiang Mai and its environs. Many Tai Yai worked in the lumber industry throughout the century in what is today the greater Chiang Mai province. By 1900, there were significant Tai Yai settlements in Mae Chaem, by Doi Inthanon, and Mae Rim, just north of Chiang Mai proper. Similarly within Chiang Mai city, the area around Chang Phuak has historically been home to many ethnic Tai Yai. Today, many people in these towns are of Tai Yai lineage.

In recent years, migrants to Chiang Mai have come mostly from the Shan State of Myanmar, the center of Tai Yai heritage and home to around 6 million. By modern-day border definitions, the Shan State shares a long border with Thailand's northern provinces. During the formation of Aung San's 1948 government, Shan leaders sought independence and agreed to a 10-year trial period of participation in the national union, after which time they were promised the option of self-rule. However once Ne Win usurped power and instituted military rule, the question of independence for the Shan State was abandoned. The Shan people became a target of military repression and in recent years the Burmese army has been engaged in bloody conflict with the Shan State Army.

Today the Shan State is wrought with violence. The state is home to several major insurgent armies who regularly clash with the military. These outbursts of violence, along with the incurrence of the military into Shan territories have left devastation and a string of human rights abuses in its wake. Tens of thousands of Shan people have fled to Thailand as refugees; however the RTG does not allow them asylum in camps, the like of which have been set up for Karen and Mon refugees from Myanmar. Thus, most Shan refugees, though their claims to asylum are in many cases legitimate; are considered officially to be migrant workers (Amnesty International, 2005).

Unlike the Karen, Shan migrants cannot be conferred with refugee status under Thai law. Though their presence in Chiang Mai is considerable, they remain a clear minority group. By contrast with Mae Sot police and immigration authorities, the police in Chiang Mai actively search out and expose undocumented migrants. As a result, migrants in Chiang Mai must remain much more hidden than their counterparts in the border towns. Because Thai and Shan languages share the same roots in the Tai language family, Shan migrants tend to learn to speak and read Thai relatively quickly upon arrival. In light of the great risks of an encounter with the authorities, most migrants in Chiang Mai seek to blend in with Thai society as much as possible to escape detection.

These conditions make migrant workers in Chiang Mai an especially critical case to study. Less information regarding migrants in Chiang Mai exists simply because the migrant population is more hidden than in Mae Sot. Additionally, migrants in Chiang Mai have necessarily become more wary of participating in activities as visible as international research projects. Despite these challenges, the migrant experience in Chiang Mai is a very important story to tell. Unable to wear their national dress or speak their native language, migrants in Chiang Mai experience a heightened precarity; and as a clear minority, they experience great isolation.

I chose Chiang Mai as the location of my study because I hoped to bring to light the situation of a migrant population that relies so heavily on invisibility for safety. The need for invisibility is a crucial dimension that heightens the level of precarity these migrant workers face – an element that will be important in my assessment of precarity. As there are no refugees in Chiang Mai, all migrants must work in order to support themselves. As such, the need for employment is more urgent. This need will help to highlight the importance of labor and work-related concerns that form the basis of the mobilization aspect of my argument. In addition, I hope also to give voice to migrant workers in Chiang Mai, whose experiences are acknowledged far less than others in the Thai-Myanmar human rights literature.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

Undertaking research on a migrant population in Chiang Mai generated many challenges. Nevertheless, I developed an effective strategy for collecting data through in-depth interviews with the help of an interpreter. With advice from local NGOs, I refined and translated my questionnaire. I then began identifying respondents, initially through snowball sampling, and later through a strategy proposed by the interpreter wherein individuals were approached at random. After collecting responses from over 100 interviews, I aggregated the data to look for emergent trends.

Here I outline a number of methodological concerns in five sections. First, I introduce the hypotheses that underlie this study and identify the information required to achieve valid conclusions. I then explain the methodological framework I designed, focusing on the questionnaire and details of the interview process. The third section addresses potential sources of error, and describes the steps I took to minimize them. The fourth section takes a look at the various ethical considerations that inform this study; issues such as sensitivities for research within vulnerable groups and means of establishing verbal informed consent. In the last section, I describe the adaptations and adjustments I made to the methodology during the research process.

4.1   Hypotheses, Expected Outcomes, and Evidence Needed

Though stating a specific hypothesis is unnecessary in this case, it is important to enumerate the expected outcomes of this study. Even prior to data collection, it seemed reasonably apparent that the majority of illegal migrant workers from Myanmar are *not* currently involved in organized social protest. This phenomenon is quite likely to be the result of

multifaceted exploitation by employers and authorities that together create a climate of fear that discourages mobilization. Representatives of NGOs and migrant workers alike have provided countless anecdotes to suggest that this is the case especially in Chiang Mai. In addition, the sheer number of migrants seems disproportional to the number and institutional size of the NGO community in the area. While the lack of social mobilization may be already apparent, it is the intention of this study to examine *why* this is the case.

An initial consideration of this question turned up several possible solutions. First and foremost, I expected that many migrant workers felt immobilized by the fear cultivated by authorities and employers in order to keep wages low and hours long by suppressing protests. This fear may encompass a range of repercussions from deportation to job loss to wage cuts. As a secondary root cause, I looked for a correlation between the strength of migrant community structures and movement participation. The social support system provided by family and community institutions has been found to provide migrants with a source of security and solidarity (Scott, 1982; Van Tran, 1987; Young, 2001). According to Van Tran (1987, 834), "the support of an ethnic community has significant direct effects on the psychological well-being of migrants and refugees entering those communities… Community support helps to relieve the stress and anxiety induced by migration and life events." I intend to draw out this variance by conflating respondents' stated perceptions of community integrity and their current participation levels.

In order to weigh these hypotheses, I adapted a data collection procedure used by the Institute for Population and Social Research (IPSR) at Mahidol University in Bangkok. In 2004, IPSR published a study of Myanmar migrant domestic workers in Chiang Mai and Mae Sot, Thailand entitled "Migrant Domestic Workers: From Burma to Thailand". This study examines the experience of domestic workers dealing with exploitation, fear, and intolerance (Punpuing, S. et al, 2004). I incorporated the IPSR study as a foundational framework from which I examined new dimensions

of migrant labor; specifically focusing on a wider range of Myanmar migrant workers who were employed in more visible industries such as restaurant work and construction. Thus, in concurrence with the procedures adopted by the IPSR, the following evidence was considered.

I.   Questionnaire data.

I worked with an interpreter to conduct 134 interviews with migrant workers from Myanmar in Chiang Mai. The interpreter later translated these interviews into English.

I subdivided my questionnaire into three sections. The first section focused on basic background information including the worker's place of employment and salary. For this section, I drew heavily on the Mahidol University.

The second section comprised general questions about migrant workers' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the treatment they were receiving from employers and authorities, and also the recourse they felt they had available should they have a complaint against either. Questions in this section also asked respondents if they felt they were free to voice their opinions in public about any matters pertaining to how they were treated by employers and authorities in Thailand.

The third section of the questionnaire established whether respondents were affiliated with any social movement organization. These questions allowed me to determine respondents' basic familiarity with the NGO community, the nature of their participation, and their interest in future involvement.

II.   NGO representatives' testimonies.

NGOs are well-positioned to provide experienced commentary on the issues I addressed in this study. Over the years, these organizations

have established a rapport with the Myanmar migrant community and are now familiar with the daily struggles of migrant labor. In the final phase of my project, I conducted ten interviews with staff members and interns at several community-based NGOs in Chiang Mai.

III. Translators' observations and commentary.

Another way of embedding this project in the community was to maintain a system whereby my translator recorded her own impressions and observations of the interview process in a journal. She provided invaluable insights into the research process and also input into data collection. As a member of the Myanmar migrant community herself, the translator served as an intermediary between the respondents and principle investigator. In speaking directly with respondents, she noticed cultural subtleties and nuances that might otherwise have been lost in translation. Journal keeping was a means of recording behavioral and social trends observed during the interviewing process.

4.2 Framework and Research Strategies

Studies of individuals in complex contexts may also present some unconventional challenges for researchers when it comes to identifying a methodological framework and variables for consideration. More often than not, researchers in these circumstances are not able to manipulate groups within complex contexts in order to isolate control groups. Therefore, it must be accepted that studies in complex contexts may be lacking in control groups altogether (Jacobsen & Landau, 2003). Also, research in this field is often based more on stories and testimonies than direct observation of variables, which would be difficult to isolate and observe in person. Therefore, researchers must be creative – by looking to causal linkages within limited data – and by supplementing this analysis with comparative studies and

references from the literature (Jacobsen & Landau, 2003).

Given these limitations, I have chosen to implement a qualitative structuring for my research for several reasons. While quantitative research may examine one specific factor leading to an observed outcome, qualitative research is primarily concerned with understanding the complexities that combine to create that outcome (Dean, 2007). The context in which I have examined social movements is highly complex in nature. Thus I understand that the outcomes I have observed were the result of the interaction of many factors. Any study isolating these factors could very possibly lose significance as it would inhibit the synthesis of the situation as a whole.

For the purposes of this research, I have adopted a strategy which will conflate two loosely-structured cases in an analysis of the labor situation along the Thai-Myanmar border. My research question conforms to the three identifiers for case study research laid out by Yin: focus on contemporary events, lack of control over behavioral events, and framing of the research question in terms of 'how' or 'why' (Yin, 1994). I aimed to achieve the "configurative-ideographic" case analysis typology identified by Eckstein, which assesses and analyzes migrant workers' experience of mobilization in Thailand (Eckstein, 2000). Thus I structured my research as part ethnography and part loose comparative method case study, as described by Gerring (2007).

The dominant analysis in this study is ethnographic. It draws from narratives structured as an array of testimonies in answer to prompts from the questionnaire. Commentary draws reflexively from what the respondents themselves report, and from a comparison of the trends which have emerged in the aggregated data.

I have also selected two cases whose primary variance is sociological in nature. In the first case, I looked at those migrant workers who were unaffiliated with any political or social organizations (Case 1: Unaffiliated). The majority of respondents (124 of 134) fell within this category. In the

second case, I focused on those migrants who participated in some way with a social movement organization or group (Case 2: Affiliated). This latter classification was rather limited in scope as there were only 10 respondents in this case group. These two groups differed only on the point of affiliation, having all other qualities in common (origin in Myanmar, migrant status, employment in Chiang Mai, etc). I selected these cases because their combined dichotomy best conforms to what Gerring (2007) calls a "most-similar" structure in which cases are selected to be similar in all variables save one; which in this instance is affiliation with a social movement organization. As the size of these case groups is so unequal, the case study portion of the analysis played only a minor supporting role.

Within these two cases, I used an inductive framework which is based on grounded theory, as presented by Glaser and Strauss (1964). This framework enabled a higher degree of adaptability which allowed new concepts to emerge during the data collection process that were not previously predicted or considered. A preliminary review of the existing literature suggested several possible theoretical explanations for observed social movement phenomena. However, I also posited an alternative linkage to precarity as a theoretical basis for this study. Thus I decided to structure my initial research question around existing theory while refraining from developing a specifically-stated hypothesis as this inductive approach would help me to better understand linkages to my alternative theoretical explanation of precarity.

According to Jacobsen and Landau (2003), randomly-selected representative samples are extremely difficult to obtain in research involving refugee subjects. The reason for this difficulty is threefold. First, researchers wishing to interview refugees or other migrants may be unable to identify a clear sampling frame. Second, it is unlikely that they will be able to access the full range of the population due to hidden social groups, lack of voice, or the standards for public participation. Third, researchers may find that there is a strong self-selection bias. Those who are willing to share information and personal narratives may have alternative views or

agendas not representative of the wider population (Jacobsen & Landau, 2003).

As a result, researchers interested in refugee or migrant subjects may need to resort to snowball sampling (Jacobsen & Landau, 2003). Snowball sampling does not generate a randomized sample. However, it remains a recognized and accepted technique in the social sciences.

Respondents in this study were first selected by purposive snowball sampling. Later, the interpreter, a Myanmar migrant herself, approached individuals of Myanmar origin at their workplace in Chiang Mai. The locations at which she approached potential subjects were carefully selected, taking into consideration geography and industry-specific factors. The sampling was designed to comprise a representative array of industries, genders, and ages. In keeping with a purposive snowball sampling approach, the interpreter canvassed a number of different locations across Chiang Mai including hospitals, markets, restaurants, construction sites, and nightclubs. She also used her own social connections in the migrant community to identify willing respondents through networking and the recommendations she received from others whom she interviewed. The final sample was as random as could reasonably be obtained within the ethical boundaries of research in sensitive fields.

4.3 Potential Sources of Error

The interview method often used in social science research has several process-related limitations; namely the possibility of non-represetativeness and bias within a sample. The nature of this kind of research inherently opens the door to inaccuracies should the interviewer unconsciously affect respondents' perspectives. Additionally, the interviewer may incorrectly record or misinterpret responses. However, Jacobsen and Landau (2003) suggest that interviewers who have established familiarity and trust in the

respondent community are less likely to be influenced by political claims or first impressions of the respondents; hence another reason for hiring a Myanmar migrant as interpreter/translator.

