

DISPLACED AND MISPLACED OR JUST DISPLACED:
Christian Displaced Karen Identity after Sixty Years of War in Burma

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None.

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Abstract

The international community at large knows little of the Karen struggle. They are much more familiar with the pro-democracy movement within Burma and the National League for Democracy's (NLD) leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. It is for this reason that it was decided to conduct this research on the Karen – to make the invisible visible, the inaudible audible, the unsayable sayable to the international community. The thesis sought to explore the impact of organized violence, displacement and resettlement has had on the identity of a micro-section of the displaced Karen people – those professing to be Christian and either living in a displaced persons' camp on the Thai side of the Thai-Burma border or having migrated to a third country under the UNHCR Resettlement Scheme with a special emphasis on Australia. The reason for choosing this particular micro-section of the Karen people is that, though not the predominant faith practiced by the Karen, the Christian Karen are a synecdoche for the Karen internationally.

The thesis was informed by theories of organized violence, displacement and resettlement and explored their relationship to the central construct of identity. A transitional ecosystems model was used to explore the interrelationship of these theories and concepts for Christian Karen, displaced from their homeland by organized violence perpetrated by the ruling power of their country.

Two studies were conducted. The first study comprised of interviews with sixteen people aged between nineteen and sixty-four living in Mae La Displaced Persons' Camp, Thailand. The second study was conducted in Sydney and its environs, Australia and involved two focus groups of displaced Karen who had resettled in Australia within the last three years and ten interviews with Karen community leaders. Translators were used in the majority of the interviews conducted in the camp and in both focus groups in Australia. Interviews involving a translator were transcribed in both Karen and English and back-translated for rigor and trustworthiness of the data. One set of interviews was conducted in Burmese and transcribed in both Burmese and English and subsequently back-translated. All other interviews were transcribed in English. A thematic analysis using the general inductive approach advocated by Addison (1989); Strauss and Corbin (1998); Miller and Crabtree (1999) and Thomas (2006) revealed themes that answered the research questions.

The stories shared in the interviews resonated common themes that had impacted on participants' lives and shaped their identity. They are culture, Christian faith, education, nationalism, oppression, displacement and resettlement. Each of these themes is a link in a chain that revealed insights into how the participants perceived their identity. In this way, the seven themes are intertwined and interdependent.

Amongst the Christian displaced Karen, a dual identity was evident, encompassing a strong super-ordinate identity as being Karen (identifying as a nation) together with a sub-group identity rooted in their faith and community. Both seemed to maintain cohesion for both those living their displaced lives within Mae La Camp and those who had resettled to the third country.

With the majority of Karen national leadership identifying as Christian, these findings lend an understanding into why they have maintained their struggle for recognition of their homeland Kawthoolei, in what has become the longest civil war in world history. They also have the potential to assist agencies working with Karen resettling to third countries to develop culturally competent practices by lending an understanding into the identity of these people.

Keywords

Karen, Christian, organized violence, displacement, nationalism, community, identity

Australian and New Zealand Standard Research Classifications (ANZSRC)

160799 Social Work not elsewhere classified (60%)

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LIST OF ACRONYMNS, TERMS and KAREN WORDS USED IN THE THESIS

Political and Military Organisations

DKBA	Democratic Karen Buddhist Army
DKBO	Democratic Karen Buddhist Organization
ENC	Ethnic Nationalities Council
KCO	Karen Central Organisation
KNA	Karen National Association
KNDO	Karen National Defense Organisation
KNLA	Karen National Liberation Army
KNPP	Karenni National Progressive Party
KNU	Karen National Union
KPF	Karen Peace Force
NLD	National League for Democracy
RTG	Royal Thai Government
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council – Burma’s ruling military government
Tatmadaw	The military force of Burma’s military government (SPDC). In this thesis, the term Tatmadaw and Burmese Army are used interchangeably.

United Nations and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

AHRC	Asian Human Rights Commission
AMI	Aide Medicale Internationale
BERG	Burma Ethnic Research Group
BPHWT	Back Pack Health Worker Team
CCDDPT	Committee for Coordination of Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women
CSW	Christian Solidarity Worldwide
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDMC	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
IRIN	Integrated Regional Information Networks
PRAD	Partners Relief and Development
SMRU	Shoklo Malaria Research Unit
TBBC	Thai Burma Border Consortium
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USCRI	United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants
WLB	Women’s League of Burma

Community Based Organisations (CBOs)

AKO	Australian Karen Organisation
CIDKP	Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People
FBR	Free Burma Rangers
KBC	Karen Baptist Convention
KBCA	Karen Baptist Churches of Australia
KCDO	Karen Culture Development Organisation
KCG	Karen Culture Group
KED	Karen Education Department
KESAN	Karen Environment and Social Action Network
KHCPS	Karen History and Culture Preservation Society
KHRG	Karen Human Rights Group
KKBC	Kawthoolei Karen Baptist Churches
KKBWO	Kawthoolei Karen Baptist Women's Organisation
KKBYO	Kawthoolei Karen Baptist Youth Organisation
KRC	Karen Refugee Committee
KTWG	Karen Teachers Working Group
KWO	Karen Women's Organization
KYO	Karen Youth Organisation

Educational Institutions and Related Terms

KKBBSC	Kawthoolei Karen Baptist Bible School and College
BTh	Bachelor of Theology
LTS	Licentiate in Theological Studies
OTS	Oriental Theological School, Nagaland, India

Miscellaneous Terms and Acronyms

ESL	English as a Second Language
IDP	Internally displaced person
Kawthoolei	Karen name for their Karen State within the Union of Burma. In the thesis, Kawthoolei and Karen State are used interchangeably
Pwo	The second most populous tribe of the Karen
PTSD	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
SBGV	Sexual Based Gender Violence
Sgaw	The most populous tribe of the Karen

Karen Words and Phrases (spelt phonetically in Roman script) used in the Thesis and their English Translation

Bwa ba gaw ba kair	Refugee, oppressed
Bwa da war	Community
Chaka	Tradional shirt worn by both male and female. For men, this is a vertically striped shirt with tassels
Chemowah	Traditional long white cotton dress with coloured threads worn by unmarried girls
Da blu pa doh	literally ‘thank you so big’
Dawkelu	Entire race
Dee	Uncle
Golawah	White person
Gu	Conical bamboo basket carried on back or shoulder
“Hsa Tu Gaw”	“Morning Star”
Hta lah au lah	leaves that are used for the thatch roofing of the houses, both in the camps and villages
Lah Koo Gee Su	Wrist Tying Ceremony
Lee Kwa	Grandson
Mu gar	Aunty
Naw	Miss or Mrs
Pee Pee	Grandmother
Pu	Grandfather
Pwa K’nyaw	Karen person or people
Pwa K’nyaw Nee Htaw Thaw	Karen New Year
Pwa K’nyaw Dawkelu ah Naw T’ya	Karen National Flag
Saw	Master or Mr
Teloba	No worries
Thra	male teacher
Thramu	female teacher
Y’wa	God

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

... have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves ... don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now ... And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer (Rilke, 1984, pp. 34-35).

1.1 Background to the Research

It is said a reflective journey never ends. I believe Rilke's words exemplify the many experiences along my life journey that brought me to the point of conducting this research. These include the experience of marginalisation gained through being a young white woman married to an Aboriginal man, a victim of "the stolen generation", living with him in an Australian outback settlement in the 1970s and later, of being a single mother relying on the benevolence of the State. They include the experiences of my faith journey beginning when I became a Christian in my middle teenage years. They also include the acquisition of knowledge through tertiary study in the areas of social work and Christian ministry during my middle age years and the implementation of that knowledge as a social work practitioner, teacher, researcher and church leader. More recently, they include the experience of cross cultural work gained through participation in a Council of International Fellowship social work exchange program in India, and on my return, establishing a Branch of that organization in Australia.

Levinas proposes that:

... there is a form of truth that is totally alien to me, that I do not discover within myself, but that calls on me from beyond me, and it requires me to leave the realms of the known and the same in order to settle in a land that is under its rule (cited in Godzich, 1986, p. xvi).

On reflection, this is where I am now. A chance meeting in Melbourne in 2001 with Mr Steve Gumaer, co-founder and Executive Director of Partners Relief and Development (PRAD), a Christian community development organization working with the Karen people of Burma and Thailand, has led me on an exciting journey of discovery to a place and people group that otherwise might have remained completely unknown to me. Following that chance meeting with Mr Gumaer, I was given the opportunity of joining a short term missionary programme in two of the seven Karen displaced

persons' camps on the Thai-Burma border in 2002/2003. Later that year, I completed a detailed Area Study for my Graduate Diploma Studies in Christian Ministry under the supervision of Reverend Dr Alan Nichols entitled "The History of Christianity Amongst the Karen in Burma and its Impact on the Nation as a Whole". The research conducted for this study led me to explore factors contributing to psychological recovery of displaced Karen people within the camps which was presented as a paper at the International Federation of Social Work Conference in Adelaide in 2004. The encouragement I received from colleagues following this presentation and from displaced Karen leaders when I located as a teacher in Mae La Displaced Persons' Camp shortly after led me to embark on this more ambitious research journey.¹ Over the past seven years, I have been privileged to come to know these people, and more specifically, to gain an understanding of the issues that are affecting the displaced Karen of Burma today. The Karen who were once an unknown people group to me are now an intimate part of my life.

Burma² is a country of great ethnic diversity, with its estimated fifty-two million population divided between at least fifteen major ethnic groups (Ministry of Information, Union of Myanmar, 2002, pp. 4-5 cited in Ngun Ling, 2006, p. 35). After the Burmans, the most populous group is the Karen, with an estimated seven million people, belonging mostly to the Sgaw and Pwo sub-groups (Smith, 1999, Rogers, 2004). The Karen have suffered oppression for thousands of years at the hands of the ruling powers in Burma, being only afforded some reprieve for the century of British colonial rule between the mid 1800s to the mid 1900s. Civil war has plagued the country since independence in 1948 resulting in gross human rights violations and mass displacement of the ethnic peoples, especially the Karen.

¹ This current research with the Karen is not affiliated with or financially supported by Partners Relief and Development .

² When the British conquered Burma in the 1800s, the name Union of Burma (or Burma for short) was adopted. In 1989, the official name of the country was changed to Myanmar by the State Law and Order Restoration Council (which in turn, became the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in 1997) to better reflect the peace and prosperity the ruling junta was promoting to the international community. Because of the hypocrisy of this and because it was an illegitimate government which changed the name of the country, without any mandate from the people to do so, many of the people living within Burma including detained political leader of the National League for Democracy (NLD), Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, as well as governments of many countries including the USA and UK are continuing to use the title Burma, in defiance of the SPDC (Rogers, 2004, p 29; Wintle, 2007, xxviii). This writer supports this view. As such, 'Burma' or 'Union of Burma' will be used throughout this dissertation except when references directly refer to Myanmar.

1.2 Aims and Significance of the Research

What was dismembered needs to be re-membered ... it requires the gathering together of forgotten and denied fragments from dreams, memories, history. It asks to bear witness to the shattered narratives of survivors ... The wholeness ... suggests that the true self is fluid, changeable, inclusive ... that it might be broken and then be re-membered, emerging stronger and more varied than before (Malpede, 1996, p. 232).

The voice of the Karen people of Burma today has been largely silenced by the ruling military junta. The writings of contemporary French philosopher, Jacques Ranciere, coupled with the values of the social work profession provide an insight into the impact caused by this.

Ranciere's conception of the "political" focuses firstly on "part-taking" and secondly, on the notion of "political struggle" within a community. In relation to the first, Ranceire's dialectic is that part-taking, referred to also as the "distribution of the sensible" is circumscribed by the dominant power in a community. This leads to a notion of "political struggle" – about how a people are ac-counted for (Ranceire, 2004). Relating this theory to the Karen, prior to colonisation, they had no part in the "distribution of the sensible" in the country of Burma and as such, were not counted in any way. The ruling Burmans showed them no regard as exemplified in an old Burman proverb – "you can teach a water buffalo to drink but you can't teach a Karen anything" (Conn, 1994). This position took a three hundred and sixty degree turn with the arrival of the British colonialists and American missionaries. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Karen were part-taking in the wider community of Burma. They were part of the whole. Yet in less than a century, they have been relegated to their former position by the ruling military junta – invisible in the distribution of the sensible in the community, perceived as the parts that have no part in the so-called Union of Myanmar. Their lives are not accounted for, their deaths are not counted, their history has officially been silenced by the ruling power. They have no voice, no part in the unity of the whole. Ranciere (2001) writes that:

The principal function of politics is, therefore, to disclose the world of its subjects and its operations: to make visible that which had no reason to be seen, by lodging one world into another, constructing a paradoxical world that relates two separate worlds (21-2, 24).

Ranciere's dialectic is complemented by the principles of the social work profession; summarized by Clark (2000, p. 28) as the worth and uniqueness of every person, an entitlement to justice, the

aspiration of freedom and the essentiality of community. These principles epitomize the very reason for this research. By taking these core principles one at a time, an understanding of them in the context of the Karen situation today can be gained. The “worth and uniqueness of every person” relates to the Karen individual identity, embedded in the uniqueness of their culture and their values. An “entitlement to justice” relates to the ongoing oppression and human rights violations being perpetrated by the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in Burma against the Karen and other ethnic groups resulting in gross displacement of the people from their land. The “aspiration of freedom” is the Karen’s political struggle to enjoy freedom within their country – to be accounted for in a Rancierian sense. The “essentiality of community” is a recognition that the Karen have a collective identity, a right to their own land – their beloved Kawthoolei also known as Karen State.

These core principles are the inalienable rights of every human being and are reflected in the international and national codes of ethics of the social work profession. In a world of increasing global awareness, these codes provide a basis from which to explore what could be considered as universal values in the disputatious area of international social work (Powell, 2005, p 23). Estes (1999) and Bowles (2002) add to this view with the belief that as a profession with a unique history, knowledge, value and skill base, social work is ideally located to address the global disparities evident in the world today.