An indigenous interpreter has established trust in the community. Such an interpreter is best positioned to understand the culturally-imbedded nuances of the respondents' dialogue. As Smith (1999, 15) suggests, "indigenous methodologies tend to approach cultural protocols, values and behaviors as an integral part of methodology. They are 'factors' to be built in to research explicitly, to be thought about reflexively, to be declared openly as part of the research design…." Employment of an indigenous interpreter is one way of weaving these factors into the research design. By minimizing the cultural difference between the interpreter and respondents, I hoped also to minimize the potential that she misunderstand or misinterpret responses.

Translation errors are somewhat unavoidable when interviews undergo translation from the original spoken language. However, when the principal investigator has not achieved the necessary level of fluency in the native tongue of his/her respondents, it becomes necessary to hire an interpreter. In this study, I attempted to minimize translation error by asking the interpreter to write down the responses she received in the language of the interview. Then, immediately upon leaving the interview, she translated responses into English while the nuances and tone of the interview were still fresh in her memory.

I decided to commission only one interpreter to complete the entire project. While using a team of multiple interpreters might have sped up the process, it would have threatened to increase translation error and introduce unnecessary inconsistencies. By using only one interpreter, I eliminated these inconsistencies that would risk polluting the dataset.

In the initial phases of my fieldwork, I designated one month to work exclusively with the interpreter to ensure that she follow a strict protocol for interviewing and translation. I divided this month-long preparatory period into

several phases:

> *Week 1.* Introducing the interpreter to key concepts and research
> goals; holding meetings the interpreter and representatives from
> the NGOs to discuss the questionnaire
>
> *Week 2.* Discussing protocol for interviews; preliminary data
> gathering; and record-keeping
>
> *Week 3.* Conducting the first five interviews
>
> *Week 4.* Discussing the interpreter's observations and reactions
> to the initial interviews; revising interview strategies

In addition to creating a more complicated ethical environment for researchers, complex contexts may complicate the data collection process, in terms of accuracy and data integrity. Interviewing respondents who may be considered vulnerable is a process that may incur basic experimental error. Validity problems facing researchers in the field of illegal migration may introduce some inherent non-represenatitiveness and bias, translation error, and confidentiality issues (Jacobsen & Landau, 2003).

While data sets involving vulnerable populations may be more tenuous than those involving less precarious respondent groups, research outcomes are still of great value. The potential benefits of research findings therefore justify work in a less traditional field (Jacobsen & Landau, 2003). By considering these limitations within the methodological framework, I hoped to develop a sound research design, maintain vigilance, and minimize potential sources of error resulting from these limitations.

Gerring (2007) suggests that in order to establish internal validity, the researcher must draw out a clear causal relationship, which in case study research designed around the experimental method, may be conceptualized as temporal or spatial. This study was designed to test the attitudes of two

groups of migrant workers differing in institutional affiliation but sharing the same demographic profile and time reference. The difference in affiliation introduces additional categorical differences such as educational background and political awareness.

In order to confirm a causal relationship between the two, I developed my sampling strategy within a framework designed to be as representative of the migrant population as possible. I recorded the geographic and demographic background of each respondent and synthesized this in a matrix along with their questionnaire responses. This aggregation of data, once developed, enabled me to analyze the social mobilization within the migrants' response to their precarious environment.

4.4   Ethical Considerations

As with many things, research studies are so often justified to the public by their ends, rather than their means. However, it is important to ensure that ethical considerations not be neglected during the execution of research. Ethical considerations for human subjects and communities should form a strict guideline to which research methods adhere. The validity of study results is thus embedded in a conscientious ethos. Data achieved in an unethical way disrupts the overall merit of research outcome.

Researchers have a responsibility to protect human subjects by ensuring the security and confidentiality of respondents' personal information. In designing a study involving human subjects, researchers must consider potentially compromising factors including those which respondents themselves may not think of. Research participants indicate an acceptance of risk when they issue formal consent, in full knowledge of the facts. However, it is the researcher's responsibility to minimize these risks from the outset of the project.

Many research studies today are conducted in the midst of humanitarian

emergencies. While the results of these studies may be especially invaluable for humanitarian efforts in the prevention of future disasters, data should never be collected at the expense of study participants (Reed, 2002). Ethical considerations for individuals participating in these studies should never go overlooked; and in emergency situations, individuals may be especially susceptible. As found by the National Research Council's Roundtable on the Demography of Forced Migration, traditional research strategies are often inappropriate in complex or volatile settings, such as those embedded in humanitarian emergencies and endemic poverty (Reed, 2002).

Migration; and particularly *illegal* migration; is often a product of sustained cyclical poverty and humanitarian problems. Therefore, in accordance with the National Research Council, special protocols must be adopted when conducting research with illegal migrant workers, as in this study. A useful body of literature has been published on the subject over the past decade. In the literature, social science researchers with experience in emergency settings address the use of migrant or refugee subjects in academic research studies. Some studies focus on inherent vulnerability; others on susceptibility induced by emergency situations; and still others on the general ethics of interviewing migrants in tenuous work environments.

In humanitarian emergencies, people are left powerless and insecure; a state which only widens the gap between the goals of the subject and those of the researcher. Levine et al. (2004) note the implicit inequality of the power relationship between researchers and subject populations in complex contexts. Also, the immediacy of the subjects' needs may induce somewhat of a clash of interest with the needs and goals of research. For example, while research may benefit future migrants or refugees, it may do little to address the current deprivation and needs of the respondents themselves (Reed, 2002). This divide, while impossible to eliminate, can be minimized or at least placated through constant vigilance and attention to the ethical implications of research protocol.

One theory that could aid in the development of such a protocol is that of *vulnerability*. Vulnerability is a term used to identify research participants who may be made particularly vulnerable to exploitation by their circumstances and surroundings. These 'vulnerable' populations require special attention and would very likely benefit from the non-traditional research strategies recommended by Reed (2002).

Migrant workers engaged in a complicated legal position could be considered a *vulnerable population* as defined by Zion, Gilliam, and Loff (2000). A vulnerable population is one which lacks basic rights and is therefore especially susceptible to exploitation (Zion et al., 2000). These social groups, they argue, become vulnerable when individuals lose the ability to exercise the "freedoms that form an essential part of choosing the basic course of their life" (Zion et al., 2000, 615). Vulnerability can be understood in terms of a loss of welfare through poverty in which physical circumstance may be so variable that it is beyond the control of an individual (Ligon & Schechter, 2003). This designation is primarily used as an instructive research tool which signals researchers to implement proper ethical strategies.

Foremost, researchers must consider that vulnerable subjects may make decisions that are not in their own best interest due to their lack of basic life-sustaining rights and provisions (Zion et al., 2000). Participating in research studies may jeopardize subjects' security, though their ability to weigh the risks may be influenced by their vulnerability and lack of access to those rights which protect them from harm. For example, individuals driven by poverty to engage in some illegal activity (such as illegal migration) are often faced with extreme choices, as the normal recourse may be unavailable to them. Thus these individuals may take considerable risks, such as exposing their identity by participating in a public survey, if they are under the illusion that the action might be to their long-term benefit.

Herein arise two critical points for researchers: informed consent and

confidentiality. These two concerns are almost sure to confront researchers dealing with illegal migrants (Jacobsen & Landau, 2003).

Conventional informed consent procedures may ask respondents to sign a contract verifying their official consent to participate in the study. However, individuals with few basic rights may not be free to weigh the risks involved in decision-making and may therefore be unable to give true informed consent in the conventional way. Researchers must be aware of this issue and exercise particular sensitivity when identifying new subjects for interview. At the National Research Council's Roundtable on the Demography of Forced Migration, researcher Phillip Nieburg argued that informed consent needs to be a process on-going throughout the course of the research, rather than a one-time event (Reed, 2002).

Additionally, researchers should consider that some respondents will be willing and able to give verbal consent but unwilling to sign a contract document stating as such. Yu and Liu (1986) suggest that respondents living in complex contexts (such as refugees, in Yu and Liu's case) may be nervous about signing their names to any written statement as such an act may have in the past caused them "psychological injury because of their previous political and social experiences" (Yu & Liu, 1986). Hesitation on this front may persist in spite of researchers' assurances that paper records will be kept safe and confidential. In such a circumstance, researchers may need to adopt a verbal consent strategy. During the same Roundtable, academic Ron Bayer reported that he could obtain only oral consent during a study of illegal North Korean migrants in China due to concerns for migrants' security (Reed, 2002). Thus we see that in complex contexts, conventional protocol can and must be adapted to suit the research environment.

Confidentiality is another issue deserving of adaptation from traditional research protocol. When collecting interview data from vulnerable individuals, researchers must make data security a top priority. As frequently is the case during humanitarian emergencies, individuals could

face severe repercussions if their personal information should be leaked to anyone not specifically permitted to view this data. Not only is the penalty for information leakage higher, but security may be more difficult to guarantee. Often in an emergency, the security of data and records cannot be guaranteed, despite researchers' best efforts (Reed, 2002). Errors in the preservation of data security could result from a number of factors inherent in emergency settings such as a lack of permanent research facilities. Often, researchers conducting fieldwork in the midst of a humanitarian emergency cannot obtain a confidential location for interviews.

In the case of illegal migrants, research data, if seen by any government officials, could enable authorities to identify and possibly even deport research participants immediately on the basis of their illegal status. Jacobsen and Landau (2003) note that in research involving illegal migrants, there are almost always logistical challenges such as data security. In other words, after interviews are conducted, researchers must make the protection of both hard and soft copy data a top priority. As with the difficulty in obtaining confidential locations for interviews, researchers in the field may find it very difficult to secure facilities in which to store data.

It is important to make the interview process as comfortable as possible. Intensely questioning a respondent on emotionally-charged subjects may make recalling a painful past even more difficult. One way to avoid this is to open up the format of the interview. Rather than drilling respondents on a list of questions, researchers can use an open-ended approach that favors testimonies and storytelling over questioning (Smith, 1999). Smith (1999, 144) argues: "there is a formality to testimonies and a notion that truth is being revealed 'under oath'. Indigenous testimonies are a way of talking about an extremely painful event or series of events…. While the listener may ask questions, testimonies structure the responses, silencing certain types of questions and formalizing others". Much in line with Smith, Russell Bishop (1996) argues that structuring interviews as storytelling sessions allows respondents to remain in control of the topics which emerge; more correctly representing the 'diversities of truth'.

Despite all the potential risks and setbacks that emergency settings pose for researchers, there are other elements to complex contexts that can be used as critical assets to enhance the research process. One of the first themes confronting the researcher is culture. Culture can be a barrier to research, or it can be an asset, and a major contributor. Studies which embrace culture as a value-adding phenomenon are likely to not only gain added depth to their outcomes, but also ease the data collection process tremendously. Smith (1999) discusses culture and the value of adopting what she terms 'indigenous methodologies' which can ensure both best ethical practice and highest quality data.

> *Some methodologies regard the values and beliefs, practices and customs of communities as 'barriers' to research or as exotic customs with which researchers need to be familiar in order to carry out their work without causing offence. Indigenous methodologies tend to approach cultural protocols, values and behaviors as an integral part of methodology. They are 'factors' to be built in to research explicitly, to be thought about reflexively, to be declared openly as part of the research design, to be discussed as part of the final results of a study and to be disseminated back to the people in culturally appropriate ways and in a language that can be understood.*
> (Smith, 1999, 15)

Smith (1999) identifies what she terms the 'indigenous research agenda' (Figure 4.1). This agenda is designed to help researchers identify the goals of their respondent population in an organized way, and to design their methodology with these goals in mind. In so doing, researchers can make sure that ethical considerations remain at the center of the research process. Additionally, researchers should imbed cultural protocol into methodology itself. These cultural traditions should be seen not as barriers, but assets that will enhance the quality and application of the research (Smith, 1999).