Despite reports by many advocacy agencies and delegations of the Karen themselves at United Nations and related organizational meetings, the world at large knows little of the Karen struggle¹. It is for this reason that it was decided to conduct this research – to make the invisible visible, the inaudible audible, the unsayable sayable to the international community (Ranciere, 2004, p. 12) – and in so doing, explore

¹ While not an exhaustive list, international advocacy organizations include Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch (HRW), Watchlist, and Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW). National advocacy organizations include Thai Burma Border Consortium (TBBC), Back Pack Health Workers’ Group (BPHWT), Free Burma Rangers (FBR), Partners Relief and Development (PRAD) and Women’s League of Burma (WLB). Community based organizations include Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG), Karen Women’s Organization (KWO), Karen Refugee Council (KRC), Karen Office of Relief and Development (KORD). Recent delegations of Karen to United Nations and related organizational meetings include members of the Karen National Union (KNU) joining a delegation from the Burma Ethnic Nationalities Council (ENC) meeting with Mrs Laura Bush in the Whitehouse in June 2007; members of KWO joining the delegaton from WLB in Geneva, Switzerland, November, 2008 for the launch of the report “In the Shadow of the Junta” to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); KWO delegates attending the 53rd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and parallel events organized by UN Missions and UN Entities in New York, in March, 2009 and KHRG delegates attending the launch of the Watchlist Report “No More Denial: Children Affected by Armed Conflict in Myanmar” at the United Nations, New York, May 2009.

the impact of organized violence, displacement and resettlement on the identity of a micro-section of the displaced Karen people.

The micro-section of displaced Karen people chosen as the subject of this research were those who profess the Christian faith and who either were living in a displaced persons' camp on the Thai side of the Thai-Burma border or had migrated from the camps to Australia under the recent United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) Resettlement Scheme. The reason for choosing this particular micro-section of the Karen people is that, though not the predominant faith practiced by the Karen, the Christian Karen are a synecdoche for the Karen internationally. Coupled with British colonization, the Christian missionisation of the Karen in the 1800s is widely recognized as the vehicle by which the Karen became a nation with national hopes and aspirations, the vehicle which fuels the current drive for recognition of an independent Karen State within the wider Union of Burma (Smeaton, 1887; Purser, 1911; Richardson, 1928; San Po, 1928; Keyes, 1979; Petry, 1993a; Marshall, 1997; Buadaeng, 2007).

1.3 Research Questions

In keeping with the aims of this research, the following research questions were formulated.

1. How do Christian displaced Karen living in displaced persons' camps and in third countries perceive their identity, individually and collectively?
2. What factors do Christian displaced and resettled Karen perceive as influencing them to maintain their sense of identity, individually and collectively?

A qualitative approach was chosen guided by transitional and ecological systems theories. Two studies were conducted, one based in Mae La Displaced Persons' Camp in Thailand and the other in Sydney and its environs, Australia.

1.4 Overview of the Thesis

Chapter Two provides a historical picture of the Karen. The importance of understanding the Karen situation, historically and contemporarily, is essential in understanding the issues of identity affecting the micro-section of those professing the Christian faith chosen for this study.

Chapter Three firstly considers the literature surrounding the constructs of identity, organized violence, displacement, and resettlement and secondly, locates the Christian displaced Karen within the context of these constructs.

Chapter Four provides an overview of the methodological approach used in this research. This research utilizes Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems model and Raphael's (1986) phases of refugee trauma model to explore the wide range of factors affecting the Christian displaced and resettled Karen and the impact these factors have on their identity.

The next three chapters outline and discuss the findings of the two studies that comprised this research. In both studies, the themes of culture, Christian faith, education, nationalism, oppression, displacement and resettlement emerged from the data.

Chapter Five outlines the findings gained from my observational living in Mae La Camp over an eight month period. Through the process of listening to stories told to me, my teaching role in the Bible College in the camp and through my participation in various activities within the community in this place, I gained an increased understanding of how the above themes informed the identity of the Christian Karen with whom I came into contact.

Chapter Six introduces the participants in both studies utilizing the microsystem of Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems theory to gain an understanding of how the factors in that system impact on their identity.

Chapter Seven is the final of the findings chapters. In this chapter, the wider meso and macro systems of the participants' lives within their transitional journeys are explored, revealing in greater detail the emerging themes that highlight the identity of these people.

Chapter Eight concludes the dissertation, drawing together the central themes outlined in the previous three chapters to reveal how the Christian displaced Karen in both the camps and those who have resettled in third countries perceive their identity. Suggestions are provided for further research.

CHAPTER TWO
A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE CHRISTIAN
DISPLACED KAREN OF BURMA

To gauge the present-day attitude and social status of a nation, a knowledge of the past history is essential. The past not only makes the present more easily comprehensible, but it also enables one to conjecture what the future may hold in store (San Po, 1928, p. 1).

2.1 Introduction

History is a contested terrain. The history of the Christian Karen is derived from numerous sources. This includes formal academic literature as well as the local indigenous sources of living oral legends passed down from generation to generation to this present day. Various writers have connected the ancient oral traditions of the Karen with their current situation (Keyes, 1979; Hovemyr, 1989; Petry, 1993a; Marshall, 1997; Rogers, 2004). Further, historical memory is vital to defining the identity of a people (Gravers, 1999, p. 145). Hence, this chapter will outline a historical horizon of this people group by exploring both their ancient and contemporary history which includes several phases of colonization. These include the Burman colonization of the indigenous peoples of that land, the British colonization of Burma in the 1800s, Christian missionisation and the resultant provision of education during the same period, the rise of Karen nationalism, Burma independence and ensuing civil war which has resulted in oppression, displacement and resettlement to third countries. In this way, the chapter aims to lay a foundation for understanding contextual factors relevant to the identity of the Christian displaced Karen of Burma.

Firstly, the historical origins of the Karen's arrival in Burma will be explored. Secondly, an exploration of some of the ancient oral Karen legends will provide a foundation for an understanding of contemporary history. Finally, aspects of this contemporary history including Christian missionisation, colonization, education, oppression, displacement and resettlement will be explored.

2.2 Origins

According to oral historical traditions and academic literature, it is generally agreed that the Karen began to arrive in what is now known as Burma approximately 2,500 years ago from the region of Mongolia via three routes: the Mekong Valley, the Irrawaddy Valley and the Salween Valley. Karen history states that the earliest Karen settled in Htee-Hset Met Ywa – the Land of Flowing Sands, a land bordering the source of Yang-tse-Kiang River in the Gobi Desert. From there, they migrated southwards to become the first people group of Burma. On arrival in Burma, they settled in the central lowlands around the Irrawaddy and Sittaung Basins, which they called ‘kawlah’, meaning the green land (Thanbyah, 1904, 1917; Aung Hla, 1932; Keyes, 1979; Marshall, 1997).

Traditionally, the Karen were farmers and the fertile land of the lowlands was ideal for agriculture, cattle, horses and buffalo grazing. They settled in village clusters with local leaders and an emphasis on the values of kinship. There are seven main sub-groups of Karen who settled in Burma, the majority being Sgaw and Pwo, each with their own language. Their religion was animist and monotheistic – a belief in the ancestral spirits and one creator God, pronounced Y’wa in both Sgaw and Pwo Karen languages. Saw Aung La (1932) records:

We began to peacefully clear and till our land free from all hindrances. Our labours were fruitful and we were very happy with our lot. So we change the name of the land to Kawthoolei, a land free of all evils, famine, misery and strife – Kawthoolei, a pleasant, plentiful and peaceful country. Here we lived characteristically simple uneventful and peaceful lives, until the advent of the Burman (trans. Tamla Htoo, 2004, p. 56).

In the years following the arrival of the Karen in Burma, other ethnic peoples migrated to this ‘kawlah’, among them the Mon, Shan, Lahu, Chin, Naga, Kachin, Karenni, Rakhine and finally, the Burmans. The latter two began to impose their feudal kingdom structure on the other peoples, which led the Karen to move out of the lowlands into the hill areas to the east and south. From that time onwards, they became a subjugated race of peoples, treated as inferior beings, oppressed, exploited and marginalized (Smeaton, 1887; Hovemyr, 1989; Petry, 1993a; Heppner, 2000; Cheesman, 2002).

The word ‘Karen’ was never used by the people themselves until the nineteenth century. The word in Sgaw Karen that is still used today is ‘pwa k’nyaw’ which simply translates as human being. The word ‘Karen’ originates from a combination of the Mon words ‘kha’ and ‘riang’ – people living amongst Tai (that is, people from a Sinitic background). In Burmese, ‘khariang’ is pronounced ‘Taw Tawin’. For

centuries, this reference to the Karen people was used in a derogatory manner by the successive ruling ethnic groups in Burma. It came to mean those people who were animist living in the forest and mountains – a people who were uncivilized and uneducated. However, the Christian missionaries and British who arrived in the 1800s adapted the term to ‘Karen’. Within a short period of time, the people themselves began to positively identify with this word to distinguish themselves as a distinct ethnic group (Lieberman, 1978, p. 456; Gravers, 1999; Jorgensen, 1997, p. vi; Renard 2003, 1-2).

To understand the Karen view of history one needs to examine both academic sources and the rich tradition of oral legends that comprise the combined histories of pre-colonization and colonization in its various phases with their contemporary situation. The next section outlines five key oral legends which play an important role in shaping the identity of the Christian Karen.

2.3 Ancient Karen Legends – the Past informing the Present

Many indigenous peoples have a rich legacy of oral history which informs their past and present. Some of these legends expand on their origins as a people, their wider understanding of their role and place in the world, including stories of omnipresent or metaphysical explanations of life and well being (Richardson, 1984). In the context of this tradition, the Karen are lovers of stories and their collection of legends relating to the creation of the world, the founder of the Karen race, the fall of man, their forced exit from a garden, the story of the lost golden book of knowledge and subsequent prophecies concerning their future generated immense interest among the early Christian missionaries (Bunker, 1902; Mason, 1861) and later, among ethnographers and researchers (Keyes, 1979; Hovemyr, 1989; Marshall, 1997; Petry, 2003a). In Karen, these stories are called ‘htas’, which are a seven syllable couplet where the last word of each couplet rhymes (Marshall, 1997, pp. 211-212).

The following relates five of these ‘htas’ that are particularly relevant to Karen notions of identity. The first four have been linked with the unprecedented success of Christian mission in Burma among the Karen in the years following 1828 with their seemingly Biblical parallelism with early accounts in the book of Genesis including the similarity of the Karen word ‘Y’wa’ and the Hebrew word ‘Yahweh’, together with the prophecy of the return of the white brother with the lost book of knowledge. The final ‘hta’ relates directly to the Karen virtue of hospitality passed down from the legendary founder of the Karen race, Htaw Meh Pa, which has been commented on by several contemporary writers as being a

unique quality of the Karen today (Keyes, 1979; Marshall, 1997; Rajah, 2002, pp. 520-524; Rogers, 2004; Panter, 2008).

The first of the five legends ('htas), relating to the creation of the world, tells of Y'wa, the high god, who creates the earth with the assistance of a termite and a blackbird. The legends in relation to creation are lengthy and talk about Y'wa creating the earth out of foam and subsequently creating banyan seed, termites, blackbirds and humans. They say that the earth was round; it started out the size of a nut but with the help of the termite and blackbird, it increased in size (Vinton & Thanbyah, 1924; Hoveymr, 1989, p. 66).

The second of the five legends ('htas') pertains to the founding of the Karen race. This legend tells the story of a legendary character known as Htaw Meh Pa who killed a wild boar. He used one of the boar's tusks to make a comb and as he combed his hair with it, he became young again. Htaw Meh Pa then gave the comb to his family who also became young again when they combed their hair. His children produced a great many offspring, and they in their turn had many children. As they all used the comb, their numbers were not reduced by death and the land they occupied became overpopulated. Hence, Htaw Meh Pa decided that they should set out in search of a new land to settle. As he travelled further afield, he lost his children after he crossed a 'river of sand'. The descendants were left behind because of their laziness and unwillingness to keep up with him and thus became orphans, vulnerable and unprotected. The legend ends with a declaration that when Htaw Meh Pa's children are freed from sin, Htaw Meh Pa will return and lead them across the river to the pleasant land which he has found beyond (Gilmore, 1911, p. 38; Stern, 1968, p. 304).

Htaw Meh Pa is credited among the Karen as creating and passing down the values that the Karen today consider foundational in their lives – the knowledge that there is one Divine Being, high moral and ethical standards, simple, quiet and peaceful living, hospitality, language, national costumes, and love of music (Moo Troo, 1981; Micah Rolley, 2006b).

The third of the five legends ('htas') involves an explanation of the "fall of man" which is remarkably similar to the theological view of humankind expounded in the Bible. This legend tells of how the first human couple were forbidden to eat of a certain fruit, but that a wily serpent, Mu Kaw Li, who had once been a servant of Y'wa but had been cast out of his presence because of a gross insult, deceived

the couple to eat the forbidden fruit and thus became subject to ageing, disease and death (Marshall, 1997, p. 212).

The fourth of the five legends ('htas') outlines a vision of the Karen people's colonial encounter with the Burmans and later the Christian missionaries. The latter are predicted to play a significant role in their reconciliation to their past and a more optimistic future. This legend tells the story of how Y'wa gave his children, amongst who were the Karen, golden books of knowledge. However, the Karen lost their book through carelessness and it was eaten by termites. They were then subjected to a wretched existence, ignorant and cruelly oppressed by the Burmans. One of the books was taken by a white brother across the sea and Y'wa promised the Karen that this white man would return with the book one day and that if the Karen people would receive and obey the teachings of the book, they would enjoy salvation and untold blessings (Gilmore, 1911; Purser, 1911; Keyes, 1979; Petry, 1993a; Marshall, 1997; Rogers, 2004).

The final of the five legends ('htas') relates to the Karen value of hospitality. This legend tells the story of an orphaned brother and sister who were banned from their village because of the fear they would bring bad luck. They lived a precarious existence on the outskirts of the village. During a famine, the villagers trekked to a far off place in search of grain. The boy followed the clan at a safe distance with the few coins left to them by their parents. On the return journey, an old woman called Pee Bee Yaw was by the side of the trail entangled in vines. She cried out for help, but the villagers refused because they worried she would then be an extra mouth to feed. However, the boy thought it would make little difference as the food he had purchased would only last two days anyway so cut Pee Bee Yaw loose. She accompanied him to their little hut and with the help of her magical powers, the orphans never wanted for food again while the selfish villagers were left poor and struggling (San Po, 1928, pp. 28-32).

2.3.1 Summary

The historical context is important in understanding the identity of all people. For the Christian Karen, this history is a blend of their oral traditions interwoven with academic literature detailing their past and present. This oral history will be revisited in subsequent sections of this and following chapters showing their relevance in relation to how the Christian displaced Karen today perceive their identity.

In the next section, the processes of missionization are outlined.

2.4 Missionisation and the Birth of Karen Christianity

The Christian missionary movement was largely driven by American Baptists. As stated above, Karen oral tradition was one of the reasons given for the unmitigated success of the receptiveness of Christianity amongst the Karen in the nineteenth century. Historical narratives relate how in 1828, Ko Tha Byu, a Karen slave who was given to one of the first Baptist missionaries in Burma, Reverend Adoriram Judson, by one of his Burman converts to be his servant, connected the ancient legend of the white brother and the lost book to the white missionary and his Bible. After sharing this legend with Reverend Judson and his assistant, Reverend Boardman, Ko Tha Byu became the first Karen Christian and together with Reverend Boardman, took the Gospel message to his people throughout Burma. For these Karen, the finding of the lost book was seen as an integral and symbiotic fulfillment of the fourth oral legend discussed above, thus giving credence to their oral tradition (Mason, 1861; Bunker, 1902; Cady, 1958; Gravers, 2007a).