Figure 4.1 The Indigenous Research Agenda
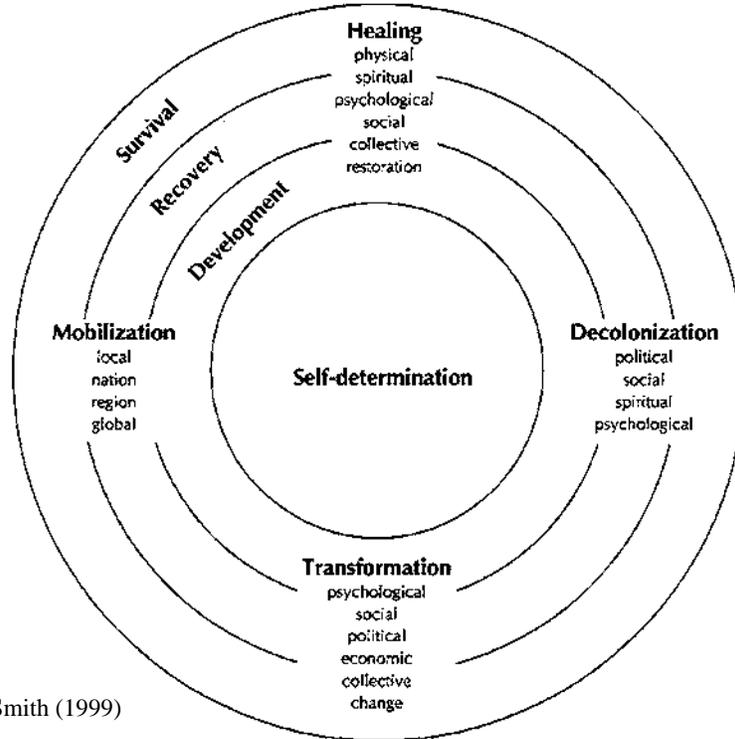
Smith (1999)

Ensuring that the questionnaire and interview process are culturally appropriate is critical to achieving integrity in research. Understanding a population's research agenda (as discussed by Smith, 1999) requires input and participation from community members. One way to do this is to use local institutions and researchers to aid with research (Jacobsen & Landau, 2003). Community organizations and local NGOs can offer support and opinions based on their experience and intimate knowledge of local culture. These groups and their affiliates are ideally placed to give feedback, make recommendations, and review initial research designs.

Another way of incorporating community members is to use local people as translators/interpreters. Community members are in the best position to gain the trust of respondents, conduct research in a culturally-appropriate way, and provide insight into cultural subtleties that a researcher coming

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from outside of the community would likely miss (Vincent & Sorensen, 2001).

In addition to ethical complications induced by emergency settings, researchers working with populations in the midst of humanitarian crises face a number of logistical or practical difficulties. When Yu and Liu (1986) were in the midst of an empirical study of Vietnamese refugees in mid-1980s, they came across a rather unexpected problem: the refugees they were surveying did not understand the concept of academic research itself. Members of the community in question had never before participated in a survey, and therefore did not fully understand the intent of the researchers.

Another problem commonly encountered by researchers in the field is discomfort among respondents when asked sociodemographic questions. Yu and Liu (1986) found that the Vietnamese refugees they were interviewing were extremely reluctant to answer questions about family members. Indeed, to those who do not fully understand the intent of research or the value of the academic process, the collection of sociodemographic data may seem dubious indeed.

Therefore, we see that due thoroughness in explaining research goals and processes can be of great ethical and practical benefit. Researchers must take care to introduce respondents not only to their specific study but also to the overall ethos of research itself. But patience and thoroughness invested in establishing this rapport from the point of first introduction does have practical benefits as well.

Challenges and setbacks in emergency settings need not be seen as impairing; rather they should become part of the research (Reed, 2002). Many researchers working under such conditions are forced to take a creative approach to an old problem. The challenges of complex contexts should not deter research in these areas; rather it should be used to enrich the research imperative.

Jacobsen and Landau (2003) identify what they call the *dual imperative* for ethical research. This imperative weighs the value of research outcome against its potential costs. A worthy project would be one in which the significance of potential outcomes trumps the risks incurred. To do this, researchers must understand their goals in terms of a dual imperative: that their work be both academically sound and policy relevant. When one or both of these qualities are lacking, the ethical complications of research in complex settings invalidate research aims and value. Achieving the dual imperative is entirely possible however, so long as it remains at the forefront of research aims (Jacobsen & Landau, 2003).

The Myanmar migrants involved in this study meet the criteria of a 'vulnerable' population. As illegal migrant workers, the majority of this study's respondents exhibit a number of highly compromising qualities. First, a large number of migrant workers in Thailand have no official identification documents. Even those who have entered a country legally face frequent legal challenges and often clash with the authorities when they are expected to pay exorbitant fines or bribes. To an extent, it could be said that all illegal migrants have a necessarily tenuous and difficult relationship with the authorities in their host country. Such a relationship would naturally lead migrants to be wary of any unnecessary contact with political entities or behavior which might lead to their identification.

Having no protection under the law of the host country, migrants have little recourse should they experience problems. In most cases, illegal and undocumented migrants are deported to their home country without further inquiry (BUNSO, 2002). Of those Myanmar migrants I interviewed in this study, most had risked their lives in leaving their homeland illegally and would face severe penalties upon return. As a result, migrants were experiencing a very low degree of human security and a heightened precarity which threatens their day to day existence. For many, remaining in Thailand is only possible if they can avoid detection by the authorities, and engaging in public activities could interfere with their ability to remain hidden

(Amnesty International, 2005).

Secondly, migrants from Myanmar in Thailand are typically paid a very low wage. As a result, they may experience sustained economic hardships (Amnesty International, 2005). For many of the respondents in this study, paying rent each month and putting food on the table was a daily worry. Not only do migrant workers receive a reduced salary, but they could lose their job – their only source of even the most meager income – on a moment's notice.

It was thus anticipated that unconventional methods would need to be adopted in order to uphold the highest standard of both ethics and data quality. In keeping with Smith's (2001) arguments for attention to the indigenous agenda within research methods, I adopted several culturally-rooted protocols.

First, I worked closely with an indigenous interpreter/translator who conducted all of the interviews in this study, as recommended by Vincent and Sorensen (2001). This interpreter, as a migrant herself, had achieved a significant rapport with the community. She was fluent in Shan and Burmese languages, as well as in cultural praxis and appropriateness. Her fluency in culturally-rooted customs proved to be particularly important as it informed her ability to explain to respondents the goals of research in a way that they could understand.

Second, I considered means of obtaining verbal consent instead of written consent from the respondents in this study – a technique adopted by Bayer in his study of North Korean migrants in China (Reed, 2002). I discussed the best method for obtaining clear verbal consent with the interpreter, who provided several critical suggestions for adapting methodology to fit with cultural subtleties.

Lastly, I worked closely with a local migrant workers' organization, the Migrant Learning Center (MLC) of Chiang Mai, during the initial trial of

my questionnaire, as recommended by Jacobsen and Landau (2003). I asked several of the administrators at the MLC to review the questionnaire and to provide feedback and recommendations as to how I could better tailor the questionnaire to the interests of the community. I also used the MLC as a safe space in which to conduct the first few interviews while I got a sense of how respondents received me, the interpreter, and my questionnaire.

4.5   Adaptations Made

Several revisions had to be made during the data collection process in order to adapt the original methodology to cope with emergent problems. Most of the problems which arose were related to gaining respondents' confidence and making sure that they felt secure throughout the interview process.

Originally, interviews were to be conducted either at respondents' homes or public venues, in order to preserve the anonymity of the respondent's place of work. The first five interviews were thus conducted at respondents' homes. However, the respondents seemed nervous and uncomfortable, even indoors. It later emerged, however, that most of the respondents who were not being closely supervised at work (for example those working in food service, cleaning, and security) preferred to be interviewed *at* their workplace. They could thus complete the interview discreetly while working at the same time.

Another concern was the security of the interpreter. She herself, as a migrant of uncertain legal status, faced similar restrictions such as not being able to legally own a cell phone or to ride on a motorbike (both recent laws enacted by the Thai government). In spite of this (ridiculous) law, she chose to own a cell phone, as do most migrants though they know it is forbidden even for permit-holders. However, this meant that she was not always able to answer her phone in public. In addition, we needed to

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take public transportation whenever we were traveling together to interviews, instead of riding on a motorbike.

Being discreet was an absolute priority. Even the literature did not seem to prepare me for this. As a blond Caucasian female, I stood out very much wherever I went in Chiang Mai. I knew therefore that I had to physically distance myself from both the interpreter and respondents in public. However, I was unprepared for respondents to be so worried about my audience in private. In the first few interviews, I could sense that respondents were very uncomfortable with my presence in the room with them and the interpreter. It is well known in Thailand that many foreigners come to Chiang Mai to conduct research and work in migrants' advocacy organizations. Therefore, many respondents worried that I might unwittingly lead police to them. After conferencing with the interpreter, I had to make the decision not to sit in on many of the interviews. This was very frustrating, but it was critically important that respondents were completely anonymous and secure.

In order to compensate for my inability to be present during some of the interviews, I increased communication channels with the interpreter. I asked her to write down her own thoughts and observations after each interview. Also, we had regular meetings during which we discussed her impressions of how the interviews were going. We talked about the overall sense she was getting from each respondent, and the trends that we saw emerging.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

My main objective in gathering this data was to lay the groundwork for an analysis of the relationship of precarious conditions to social mobilization outcomes. Therefore, there were two core questions I wanted to be able to answer: first, are the qualities of precarity present in migrant life? And second, is mobilization occurring? In answer to these questions, I found that yes, precarity is a common experience of migrant workers in Chiang Mai; and that no, social mobilization is not occurring.

Further questioning allowed me to build on these core findings. In the case of Myanmar migrant workers, precarity encompasses many dimensions. Some elements of precarity arise in regard to confrontation with authorities, such as the fear of deportation, the threat of being required to pay steep fines, or even the fear of physical abuse. Other dimensions are work-related: the threat of dismissal, the possibility that wages will be withheld for long periods of time, or the reality that working conditions are substandard and work hours excruciatingly long. A third dimension of precarity lies in daily life outside of the workplace, and includes problems such as being cheated by Thai businesspeople, not having access to healthcare, or facing prejudice and discrimination.

Inquiry into the realm of mobilization turned up a number of equally interesting details. Though the vast majority of migrant workers are not mobilized, almost all are discontented with their present situation and hopeful that someday it might change. However, the majority also says they purposefully distance themselves from politics and would never want to engage in mobilization.

I conducted this survey of 134 migrant workers from Myanmar living and working in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Of the 134 surveyed, 57% were female;

43% were male. Many migrants enter Thailand at a young age; thus the average age of the migrant population is skewed towards the younger generations. Most of those surveyed were under the age of 30: 21% between age 16 and 19, 35% between 20 and 24; and 29% between 25 and 29. The remaining 15% were aged 30 or older.

The MAP Foundation estimates that there are around 400,000 Shan migrants currently living in Chiang Mai and neighboring Chiang Rai, and Mae Hong Son provinces. The majority of respondents (61%) were of the Shan ethnicity; however thirteen different ethnicities were represented. All interviews were conducted either in the Shan or Burmese language.

Of the 134 respondents, 46% had some form of official identification card issued by the Thai authorities. Possession of an ID card gives documented migrants somewhat of an advantage over their undocumented counterparts. In theory, permit holders are entitled to some human and labor rights guarantees including minimum wage, though in practice this is not always the case. In addition, permit holders are legally allowed to remain in Thailand so long as they are gainfully employed according to the specifications of their permit.

This chapter provides a more in-depth look at these findings. It is broken down into three sections. In the first, I establish precarity by focusing on a question of living and working environment. In the second section, I draw out the socio-cultural aspect of mobilization by discussing social networking and engagement with the community. The last section examines findings related to social mobilization and activism.

5.1   Precarious Conditions

Migrant workers were observed to be widely underpaid. As of October 2009, minimum wage in Chiang Mai was 168 Thai Baht (THB) per day – a

total of about 5,200THB per month. However, 90% of those surveyed reported a salary less than the minimum wage, with some receiving as little as 2,800THB per month. Of the remaining percentage, 6% declined to answer, leaving a meager 4% reporting salaries above Thai minimum wage. According to a report of the National Statistical Office, the average monthly wage in Thailand in 2007 was 8,368THB – a good indicator that at an average of around 4,500THB per month, migrant workers in Thailand receive considerably less than Thai workers.

Those surveyed were working in a wide range of industries including construction, cleaning services, restaurant/food service, retail and market vending, sex work, maid service, and security.

One important aspect of this study is the inclusion of ten respondents who are working in the non-profit sector. These ten respondents were working for migrants' rights advocacy NGOs, rather than in jobs normally held by Myanmar migrants. Since these NGOs were advocates for labor rights and migrant protection, they were more likely to provide a fair and safe work environment. By nature, NGO employers encouraged their employees to be aware of their rights, provided them with some legal resources, and even promoted community activities amongst their staff. Indeed, the non-profit sector proved to be, in stark contrast to the employers of the rest of the respondents, a mental and physical health-promoting, conscientious employer. When asked whether they were satisfied with their work, 9 out of 10 NGO workers responded not only that they were satisfied, but that they very much enjoyed their work.

The vast majority of the 2 million migrants from Myanmar currently living in Thailand, however, would never have the opportunity to work for an NGO. Instead, most migrants work in basic manual labor and service jobs where the hours are long and pay is low. The majority of the respondents (124 of 134 total respondents) in this study reflect this reality. However, I felt that including these ten NGO-worker respondents in the study provided an interesting contrast to the data I gathered from those working in a

manual labor capacity. Within the full data set, the data generated from these 10 NGO workers showed up as a small cluster of outliers, having very little in common with the trends I observed across the rest of the data. Thus, it proved necessary to segregate the data generated by NGO workers at times in order to ensure the greatest depth to my analysis.

At the start of the interview, I asked respondents about the problems they were encountering in the workplace. Approximately 24% of respondents (excluding those employed by NGOs) reported either that they had no problems, or that the problems at their current job were negligible in comparison to problems they had faced in the past. Several respondents drew direct comparisons to their lives in Myanmar: "Since I ran away from Burma I can deal with the hardship out here [in Thailand] and live happily" (Respondent 58 (henceforth R58)) and: "I have faced so many problems [in the past] that my current situation is wonderful in comparison" (R85). Another commented: "I don't have as many problems as I did when I was living in the midst of a clash between the two armies in my hometown, so [my life now] is ok" (R19). Some respondents justified their satisfaction with a pragmatic perspective: "Every job has its problems" (R106).

However, a much larger percentage – 73% (again excluding those employed by NGOs) – reported facing problems in their workplace. These problems ranged from language barriers to dangerous working conditions, to verbal and sexual abuse. One female respondent working as a waitress said: "Some customers have been rude and touched me. I really hated that and I told them that I don't like it and not to do it. But my boss said not to say such things because it's normal and we could lose the customer" (R28). It seems that these kinds of problems are relatively common among migrant workers. Consider the following responses.

> *The biggest problem I have is when I am treated cruelly by my boss. He treats me as though I am not human.* (R100)

> *I have faced every sort of problem.* (R89)

Now I face many problems in my job [as a caretaker for the elderly.] The grandfather who I take care of likes to touch me sexually although he is very old. When I wash or clean him, I feel so disappointed with him and hate him whenever he touches me. I tried to understand him like his daughter said but I can't. Sometimes when he calls me I don't go at once and he yells at me the whole day. He also tells his daughter that I am not doing a good job. (R17)

I tried to help my sister with her work load, and our bosses yelled at us saying we just wanted to socialize. They are cruel and unfair. (R121)

[I have] many mental and physical problems I cannot explain in detail. (R57)

Some respondents focused on their low pay and the unfair or erratic means by which they received pay from their employer. One respondent replied "I have issues with [receiving] payment, as does everyone with my current boss" (R83). Indeed, it seems that many employers delay or withhold payments from migrant workers who have little bargaining power due to their lack of work permit documentation. Another respondent said "The hospital [where I work] has cut my pay unfairly. All in all, I can't make enough money anywhere" (R86).

Another common problem among migrants, according to the responses in this survey, was fear of workplace police raids; as reported by half of those surveyed. It is common practice in Thailand for police to raid a workplace known to employ undocumented migrant workers, unless the employer is willing to bribe them to overlook the situation. If the employer opts not to pay off the police, they may simply alert workers ahead of an oncoming police raid, leaving them on their own to hide as best they can.

Despite the great variety and severity of problems respondents cited, however; when asked if they were satisfied with their job, 50% responded that they *were* satisfied and would *not* want to change jobs. In addition, 69% of those surveyed reported that they regularly worried about losing their job and feared they might soon be forced to find a new one.

In sharp contrast, six of the ten non-profit sector workers considered in this study reported that they had no problems. For example, one intern at the Women's League of Burma (WLB) commented: "Every day is great; I enjoy working and learning from this organization" (R122). Another, who worked as a teacher, said: "No problems; I love my work" (133). Those who did report problems mentioned only non-employer-related problems such as language barriers, inability to get a government ID card, and financial troubles. One staff member of the Shan Health Committee (SHC) said: "Everything at work is fine. The problem is that I don't have an ID card" (R109). Only one out of ten respondents reported a work-related problem: "I have faced many kinds of problems since I joined the study program. No friends, no relatives, no community, no money. It is difficult here" (R111).

The next set of questions asked respondents about how they had been treated since leaving Myanmar. 71% reported that they had been physically or mentally abused while in Thailand. Of those reporting that they had experienced abuse, most did not wish to give further details. For example, R7 said: "I don't want to explain because I want to leave it in the past. I have been trying to forget it until now". Many indicated that while they had experienced abuse, such a thing was so common amongst migrant workers that it had become "normal" (R23). "I never think of it as abuse because this kind of thing happens so often," replied R12.

Some respondents, however, recounted very serious abuses. The following is a selection.

A group of Thai workers assaulted me by throwing a brick at my head. My husband and others retaliated, but the Thais threatened to call the authorities, and we have no power in this case. We left instead, but I have been "brainsick" ever since. (R85)

I have to endure my boss' complaints and threats. He says that we will get into trouble for living here illegally if we ever try to stop working for him. (R54)

My sister was killed in a hit and run accident, and we weren't informed that medical procedures took place until the morning afterwards, after she had already died. I believe they used her for black market organ opportunities, selling her parts to rich Thai people. (R101)

When I worked as a housemaid in Mae Hong Son, I wanted to leave my job and my boss told me that if I did they would not sign my card and would inform on me and have me sent back to Burma. (R40)

I was raped by my previous boss. He was drunk and assaulted me when his wife went away, and then tried to silence me with 2000 Baht. I try to think it was all a bad dream. (R106)

When I worked as a restroom attendant I felt sub-human to my employers. They didn't pay me respect or treat me with any dignity. (R62)

Yes [I have experienced abuse], but if I recount every detail it will take a week. Life as a refugee is very difficult. (R103)

When asked how they tried to protect themselves from future abuses, most respondents replied that it was not possible to prevent abuse. Respondents

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described random, unprovoked acts of abuse that they had not anticipated. The majority of respondents reflected this futility in their answers. The following selection sums it up succinctly.

There's no safety. (R26)

There is nothing we can do. (R27)

What can I do if I have no ID card? (R28)

Several respondents favored compliance and submission strategies in an attempt to avert abuse. "I have protected myself by saying 'yes' always", one respondent commented (R7). Another said: "I just try to do my best work" (R24). One respondent replied that when she does stand up to customers who are abusive, her boss reprimands her: "Many boys and men touch our bodies and look down on us … I tried to respond and express my anger and my manager told me to behave properly at once" (R68).

Half of the respondents surveyed reported feeling fear and worry that the police might raid their homes. However, the majority said that they were content with their accommodations and living situation. One migrant said: "It's not safe [here in Thailand]. I'm afraid of something everyday" (R28).

Overall we see several major trends emerge. For one, migrants often face mental and physical abuse, as well as countless other problems, at their workplace. However, even in spite of their troubles, many report that they are satisfied with their job. Most fear police raids at their homes and workplace, are often required to pay bribes, and report that they live in fear and worry. However, when asked how they have responded to these problems, most indicated that the best response was capitulation, compliance, and passivity.

5.2   Social Mobilization

In order to get a feel for the prevalence of communitarian sentiments, respondents were asked about their participation in cultural, religious, and social events.

When asked whether they felt that they had friends in Thailand, only 16 of the 134 respondents replied that they did not. Only one respondent (R94) provided an explanation: "no, I do not have friends because I am working all the time."

Though most respondents claimed to have many friends, 53% said they only socialize *at work*. It is very interesting that over half of those interviewed associated work with socializing, whereas most non-migrants would probably consider work and social life to be two separate things. "I socialize only with the people I work with," stated one female respondent (R54). Some respondents, however, seemed to view the fusion of work and socializing as a mere matter of fact: "We socialize at work" (R62). Indeed, it may be hard to tell if the subject regarded this phenomenon as a pitfall or an opportunity. Still others recognized that they were not supposed to socialize during working hours: "I see them [my friends] at the market, but we cannot socialize without upsetting our boss" (R134).

A much smaller fraction (9%) of respondents mentioned another social outlet – chatting on the phone. "I sometimes speak over the phone, but have no actual direct contact [with friends]," said one woman who was working as a housemaid (R74). Alternately, 25% of respondents reported that they occasionally visited their friends at home or met up with them in public spaces. Of these, however, several indicated that visitation was infrequent: "we sometimes visit and eat together, but mostly we are all very tired from working so hard" (R77).

The majority of those migrant workers surveyed reported that they either regularly or occasionally went to a church or temple. Only 18.5% of

respondents reported that they did not. Of those who did not attend a church or temple, several seemed interested in doing so: "I haven't yet. I would like to go and learn about how people from the Shan State are living out here" (R51). The two chief impediments to public religious participation were lack free time and/or transportation.

Roughly 80% reported that they celebrate Burmese holidays including Shan National Day, Shan New Year, Buddhist New Year, other Buddhist holidays, and Christmas. One respondent noted that Shan New Year is particularly poignant for him: "yes, I like to celebrate Shan New Year. We were forced from our village for openly celebrating this back in the Shan State" (R107). In general, we see that the large majority of respondents place a high degree of importance on participation in holiday traditions: "we have gone to Shan New Year and Buddhist New Year because it is too important to miss" (R3) and: "I celebrate Shan National Day and the New Year of Shan State and Buddhism. I often do it. Although I am not free, I make time for it" (R21). According to some, celebrating holidays provides an excuse to socialize with their family members and other migrants from Myanmar: "I like [celebrating Burmese holidays] because I have a chance to see so many other people who speak Shan" (R6).

Among the remaining 20% of respondents who do not celebrate holidays, most reported that they would like to but are unable for a number of reasons; the most common being financial. One respondent put the problem quite frankly: "no, I haven't [celebrated any holidays]. I would like to, but I don't want to spend my money" (R12). Participating in holiday festivities can mean spending money on unbudgeted expenses such as transportation, offerings, or requisite small gifts. Additionally, participation in holidays often means migrants must take time off from work, and therefore miss that day's wages.

The last question in this section of the questionnaire inquired: "Do you feel that there is a sense of community among migrants from Burma?" A large majority (78%) responded in the affirmative. Of the remainder, 16%

responded "don't know", leaving only 6% who felt that there was no migrant community.

The main point we can draw from this section is that the large majority of migrants desire social space and communitarian networks; and to some extent they have created a sense of a social safety net. However, the constraints of long working hours and financial struggle also have a significant impedimentary impact on migrants' ability to reap the full benefits of community.

5.3   Political Mobilization

After establishing a sense of how migrants view and participate in community networks, the questionnaire then moved on to questions regarding political engagement.

First, respondents were asked "Do you feel like your views are represented in the local government in Chiang Mai or in the national government?" Only two respondents answered that they did feel as though their views were represented, while 76% responded in the negative, leaving 22% to respond "don't know". One interesting observation we can draw from the dataset is that of the 102 respondents who felt their views were not represented, 34% voluntarily added some comment to the effect of "we are not Thai citizens, so how could we expect to have our views represented?"

Migrants were then asked how they responded to mistreatment by their employer or by the Thai authorities. 56% said that they can do nothing if they are mistreated by their employer. Of these, several respondents mentioned that they would apologize and try to work harder. 13% responded that they would attempt to discuss the problem with their employer, 9% responded that they would quit and leave, 2% said they would take the issue to the law, and 1% said they would bring the issue to

the attention of an NGO. The remaining 19% responded "don't know" (Table 5:1).

Table 5:1

If you have a complaint about the way you are treated what can you do about it?		
	The way you are treated by your employer	The way you are treated by the Thai authorities
Do nothing	56 %	37 %
Discuss the problem	13 %	0 %
Quit and leave	9 %	0 %
Take the issue to the law	2 %	0 %
Take the issue up with the ILO	1 %	0 %
Pay bribes	0 %	28 %
No opinion	19 %	35 %

Migrants seem to feel equally powerless when it comes to facing the Thai authorities. 37% said there would be nothing they could do if apprehended by the police. 28% reported that they would bribe the police, but that aside from money, there was no other way out of an altercation with the authorities. The remaining 35% indicated that they did not know what they would do. One of the key themes that came up in migrants' responses was the issue of power and powerlessness. The following quotations demonstrate that relationship, as perceived by migrants.

We are powerless in this instance. (R84)

What can I do? They are the authorities. (R5)

We can do nothing - the police have all the power. (R89)

I cannot do anything. I hate people who abuse their power and use it to subjugate other people. (R107)

Without [an identity] card, I cannot hope to do anything. (R134)

These statements clearly demonstrate migrant's overwhelming sense of powerlessness and futility in the face of abusive authorities. Of all 134 migrants surveyed, not one mentioned any form of legal recourse. This omission is highly significant because it demonstrates the extreme alienation of migrants from their legal rights (and perhaps even the opportunities afforded them by non-governmental migrant advocacy organizations), both in perception and reality.

Respondents were next asked whether they believed migrants should protest their situation in Thailand. 16% were in favor of protest while more than double that number - 34% - were against. The remaining 50% of migrants said that they were unsure.

One of the most striking trends in respondents' comments was their indication that because they lacked education or awareness of current affairs, they would be thus unqualified in holding political opinions. A little more than one third of those who reported "don't know" also mentioned that they were uneducated and therefore unqualified to comment on political activism in the form of mobilization.