In a biography of Ko Tha Byu by Reverend Francis Mason (1861), various journal entries and letters record how whole villages turned from their animist and Buddhist beliefs and embraced the Christian faith as a result of Ko Tha Byu's mission activity, thus laying the foundation for the building up of the Christian church amongst the Karen and other ethnic peoples in Burma and neighbouring Thailand and India.

However, there is some contention by different Karen people that the oral legend of the lost book given by Y'wa actually refers to the Gautama (Buddha) and not Yahweh (God) as projected by the early missionaries. The reason given for this is that these early missionaries found no distinct worship of Y'wa; in fact, the Karen were forbidden to use the actual word with an alternate word "Pu Ke Re" used to refer to Y'wa. At the time, many Pwo Karen had joined Buddhist charismatic leaders awaiting the return of the Gautama who would revive the Buddhist doctrine with resultant benefits of prosperity, knowledge, morality and peace (Gravers, 2007a, pp. 233-234; South, 2008, pp. 14-15; Keenan, in press). In relation to this, translator and missionary, Reverend Francis Mason admitted in an article published in the Baptist Missionary Magazine (1856, cited in Gravers, 2007a, p. 234) that the Karen were divided in their expectations of who Y'wa was – God as an omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent creator and ruler of the world, or a reincarnation of the Buddha who would come back to

rescue them from their moral and social decline. Not surprisingly, Mason translated the word Y'wa to represent the former expectation.

While the missionaries' interpretation of the Karen oral legends supported their evangelistic zeal and provided hope for many thousands of Karen, it cannot be denied that this schism of belief set the stage for ongoing intra ethnic conflict that has impacted on Christian Karen identity to the current day. It illustrates one way politics and religion has been entwined into the ongoing Karen struggle for autonomy and recognition within their homeland.

2.5 British Colonization and its Impact on the Karen

Concurrent with American missionisation of the Karen, Britain extended its territory west of India, carrying out a complete annexation of Burma to colonial India over three Anglo-Burmese wars between 1824 and 1885 (Smith, 1999, p. 22; Heppner, 2000, pp 14-16; Wintle, 2007, pp. 27-40). Completing their colonisation of Burma in 1886, Britain effectively eradicated the structure of the Burman kingdom, giving a much welcome reprieve to the various indigenous peoples including the Karen.

However, even though British forces finally deposed the Burmese monarchy in November 1885, they failed to disarm the royal army when they were disbanded. Without means of support, many formed into groups of dacoits (bandits) and moved to Lower Burma which was poorly garrisoned due to British troops having been sent north to assist in the overthrow of the Burmese monarchy. Over the next two months, these dacoits created havoc among villages, plundering and murdering as they went. Many banded together under the leadership of some Buddhist monks, most notably the Myangyoung Pongyi. From independent marauding dacoitry, the situation in Lower Burma quickly turned into a full scale insurrection against the British which threatened their annexation plans (Smeaton, 1887; Bunker, 1902, 1910; Cady, 1958).

Smeaton (1887) and Bunker's (1902, 1910) historical narratives relate how the Christian Karen in Lower Burma were prominent in restoring law and order to this area. In the absence of British troops to defend and repel the attacks on their villages, they joined together under the leadership of their pastors and American missionaries such as Reverend Dr Vinton and on being issued arms and

ammunition from the British, they actively pursued and attacked the marauding bands. Smeaton (1887) quoting from a letter he received from Reverend Dr Vinton stated of this time:

Every mission has promised me a levy en masse of all able bodied men. They all agree to refuse all pay and fight for pure loyalty to the Queen (p. 10).

Both Smeaton and Bunker recount that the insurrection ended when the small army of Christian Karen captured the Myangyoung Pongyi, for whom the British had posted a 5000 rupee reward, effectively “[breaking] the backbone of the rebellion ... [and] raising the despised Karen Christians to a high plane in the esteem of all good men and the rulers of the country” (Bunker, 1910, p. 79).

Subsequently, Burma was officially annexed to British India in January 1886. The British strategy of divide and rule resulted in the implementation of indirect rule through the leaders of the indigenous people including the Karen in the delta and hill areas, granting them autonomy and helping to promote a group identity for the first time. This occurred alongside the American missionisation movement. With the lack of co-operation of the majority Burmans in the colonial annexation, the British, supported by the American missionaries, keenly encouraged the formation of non-Burman identities, and with this encouragement, the various Karen sub-groups began to identify themselves as part of a larger Karen people (Cheesman, 2002; Buadaeng, 2007, Malseed, 2009). The Karen’s loyalty to the British colonial government proved them to be dependable allies and over the next one and a half centuries, their loyalty was rewarded as they gained prominent positions in the civil and military services which resulted in deep antagonism by many Burmans (Gravers, 1996; Keyes; 2003; Buadaeng, 2007; South, 2008).

In the decade leading up to World War II, a Burman nationalist movement led by Aung San campaigned strongly for independence from Britain. This movement allied itself to Japan during the war and supported the Japanese occupation of Burma which caused the British to retreat to India over four months from December 1941 to March 1942. Many Karen who were in the British Armed Forces at this time joined the British in India and were instrumental in helping the British recapture Burma from the Japanese in 1945. For the ones who remained, many were active in the resistance movement against the Burman and Japanese coalition, for which many Karen villagers suffered terrible atrocities (Morrison, 1947; Kratoska, 2002; Tharckabaw & Watson, 2003).

History was repeating itself. As Christian Karen were prominent in the repelling of the insurrection against the British in 1885/6, they again were prominent in the resistance during the Japanese occupation of Burma and the subsequent British reoccupation in 1945. Morrison (1947) demonstrates the intersecting identities of faith, nationalism and political allegiance of enlisted Karen in the British forces in his record of a letter sent by a group of Karen soldiers stationed in India to Karen in the resistance movement under British Army officer, Major Seagram:

We know that you Karens in Burma are undergoing much suffering. But we are always remembering you in our prayers and we ask you to remember us in your prayers (p. 117).

Following the war, Burma continued to seek independence from Britain, but this movement was fraught with internal warring factions. Despite the assassination of Aung San by his Burman rivals in July, 1947 and no consensus regarding the setting up of a democratic government representative of all the ethnic nationalities, Britain granted Burma independence in January, 1948. Beginning with a flawed constitution, civil war has raged ever since (Smith, 2003; Yawngghwe & Sakhong, 2004, pp. 15-17). Many Karen still today believe they were betrayed by the British; that their loyalty to the Mother country went unrecognized and unrewarded (Petry, 1993b, p.90; Micah Rolley, 2006a). While this is a contentious issue, both Karen and outside historians agree that the collaborative relationship between the British colonialists and the Karen of Burma has resulted in a legacy of Burman resentment which has been manifested in the systematic organized violence against the Karen since independence in 1948 (Moo Troo, 1981; Keyes, 2003; Micah Rolley, 2006a; Buadaeng, 2007; Gravers, 2007b; South, 2008).

2.6 Education

Central to an understanding of the identity of the Christian displaced Karen today is the connection with their understanding of the far distant and recent past in relation to the value of education and where that education has led. Cheesman (2002) put this simply:

... the implication is clear: the Karen had important knowledge, lost it, and suffered as a result (p. 210).

Opportunities for formal secular and theological education proliferated with the arrival of the missionaries. When the missionaries arrived with 'the lost golden book of knowledge', many Karen believed they were being afforded the opportunity to regain that lost knowledge and reverse their

oppressive situation. The emphasis on education dovetailed with the promises contained in the oral legends and the 'vision' of a better future.

The uptake of educational opportunities by the Karen occurred relatively quickly. It began with the language proficiency and translation skills provided by the missionaries. Within four years of Ko Tha Byu's conversion, American missionary Reverend Jonathan Wade had created a written script for the Sgaw Karen language based on Burmese letters. With the assistance of new Karen Christians such as Saw Quala, the entire Bible was translated by Reverend Mason into Sgaw Karen in 1853. Simultaneously, a written script was devised in Pwo Karen and the entire Bible in Pwo was printed in 1878. Readers, textbooks, and a Karen thesaurus and dictionary still in use in schools today were being printed and distributed from as early as 1837. In 1842, the Baptist Mission began publication in Sgaw Karen of a monthly magazine called "Hsa Tu Gaw" (The Morning Star) which continued without disruption except during World War II, until closed down by General Ne Win's military government in 1962.

The spread of evangelistic endeavours actively encouraged the development of schools and both Karen children and adults eagerly availed themselves of this education. The take-up of educational opportunities provided by the missionaries was motivated by other fundamental aspects of Karen identity and self esteem apart from religious conversion. For centuries, successive Mon, Rakhine and Burman Kingdoms had portrayed the Karen as an uncivilized and uneducated people, according them an inferior status as such. As the Karen across many areas of Burma became literate, they proved that it was the lack of opportunity rather than intelligence that resulted in their inferior status (Hovemyr, 1989, pp. 89, 98; Petry, 1993b, pp. 88-81; Cheesman, 2002, pp. 210-211). However, their access to education initially came at a high social cost. Britain did not control the whole of Burma until the beginning of 1886 and the areas still under the control of the Burman monarchy made it illegal for the Karen to attend these new schools established by the American Baptists, resulting in the brutal oppression of those who defied the King's edict. Many Karen were tortured and killed and church buildings that were also used as schools were razed. Even so, this oppression did not have the desired effect. Instead of fleeing their oppressors as in previous times, these Christian Karen banded together under their missionaries and allied themselves to the British, helping them achieve total control of Burma in 1886 (Mason, 1861, p. 88; Bunker, 1902, pp. 137-138; San Po, 1928, pp 2-3; Gravers, 1989, p. 22; Marshall, 1997, p. 298; Smith, 2003, p. 12).

A testament to the determination of the Karen to be educated in the face of opposition was revealed a century after the advent of the first Karen converts. In 1928, the British conducted a Census in Burma which revealed that twelve percent of Karen identified as Christian and that the Karen Christian churches were administering nearly one thousand schools and an equal number of churches (Richardson, 1928, pp. 25-39). These schools were the crucible for an emergent sense of Karen-ness that transcended local communities. Many educated Karen, particularly those who held roles outside of their villages in church organizations, education, and publishing, began to identify as Karen rather than just a member of their village (Keyes, 2003, p. 212). Reverends Mason and Jade's early motivation to create a written script and subsequent printed matter may primarily have been to teach the scattered tribal Karen the Word of God, but it became the vehicle by which the Karen "narration of the nation" (borrowing from Bhaba's concept, 1990) was written, transforming them from their far distant past into the modern era.

2.7 Karen Nationalism

Rajah (2002) states that nation states do not emerge from nothing; a structural process beginning with cultural histories, developing into an ethnic consciousness has to first occur (p. 517). It is widely agreed that the activity of the American Baptist missionaries in Burma was a significant part of those structural processes facilitating the development of Karen nationalism (Cady, 1958; Hovemyr, 1989; Petry, 1993a, b; Gravers, 1996, 2007a, b; Marshall, 1997; Cheesman, 2002; Keyes, 2003; Rogers, 2004; Buadaeng, 2007).

Through the creation of a written script, the Karen oral tradition was transformed into written form. Their history was being taught in the newly formed schools. An ethnic consciousness was born. Prior to the arrival of the missionaries, the village unit was the political and social centre of a Karen's life. However, as the numbers of educated Karen increased, many Karen began to mobilize outwith of their villages. A model of consociation was being developed which began trans-locally with the organization of the Christian Karen through the formation of the Karen Baptist Convention (KBC) in 1840. The KBC held regular conferences and training sessions in urban centres which were attended by Karen who had previously rarely left the immediate locale of their village. In this way, the Baptist

Church and education combined to “complete what may be called the federative capacity of the Karens, and make their national unity strong enough to resist all disintegrating forces” (Smeaton, 1887, p. 191).

This model of consociation was further developed with the creation of a new Karen word meaning ‘entire race’ – ‘dawkelu’ – by the Christian educated elite led by Dr T Thanbyah. To cement this concept of ‘dawkelu’, this group of people led by Dr T Thanbyah formed the Karen National Association (KNA) in 1881, five years before Britain had full control of Burma. Its principal aims were to promote Karen identity, leadership, education and writing and to bring about the social and economic advancement of the Karen people (Smith, 1991, p. 45; Cheesman, 2002, pp. 202-3; Rajah, 2002, p. 527). The agenda of a meeting held in late 1885 gives indication of the influence the KNA was to have on Karen nationalism through to the present day and its sense of loyalty to the British colonial government at the time:

1. To discuss measures for promoting a closer union among all the clans of Hillmen, in any matters pertaining to the Queen’s government in Burma, and their future welfare as a united people.
 2. Discussion of the attitude to be taken in regard to the rebellion now existing – let the Queen’s officers give us arms and ammunition, and we will clear all Lower Burma of Dacoits in six weeks, and ask nothing for our services.
 3. Discussion as to the matter of a Karen representation at the visit of the Viceroy, and at the Queen’s jubilee soon to be held in the chief town of the Province
- (cited in Bunker, 1902, p. 242).

Under the KNA banner, Karen were armed by the British and fought alongside them in the final Anglo-Burmese War and both World Wars. From the KNA, the Karen Women’s Organisation (KWO) and the Karen Youth Organisation (KYO) were formed and promoted Christian and educational forums. In 1923, the KNA lobbied for Karen to be elected to the newly formed Legislative Council whereby the British recognized partial home rule. Dr T Thanbyah was among the first Karen to be elected to this Council and at the time, the Karen were the only ethnic nationality besides the Burmans to be appointed (Cheesman, 2002, p. 204). In so doing, the colonial rulers defined and gave credence to a Karen identity in the modern national sense (Harriden, 2002, p. 98). In the latter half of the 1920s, KNA President, Dr San Po, began lobbying with members for the creation of a self governing Karen State under British rule; a goal maintained but never realized up until independence in 1948 (San Po, 1928; Buadaeng, 2007).