I have no thoughts on the subject [of political mobilization] - I am not an educated person. (R64)

I don't have any ideas concerning politics or my current plight. I am not an educated person. I just want to return to a safe home. (R84)

I stopped my education long ago. For me, the present moment is for working and saving for our future only. That is it. I don't have the time or energy to worry about this. (R78)

It is interesting that so many respondents believed mobilization to be an option only for the educated and that an education was needed even to have basic opinions about how they were being treated. Another important theme that emerged was migrants' fear of the potential penalties of mobilization.

Incarceration: *We will be jailed if we try.* (R53)

Deportation: *I don't know and I don't want to talk about political things because I don't want to be sent back to Burma.* (R12)

Punishment of migrants' family members inside Burma: *My father is a soldier in Burma, so I have never spoken out against the Burmese authority, and I never will.* (R104)

Police crackdowns and heightened abuse by the authorities: *No, it causes more troubles for all migrant workers.* (R113)

Being fired from a job: *No, I 'm afraid I would lose my job [if I engage in political activism].* (R2)

Despite the fear that seemed to curtail migrants' interest in protesting their situation, the minority of those who did believe in protest are also deserving of a closer look. These migrants cited a number of reasons that protest could be a positive thing for migrant workers in Thailand. For example:

I think they should protest so that we might have a chance to get work permits and drivers' cards. And if we have money, we can buy everything that we want. Also they should protest so that when we face the police, we will not be arrested. (R20)

Statements such as this one suggest that migrant workers who are thinking about mobilization are not doing so blindly; rather, they have clear goals they wish to achieve through mobilization. However, when asked whether they have actually ever participated in a *program sponsored by a political organization*, only 7 of 134 (5%) reported that they had. 9 of the 127 who had not participated (7% of non-participants) indicated that they would like to participate at some point (Table 5:2). 60% said they were not interested in ever participating in political activities, and 28% were unsure. The figures were similar when respondents were asked whether they had ever joined a political organization: only 2% had joined, 15% had not but were interested, 63% were not interested, and 20% were unsure.

Table 5:2

Have you ever participated in / joined….		
	A program sponsored by a political organization	A political organization
Yes	5%	2%
Not yet, but I am interested	7%	15%
No, and I am not interested	60%	63%
No opinion	28%	20%

In both cases, the majority of those who reported that they "didn't know" added also that they were too uniformed to have an opinion, or that they

simply did not care to know. For example, one respondent said "I don't know about this, and I don't want to know about it, it is too dangerous" (R134). Many feared the repercussions of involvement: "I don't know and I don't want to talk about political things because I don't want to be sent back to Burma" (R12). Another responded: "I don't know about politics here or in Burma. I don't want to join because I want to stay safe" (R90). Safety, protection, and safe passage back to Myanmar were all important goals that prevented respondents from engaging in political activity. Several even mentioned their families: "I have no ideas about this because I want to go back [to Burma] and see my parents and children" (R37).

Still others viewed political activities as an ineffective use of time. In response to questions about political participation, one subject stated simply: "it is futile" (R83). When asked whether he would be interested in participating in some political program, another replied; "No. I feel powerless against a big and evil entity" (R105).

Despite the disinterest of the majority, however, about one quarter of those surveyed did want to participate in some way, if they were not already doing so. Consider the following responses.

> *I haven't, but I want to. I feel I have a responsibility to change things for the better.* (R108)

> *Not yet, but I would like to because if we are united we have a much better chance of making a positive difference.* (R95)

> *Not yet, but I would like to so that we can work on achieving democracy, self determination, and minority rights.* (R102)

> *Not yet, because my family is afraid I will end up like my father. But I want to do it as a form of revenge.* (R124)

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I want to join in something like this, but I am not educated enough yet. One day I will do something like this, because my heart is in it, and I want to learn more along these lines. (R112)

Not yet, but I would like to [join an organization]. In Burma we have no opportunities to learn like we can in Thailand. But it is difficult to balance learning and working. (R131)

The next question asked respondents how they felt about other migrants who were becoming involved in political action. 73%, responded that they didn't know or didn't have any opinion. 11% were in support of migrants engaging in political activities, and 16% were against. One of the supporters of social mobilization commented: "I believe we should make changes because we are unfairly discriminated against and belittled by regular Thais all the time" (R79).

Several respondents commented that mobilization would be good for the community as long as participants had work permits and educational backing. For example, one migrant stated: "I think they should, provided they are informed and legal residents of Thailand" (R112). Another respondent also weighed in on identity cards: "We aren't Thai citizens, so this [social mobilization] is very dangerous, but it is important" (R107). For some, however, the repercussions of mobilization were too great: "We shouldn't [engage in social mobilization]; we don't have ID, and we are illegal. We will pay for it if we get involved in this way" (R101).

Several respondents claimed that mobilization was both dangerous and futile. However, some still believed mobilization to be a good thing, in spite of its potential costs. One respondent took a pragmatic approach: "I think [mobilization] is good, if [migrants] can, but they won't… at least not publicly" (R71). This kind of measured, pragmatic view was shared by many of the respondents. In fact, it seemed that many of those reporting no opinion / "don't know" had no opinion simply because they believed mobilization efforts to be futile from the start.

The last question asked respondents to stipulate how their lives could, in theory, be made better by the Thai government, should the government become more receptive to their rights and needs (Table 5:3).

Table 5:3

What could the Thai government do to make your life better?	
	Percentage
They won't do anything	16%
They can't do anything	12%
We alone are responsible for making our lives better	10%
Reform the justice system / the police	7%
Issue IDs / work permits	19.5%
Issue driver's licenses	7.5%
Issue both ID cards and driver's licenses	4%
Give us voice	1%
No opinion	23%

The most important thing to notice is that only about one third of respondents gave an active response. Those answering either that they didn't know, or that the government could do nothing represented (23% + 37% = 60%) nearly two-thirds of all those surveyed. Thus, two-thirds of respondents were unable to demonstrate any vision for a better life in Thailand, as they could not even speculate as to what *might* possibly improve their quality of life. Thus the table can be condensed (Table 5.4).

Table 5.4

What could the Thai government do to make your life better?	
	Percentage

Nothing	37%
Issue ID cards / work permits / driver's licenses	32%
Make the system more fair	8%
No opinion	23%

In the political section of the questionnaire, one very important trend emerged: the most popular response for all questions was either condemning of political action or having no opinion of the matter. However, the high instance of 'null' answers is no less significant and interesting than would be a high instance of positive, active interest in political activism in the form of social mobilization.

Taken together, the results of this study paint a picture of extreme political alienation amongst migrant workers from Myanmar in Thailand. Throughout the study, many respondents expressed extreme reservations in not only voicing opinions but *having* them. Social mobilization thus appears to be constrained to a very small minority who are acting largely without the support of the community. In fact, the percentage of the community who would go so far as to condemn mobilization is larger than those who would actually participate.

CHAPTER 6: INTERPRETATION & ANALYSIS

My fieldwork generated three key findings. First, a majority of migrant workers from Myanmar in Chiang Mai have experienced mental or physical abuse either firsthand, or had friends and relatives who have suffered abuse at the hands of employers or authorities in Thailand. Respondents reported an array of abuses from withholding of pay and excessive fining to emotional and physical abuse. In addition, migrants indicated they were frequently under threat of harm and feared for the safety of their family. All things considered, it is important to note that migrants are being taken advantage of in a very significant way.

Second, a majority of migrants reported both dissatisfaction with their quality of life and anxiety about the future. Of course the potentiality of regular abuses – whether big or small – builds a culture of worry and anticipation; of hopelessness and mounting stress. Migrants recognized their dissatisfaction. However, the majority of respondents also reported a sense of futility leading to the psychological acceptance of their situation.

Third, a majority of migrants indicated that they were wary of or disinterested in political participation. Many claimed to have no opinion on political issues. Others stated that they were too uninformed to participate in social mobilization; even to demand protection of their most basic human rights. Many responded that political action – however small-scale – was too risky. Perhaps the most telling response – and the most common – was the widely-held idea that poor quality of life was somehow self-imposed; and that the authorities were not responsible for taking measures to abet their suffering.

These three findings together indicate that the migrant population in question is undoubtedly experiencing precarity, suffering abuse at the hands

of authorities and employers intent on exploiting their vulnerability, and yet feeling so disenchanted and disinherited that they come to accept these circumstances as fate. This phenomenon is symptomatic of a critical level of political alienation, passivity, and hopelessness.

In this chapter, I begin with an in-depth look at the findings of this study and the significance of the trends I have observed. I follow this interpretation with two comparative analyses. The first comparison I wish to make draws on themes from the literature. I return to social mobilization theory, discussing in turn the benefits and shortcomings of each when applied to the outcome of this study. I then draw a second comparison between my results and several past incidents wherein mobilization has occurred among Myanmar migrants in Thailand. Here, I attempt to draw out the differences between the un-mobilized migrant group that I studied and the mobilized groups involved in these other incidents.

6.1   Interpretation and Observed Trends

As seen in the dataset, a significant number of Myanmar migrants are the victims of mental and physical abuse in the workplace and by the Thai authorities. They, like North Korean migrants in China (as documented by Chang et al., 2008), display characteristics of high-level stress and anxiety over issues such as personal safety, the safety of family members, and job security. Many display the symptoms of encroaching despair; being unable to make many prescriptions for the future. In addition, the tone of hopelessness is a significant undercurrent throughout the majority of migrants' testimonies.

Hopelessness, fear, anxiety, and debilitating stress are telltale signs of degrading, precarious conditions that can, over time, result in serious psychological symptoms akin to post-traumatic stress disorder (Chang et al., 2008). All are the result of precarious life circumstance. While the degree

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to which migrants experience these lifestyle stressors varies greatly, the presence of higher-than-normal levels of anxiety seem to appear in the testimonies of a majority of respondents in this study.

One interesting factor introduced by Arnold and Hewison (2005) is Myanmar migrants' high tolerance for oppression and economic hardship; a condition they have acquired over a lifetime of state-sponsored oppression in Myanmar. Due to this background, many workers can sustain much higher levels of strain before taking action. Employers often capitalize on the opportunity to encroach on workers' rights that is afforded by their high tolerance to strain.

Political alienation is a psycho-social phenomenon that occurs when individuals begin to feel disconnected from the government. They may believe that their views are not represented or that their voice is unheard. Political alienation is a state of perceived powerlessness. A growing rift between an individual and the government can either incite the individual to take action to reclaim voice, or to withdraw from political society altogether. The latter trajectory takes individuals into a world in which they are inclined to accept even the greatest injustices under a government which they feel they are powerless to change.

Though alienation begins with the individual, the phenomenon may spread through communities who have little voice in the wider social system. Minority communities may be most susceptible to feelings of powerlessness or invisibility. Minority status – be it based on ethnic, socioeconomic, ideological, or other divisions – may indeed decrease perceptions of community opinions and voice resonating with a national or state-level government. Naturally, the smaller and more esoteric the social group, the greater chances they have of being engulfed in a political system which may to them seem altogether foreign. Migration may act as a trigger event for the alienation of minority groups. Migrants share several key traits that make them more vulnerable in host societies.

Foremost, illegal migrants do not have political status. Lack of documentation cuts them off from political opportunities and access to traditional participatory channels. Not only will they be prohibited from voting and participation, but they may also be denied judicial recourse should the government or authorities infringe upon their human rights, even at the most basic level. Migrant workers with limited documentation are barred by law from formal political participation at many levels. In spite of these legal obstacles, migrants may still be able to make their voices heard through informal channels such as demonstrations or advocacy organizations working on their behalf.

Migrant populations also face the challenge of living within a society in which ethnic and cultural traditions are very different from their own. They must deal with the oft conflicting pressures to assimilate into the culture of the host country and at the same time, to preserve their native heritage. Unable to speak the host country's language with fluency, migrants may not fully understand the social and political clime of society outside of their home country. Communication barriers are likely to lessen their confidence in political action. The challenge therein becomes not only for migrants to make themselves heard, but to make themselves understood – both ideologically and literally – by the social majority with whom they do not share a native language.

Migrant populations are also segregated by socioeconomic status. Many migrants, particularly those who are illegal, may enter a host country with very few assets. As in the case of Myanmar migrants, many come in search of better economic prospects. Such a situation would naturally put them at the bottom rung of society upon arrival. Also, if they are undocumented, they may be unable to access basic social services that even the lowest classes of the native population can utilize. These services may include healthcare, welfare programs, or enrollment in the school system.

Overcoming educational and knowledge barriers may also present additional challenges for migrant populations. Though migrants may have

been educated in their home country, they may be less familiar with the political system or current events in the host country to which they have migrated. A daunting lack of familiarity with the new social system, political system, and economic system is potentially highly discouraging to migrants seeking voice in society. Lack of information would seem to be a quick deterrent for potential activists.

With these factors taken together (lack of access to legal channels, lack of access to social services, extensive language barriers, cultural unfamiliarity, a climate of strong social stigmas, and lack of information/education) it is not difficult to see how individuals could be swiftly discouraged from social mobilization.

Widespread political alienation is an important trend observed in the migrant population of concern in this study. Despite mass dissatisfaction with present circumstance, a majority of migrants express almost complete acceptance of and submission to these conditions. Many indicate that action – political or personal – is futile. The most significant trend to appear is that of emotional detachment from the stressors of life as a migrant; indeed, most respondents indicate that they do not have any opinions or want to talk about politics. Most do not want to speculate on their future or strategies for improving their position. One respondent summed the matter up in a very succinct way: "What can we do? This is our life" (R10). This kind of response is perhaps the most common throughout the survey – an indication that, for many, hopelessness pervades in social, political, and work life.

Alienation can result from non-representation on a national level; or perhaps from simply feeling disconnected from one's community. In a study of Vietnamese refugees resettled in the United States, Van Tran (1987) finds that the support of a community helps to relieve the stress and anxiety that are typical psychological byproducts of migration. He finds that this kind of communitarian support among migrants has significant direct effects on the psychological well-being of migrants (Van Tran, 1987).

Strong community networks thus help to decrease stress factors. Community members can take the emotional place of family members and loved ones left behind in the migrant's country of origin. They can also help new migrants to settle in a foreign place by providing practical support and advice that can significantly improve a migrant individual's state of well-being. In migrant populations where communitarian sentiments are strong, Haines et al (1981) find that a focus on individual needs or deprivation is "conspicuously absent". Instead, communities can provide a kind of safety-in-numbers comfort zone for individuals who crave interaction with people of their own ethnicity.

Community support serves to ease the resocialization process; whereby migrants must establish a new identity for themselves within a foreign society. Especially in countries where migrants find themselves unwelcomed by the majority of people they meet day to day, community can serve as a refuge. This refuge may act as an emotional safe haven that individuals cannot achieve in other aspects of their life that are flooded with stress, fear, and anxiety. Thus, strong communities breed a stronger sense of well-being among community members (Bar-Yosef, 1968).

In a 2001 study of Salvadoran refugees, Young (2001) finds that communities are a source of critical self-esteem that can moderate between life events and personal contentment. By associating with community groups, individuals find others who have suffered similar hardships. Together, they can support each other in overcoming the trauma of not only a difficult past, but the prospects of more difficulties to come. Communitarian support appears to ameliorate the repercussions of these past events and anxiety in migrants' daily life (Young, 2001).

In sizeable migrant communities, people sharing similar circumstance begin to define themselves not in isolation but in relation to other individuals who are part of that group (Haines et al., 1981). The common bonds of community – such as shared language, traditions, religion, and other cultural practices – help migrants to feel more at home in a foreign

land, through their relation to others facing similar challenges. Communities promote solidarity through the practice of cultural norms that might otherwise cease to be a part of a migrant's life. They also urge individuals to overcome the challenges of being foreigners; for example, communities encourage learning the language of the host country (Scott, 1982).

In the end, we see that the presence of a strong community helps with the resocialization process. Communitarian support may counter political alienation by replacing the perceived disconnect from politics with connections to a social network that fosters political sensibilities within the more comfortable confines of the collective.

The findings of this study indicate that migrant workers in Thailand face a gamut of abuses both within their workplace and in their daily life. They report abuse at the hands of their employers and by Thai authority figures. Yet most suffer in silence, believing themselves to be undeserving of any legal protections (recall the common response: "What can we do? We are not citizens").

While many Myanmar migrants may believe that they are not entitled to human or labor rights as they are not citizens of Thailand, this belief may stem in part from lack of information. There are a number of legal precedents through which migrants are entitled to certain protections, though the findings of this study suggest that these provisions are not widely known among the migrant population.

All migrants – whether they are in possession of a work permit or not – are entitled by international law to human and labor rights protections, as previously discussed. However, as documented in this study, this guarantee is largely unheeded in the case of migrant workers in Thailand, regardless of their legal status. Despite the universality of this oversight, migrants who lack official work permit documentation face even greater discrimination and difficulties in Thailand.

In theory, a worker cannot be arrested and deported while they are in possession of a valid work permit. Unfortunately, additional policy loopholes stipulate that any person found not to be carrying the permit on their person at any given time is still eligible for deportation. Considering that it has become common practice in Thailand for employers to retain their workers' permits (ostensibly to prevent them from leaving the job), this loophole may serve to nearly cancel any potential benefit.

The finding of this study that more than half of respondents had no official identification documents is consistent with the findings of other research studies. Three years prior to this study, Amnesty International found that while some migrants were able to obtain identification cards from the Thai authorities, a majority had no ID even though many expressed a desire to obtain one (Amnesty International, 2005). The most common reason for not having ID cited by those in the Amnesty study was the inability to pay the registration fee (which is 2004 was 3,800 THB) (Amnesty International, 2005).

6.2   Comparative Analysis: Literature and Theory

Political inaction is, in a way, the null hypothesis of social mobilization studies: most of the existing literature explains inaction in the course of explaining mobilization. Trends are usually developed from cases in which social mobilization occurs, rather than social passivity as in this study. Despite this fact, however, the literature still very much applies in the case of inaction. The only loss may be that the literature can provide a far richer picture of cases in which social mobilization occurs, than those cases in which it does not. Often the literature goes beyond simply dividing cases between 'social mobilization' and 'non-mobilization' by further subdividing the 'social mobilization' category. In such an instance, however, those cases under 'non-mobilization' may not be served with any further

comment. In spite of this oversight, however, it is easy to see how the results of this study can be examined within extant theory.

Doug McAdam (1982) derives several interesting insights from a critical review of previously advanced theory. First, he concludes that the shortcoming of the classical model for social mobilization lies in its assumption that disruptive psychological states invariably lead to social movements. McAdam argues that in so doing, classical theorists both underestimate society's capacity for strain and fail to explain collective behaviour; an oversight also shared by mass society theorists (McAdam, 1982).

A failure to explain the origins of collectivity may be significant for this study, as mass society theory posits strain in relation to *individuals* in society. Under mass society theory, social movements as an outcome are a product of mounting anxiety (which is viewed as an intermediary stage) that results from atomized social groups in isolation (i.e. the initial condition) (Kornhauser, 1959). Critically, Kornhauser (1959) argues that individuals join social movements because they find in mobilization a sense of community which allows them to escape from their psychological condition. Two out of three of the stages described by Kornhauser (1959) are evident in this study, though the mobilization outcome is not.

We see, in this study, a pre-existing condition for Myanmar migrant workers that could certainly be considered social isolation and atomization. Political, socio-economic, legal, and cultural isolation have been well-documented among Myanmar migrants in Thailand. Secondly, as this study has shown, isolation has led many migrants to develop a disturbed and anxious psychological state. The overwhelming sense of despair, hopelessness, and insecurity demonstrated by a majority of respondents are more than indicative of mental strain. However, by the bounds of mass society theory, the development of this intermediary stage of psychological unrest is sufficient catalyst to precipitate social mobilization as an outcome. In Kornhauser's (1959) model, psychological alienation leads to collective

action, whereas in this study the same state leads to literal alienation and inaction.

Similar to the mass society argument is status inconsistency theory in which a widening gap (i.e. socioeconomic) between groups in society leads to their psychological unrest. Status inconsistency as an existing condition is clearly evident in the Myanmar migrant population. However, it is not present as a causative force. In the case considered in this study, the gap between Myanmar migrant workers and local Thai workers is vast. Myanmar migrants are undocumented while Thais are citizens; Myanmar migrants work dangerous jobs with low pay while Thais fill upper level positions and are protected by minimum wage laws; Myanmar migrants may be deported; Thais are protected under the law; Myanmar migrants suffer a range of physical and psychological abuse in the workplace; Thais have legal recourse which entitles them to enjoyment of basic labor and human rights standards. Despite considerable evidence of status inconsistency, however, social mobilization largely does not occur among the Myanmar migrant population.

McAdam (1982) also weighs the theory of collective behaviour in which social strain leading to normative ambiguity precipitates social mobilization. This theory draws on the idea that social change provides the psychological stressor which eventually precipitates social movements. McAdam (1982) points out that while the theory of collective behaviour does address the formation of a collectivity (as opposed to only explaining revolutionary tendencies by an individual), it still overlooks the point at which personal action becomes political.

The crucial shortcoming of all of these theories, McAdam (1982) argues, is their assumption that unquiet states of mind lead to political action. He suggests that the conclusion that social movements are born of psychological strain undervalues social movements' political nature (McAdam, 1982). He does, however, find value in the ability of classical theories to explain why social movements may opt for informal channels

instead of the resources (institutional channels) available to them in a responsive, democratic country. Classical theories, he suggests, do not understand social movements as synonymous with rational political action (McAdam, 1982). Herein lies a critical point for this study: social mobilization is not dependent on the rationality of its members. Though social movements are necessarily political, they are not necessarily rational, as they may be genuinely affected by the psychological state of their members.

Psychological state may be an important factor in this study as the nature of social strain is highly personal for most migrant workers from Myanmar. In this study, we have seen that the evidence of strain is very intimate: it manifests when human security and psychological well-being are threatened. Individuals under this kind of strain may not be perfectly rational actors able to identify targeted, change-oriented goals within a system. However; the classical understanding of social mobilization allows for discrepancies in this trend.

Rationality is an important factor in the consideration of institutional opportunity. As discussed previously, post-classical theorists are divided between state-driven and non-state-driven models. Resource mobilization, as advanced by McCarthy and Zald (1977), is based on the assumption that individuals acting from poor or politically powerless backgrounds require resources in order to form and sustain a social movement. Resource mobilization views actors as rational and movements as political; however outside influences and the limitations of the social system will eventually necessitate the accrual of a resource base.

While resource mobilization theory can be applied to the findings of this study, its understanding of the situation is somewhat limited. By McCarthy and Zald's (1977) conception, social movements cannot arise in the absence of a resource base. The situation of Myanmar migrants in Thailand exemplifies resource deprivation: migrants have either no access or only minimal access to institutional channels, depending on their documentation

status; and as a particularly precarious and impoverished group, they have only very limited access to social channels. In fact, Myanmar migrants present a particularly extreme case as many are unable to secure the bare resources necessary for subsistence, much less political action. Thus while the findings of this study fit with resource mobilization theory, its explanation for inaction on the basis of having no resources seems to be altogether too shallow.

Critics of resource mobilization theory have suggested that there are many more factors at play than simply resource availability. Subsequent studies have suggested that additional social and political factors such as media influence, public image labeling, access to information, and recruitment of capable political organizers; *in addition to* economic resources; affect social mobilization outcomes (Fireman & Gamson, 1979, Marx, 1979). However, the need to account for such a wide range of additional factors in order to arrive at the social mobilization conclusion would recommend another approach altogether.

A more complex spin-off on resource mobilization is the theory of political opportunity structures, advanced by Kitschelt in 1986. Under Kitschelt (1986), social mobilization occurs in the presence of political opportunities including organizational resources, institutional channels, and historical precedents. The migrant community considered in this study has been shown to have very limited if any access to these or other political opportunity structures. According to Kitschelt (1986), therefore, it would follow that social mobilization does *not* occur; as was indeed the finding of this study. The deprivation of political opportunities is markedly extreme, however. While mobilization has not occurred, it may be too shortsighted to say that lack of political opportunities was the only reason.

Perhaps a more satisfactory approach is that of Anthony Orum (1972) who looks at a number of factors influencing individuals to engage in collective action. Orum (1972) identifies four mechanisms necessary for social mobilization: socialization, deprivation, development of psychopolitical

ideals, and engagement in mass society. The key elements we can extract are deprivation as seen in the classical model and pscyhopolitical ideals. Deprivation in the case of the Myanmar migrants has been clearly established. However the development of pscyhopolitical ideals represents what could be a crucial point. As Orum (1972) defines this mechanism, individuals must develop a belief that their actions may have a real influence on policy outcomes. The process by which individuals reach such a point in their political awareness is marked by the moment they view themselves as political actors. Thus the development of pscyhopolitical ideals is an important yet subtle phenomenon which, as we can see, is markedly absent among Myanmar migrants.

Overwhelmingly, Myanmar migrants express the belief that because they are not citizens, they not only cannot but *should not* have a say in political issues. The telling comment of one subject echoes a feeling of detachment expressed by the majority of respondents: "There is no way [to change our circumstances] because we are not citizens of Thailand. What can we do?" (R19). When asked to imagine how the government might address or improve the problems they reported experiencing in Thailand, most migrants were unable to respond. Their silence and uncertainty is highly indicative of a population which has not developed pyschopolitical ideals. When asked whether migrants should protest, again a majority responded to the effect that either they didn't know, or that it was not their place to engage in political activity. The results of this study demonstrate that migrants perceive an impenetrable disconnect between themselves and the government. This feeling of powerlessness has rendered them apolitical.