Though representing only a minority religion of the Karen people of Burma, it was these Christian Karen who occupied leadership positions, and who were instrumental in raising the awareness of the

‘dawkelu’, the new collective Karen identity in Burma. This position is maintained today, with the majority of leadership positions in Karen national organizations in Burma, along the Thai-Burma border and in third countries where Karen have resettled, being held by Karen who identify as Christian. In 1928, KNA member, Saw Tha Aye Gyi wrote the Karen National Anthem and the Karen flag was created in 1937. The National Anthem comprises of three verses. The first verse speaks of the love the Karen have for their people and the values they espouse. The second and third verses are distinctively Christian in their focus, giving praise to God for sending the white brother with the Golden Book to save them (second verse) and promising to be His disciples spreading His Good News to all the nations (third verse). The design of the Karen flag was decided after a keenly contested competition. The final flag chosen was a combination of the three finalists and is representative of the collective Karen identity that was being promoted by the KNA, combined with Karen values of honesty and purity attributed to the legendary founder of the Karen race Htaw Meh Pa (Aung Htai, 1985, pp. 190-198). The inaugural public raising of this flag was at the celebration of Karen New Year in 1937 to coincide with the State recognition of this event as a public holiday, a position still maintained today (Cady, 1958, pp. 42-3, 137-41; Renard, 1980, pp. 41-2; Petry, 1993b, pp. 87-88; Cheesman, 2002, p. 207; Buadaeng, 2007, p. 78). In so doing, the British colonial government effectively endorsed the Karen view of their history as recorded by Dr T Thanybah (1902, 1917) and Aung Hla (1932), identifying them as the first inhabitants of Burma (Buadaeng, 2007, p. 78). This has had a range of short and long term political consequences for the internal domestic politics of Burma.

The KNA evolved to the Karen Central Organisation (KCO) in 1942 and was active in discussions leading up to independence, acting in a vetoing role, maintaining that Burma was not ready for independence as a proper system of governance representative of all the ethnic nationalities of Burma was not in place. They sent a delegation on a goodwill mission to London in 1946 to voice their concerns about independence, requesting the British Government to grant a separate Karen State (also known as Kawthoolei) within the Union of Burma, a concept first proposed by Dr San Po in 1928. When these negotiations were unsuccessful, the KCO further evolved in 1947 under the leadership of Saw Ba U Gyi to form the Karen National Union (KNU) which continues to be the recognized government by many Karen today. At the same time, the KNU created the Karen National Defense Organisation (KNDO) as their armed security wing (KNU, 2006, p. 4; Gravers, 1999, p. 148; Cusano, 2001, p. 145; Keenan, 2008, pp. 4-6).

Leading up to independence, Burman nationalist leader, Aung San, who had prudently changed allegiances towards the end of World War Two, convened the Panlong Conference in February 1947. Though the newly formed KNU declined to participate in this conference, reportedly because of mistrust of the Burman leadership and their determination for the recognition of an independent Karen State, its outcome was a signed agreement of a federal, democratic Union of equal partners recognizing the identities of the various ethnic nationalities and their homelands (Buadaeng, 2007; Thawngmung, 2008). This Agreement was the basis of the inaugural Constitution for the soon to be independent country. However, the dream of a united country encapsulated in the spirit of the Panlong Agreement died with the assassination by Burman rivals of Aung San together with six others including his older brother, Karen leader, Mahn Ba Khaing and Shan leader, Sao San Htun just months later in July 1947 (KNU, 1998; Yawnghwe & Sakhong, 2004, p. 16; Wintle, 2007, pp. 146-147).

Upon independence in January 1948, the Burman dominated Government led by U Nu left the other ethnic nationalities without a voice. In peaceful demonstration held in February 1948, four hundred thousand Karen across Burma showed their solidarity for their homeland, Kawthoolei, to be officially recognized. They carried banners proclaiming:

1. Give the Karen State at once
2. Show Burman one Kyat and Karen one Kyat
3. We do not want communal strife
4. We do not want civil war (KNU, 2006, p. 7).

However, their entreaties and those of other ethnic nationalities were ignored by the ruling Burmese Government. When Karen security posts and villages were attacked by Government troops and large numbers of Karen killed and women brutalized in the area around the capital Rangoon in late 1948 and early 1949, the KNU believed it had no choice but to take up arms against the Government in defense of itself (Smith, 1991, pp. 77-86; Yawnghwe & Sakhong, 2004, p. 62). In addition to the KNDO, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) was mobilized and the civil war the Karen did not want began. More than sixty years on, they are still fighting that war. Burma's independence has both been born and maintained out of bloodshed and gross human rights violations (Smith, 1994, p. 25; Tharckabaw & Watson, 2003, p. 4; Keenan, 2008, pp. 14-15).

The war to achieve recognition of Kawthoolei, which was initially known as the Karen Revolution and now often referred to as the Karen struggle, began on 31 January 1949. At that time, the first President

of the KNU, Saw Ba U Gyi united the Karen people to this cause under the banner of the Four Principles he devised:

1. For us, surrender is out of the question.
2. Recognition of the Karen State must be completed.
3. We shall retain our arms
4. We shall determine our destiny (KNU, 2006, p. 8).

Harriden (2002) highlights that at this time

The KNU made the Karen nation a reality in space and time for the majority of Karens in Burma ... cultural and religious division became subordinate to the geo-political divisions that distinguished the Karen nation from the Burmese State (p. 113).

Over the ensuing sixty years, the KNU have suffered significant losses due in part, to the well organized external opposition of successive Burmese Governments, but also to internal faction fighting and at times, questionable leadership decision making (Harriden, 2002; Smith, 2003; Gravers, 2007b; South, 2008; Thawngmung, 2008; Keenan in press). The latter resulted in the defection from the KNU of a large amount of Buddhist rank and file soldiers in late 1994. This internal split in the ranks of the opposition occurred along religious affiliations. Led by Buddhist monk, U Thuzana, these soldiers first joined under the name of Democratic Karen Buddhist Organization (DKBO). Later, in January, 1995, with support from the SLORC (now SPDC), they formed a separate armed force, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA). This defection directly resulted in the loss of the KNU's political headquarters at Manerplaw shortly after and subsequent loss of control of much of Karen State.

It is generally agreed as detailed by the above writers that prolonged disenchantment among the Buddhist majority rank and file KNLA troops resulting from perceived religious and racial discrimination by the majority Sgaw Christian KNLA leadership was the predominant reason for the defection. A dispute over the erection of a white pagoda by U Thuzana on a military strategic hill overlooking the political headquarters at Manerplaw was a major catalyst in the final split. While this has been cited in support of the view of a religious divide spearheading the KNU/DKBA split (Gravers, 1999; South, 2007), Zoya Phan, daughter of KNU leader Padoh Mahn Sha who himself was an animist, gives a different version. Recognizing that religion was the one thing that might split the resistance apart, the SLORC (now SPDC) utilized this dispute to cause discord. She writes that her father believed that U Thuzana had been manipulated by the SLORC to promote religious division. U

Thuzana visited the front line soldiers urging them to build a large white pagoda at the place where they were fighting (earlier he had a vision that when fifty white pagodas were built, peace would come to the Karen). The refusal by KNLA commanders to give permission for this was a military rather than a religious decision, as stated in this conversation her father had with the family after his release from DKBO captivity in late 1994 (Padoh Mahn Sha was part of a KNU delegation that had gone to U Thuzana's monastery to attempt a reconciliation with the defected soldiers, but all were imprisoned and some killed by DKBO soldiers). Speaking of the building of a pagoda in the front line, Padoh Mahn Sha said:

'Obviously they [the soldiers] couldn't do that, as it would have given their position away. But the monk told the soldiers that this was religious prejudice, and proved that only Christians mattered to the Karen leaders' (Phan, 2009, p. 123).

Gravers (2007a) writes that U Thuzana distanced himself from the DKBA when "... it began to use violent tactics similar to the Burmese army in the name of the DKBO ... he withdrew to meditate and is said to have continued building pagodas" (p. 248).

As a proxy army of the SPDC, the DKBA now controls much of the border between Burma and Thailand and has committed a wide range of human rights abuses including forced labor, forced portering, child soldier recruitment and illicit taxation of villagers under their control as well as engaging in the illicit drug trade (HRW, 2005, KHRG, 2006, 2008; KWO, 2007, 2010a; Watchlist, 2009).

Further defections to the SPDC including KNLA Colonel Thuh Meh Heh's signing of a cease fire agreement without the authority of the KNU and forming the Karen Peace Force (KPF) in 1997, and in January 2007, when Major General Htin Maung left with a sizable proportion of the KNLA Seventh Brigade under the misnomer KNU/KNLA/Peace Council has further weakened the exiled government.

Notwithstanding, the narration of the Karen nation continues to be told. Despite being severely outnumbered with an army of just seven thousand troops against a formidable Tatmadaw of four hundred thousand troops, and a number of "cracks [that] have rent the conceptual unity" (Cheesman, 2002, p. 212) of the 'dawkelu' over recent years, the KNU continue to fight the war for recognition of the Karen homeland, Kawthoolei. Christian displaced Karen on both sides of the border continue to recite Saw Ba U Gyi's Four Principles at all national events, and all three verses of the National Anthem are sung at formal meetings.

While many displaced Karen of all three faiths, Christian, animist and Buddhist, maintain their allegiance to the KNU and commitment to the armed struggle for freedom of their homeland, there are a number of other political, quasi-political and political-religious Karen based national organizations with both differing and opposing views to the KNU that have operated in Burma before and since its creation (Buadaeng, 2007, p. 82). Today, these organizations receive little international attention, mainly because of the restrictive mainstream government policies in Burma, but also because the limited international attention given to the Karen is focused on the more visible border situation where the KNU support is strongest. South (2007) refers to the views and actions of these organizations as the “Union Karen” perspective. While also committed to asserting Karen national identity characterized by common history of origin, language and cultural aspects, these organizations seek an accommodation with the State to “create the social and political space within which community based organizations may operate” (South, 2007, p. 64). Together with writers such as Gravers (2007b) and Thawnghmung (2008), South stresses the need to acknowledge the legitimacy of these organizations alongside the KNU as representative of Karen national identity.

2.8 Displacement

The results of this war for the Karen living in Eastern Burma have been catastrophic. While the KNU enjoyed some initial victories against the early Burmese government armed forces and were able to protect their people living within Kawthoolei, the relentless campaign of genocide being carried out by the ruling military junta since 1962 has resulted in hundreds of thousands of Karen as well as other ethnic groups being tortured and/or killed, women and children raped and brutalized, many conscripted into forced slave labour, and villages, crops and livestock plundered and destroyed in a scorched earth policy.

As a result, it is estimated that over two million people of many of the ethnic groups are internally displaced in their own country with a similar number living and working illegally in bordering countries. A large proportion of these people are Karen. Further, more than two hundred thousand Karen and their related ethnic group, the Karenni, have chosen the relative safety, though without freedom, of the nine displaced persons’ camps on the Thai side of the Thai-Burma border (Smith, 2003; Keenan, 2008; South, 2008; Thai Burma Border Consortium (TBBC), 2009).

The Royal Thai Government (RTG) is not a signatory to the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention so the people displaced in these camps are regarded as illegal aliens by the Royal Thai Government and while being granted temporary protection in the camps, are not allowed outside the camps. The situation inside Burma has consistently worsened over the past five decades and shows no signs of improvement. This has created a 'warehousing' of the displaced persons who live in these camps. They cannot join Thai society and they cannot return to their own land. They are simply 'warehoused' waiting for something to change (Brees, 2008, p. 380).

The phenomenon that has come to be known as 'warehousing' is defined as,

... the practice of keeping refugees in protracted situations of restricted mobility, enforced idleness, and dependency – their lives on indefinite hold – in violation of their basic rights under the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention (Smith, 2004b, p. 38).

Globally, in countries as diverse as Australia, Kenya, Thailand and Uruguay, warehousing of refugees has resulted in an antithesis of the rights afforded in the 1951 Refugee Convention including the right to work, the right to a livelihood and the right of freedom of movement. In recent decades, this has led to increased international dialogue in the area of refugee law through the transnational advocacy of non-governmental organizations (NGO's) to address this injustice (Albert, 2007; Cholewinski, Perruchoud & MacDonald, 2007, p. 173). Even so, with the number of refugees and displaced persons increasing globally, it is unlikely that this phenomenon of warehousing will be resolved in the near future.

In the camps, under the aegis of the UNHCR and with the assistance of international NGOs, the displaced Karen have set up infrastructure of camp governance, sanitation and water supply, schools and training facilities, and religious and health centres. For many displaced Karen, this infrastructure has provided a protective buffer enabling them to adapt positively to their changed environment. However, the negative impact of warehousing is evidenced in the difficulties experienced by many others. Losses at family and social structural levels, situational instability, loss of personal control and the life reversals resulting from uprooting and forced migration have been linked to increased levels of drug and alcohol abuse and sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) in the camps (Walter, 2001; Eh Doh Wah & O'Brien, 2006; Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), 2009a).

Both the RTG and the displaced Karen themselves have always viewed the camps as a temporary situation – a sojourn in their journey to achieving freedom in their own land of Kawthoolei. However

as the years have turned into decades, with repatriation to Kawthoolei becoming less likely, the UNHCR began to seek alternative durable solutions in the form of resettlement to third countries.

2.9 Resettlement

According to the UNHCR, there are three durable solutions for refugees – repatriation, integration and resettlement. (These will be discussed in more detail in 3.4.3.2).

In the situation of the displaced Karen staying in the camps in Thailand, the first two solutions are unviable, with the intransigence of the Burmese military junta and the refusal of the RTG to permit the displaced Karen to participate legally in any activity in Thailand. This has left the displaced Karen in a state of liminality – unable to move forward or backwards. Hence, the third solution of resettlement remains. Prior to 2006, very limited opportunity to resettle in a third country existed for those living in the camps, with only a few families being successful under family reunification schemes. However, in the early 2000s, the UNHCR began negotiations with governments of a number of Western countries to provide a way for large numbers of displaced Karen in the camps to migrate permanently to third countries. With the favorable outcome of these negotiations, resettlement is now a major policy initiative of the UNHCR. The first displaced Karen left the camps under this scheme for third countries including USA, Canada, Sweden, Norway and Australia in 2006 and since that time, more than forty thousand have sought a different future in countries far removed from their beloved Kawthoolei to which they had waited so many years to return. Many more are expected to leave in the coming years (McKinsey, 2006; Karen Refugee Committee (KRC) 2009 a, b; UNHCR, 2009a).

The Karen diaspora, begun in their forced migration from their homeland to adjacent Thailand, is now extending to the West. This policy has had dynamic implications on both those who have chosen to go and those who have chosen to remain and created dilemmas for those unable to decide. In a 2009 UNHCR registration check in Mae La Camp, one of my gatekeepers was formally asked by the Camp Leader if he was staying or going. He replied, (translated) “I don’t want to stay and I don’t want to go, I just want to eat rice”. Thra William was just one of the forty-three thousand registered displaced people in Mae La Camp faced with the dilemma of choosing whether to remain or leave. At the time, Thra William was making the point that while he does not want to remain in the camp, he also does not want to leave for the third country. Registration for him simply meant he would have access to the

food rations provided by the TBBC. He maintains a hope that he will return to his own land, and in the meantime, has decided to stay and continue in his role as a teacher.

Overwhelmingly, the decision to resettle is the expectation that there will be opportunity for higher education for themselves and their children. Secondary motivations are freedom, safety and the opportunity to become self-reliant (Earth Rights School–Burma, 2007, p. 195; Kanska, 2008, p. 19). The decision to remain largely is related to obligations to family and community as well as maintaining the hope of return to their homeland. However, that is not to say that those who leave have relinquished their hope of returning to their homeland or in the cause that led to their displacement in the first place. It is argued that new diasporas have the capacity to impact on politics in the country of origin through lobbying and mobilization of resources in their host country (Koslowski, 2004; Newlands, 2004; Vertovec, 2005). Further, a characteristic of diaspora involves both the hope to return and the hope of new beginnings (Hinnells, 2005, p. 23).

2.10 Oppression

Throughout Karen history to the modern day, via oral tradition and written records, “oppression is seen as the norm in word and in deed” (Cheesman, 2002, p. 208). The response to this oppression has varied according to the situation. It has involved both fight and flight. When conditions seemed favourable, Karen have fought against their various oppressors – the Mon, Rakhine, Burman and Japanese – by allying themselves to the Siamese (1600s-1700s), the Mon (1700s), the British (1800s-1900s) and in their own right in the current war that began in 1949. Sometimes concurrently, sometimes alternately, they have fled their oppressors; there have been forced migrations to the Eastern mountains and jungles of Burma and exoduses at differing times in history to Thailand and more recently, to third countries.

The response has also involved adaptation. The Karen fleeing from the lowlands to the mountains millennia ago learnt to adapt to a different style of farming. Under British rule, they adapted to a Western style of politics to lobby for rights for themselves as a fledging nation. In the current displacement of more than one million of its citizens, the Karen are adapting to changed environments within Burma, across the border into Thailand and further into third countries. In all of these various

adaptations, the common denominator is that they have maintained their sense of Karen-ness with their distinctive cultural and national attributes.

2.11 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a brief historical analysis of the Christian Karen of Burma. Cusano (2001) writes that “nothing is more contentious than a fact” and proceeds to say that “the history of Burma is a battleground of facts, opinions and interpretations” (p. 144). History from the colonial to the present time indeed shows that these “facts, opinions and interpretations” have and still are causing division amongst the Karen.

The advent of Christianity divided whole communities along social and political lines. In those early years, there were instances of new converts being excommunicated from their family and villages and even armed conflict between the new believers and traditional animist and Buddhist Karen who perceived this new religion as a threat to their beliefs and customs (South, 2008, p. 15). The Burman monarchy labeled the new converts as “kalas” (foreigners), who were further extricated from the wider Burmese community and actively persecuted (Bigandet, 1887, p. 4 cited in Gravers, 2007a, p. 237). In this way, early Karen identity came to be defined in ethno-religious terms distinguishing the Christian Karen from Buddhist Burmans including those Karen (mostly Pwo) who ascribed to a Burman identity (Harriden, 2002, p. 95). While the 1881 KNA’s charter and subsequent 1947 KNU charter clearly includes all Karen regardless of sub-group or religion in its promotion of a united Karen cultural and nationalistic identity, it is recognized that leadership of these organizations has traditionally been Sgaw Christian and this has been cited as one reason for the 1995 KNU and DKBA schism.

Further, the impact of the coalescence of British colonial rule and the American missionary movement in relation to the formation of Karen identity cannot be understated. With the support of those early American missionaries, the British took advantage of centuries old antagonistic divisions between the Burmans and Karen to effect their annexation of Burma in the 1800s. While the missionaries’ motive was clearly to diminish the influence of the perceived pagan animist and Buddhist religions, the British motive was clearly territorial (Gravers, 2007a; Gray, Yellow Bird & Coates, 2008; South, 2008). Together they combined to create boundaries, both symbolic and political, which remained evident until Burma independence in 1948 with “the minority within a minority” (as Harriden 2002, p. 96

describes the Christian Karen) benefiting educationally, socially and politically, yet also being oppressed for their loyalty to the Crown and beliefs as occurred during World War II. Since that time, these boundaries have been deconstructed and reconstructed in many ways influencing Karen ethnics and identity to the present day (Gravers, 1996). There is no doubt that the Karen, especially the Christian Karen, benefited under colonial rule. It also cannot be denied that they were active participants in the legitimization of that rule which restructured the landscape of Burma and set the stage for violent nationalist struggles that continue to the present day (Midgley, 2008, p. 44).

Notwithstanding these contentions, in this chapter, I have sought to identify the historical events relating to the Christian displaced Karen of Burma, as commonly identified in the literature. Such common ground includes Karen cultural values encapsulated in their ancient oral legends and passed down from generation to generation; education borne out of their acceptance of Christianity and leading to nationalism; and oppression resulting from their ancient orphan status and loss of their golden book of knowledge and, more recently, from their collaboration with the British during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and refusal to surrender to the rule of the Burmese military junta. These circumstances have combined to inform the identity of the Christian displaced Karen today and the small proportion of them who have resettled in third countries. With this foundation laid, the following chapter will explore the key constructs that inform this research.

CHAPTER THREE

KEY THEORETICAL CONCEPTS

3.1 Introduction

Theories have their own ways of travelling across historical periods and culturo-political contexts. Theoretical applicability and/or re-formulations are processes of understanding oneself and others. Every time there is an encounter, there are negotiations; and theories come to aid those in the engagement (Tangseefa, 2003, p. 20).

This chapter reviews the literature relating to the four constructs that guided this research; identity, organized violence, displacement and resettlement. Identity is the central construct on which the research is based, and as such, overlays the other three. Organized violence, displacement and resettlement are seen as sequential contextual circumstances (organized violence gives rise to displacement, which precedes resettlement) faced by the Christian Karen who participated in this research; these are the contexts within which participants' understanding of identity have developed and must be viewed. Theory relating to identity is first explored, followed by discussion of the other three constructs, organized violence, displacement and resettlement. Within each of these four constructs, a context specific review of how they have impacted on the lives of the Karen people of Burma will be explored with a specific focus on those displaced Karen who profess the Christian faith.

3.2 Identity

Identity re-membered in community can be more than the sum of the past's fragmented and violent experiences (Strassberg, 1999).

This research recognizes the centrality of identity to gaining an understanding of the lives of the Christian displaced Karen of Burma. The ethnicity of the Karen is characterized by the collective nature of their society (McKinnon, 2003). Characteristics of identity within collectivist societies include the sharing of resources, interdependence of relations among group members and a feeling of involvement in one another's lives (Erez & Earley, 1993, pp. 77-78). This section will first review contemporary theories of identity. Secondly, these theories are related to the situation of the Christian

displaced Karen of Burma with a recognition that they have a wider application to the total displaced Karen population including those of Buddhist and animist faiths.

3.2.1 Contemporary Theories of Identity

In this first section relating to the construct of identity, two related theories will be explored. Firstly, social identity theory will explore identity from a psychosocial perspective, followed by intersectionality identity theory which explores identity from a socio-political perspective. Together, they form a comprehensive framework from which to understand the complexities of the identity construct.

3.2.1.1 Social Identity Theory

A beginning place for this review is Tajfel's (1972) social identity theory, which posits that a person has not one 'personal self', but rather several selves that correspond to widening circles of group membership. Different social contexts may trigger an individual to think, feel and act on the basis of his personal, family or national 'level of self' (Tajfel, 1981; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell, 1987; Hogg, 1996). Turner (1982, 1987, 1999) built on Tajfel's (1972) work when he developed social categorisation theory which posits that people define themselves in terms of membership in particular social categories. Turner's (1999) research in relation to this concludes that

... when social identity becomes relatively more salient than personal identity, people see themselves less as differing individual persons and more as the similar, prototypical representatives of their ingroup category (p. 11).

Further, self categorization theory states that when people perceive their identity in terms of "we and us" as opposed to "I and me", their subjective experience and identity occur in relation to the wider group to which they belong and cannot be reduced to a concept of personal identity (Turner, 1999, p. 12). Druckman (1994) supports the viewpoints of Tajfel (1972) and Turner (1982) and adds that membership of an ethnic group becomes part of the individual's self-identity and critical to a sense of self worth (p. 49).

Hall (1999) expands on these views by incorporating Durkheim's sociology and Erikson's psychology of identity to conclude that collective and individual identity are co-constituted; that is, an individual's identity acquires social significance only with reference to the identities of others. This occurs through

the process of individuals being socialized into their society whereby they form cognitive and emotional attachments to it and incorporate its features and norms into their identity. Further, individuals form and reform identity commitments from experiences resulting from forces both within and external to domestic society (p. 35-6).

Social identity theory as posited by Tajfel (1978) also states that it is

... an intervening causal mechanism in situations of objective social change observed, anticipated, feared, desired or prepared by the individuals involved (p. 86).

In this way, one's social identity "is a guide to action" (Tajfel, 1972, p. 298). The tenets of social identity and social categorization theories have consistently demonstrated that individual perception, evaluation and behavior are determined by a variety of contextual features, including social mores and norms of the group to which they belong (Verkuyten, 2005, p. 221). Verkuyten (2005) developed a model for understanding ethnic identity based on the tenets of Tajfel's (1972) and Turner's (1982) identity theories. This model posits that ethnic identity comprises four dimensions of being, feeling, doing and knowing. 'Being' relates to an individual's origins - their ethnicity, their family and homeland. 'Feeling' relates to the importance and commitment individuals place on their origins. 'Doing' relates to an individual's socialization within his/her group and participation in group activities. Finally, 'knowing' relates to an individual's understanding of group beliefs and cultural mores and norms (p. 118).

Stet and Burke's identity control theory (2005) dovetails Verkuyten's ethnic identity model and further supports the tenets of Tajfel's social identity theory and Turner's social categorization theory. This theory posits that identity is a set of meanings that define who a person is, both in terms of the group to which they belong and their personal attributes. These meanings serve as a standard for assessing self-relevant meanings in the various situations individuals experience through their lifetime (p. 45).

3.2.1.2 Identity and Intersectionality

Expanding on the concepts of social identity and social categorization theories is intersectionality theory. This theory arose out of feminist research whereby it was recognized that people can belong to multiple categories simultaneously and that both individual and group identity occurs at the place where these categories intersect (Crenshaw, 1991; McCall, 2005). While the theory was

conceptualized in the 1990s, its tenets can be traced back to the feminist theories of the 1970s which focused on the intersectionality of socio-cultural power orders in areas such as feminism and socialism, post-colonial feminism and queer feminism (Knudsen, 2006, p. 62). Contemporaneously, the theory is about how all these markers of identity intersect to produce different experiences of all aspects of marginalization, oppression and inequality including categories of race, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexuality and class (McCall, 2005; Ferree, 2010).

By definition, intersectionality theory aims to “catch the relationship between socio-cultural categories and identities”, thus enabling an analysis of how both “social and cultural categories intertwine” (Knudsen, 2006, p. 61). This analysis has the capacity to distinguish amongst both self-ascribed and attributed identity, the categories in which identity occurs as well as the processes and systems that arise out of these as seen in the following quote:

Despite differences in specifics, any perspective is today called intersectional if it takes multiple relations of inequality as the norm, sees them as processes that shape each other, and considers how they interactively define the identities and experiences – and thus analytic standpoint – of individuals and groups (Ferree, 2010, p. 428).

Two aspects of intersectionality theory are locational and relational intersectionality. Whereas the emphasis of the first aspect is on identity categories and the social positions found when multiple forms of subordination co-occur, the latter aspect has as its beginning point the struggles and conflicts that impact on the identity categories and social positions of those affected, both institutionally and culturally (Glenn, 1999; Ferree, 2010, pp. 428-429). Locational intersectionality is seen to be inclusive as it enables a context contingent analysis along both contemporary and historical axes (Hulko, 2009, p. 82). By placing the emphasis on struggles and conflicts affecting individuals and groups, relational intersectionality highlights the multidimensional organization of power and privilege that structure societies (Glenn, 1999).

Both aspects have their critics. Hancock (2007) believes that locational intersectionality potentially makes cultures appear too static, homogenous and well bounded while Davis (2008) believes that relational intersectionality risks understating the significance of historically institutional collective identities as standpoints for critical view of inequalities. Even so, Ferree (2010, p. 430) believes that both aspects complement each other, and when combined together, provide a valid platform for critical analysis of identity.

The Taylorian perspective of the politics of identity recognition adds to the understanding of intersectionality theory. According to Taylor (1992), identity of individuals and groups is shaped by the recognition, non-recognition or mis-recognition by others within a society. He contends that “due recognition” of individuals and groups in society is “a vital human need” engendered in the concept of respect; while non-recognition or mis-recognition are “form[s] of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being” (pp. 25-26).

In recognition of the diversity that comprises any particular society, Taylor advocates for the adoption of the politics of equal recognition comprising of the dual political concepts of universalism and difference. The politics of universalism denotes the equal dignity of all citizens ensuring equality of rights and entitlements for all living within the society, while at the same time, the politics of difference recognizes the unique identity of the individuals and/or groups that make up the society (Taylor, 1992, pp. 37-39). Implementation of the politics of universalism by governments and citizens within society affirms the multi-identity societal context and recognizes that individual cultural identities have the ability to contribute to the enrichment and progress of the society in which they cohabit (Kaiser, 2001, p. 94).

3.2.2 Contextualizing Identity Theory in the Situation of the Christian Displaced Karen Today

These theories relating to identity assist in understanding the position of the Christian displaced Karen today, both within and without the borders of Burma. As part of the wider displaced Karen community of both Buddhist and animist faiths, they project their ethnic identity both as a nationality within the larger Union of Burma and as a community within their living situations, whether this be in a village, internally displaced persons’ (IDP) hide site, displaced persons’ camp or town or city in a third country.

Nationally, they have a democratically elected Government, the KNU; a Constitution; governmental departments, for example, defense, justice, labour, health, finance, welfare and education; and a clear concept of a State border. This projection is in direct opposition with the State construct of their being insurgents, an ethnic minority to be disposed of for the good of the whole. In so doing, the dominant military junta is intentionally practicing the malignant politics of mis-recognition (Taylor, 1992);

attempting to deconstruct, to reduce the worth of, the Karen's sense of collective identity as a nationality. Balibar (1995) relates to this concept when she states:

The very existence of minorities, together with their more or less implied inferior status, was a state construct, a strict correlate of the nation-form (p. 53).