In the failure to develop psychopolitical ideals, Orum's (1972) pathway to political mobilization is not fulfilled and as a result, social mobilization does not occur. Though the migrant community experiences both socialization and deprivation, the absence of psychopolitical ideals stymies further action. Pscyho-political ideals fall under what Campbell (2005) calls "cognitive mechanisms" in which actors assess their own limitations and prospects for achieving the change they desire.

While different elements from a number of theories seem to at least in part explain political alienation and inaction among Myanmar migrants, there is still room for a more comprehensive explanation to be developed. It is in addressing this gap that the theory of precarity may prove useful. As previously discussed, precarity is a phenomenon used to understand insecurities in the lives of workers at the margins of society. Neilson and Rossiter (2005) adapted the theory of precarity from its contemporary usage in the labor rights movement to usage in political discourse within an academic setting. One of their key emphases was an argument for the theory's more widespread applicability (Neilson & Rossiter, 2005). It is precarity by their definition that may prove the necessary detail for an explanation of passivity and political inaction.

The likelihood of political engagement within a community can be understood over a span of time. During periods of stability, wherein no strain to the social system is present, political engagement is unlikely. However, during periods of mounting strain or dramatic changes to the social system, the likelihood of political engagement increases. It is during this period that social mobilization occurs, as described by most mobilization theorists. However, increasing strain must, at some time, reach a breaking point. At this point, high levels of strain interfere with individuals' basic survival and security. When such basic necessities are threatened, individuals are no longer able or willing to act in a political capacity. The community experiences a period of passivity and political alienation. Precarity is necessarily a condition of strain; however not all strain is precarious. Low levels of strain may induce mobilization amongst a community where individuals' capacity to engage in mobilization is not inhibited by their strained condition. By contrast, I suggest that a period of extreme strain is best understood as a precarious period; and that the point where strain first trumps political engagement is the point where conditions first become precarious (Figure 6.1).

Figure 6.1 Precarity as a Product of Strain Over Time
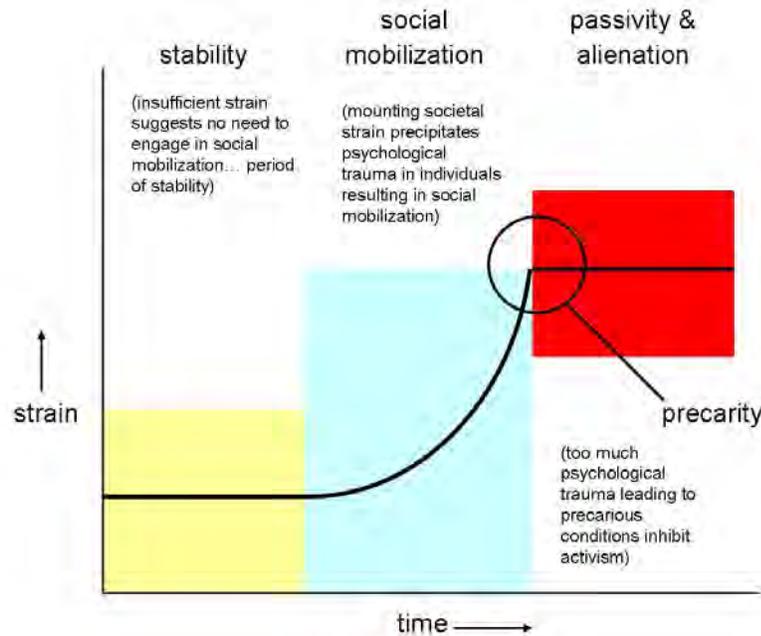
In order for this understanding of precarity to make sense, however, we must first examine evidence that social mobilization has in the past occurred within the Myanmar migrant community. There are a number of highly relevant precedents for protest among Myanmar migrants in Thailand.

6.3   Comparative Analysis: Myanmar Migrants

Migrant workers in Thailand face a number of serious deterrents to mobilization. In addition to official prohibitions of the formation of labor unions by migrant workers, employers may impose their own disincentives

for workers. Dismissal is often arbitrary and can be accompanied by the employer notifying immigration officials. The threat of dismissal, coupled with that of deportation makes mobilization a serious and highly risky endeavor (Arnold & Hewison 2005). However, there have been a number of documented incidents in which migrant workers in Thailand have mobilized to demand better treatment in the workplace.

Cases of dissent, however, appear to be confined largely to Thailand's Tak Province, where the town of Mae Sot and its environs are home to thousands of Myanmar migrants of the Karen ethnicity. According to data published by the MAP Foundation, by the end of 2006, more than 1,500 workers in Tak Province had settled legal aid cases (MAP Foundation, 2006). This figure stands in sharp contrast, however, to recorded incidents in Chiang Mai Province where only 39 individuals settled legal aid cases.

The discrepancy in the occurrence of labor cases between Tak and Chiang Mai would indicate that political activism is affected also by many of the aforementioned demographic factors that distinguish the migrant populations in each of these provinces. Among these, the difference in ethnicity is perhaps the most significant factor. While the migrant population in Chiang Mai is mostly Shan, the vast majority of migrants in Tak Province are ethnically Karen. The impact of cultural heritage and ethnicity on social mobilization among Myanmar migrants is an interesting question for further research. Though I was unable to find much information on incidents of mobilization among the population of concern in this study (migrants in Chiang Mai), I will discuss here several documented examples of mobilization in Mae Sot in recent years.

Following the enactment of registration system reforms and the ongoing yearly issuance of new work permits, several significant events brought the enforcement of the RTG's policies into question. The first occurred in October 2002 when 60 migrant workers from Myanmar employed at the Nut Knitting Factory in Mae Sot were fired after they began protesting that the factory had reneged on its promise to assist undocumented employees if

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they were apprehended by immigration authorities (Arnold & Hewison, 2005). In addition, they contested the unfair conditions of their employment, including wages that were 40% less than minimum wage. Several months later, they were arrested and taken to the border for deportation. However, after a rather drawn-out process and aid from the Law Society of Thailand, Young Chi Oo Burmese Workers' Association and the MAP Foundation, the migrants won their case against the factory in the Nakhon Sawan Labor Court.

A similar incident in 2003 followed much the same course: over 400 migrant workers were dismissed after filing a complaint with the Tak Labor Protection Office. Soon thereafter, immigration authorities were notified and the dismissed workers were deported. Upon returning to Thailand, however, they were able to win the case in court two years later when the Labor Office ordered the factory to pay the workers 15 million THB in back wages. The factory, however, failed to follow through on the order, and it is uncertain whether workers ever received the back pay that was due (Amnesty International, 2005).

Compensation was also an issue during an incident at Siriwat Garments factory. In September 2003, 78 Burmese migrant workers, all of whom had work permits, notified the Labor Protection Office after being forced to work for a continuous 28 hours under threat of dismissal. In this instance also, the workers were dismissed with insufficient compensation (Arnold & Hewison, 2005). Later that year, nearly 300 migrant workers were deported after a walk-out from the Nasawat Apparel factory in Mae Sot. The workers had negotiated with the factory to receive legal minimum wage and overtime pay; however the employer had reneged on the agreement at the first pay period (Arnold & Hewison, 2005). When the next day, the employer held a meeting with the group's leaders and a Labor Protection Officer, it was proposed that only the leaders receive the minimum wage, and the workers walked out with their leaders in protest.

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These incidents provide a prime example of the great difficulty and risks protesting can incur. There are countless documented incidents of threats, harassment, and intimidation of human and labor rights defenders in Thailand, particularly (Amnesty International, 2005). As a result, some activists have been chased into hiding, or at least experience a serious interruption in their advocacy work. In most cases, protesting workers first lose their jobs and are then arrested and deported. Those who later return to Thailand (a considerable expense in and of itself) must then enter into a drawn-out legal process for remuneration.

In order for mobilization to occur, workers must be willing to undergo a daunting, drawn-out process, as well as face the potentially devastating implications their participation might have for their family members and dependents. If indeed migrant workers are hearing stories such as this, it would seem quite obvious why most workers are not eager to instigate mobilization.

Another notable incident of social mobilization is the series of protests that sprung up with the proposed Salween dam projects. The River Salween is the most important river in Eastern Myanmar and the primary source for irrigation systems in the Shan, Karenni, and Karen States. The Salween's considerable size and length brought it to the attention of the Myanmar government as early as 1960 as a potential site for a hydropower project. Several years later, that project took the form of the Lawpita Falls dam on the Balu Chaung River in the Karenni State, the government's first large-scale hydropower project. Over the ensuing decade, 30,000 people were affected by water shortages, massive flooding, and the creation of a reservoir that displaced many settlements (KDRG, 2006). The arrival of several new army deployments introduced forced labor, forced displacement, sexual violence, the planting of hundreds of landmines, and extrajudicial killings to the region surrounding Lawpita Falls (KDRG, 2006). The project also had a severe environmental impact; ruining vast tracks of prime agricultural land and displacing animal populations.

The outcome of the Lawpita Falls dam project fell far short of government promises. Despite the passage of nearly 50 years of the promise of electricity, today 80% of the population of Karenni State remains without power. Fifty years on, the Lawpita Falls dam seems to be a rather sound failure, yet the Myanmar government is now proposing to replicate the Lawpita project with a new series of dams on the River Salween (KDRG, 2006). Of the four proposed dam sites at Tasang, Weigyi, Hatgyi and Dagwin, the Weigyi dam will be the largest, at over ten times the size of the Lawpita Falls dam. To accomplish this, the government of Myanmar is working in conjunction with the RTG, creating a situation in which "the Salween dams represent merely a "win-win" situation – electricity supply for [Thailand] and needed income for [Myanmar]. This simple equation ignores the regime's internationally condemned human rights and corruption record" (KDRG, 2006, 2).

In the wake of the announcement of the Salween dam project, however, protesters in Thailand turned out en masse to demonstrate against the authorities involved. A considerable number of Myanmar migrants joined Thai citizens in public protest efforts. On-going protests repeatedly made local headlines in several states of Northern Thailand. In May 2003, a crowd demonstrated outside a hotel in Mae Hong Son where Dr. Kraisak Choonhavan, Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs was staying (Kamthai 2003). While the protests on the whole were quite subdued, and dispersed early, this flurry of political activity and mobilization represents a significant step for Myanmar migrants who were willing to accept the risks of highly visible demonstration and associate themselves publicly with other potentially undocumented migrants from Myanmar. This kind of action sets a precedent in which migrants judged the value of social mobilization to be worth the risk of exposing themselves as Myanmar people in Thailand.

6.4   Summary

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A literature-based comparative analysis has demonstrated that a number of theories can successfully be applied to explain why precarious migrant workers do not engage in social mobilization. Under resource mobilization theory, we saw that migrants were unable to mobilize because they did not have a resource base to exploit. Similarly, a lack of political opportunity structures would also have prevented mobilization, by Kitschelt's (1986) definition. While both theories fit with the findings of this study, they provide only a shallow understanding of non-mobilization.

One slightly more satisfactory theory is that developed by Orum (1972), which states that mobilization is contingent on the presence of four mechanisms: socialization, deprivation, development of psychopolitical ideals, and engagement in mass society. Among Myanmar migrants, we see clear indicators of deprivation and socialization; however this group has failed to develop psychopolitical ideals and has thus failed to mobilize.

Orum's (1972) theory that psychopolitical ideals are a prerequisite to mobilization fits well within the context of this study. However; there are still several questions left unanswered, and room for a new theory which could more comprehensively explain non-mobilization among migrant workers where these other theories have provided only piecemeal explanations.

Precarity is a concept that may, when introduced into the mobilization discourse, provide some important insight into mobilization in complex settings. Precarious circumstance may prevent individuals from taking action (i.e. inordinately high risk factors). Precarity may instead be positively related to passivity and alienation; a finding redolent of Paugam (1995), who argued that precarious work may lead to social exclusion.

Not all precarious workers avoid mobilization, however. By comparing the migrant group in this study which has not mobilized with other Myanmar migrant groups who have, we see that precarious conditions do not always

inhibit mobilization outcomes. In several significant incidents in Mae Sot, Thailand, migrant workers united to stage demonstrations protesting poor treatment in the workplace. In almost all of these cases, those who participated were dismissed, arrested, and/or deported; thus further highlighting the extreme risks mobilization involves.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Precarity as a social condition has not proven to be conducive to emergent social mobilization. On the contrary, precarious conditions may actually deter or hinder mobilization. In order for a mobilizing outcome to occur, the makeup of society must be such that individuals are willing and able to mobilize. However, precarity threatens this relationship by disrupting individuals' willingness and ability to act; as individuals living under precarious circumstance face daily insecurity and fear. In such cases, mobilization is not the likely result.

Migrant workers are especially deeply affected by precarity; a phenomenon that can be easily observed among migrant groups in contemporary Asia. Myanmar migrants in Thailand are particularly torn between terrible conditions and an immobilizing fear of the consequences of political or social mobilization.

The outcomes of this study are manifold. First, I have assessed conditions in the context of one vulnerable population and recognized a marked lack of social mobilization. Second, I have sought to explain this phenomenon within the existing literature, while also putting forward an argument for the inclusion of a new theory. Lastly, I have introduced several critical new questions to be developed in future projects.