However, this has not achieved the intended effect as indicated by many historians and political writers who make reference to the literature produced by the Karen themselves for over one hundred years that shows that they do not perceive themselves as an ethnic minority at all, but rather a nationality (Cady, 1958; Petry, 1993 a, b; Smith, 1995, p. 237; MacDonald, 1999; Yawngnawe, 2001; Gravers, 2007b; South, 2008). The characteristics of a nation defined by Smith (1994), as being

1. the growth of myths and memories of common ancestry and history of the cultural unit of population
2. the formation of a shared public culture based on an indigenous resource (language, religion, etc)
3. the delimitation of compact historic territory, or homeland
4. the unification of local economic units into a single socio-economic unit based on a single culture and homeland, and
5. the growth of common codes and institutions of a single legal order, with common rights and duties for all members (p. 381),

give credence to the Karen claim of being a nation and the national identity inherent with that claim. It is now more than sixty years since leaders of the KNU took up arms against the Burmese Government in their quest for recognition of their homeland Kawthoolei within the Union of Burma. The military force of the KNU has suffered serious military setbacks in recent years, but their pro-democratic struggle shows no sign of exhaustion. In the 2008 Karen Revolution Day KNU speech, the General Secretary of the KNU, Padoh Mahn Sha who was assassinated just two weeks later, quoted the Four Principles of Saw Ba U Gyi (p. 21) and said:

This is a revolution for the Karen people to free themselves from being enslaved. So all people of Karen nationality should take part in it (Yazar, 2008).

On the following Karen Revolution Day in 2009, Padoh Mahn Sha's sons and daughters repeated their father's speech from the year before and again urged all people of Karen nationality to continue the Revolution to fulfill Saw Ba U Gyi's Four Principles for the Karen people.

Many displaced Karen of all faiths remain resolute in this aim. Individually, they are farmers, pastors, monks, academics, teachers, military personnel, health workers, mothers, fathers, sons and daughters,

etcetera. A personal identity is attached to these roles. However, collectively, they share the identity as a nation of people oppressed, and it is the meaning attached to this shared identity (Stets & Burke, 2005) that has led many to be killed, tortured, maimed and displaced. Their individual roles are subservient to the collective, and are the drive that enables the struggle to continue evidencing all four elements of Verkuytan's (2005) ethnic identity theory.

Tajfel (1978) refers to actions for social change as "cognitive alternatives" whereby groups with a belief structure of social change will challenge structural exclusion within a collective strategy.

Group members can envisage a future in which they are no longer subordinated, which renders their present situation contingent or insecure and which makes action for change a realistic option (cited in Reicher, 1996, p. 323).

The collectivist nature of Karen society also means that they have a strong sense of community and that their individual identity is defined in relation to their group membership within their community (Keyes, 1979; Marshall, 1997). In this way, Turner's (1982, 1987, 1999) social categorization theory gains relevance in their situation. Numerous writers have written of how the collective nature of Karen culture has enabled the displaced Karen to maintain their sense of identity within their community despite the hardships they have had to endure (Falla, 1991; Petry, 1993a; Jorgensen, 1997; MacDonald, 1999; McKinnon, 2003; Rogers, 2004; Gravers, 2007b; Dunford, 2008; Kanska, 2008; Panter, 2008).

This is evident in the Karen displaced persons' camps along the Thai-Burma border where camp committees are democratically elected to represent the camp inhabitants as a whole to their Thai protectors. Language and dress are maintained, education and health care provided, festivals celebrated, religious practices continued. Even though some have lived in the camps for more than three decades, very few are fluent in the protectorate language Thai. Falla (1991) provides an explanation of this, which further supports Hall's (1999) theory of collective identity:

As with exile anywhere, to learn the language of the country of exile is an admission that you are going to stay there, that you are not going home, you have lost whatever war it was that caused you to be there (p. 236).

Hence, the main language medium of schools in the camps is Sgaw Karen, though Thai, English and Burmese are also taught. Most of the Christian run organizations within the camps operate on Burmese time which is half an hour behind Thai time. These actions speak definitively of their strong sense of national and community identity with the vision of returning to their homeland.

For those who have resettled in third countries, reports are being received that wherever the Karen are living, the Christian Karen have formed community processes that are replicating the organizational structure within the displaced camps from which they have come, facilitating the maintenance of community identity for all the resettled Karen, both Christian and non-Christian in those places (Dunford, 2008; Kanska, 2008).

The complementary concepts of locational and relational intersectionality (Ferree, 2010) enable further analysis of the Christian displaced Karen situation today. In relation to locational intersectionality, an understanding of their identity categories within a historical perspective is gained. These categories include being displaced, poor, dependent and belonging to a minority religion. The historical concept of the Karen orphan status borne out of their ancient oral legends is related to their contemporary situation. Further, an understanding of the impact of their reversal of fates from being a privileged group within the colonial administration of Burma during the mid 1800s to the mid 1900s to the marginalized state they face today is gained.

As a multiply marginalized group, the relational aspect of intersectionality provides an understanding of the displaced Karen's sixty year struggle to gain freedom and peace in their land and the processes and systems that have contributed to this struggle. Significant change has occurred in Burma since independence in 1948 that has negatively impacted on every aspect of the displaced Karen lives.

Hulko (2009) states that the lived experience of groups who are multiply marginalized have epistemic privilege; that is, the knowledge derived from their lived experience of oppression. She contends that:

... epistemic privilege ... enables those who are multiply marginalized to understand and implement intersectional ways of thinking better and to appreciate the structure and functions of interlocking oppressions more fully (p. 49).

The maintenance of their culture and social positions in both the camps and in third countries to which some have resettled gives credence to Hulko's contention.

In Cheesman's (2002) study of the Karen, he recognized the complexity of the dynamics of Karen identity, stating that it was deserving of specific research focusing on the interrelationship of identity and their current situation (p. 219). Contextually, the constructs of organized violence, displacement

and resettlement are inherent in the current situation of the displaced Karen of Burma. Each of these constructs is now discussed.

3.3 Organized Violence

Within a system which denies the existence of basic human rights, fear tends to be the order of the day. Fear of imprisonment, fear of torture, fear of death, fear of losing friends, family, property or means of livelihood, fear of poverty, fear of isolation, fear of failure. A most insidious form of fear is that which masquerades as common sense or even wisdom, condemning as foolish, reckless, insignificant or futile the small, daily acts of courage which help to preserve man's self-respect and inherent human dignity. It is not easy for a people conditioned by fear under the iron rule of the principle that might is right to free themselves from the enervating miasma of fear. Yet even under the most crushing state machinery, courage rises up again and again, for fear is not the natural state of civilized man (Aung San Suu Kyi, 1999, p. 315).

This quote by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi poignantly contextualizes organized violence in the sphere of what Kaldor (2007) refers to as “new wars”. This section will explore this construct of organized violence. Firstly, definitions and a typology of organized violence will be detailed. Secondly, the causes of organized violence will be explored, followed by a review of the research concerning the social and psychological impact of organized violence. The section concludes with an overview of organized violence specific to Burma.

Organized violence simply defined is violence which has a political motive (Burnett & Peel, 2001, p. 606). The Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum (2009) provides a more comprehensive definition of organized violence as:

... the inter-human infliction of significant avoidable pain and suffering by an organized group according to a declared or implied strategy and/or system of ideas and attitudes. It comprises any violent action which is unacceptable by general human standards, and relates to the victims' mental and physical well-being (p. 19).

The typology of organized violence may include an armed challenge to legitimate state authority, political, secessionist, and/or ethnic civil war, and genocide with a large loss of human life (Cotley, 1994, p. 85). It involves physical and psychological torture and deprivation (Catholic Commission for

Peace and Justice, 2008). In this way, organized violence is directly linked with structural violence defined by Farmer (2005) as:

A host of offensives against human dignity: extreme and relative poverty, social inequalities and the more spectacular forms of violence that are incontestably human rights abuses (p. 8).

A reasonably modern construct, organized violence is a consequence of colonialism. Armed conflict, either inter or intra state is typified as organized violence. Over ninety percent of violent armed conflicts classified as wars in 2001 were wars within a state that were politically motivated (Cronberg, 2003). Between 1945 and 1999, it is recorded that there were one hundred and twenty-seven such wars being waged within a state, resulting in a conservative sixteen million fatalities (Fearon & Laitin, 2003, p. 78).

Globally, in 2008, there were thirty-eight internalized armed conflicts resulting in immense social and economic devastation (Piachaud, 2008; Uppsala Conflict Data Program, 2009). In common, these armed conflicts have been protracted in their duration and linked to competition for power and resources (Toole, 2007, p. 212). Duffield (1994) concludes that this type of organized violence is “a dirty form of war that results in a staggering estimate of ninety-five percent non-combatant casualties” (p. 38).

From a socio-political viewpoint, writers such as Richmond (2002a, p. 40) and Otunnu (2002, p. 2), cite the language adopted by the European Commission when they refer to organized violence as a form of social exclusion, in that, human rights are denied to a specific category of persons within a country. In this way, sovereign powers strive for political legitimacy by justifying organized violence as a means to protect the greater good of the country and ultimately promote peace as this quote by Otunnu (2002) highlights,

... effective and dehumanizing propaganda [is used] to present the ‘other’ as subhuman, evil and a threat to the survival and prosperity of society ... in such cases, genocide, including mass rapes and ethnic cleansing is disguised as a normal response to extraordinary crises and a patriotic duty (pp. 3-4).

Kaldor (2007) agrees with Otunnu (2002) that these new wars have the capacity to result in population expulsion and genocide, adding that the main aim of sovereign powers engaging in this type of organized violence is to create an unfavourable environment for all those they cannot control (pp. 81,

105). The huge increase in this type of organized violence in the past half century is reflected in several United Nations reports that strongly censure the activities of these sovereign powers as highlighted in a report by Cohen and Deng (1998) which emphasized that “sovereignty cannot be used as justification for the mistreatment of its civilians” (pp. 275-276).

3.3.1 Causes of Organized Violence

The causes of organized violence are both complex and contested within the research literature. However, many researchers agree that the current prevalence of organized violence in the world today has its roots in the decolonialization of many countries post World War II (Horowitz, 2001; Sambanis, 2001; Otunnu, 2002; Collier, Elliott, Hegre, Hoeffler, Reynal-Querol & Sambanis, 2003; Fearon & Laitin, 2003; Ghobarch, Huth & Russett, 2003; Smith, 2004; Skaperdas, 2009). According to Fearon and Laitin (2003),

Decolonialization gave birth to a large number of financially, bureaucratically and military weak states. These states have been at risk of civil violence and ethnic nationalism for the whole period (p. 88).

Two views of the main causes of intrastate organized violence exist. The first holds that pluralist societies face a host of pathologies that heighten the risk of intrastate armed conflict (Horowitz, 2001; Sambanis, 2001; Otunnu, 2002; Ghobarch et al, 2003; Kaldor 2007), while the second view regards economic variables as the main risk (Fearon & Laitin, 2003; Skaperdas, 2009). Proponents of the first view agree that there is a positive association between ethnic heterogeneity including historically held grievances between ethnic groups within a country and the onset of intrastate organized violence. However, this view is disputed by proponents of the second view who state that ethnic heterogeneity actually lends itself to political stability within a country.

Smith (2004a) acknowledges the multiplicity of factors involved in intrastate organized violence stating that “civil war does not have a distinct causal logic” (p. 7). With this in mind, he developed a model based on Dressler’s (1994) earlier research into this area to analyze the cause of organized violence within a country. In summary, this model consists of four parts. Firstly, background causes need to be explored from a social, economic and political viewpoint. Secondly, an exploration of the mobilization strategies of the key political actors needs to be undertaken to determine their objectives and how they plan to meet them. Thirdly, triggers need to be identified as they affect both the timing of the onset of

the violence and action taken. Finally, catalysts need to be taken into account as they affect the intensity and the duration of the organized violence (p. 8). The logic of this model will be revisited in 3.3.3 when an overview of organized violence in Burma today will be provided.

While researchers dispute the main causes of organized violence, they all agree that the strategies employed by State actors in the perpetration of such violence are aimed at social and psychological dislocation of those at whom the violence is aimed. This is highlighted by the following research findings:

... organized violence is aimed at severing the connections between people, controlling their ways of being together and relating to each other, destroying the possibility of free dialogue and thought (Blackwell, 1993, p. 2).

Systemic torture is designed to break the spirit of an individual, but in many countries, the intention is also to intimidate a minority or dissident group or even an entire population (Burnett & Peel, 2001, p. 606).

Recognizing that a person's sense of self is rooted in his or her relationships with others, namely family, networks and communities (Blackwell, 1993, p.2), those affected by organized violence are faced with the challenge of how to maintain those relationships as a means of coping and surviving the situation.

3.3.2 Armed Conflict as Response to Organized Violence

Prior to the discussion of organised violence in Burma, and the Karen response to that violence, it is necessary to digress with a brief discussion of the notion of "just war" as a justification for retaliation against organised violence. This is particularly so in the Christian Karen context given the paradox inherent in a devoutly Christian group whose faith is based on a Gospel promoting peace (for example, Gospel of Matthew 5:9; Gospel of John 14:27) taking up arms. This theory is explored by means of understanding and explanation rather than justification.

A number of different explanations have been put forward to explain intra state organized violence, referred to as 'new wars' by Kaldor (2007). These wars have their roots in diverse contexts and processes associated with post World War II decolonization. The principles of just war tradition/theory are one explanation for the use of military force over the past sixty years by the KNU whose leadership have predominantly identified as Christian. When the response to organized violence is in the form of

counter-attack, then morally and ethically, the principles of just war tradition/theory help to reconcile deep theological and political conflicts that arise between armed threats from external secular authorities and internal sacred beliefs and tenets of upholding peace and non-violence to all. As the writer of the Old Testament book Ecclesiastes wrote, “There is a time for war and a time for peace” (Ecclesiastes 3:8b)

Originally developed by moral theologian St Augustine in the fourth century and articulated by St Thomas Aquinas in the fourteenth century, the tenets of just war theory are still considered valid in contemporary socio-political and Christian ethical literature because they provide a way in determining the justness of embarking on armed conflict as a response to armed threat or action against a national group (Boyle, 2003; Bell, 2005; Charles, 2005; Baer & Caprizzi, 2006).

“Just War” theory addresses the morality of armed force in two parts; when it is right to resort to armed force (*jus ad bellum*), and what is acceptable in using such force (*jus in bello*). In more recent years, a third category, *jus post bellum*, has been added, which governs the justice of war termination and peace agreements, as well as the prosecution of war criminals (Ramsey, 1961; Charles, 2005). In this way, just war tradition is “... more than a checklist of criteria. It is a way of living justly in an unjust situation” (Bell, 2005, p. 26). The main principles of the three categories of just war theory are now discussed.