The basic human rights of Myanmar migrant workers continue to be seriously compromised both in the workplace and at the hands of authorities in Thailand. In the workplace, reported abuses include rape, verbal abuse, battery, withholding of pay, subjection to dangerous work environments, and long working hours, among others. During encounters with authorities, respondents reported being threatened, assaulted, and required to pay bribes. Day to day, they indicated an overwhelming and disabling fear of discovery while at home, on the street, and at work. The

consistent trend of suffering that has emerged from the dataset suggests that Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand are a vulnerable population enveloped in a dangerously precarious cycle.

Though vulnerable populations may receive few protections from the state, international customary law entitles all people, regardless of nationality or legal status, to fundamental human rights guarantees. The Royal Thai Government has been negligent in enforcing necessary protections mandated by the international conventions to which the Royal Thai Government is bound. This marked failure to act, coupled with persistent suffering, appears to be sufficient cause for precarious groups to engage in change-oriented protest action. However, Myanmar migrants' reaction is, overwhelming, one of passivity, alienation, and inaction; rather than social mobilization.

Migrants' failure to mobilize may be explained in part by a number of existing theories. For one, not only has this migrant community been experiencing a severe lack of access to resources and political opportunity structures, but it also lacks access to information. Herein we see that this group has not yet made the critical step of developing psychopolitical ideals. As such, they remain mired in the perception that they, as migrants, are powerless to change their circumstances.

While resource mobilization theory, political opportunity structures, and the 4-mechanism pathway model all contribute partial explanations to the larger puzzle of why social mobilization does not occur, the existing literature fails to provide a sufficiently detailed explanation.

To fill these gaps in the literature, I have suggested that the theory of precarity may prove useful. Precarity encompasses the critical aspects of all aforementioned theories, united by the thread of underlying precarious conditions. I argue that as seen in this study, social mobilization can be negatively influenced by a preexisting condition of precarity, even to the point that the mobilization outcome is inhibited completely. I have

suggested that the likelihood that an individual engage in social mobilization may initially be positively related to the strain they experience, so long as that strain does not become overwhelming (i.e. precarious). I have conjectured that the point at which this transformation from galvanizing strain to immobilizing precariousness occurs is the threshold point of precarity.

I have argued that students of social mobilization may benefit from conceptualizing precarity in the context of mobilization literature as a means of further developing our understanding of those communities under strain which do not evince mobilization. I recommend that this theory be explored in further studies. Foremost, it will be important to examine the relationship between precarity and mobilization in the context of other vulnerable populations around the world.

These conclusions may advance our understanding of precarious or vulnerable groups in society; particularly those suffering marginalization and state persecution. While many unanswered questions remain, I feel it is important to introduce a new frame of reference – that of the precarious worker – in order to broaden the scope of social mobilization literature within complex contexts in the modern world.

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APPENDIX 1: MAPS

1.1 THAILAND

learnnc.org

1.2 MYANMAR
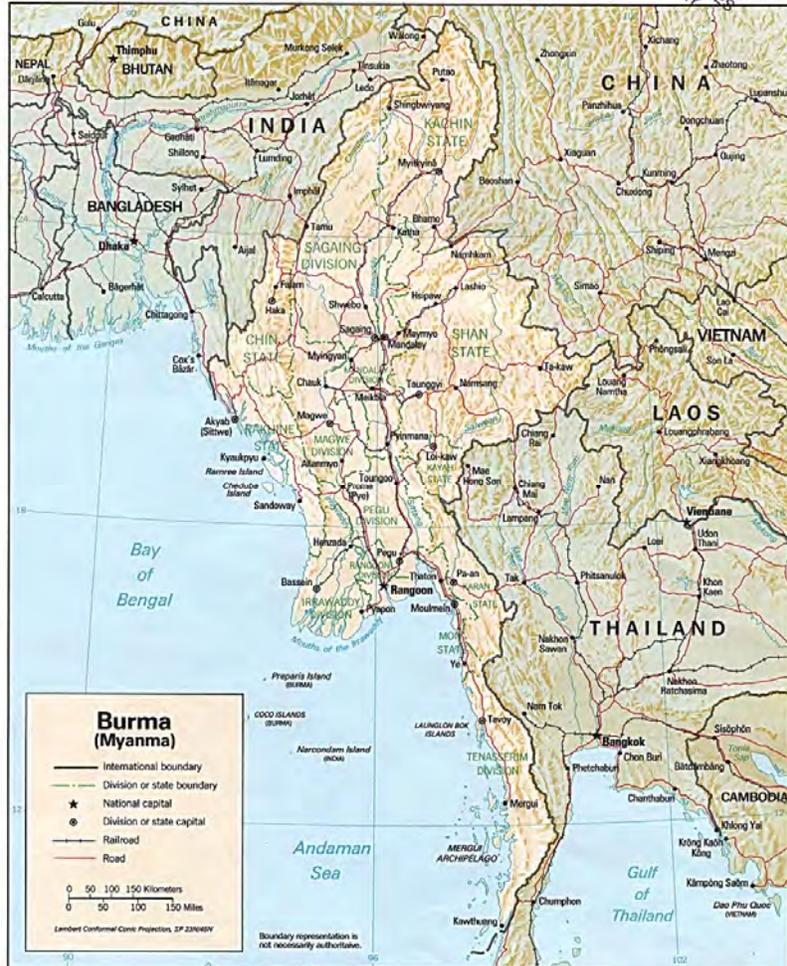
lib.utexas.edu

1.3 STATES & DIVISIONS OF MYANMAR

worldofmaps.net

150

1.4 ETHNIC GROUPS OF MYANMAR

Ethnolinguistic Groups

SINO-TIBETAN
TIBETO-BURMAN
Burman
Tribal (1. Chin 2. Kachin 3. Lisu 4. Lahu 5. Akha 6. Naga)
CHINESE
KAREN

TAI
7. Shan 8. Hkamti
Thai

AUSTROASIATIC
9. Mon 10. Wa 11. Palaung
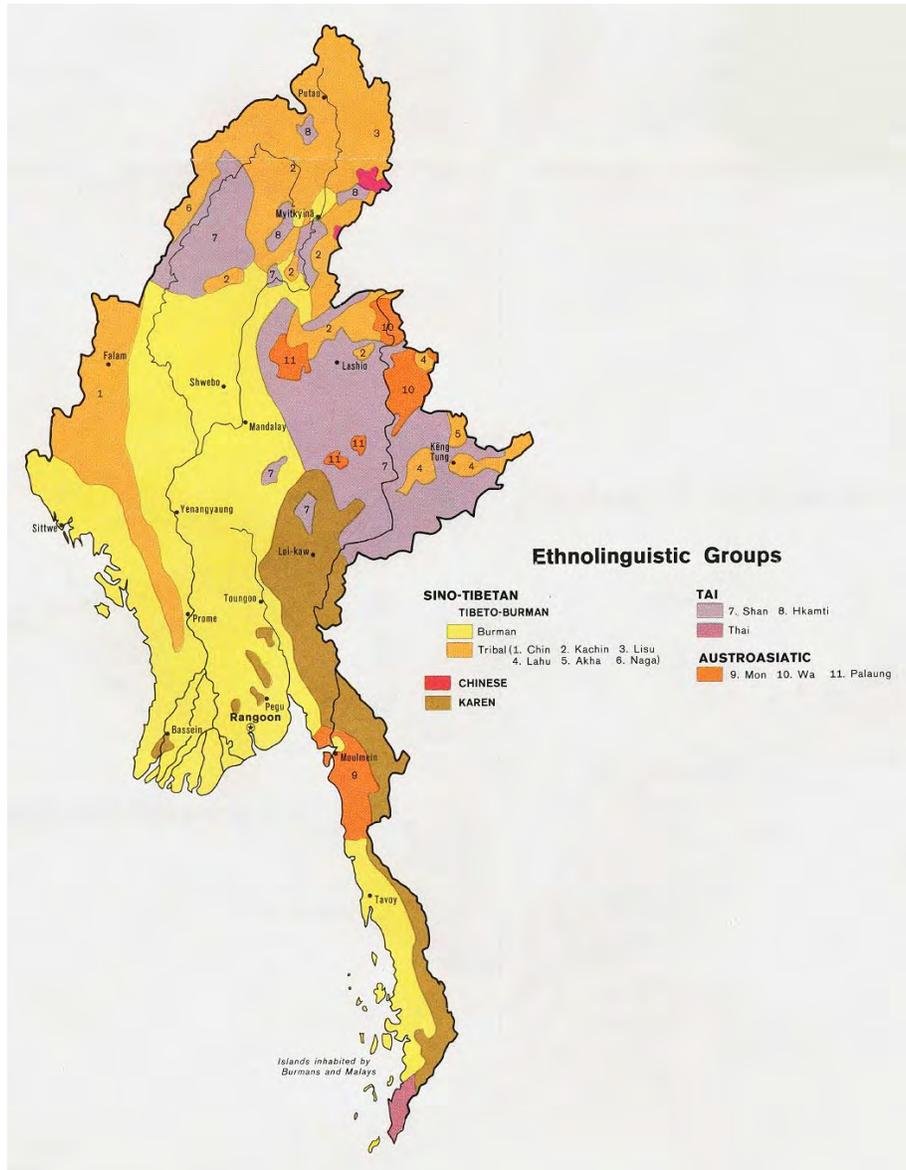
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APPENDIX 2: QUESTIONNAIRE

Myanmar Migrants in Thailand

This questionnaire is based on a questionnaire used by Punpuing et al (2004) and Mahidol University in a study of migrant domestic workers from Myanmar in Chiang Mai and Mae Sot, Thailand.

SECTION 1

Initial information.   Code:
                            Place of interview & date:

Basic demographics.   Sex:
                            Age:
                            Marital Status:
                            State of origin:
                            Ethnicity:

Education.   Spoken language:
                            Written language:
                            Education:

Employment.   Current Job:
                            Salary:
                            Working Hours:
                            Working Duties:

SECTION 2

1. Why did you decide to come to Thailand?
2. Who did you contact to find this job?

3. Since you came to Thailand what work have you done?
4. What kind of problems in your job do you have in Thailand?
5. Are you satisfied with the present work? Or do you want to change your job?
6. Do you have any ID card?
7. How did you get the ID card?
8. How can you use the ID card?
9. What is the difference before and after obtaining a work permit?
10. Do you understand the policy of the permit and your rights?
11. What health problems have you had in Thailand?
12. Have you had any accidents while working?
13. If you are sick, can you stop working?
14. Have you ever seen mental or physical abuse of migrants in Thailand?
15. Has anyone ever been mentally or physically abusive to you? If yes, please explain what happened.
16. If no, are you afraid of this happening to you?
17. How do you try to protect yourself from this?
18. Do you like living in Thailand?
19. In general, how safe do you feel while you are in Thailand?
20. Do you ever worry about losing your job?
21. What will you do if you lose your job?
22. Do you ever worry that you do not have enough food to eat?
23. Do you ever have trouble paying for or finding housing?
24. How many people do you live with? Do you live with your family?
25. Have you ever gone to school in Thailand?
26. Have you ever received skills or language training from a community organization?
27. If you have children, how do you plan to educate them?
28. Tell me about your living conditions.
29. Do you feel safe in your home?
30. How could the condition of your home be improved?
31. Do the police ever raid your workplace? What does your employer

do about it?

32. Do you feel like Thai businesspeople ever try to take advantage of you?

33. Have you ever been cheated out of money when in Thailand?

34. How often do you relocate to a new flat/house?

35. Have you ever been compelled to move to a new home?

36. Have you ever worried that the police might raid your home?

37. Do you ever talk to people about the political situation in Thailand?

38. Have you ever participated in any political organization when in Thailand?

39. Are any members of your family still living in Burma?

40. How often do you contact them?

41. Can you return to Burma to visit them?

42. Do you ever worry about the safety of your family in Burma?

43. Do you plan to ever return to Burma to live? Why or why not?

44. Do you have many friends here in Thailand?

45. How often do you socialize with other migrants from Burma?

46. Do you ever go to a temple or a church?

47. Do you ever celebrate any Burmese holidays or practice Burmese traditions? If not, would you like to?

48. Do you feel that there is a sense of community among migrants from Burma?

49. Do you feel like your views are represented in the local government in Chiang Mai? In the national government?

50. What could the Thai government do to make your life better?

51. If you have a complaint about the way you are treated by your employer, what can you do about it?

52. If you have a complaint about the way you are treated by the Thai police/authorities, what can you do about it?

53. Do you think migrants should protest their situation in Thailand?

54. Have you ever participated in a program sponsored by a political organization while in Thailand? Would you want to? Why or why not?

55. Have you ever joined a political organization or association for Burmese migrants in Thailand? Would you want to? Why or why not?
56. What is your opinion about migrant workers getting involved in organizations that stage public protests?