The principles of *jus ad bellum* are three fold; proper authority, just cause and right intent (Boyle, 2003, pp. 704-710).

In terms of proper authority, a war is only seen as just as long as the head of a polity can command the waging of a war to ensure the protection of the people under their authority. In addition, before embarking on armed conflict the cause must be considered a just one. The reason for going to war needs to be just such as “a nation state that refuses to amend outrages or restore what has been seized injuriously” (Augustine, 1920, cited in Boyle, 2003, p. 708). In contemporary times, this has been interpreted to a defensive understanding as explained by Boyle, *op cit*, “You are out of line in attacking and we are within our rights in defending” (p. 709). The third principle involved the idea that a group must possess the right intention to take up arms. A just war produces concrete goals which satisfy the just cause. Principal among these goals is that a just war must have a probability of success, aim for peace and only be engaged in when all other avenues for peace have been exhausted.

The principles of *jus in bello* direct the actions in war, specifically in relation to discrimination and proportionality. In terms of discrimination, the act of war must only be directed against enemy combatants and not involve innocent civilians caught in circumstances they did not create. This is a fairly controversial aspect of just war theory, in that human responses to armed conflict often occur without any forethought or time for critical reflection on the action proposed. The second feature, proportionality, necessitates that strategies employed in war must aim to achieve the right intention proportional to the wrong perpetrated with as limited damage to civilians and environment as possible (Boyle, 2003; Bell, 2005; Baer & Caprizzi, 2006).

Finally, the same principles of *jus ad bellum* apply to *jus post bellum*. In ending an armed conflict, principles of proper authority, just cause and right intention must be adhered to, thus increasing the probability of a lasting peace and reconciliation between all polities involved (Boyle, 2003).

3.3.3 Organized Violence in Burma

Chapter Two provided an extensive historical analysis of the Christian displaced Karen of Burma. In so doing, it laid the foundation for analyzing organized violence against this population and responses by key actors involved over the past sixty years in accordance with Smith's (2004a) model for understanding the causes of organized violence in a country. Each of this model's four elements, the background causes of the violence, mobilization strategies, triggers that have impacted on action taken and catalysts that have impacted on the intensity and duration of this violence, will be examined separately. The section will conclude with an analysis of the principle of *jus in bello* in relation to the current context of organized violence in Burma.

3.3.3.1 Background Causes

Historically, the Karen have been a subjugated race of people in Burma. However, during the relatively short British colonial period, they developed a sense of consociation and were active in administration, education, religious, political and military aspects of life in Burma. It is generally agreed by political science and historical researchers that this engendered a seething resentment against them as a people group by the majority Burman (Rajah, 2002; Smith, 2003; Rogers, 2004; Buadaeng, 2007; Gravers, 2007b; Wintole, 2007; South, 2008).

Prior to independence in 1948, the Karen leadership under Saw Ba U Gyi sought dialogue with the colonial power to effect a separate Karen State as they believed that they would not be accorded any justice or equality in a Burman led government. They were unsuccessful in their mission and their fears of injustice and inequality under the Burman regime have proved to be well founded (Tangseefa, 2003, 2007; South, 2008).

The 1974 Constitution of the Union of Burma states that the country is made up of seven divisions and seven ethnic-nationality States. However, recognition of the ethnic groups that make up the Union of Burma grants them neither equality nor representation within the political framework (Hynes, 2003). The Union of Burma, since independence, has been ruled by a succession of dictatorships, each ousting the other for greater power, leaving the majority ethnic nationalities without a voice.

3.3.3.2 Mobilization Strategies

Burma independence and organized violence occurred simultaneously for the Karen when large numbers of Karen were killed by Government troops in and around the capital of Rangoon late in 1948 and early 1949. Justice was a significant motivator for the Karen in mobilizing an army under their self appointed government, the KNU. In 1957, they were joined by the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) and its armed force, the Karenni Army.

While not directly referring to the principles of *jus ad bellum*, KNU President, Saw Ba U Gyi believed he was leading the Karen in a just revolution when he addressed the KNU Papun Congress on July 17, 1950:

In history, we find that in spite of various difficulties and hardship, all the just revolutions when led with perseverance and courage eventually triumph without exception. I firmly believe that the just revolution of the Karen people shall be victorious, eventually, in spite of all the hardships and difficulties (cited in Keenan, 2008, p. 16).

Keenan's biography of Saw Ba U Gyi (2008) and other historical writings (KNU, 1998, 2006; Rogers, 2004; Buadaeng, 2007) suggest that the principles of *jus ad bellum* were adhered to in the decision to take up arms against the appointed Government of Burma. In January, 1949 when Saw Ba U Gyi united his people under the Four Principles that initiated the Karen Revolution (p. 21), he was the elected president of a constituted authority representing the Karen people of Burma. The principle of just cause was met in that unprovoked attacks by Government troops had been made against Karen

people resulting in large numbers of civilian deaths which the KNU believed would continue. The principle of right intention was met in that at the time of engagement, there was a real possibility of success within a short period of time, unsuccessful negotiations for alternatives had been made and there was a clear goal for peace (Rogers, 2004; Buadaeng, 2007).

The response to the KNU and the KNPP's military opposition by the successive Burma's ruling military juntas has been to brand these ethnic groups as insurgents and enemies of the State. Under this branding, these ethnic groups are opposing the state construction of 'taingyintha' – a concept that all people in Burma share a common origin and sense of identity – and therefore are a threat to the peace and development of the country, thus justifying their continued military aggression against them (Cheesman, 2002, p. 216).

The State construction of 'taingyintha' correlates with the concept of the Westphalian State that assumes homogeneity within national societies (Kymlicka, 1995; Philpott, 2004). While the ruling junta constitutionally recognize the multi-ethnicity of Burma, in practice, they are non-recognized in the Taylorian (1992) sense of recognition politics as evidenced in the genocidal military campaign against the Karen in Eastern Burma whose leadership are challenging their 'taingyintha' identity construction, as well as the lack of representation of any of the ethnic nationalities in the government.

3.3.3.3 Triggers

Beginning in the early 1960s, the SPDC under Ne Win mounted a counter-insurgency programme known as the 'Four Cuts Strategy' to cut the four main links – food, finances, intelligence and recruits – between ethnic nationalities' soldiers, their families, local villagers, and local communities. In pursuit of this strategy, the SPDC have divided Burma into three zones; white zones designate those areas completely under their control, brown zones designate contested areas and black zones are areas over which they have no control. Black zones are designated 'free fire' zones where the Tatmadaw can shoot anyone they see on sight (Eubank, 2008, pp. 10; Back Pack Health Worker Team (BPHWT), 2009). The implementation of this strategy has resulted in gross human rights violations including torture, maiming through land mines, rape, horrific killings, enforced slavery, forced relocation, loss of whole villages and land and displacement. It has been recorded in several reports by organizations such as Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) (2006), Amnesty International (2008), BPHWT

(2006, 2009); Burma Ethnic Research Group (BERG) (1998), Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) (2009), Free Burma Rangers (FBR) (2005, 2010); Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) (2006, 2008a, 2009) and KWO (2004, 2007, 2010a) and by delegations to United Nations and foreign government forums from organizations such as WLB, ENC, KWO and KHRG (as mentioned on p. 4) as a campaign intent on genocide to achieve a complete Burmanisation of Burma.

The use of counter-insurgency techniques such as are being deployed by the SPDC results in the destabilization of a country and creates a climate of fear and hatred. The aim is to control a population by eradicating everyone who opposes them. These techniques fall within the definition of genocide contained in the 1948 Geneva Convention Article 2 as “any attempt whether successful or not to destroy in whole or in part a national, ethnic, racial or religious group” (cited in Kaldor, 2007, pp. 9, 105-6). Over the six decades of this armed conflict, numerous cease fire agreements have been broken by the various ruling powers in Burma, resulting in the Karen leadership believing it has no choice but to maintain their resistance against the injustices being perpetrated against them.

3.3.3.4 Catalysts

The most significant catalyst affecting the intensity and duration of this more than sixty year struggle was the defection of a significant proportion of the KNLA to the Burmese military junta to form the DKBA in early 1995. This resulted in a major shift in the power balance against the KNU with a steady loss of territory under its control since that time. Even so, the KNU maintain their resistance against their foes which now include their own people.

Another significant catalyst in this prolonged conflict was the formation of the Ethnic Nationalities Solidarity and Cooperation Committee (now Ethnic Nationalities Council (ENC) in August 2001 (Yawngghwe & Sakhong, 2004; Sakhong, 2006; Gravers, 2007b). The ENC is entrusted with the task of fostering unity and cooperation between all ethnic nationalities with a view to engaging in tripartite dialogue between the SPDC, democracy groups such as the National League for Democracy (NLD) and the ethnic nationalities (both KNU and KNPP are active participants) so as to facilitate a successful transition to democracy in Burma. The concept of tripartite dialogue in relation to Burma was first raised by the United Nations General Assembly in 1994 in recognition that to achieve a lasting peace in Burma requires these three groups to work together to form and enact a Constitution that is

representative of all peoples living therein. The ENC has developed a road map for rebuilding the Union of Burma referred to as the New Panglong Initiative based on the principles agreed to, but never enacted in the original Panglong Agreement of 1947. While tripartite dialogue has not been realized with the refusal of the SPDC to intentionally engage the other two groups, the ENC continue to work towards their goal of a federal union of Burma demonstrating that

The problem in Burma is not an ethnic problem ...[who] live peacefully and work well together ... [but] the common enemy in the past 50 years has been the Burmese military controlled by the central government (Yawnghwe & Sakhong, 2004, p. 5).

3.3.3.5 The Principle of jus in bello in the Context of Organized Violence in Burma

In considering the principles of jus in bello directing the actions of the KNU and KNPP's continued armed resistance against the ruling military junta, a number of contentious and contradictory issues have been raised. While KNU publications (KNU, 2006, 2008) continue to justify their actions citing their commitment to work for peace in Burma plus the litany of human rights abuses perpetrated by the junta against their people, there are also reports of human rights abuses they themselves have committed including extrajudicial killings, recruitment of child soldiers and use of landmines (Smith, 1999; HRW, 2005, 2010; KHRG, 2008b; South, 2008).

These reports suggest an aberration of the jus in bello principles relating to discrimination and proportionality. In response to some of these reports, the KNU have issued statements that in some cases deny and in others justify the content of the report. For example, in response to recent reports relating to the use of child soldiers, the KNU issued a rebuttal stating that it had signed a voluntary Deeds of Agreement with the United Nations in 2003 not to recruit any person under the age of 18 into their armed force and state that this is being strongly adhered to in all seven divisions of the KNLA (KNU, 2007). In support of this statement, a 2009 Watchlist Report (p. 35) cited the United Nation's Secretary-General's Report on Children and Armed Conflict in Myanmar (S/2007/666) which confirmed that no reports of child soldier recruitment by the KNU/KNLA had been made in 2007.

In relation to the use of landmines, the KNU have stated that their use of landmines is to protect civilians from attacks by the SPDC and DKBA forces and those villagers are always informed of where they are laid as opposed to the SPDC and DKBA who do not inform civilians where they lay their mines (KHRG, 2008). Watchlist (2009) add that some Karen IDP's in hiding request the KNU/KNLA

to place landmines for their protection (p. 38). Notwithstanding the reason for laying landmines, it is a fact that they are indiscriminate of whom they kill and maim, and despite local knowledge of their location, both soldiers and civilians continue to suffer injury and death resulting from mines laid by the KNLA, though to a much lesser degree than those laid by the SPDC and DKBA (KHRG, 2008b).

Reports of extrajudicial killings are isolated with Martin (1999) reporting on an incident that occurred in 1972 and HRW (2005) referring to this form of human rights abuse in the past tense – “... in the past, the KNLA has carried out well-documented human rights violations such as extrajudicial killings” (p. 23).

While there appears to be an element of truth in some of these reports and accounts, the researcher contends that they need to be considered in context of the systematic genocidal military campaign being waged against their people resulting in an overwhelming number of verified reports of human rights abuses perpetrated by the SPDC published by these same agencies and authors as well as many others.

At the time of writing, all indications point to an indeterminate time before the principles of jus post bellum will need to be taken into consideration in relation to the armed conflict in Burma. However, the endeavours of the ENC of which the KNU and the KNPP are both active participants speak positively for future aspirations of a free and democratic Burma.

Geopolitically, the armed conflict in Burma is a war that is hidden from international view because the fighting is against a people and their nation state that do not appear on a conventional map (Neitschmann, 1987, p. 1). And while it continues to be largely hidden from international view, millions of its citizens have been and continue to be displaced from their land.

3.4 Displacement

... it occurred to me that the Burmese expression for refugee is dukkha-the, one who has to bear dukkha, suffering. In that sense, none of us can avoid knowing what it is to be a refugee. The refuge we all seek is protection from forces which wrench us away from the security and comfort, physical and mental, which give dignity and meaning to human existence
(Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, 1993).

There is a strong correlation between organized violence and displacement, in that, a major impact of organized violence is the displacement of civilians, both within and outwith their country of origin. The dynamics of this reasonably new area of scholarship are complex, multifaceted, and at times, opposing in view. This section will explore these dynamics. Firstly, a definition of terms related to displacement will be provided. Secondly, displacement will be located within a global context. This will be followed by an exploration of two aspects of displacement that relate to this research; namely, internally displaced persons and refugees including reference to the situation in Burma.

3.4.1 Definition of Terms in Relation to Displacement

For the purposes of this research, the terms, refugee, complementary forms of protection, internally displaced person/s and prolonged refugee situations are defined as follows.

According to Article 1A (2) of the United Nations 1951 Refugee Convention and its associated 1967 Refugee Protocol, a refugee is

someone who owing to 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 [or her] nationality, and is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to avail himself [or herself] of the protection of that country, or who not having a nationality and being outside the country of his [or her] former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it (cited in Kourula, 1997, p. 56).

This definition includes those individuals granted complementary forms of protection (UNHCR, 2009a, p. 5).

Complementary forms of protection refers to protection provided under national or regional law in countries which do not grant 1951 Convention refugee status to people who are in need of international protection against serious, but indiscriminate attacks. In such cases, permission to stay in a country is granted on a temporary basis determined by initial protection needs with the host State obliged to respect the fundamental principle of non-refoulement, that is, preventing a return to a situation that would place the refugee's life and/or freedom at risk (UNHCR, 2000, p. 163-164; 2009a, p. 5).

According to the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (1998), internally displaced persons are:

Persons or group of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or man [human]-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border (cited in Kälin, 2008, p. 2).

This definition was revised in 1998 by Dr Francis Deng, then Secretary-General of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, from the original definition formulated in 1992 which restricted the IDP concept temporally and numerically by stating “those forced to flee their homes suddenly or unexpectedly in large numbers”. As such, this definition did not take into account organized state policies in countries such as Burma, Ethiopia and Iraq where displacement of its citizens has been occurring over decades and cases of governments such as in Burma and Zimbabwe forcibly evicting and relocating its citizens without choice or consultation (Mooney, 2005, p. 11).

The UNHCR defines a protracted refugee situation as:

... one which 25,000 or more refugees of the same nationality have been in exile for five years or more in a given asylum country (UNHCR, 2009a, p. 7).

3.4.2 Global Context of Displacement

Over the past half century, there have been an increasing number of refugees and displaced persons globally, reflecting political and economic instability in several regions of the world. Globally, the UNHCR (2009a) estimated that forty-two million people were forcibly displaced as a result of armed conflict at the end of 2008. This included 15.2 million refugees and 26 million internally displaced persons (p. 2).

As the principal agency involved in the plight of displaced people globally, the UNHCR’s mandate is to “pursue protection, assistance and solution for refugees” within a “rights and community based approach” (UNHCR, 2005). Human rights standards are inextricably linked to all parts of the refugee experience and are of central importance to the core mandate of the UNHCR (Towle, 2000, p. 26). However in the 2008 Global Trends Report, the UNHCR (2009a) acknowledges that fulfilling this mandate within the unpredictable and volatile nature of global displacement is a constant challenge with limited long term solutions available (p. 4).

3.4.3 Some Issues Relating to Internally Displaced Persons and Refugees

While both internally displaced people and refugees have been displaced from their habitual abode, two essential differences exist between them. The first concerns cross-border movement; refugees cross an internationally recognised State border while internally displaced people remain in their country of origin. The second difference concerns their legal status. Refugees come under the 1951 Refugee Convention and its associated 1967 Protocol on Refugees which is internationally legally binding. Conversely, there is no legal convention governing internally displaced people, thus increasing their vulnerability (Rosenberg, 2004). Issues relating to both these categories of people will now be explored within a rights framework. Further, an analysis of the impact of humanitarian aid in relation to these populations will be made.

3.4.3.1 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

In recent decades, the numbers of IDPs resulting from armed conflict worldwide have increased dramatically and international predictors warn that this trend will continue (Rosenberg, 2004; Eschenbächer, 2005). At any one time, it is only possible to assess rough estimates of the number of IDPs globally as access to this population is often very restrictive due to political situations that frequently are the cause of their displacement (Eschenbächer, 2005, p. 49; Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, (IDMC) 2008).

As such, IDPs represent a most vulnerable group of people. Whether ‘forced’ or ‘obliged’ to leave their homes, the result is they are “stripped of their means of survival” (Mooney, 2005, p. 13). Dennis McNamara (2005), then Director of the Internal Displacement Division of the Office for the Coordination of Human Assistance (OCHA) highlighted this fact when he said, “No doubt, the internally displaced persons are among the most vulnerable. Not only that, but they also get the least help” (cited in Mooney, 2005, p. 18). Over recent decades, there has been considerable debate as to whether internally displaced people should be grouped with refugees as a single category. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) initially advocated for a single grouping in the belief that this would gain the IDPs wider protection and assistance. However, in recent years, the ICRC have changed their stance and now agree with other international agencies including the UNHCR, IDMC and OCHA, for example, as represented in reports by Cohen and Deng (1998), Barutciski (1999) and Borton, Buchanan-Smith and Otto (2005), that IDPs have different and often more urgent

needs and are therefore in need of being identified as a distinct category of concern (Mooney, 2005, p. 16).

In recognition of the special needs of this population, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights directed the formulation of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement which were presented to the Commission in 1998. While based on international humanitarian and human rights law, they are neither a declaration nor constitute a binding legal statute. However, they do address the specific needs of IDPs by identifying rights relevant to their protection. The Guiding Principles cover four main rights based categories; rights related to physical security and integrity, rights related to basic necessities of life, rights related to other civil and political protection needs and rights related to other economic, social and cultural protection needs (Kälin, 2005, pp. 28-33). The challenge remains how to implement these principles in countries where the government itself is the main agent of displacement and responsible for the human rights violations against its people; a challenge that has come to be known as “the protection gap” (Eschenbächer, 2005, p. 53; Kälin, 2005, p. 29).

The causes of the displacement of the Karen in Burma have been outlined in Chapter 2.8. In Burma today, the IDMC (2008) estimate that more than one million people are displaced with a further three million forced to migrate within and outside of Burma over the past decade. The TBBC (2009) estimate that there are four hundred and seventy thousand IDPs in Eastern Burma with the largest number of these being in Karen and Karenni States. Displacement in Burma is a systematic policy of the Burmese ruling military junta aimed at crushing all opposition to its leadership and has been taking place for more than four decades. Despite large scale human rights abuses in relation to this policy of displacement being recorded by advocacy agencies such as Amnesty International, BERG, BPHWT, FBR, HRW, KHRG, KWO, PRAD and Watchlist, this situation has received very limited international attention.

Under very difficult and dangerous circumstances, a small number of CBOs and NGOs provide whatever assistance they can to this vulnerable group of people. One such agency is the FBR. Since 1997, this agency has been providing medical aid and auxiliary support to ethnic soldiers, villagers and the internally displaced within Burma, and reporting human rights violations to the international community via their website and published reports. BBC correspondent Francis Smith joined the FBR

on one of its missions. He provides an interesting description of them in his report that went to air on BBC 2's Foreign Correspondent on July 28, 2002,

It is a strange band – young Karens, trained and helped by American ex-special forces, running missions inside Burma assisting and encouraging the internally displaced. A disparate group of dreamers, preachers, medics and soldiers who push deep into the jungle trying to find the scattered groups of displaced hiding from the Junta's forces ... old army comrades joined together again to fight against the regime. They shun violence but as one American said, "killing ain't right but there is a time and a place for it". It is an NGO with a difference for these Americans have taken sides. They work as medics but travel armed. For them there are no niceties in the Burmese jungle; if they see the Burmese troops they will fight (Smith, 2002).

Amongst other agencies that directly assist the IDP population in Burma, PRAD works closely with FBR in providing emergency aid and development across Eastern Burma. PRAD also works alongside CBOs such as Committee for the Internally Displaced Karen People (CIDKP) who provide relief aid and the Karen Teachers' Working Group (KTWG) who provide education materials and teacher training and stipends to those internally displaced in Karen and Karenni States. BPHWT also provide regular medical and relief aid and TBBC provide emergency relief supplies to the internally displaced.

Many internally displaced people, finding it untenable to remain in their country, make precarious journeys across internationally recognized borders seeking safety and asylum. If they meet the criteria set out in the definition of refugee in the 1951 Refugee Convention, their status changes from IDP to refugee and in principle, they are afforded the protection inherent under the Convention and its associated Protocol.

3.4.3.2 Refugees

Globally, the majority of refugees seek refuge in adjoining countries with only sixteen percent moving outside of their region of origin. Nearly six million refugees are in protracted refugee situations living in twenty-two countries. Most of these are living in developing countries. In 2008, less than one percent of the global population of refugees benefited from resettlement (UNHCR, 2009a, 5-11).

While the 1951 Refugee Convention and its associated Protocol define minimum standards for the provision of security, material, health and social needs of refugees, it is a misconception that this occurs once the refugee reaches a country of asylum. Despite the best intentions of the UNHCR and its

partner agencies in countries worldwide, the sheer volume of refugees and the volatile nature of the conflict that causes their displacement results at times in a denial of the most basic human rights and even re-enfoulment as in the situation in many of the African States (Towle, 2000, p. 32).

While half of the refugees globally live in urban centres, the other half are confined to displaced persons' camps in the country in which they have sought asylum (UNHCR, 2009a). In countries such as Thailand which is not a signatory to the 1951 Convention, the displaced people are accorded refugee status under international law but are not accorded the full rights and benefits of this status under national law. In this way, they come under the status of refugees with complementary form of protection (UNHCR, 2000, pp. 163-165). In the many protracted refugee situations worldwide, this has resulted in millions of people spending decades of their lives living in overcrowded, confined situations with no freedom to leave the camp or participate lawfully in the life of that country.

For the displaced Karen and their related ethnic group, the Karenni, who have sought refuge in Thailand, the RTG has granted them temporary protection status within the confines of nine camps along the Thai-Burma border. However, this temporary protection status does not extend to all the rights accorded to refugees under the 1951 UN Refugee Convention resulting in a warehousing phenomenon. Outside each camp, a sign stating in Thai "Temporary Shelter Area" is posted and the camps are guarded by Thai military restricting the movement of those inside.

The 2009 World Refugee Survey published by the United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), states that there are 311,000 refugees from Burma who have been 'warehoused' in Thailand for more than ten years. In condemnation of this practice, Smith (2004b) states,

... condemning people who fled persecution to stagnate in confinement for much of the remainder of their lives is unnecessary, wasteful, hypocritical, counterproductive, unlawful and morally unacceptable (p. 38).

Notwithstanding these challenges, the UNHCR maintains that wherever refugees are involved, they will continue to have an interest and indeed a duty to ensure adequate provision and expertise given to the needs of these people, and to search for durable solutions to their situations which aim to enable refugees to rebuild their lives in dignity and peace (UNHCR, 2000, p. 169; 2009b).

The three durable solutions pursued by the UNHCR in refugee situations are voluntary repatriation, integration and resettlement. For each of these solutions, the UNHCR relies on sustained international co-operation and support. Voluntary repatriation remains the strongest hope for many people forcibly displaced from their homeland and therefore the most desirable of the three durable solutions. Where this is possible, the UNHCR assists the process by engaging in peace and reconciliation programmes, promoting housing and property restitution and providing financial assistance to enable returnees to rebuild their lives. Local integration occurs when the asylum country accepts the refugees seeking asylum to become functioning members of society with the ultimate goal of becoming naturalized citizens such as happened in Tanzania with Burundian refugees. In these instances, the UNHCR assists local governments and local communities develop feasible integration plans. However, increasingly in the world's protracted refugee situations, the first two durable solutions are not practicable. Globally, in 2010/11, it is expected that 747,000 refugees will be registered by the UNHCR for resettlement with 203,000 identified as being at heightened risk from a protection standpoint and therefore, prioritized for resettlement to third countries. Of increasing concern for the UNHCR is the fact that the number of places offered annually by resettlement countries (79,000 in 2010) is significantly less than the number of people registered for resettlement. As an immediate response to this shortfall, the UNHCR is employing deployment schemes and identifying and prioritizing emergency cases. A longer term strategy is negotiating with more countries to accept refugees and encouraging receiving countries to develop multi-year approaches to their resettlement policies (UNHCR, 2010).

3.4.3.3 Impact of Humanitarian Assistance on Internally Displaced and Refugee Populations

In a world of increasing conflict, human assistance organizations face a daily conundrum – how to represent values of humanity and peace within societies that are often dominated by values of inhumanity and violence (Slim, 1997, p. 343). Encapsulated in Article 23 of the IV Geneva Convention relating to the protection of civilian persons in time of war (1949), the ICRC (1965) adopted three key principles in relation to the provision of humanitarian assistance which continue to guide many national and international NGOs and CBOs involved in provision of humanitarian assistance – humanity, neutrality and impartiality (Pictet, 1979).

The principle of humanity aims to:

... prevent and to alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found ... to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being (Pictet, 1979).

The principle of neutrality is defined as:

... a duty to abstain from any act which in a conflict situation might be interpreted as furthering the interests of one party to the conflict or jeopardizing those of the other (Plattner, 1996, p. 165).

The principle of impartiality makes no discrimination in relation to nationality, race, religion, belief, class or political opinion and aims to:

... relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress (Pictet, 1979).

Pictet (1979) makes an important distinction between the principles of neutrality and impartiality:

The neutral man [sic] refuses to make a judgment, whereas one who is impartial judges a situation in accordance with prestablished rules.

However, as all humanitarian assistance organizations agree in principle to the first principle, there are divided opinions in relation to the second and third principles which some believe negate the “ensure[ing] the respect for the human being” aspect of the principle of humanity, in that their human rights are not addressed (Slim, 1997, p. 349).

This has led to the creation of a fourth principle of solidarity which the African Rights (1994, states is made up of four components (p. 27, cited in Slim, 1997, p. 349). Firstly, a focus on human rights and the pursuit of justice ensures an agenda based on a set of rights; secondly, it is essential to consult with and be accountable to the people with and whom solidarity is expressed; thirdly, a preparedness to share risk and suffering with those people is required; and fourthly, implement concrete action in support of those people and their cause. Many faith-based humanitarian assistance organizations, of which a large number identify as Christian, adopt the solidarity principle in place of the principles of neutrality and impartiality (Smillie & Minear, 2004; Ferris, 2005). The principle of solidarity, while being in opposition to the principles of neutrality and impartiality, fits in well with the tenets of Christian moral theology and development work based on social justice principles which require people to “take sides” in certain situations as poignantly stated by Dominican Father Albert Nolan (1984):

In some cases, one side is right and the other is wrong ... In such cases, a policy of seeking consensus and not taking sides would be quite wrong. Christians are not supposed to try and reconcile good and evil, justice and injustice; we are supposed to do away with evil, injustice and sin (p. 2).

Christian faith-based humanitarian assistance organizations have a long history of providing aid to refugees of natural disasters and armed conflict. Their reputation for ability to work effectively with locally based CBOs, to garner support from volunteers and to access remote and difficult to reach populations is cited as reasons for governments such as in European countries and USA for channeling humanitarian assistance funding through these organizations (Ferris, 2005). Ms Linda Shovlain of the Center for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives of USAID stated in a 2004 interview:

... faith-based organizations are usually the people on the front lines of need and human assistance. They go there motivated purely out of love for their human brothers and sisters ... the faith-based mechanism is a lot of times the easiest mechanism for the government to use to reach those people who are not usually reached, and, therefore, more in need (cited in Ferris, 2005, p. 324).

Regardless of which principles are adopted by human assistance organizations, the basic premise is that any aid given will do more good than harm (Anderson, 1999). With the prolonged nature of internal armed conflict continuing unabated in many parts of the world, this premise is gaining increased international consideration in relation to the ethical and practical challenges faced by the human assistance organizations who respond to the victims of these conflicts. The reality is that any response by humanitarian assistance organizations in areas of armed conflict will have political and potentially military consequences, regardless of the degree to which the organization adheres to an agreed set of the principles discussed above (Lischer, 2003; Malseed, 2009; CDA, 2010).

Lischer (2003) identifies three types of refugees whose circumstances result from armed conflict and who are likely to be recipients of humanitarian assistance. These are firstly, situational refugees who have no relationship to either party of the conflict but are caught in the crossfire. Secondly, are persecuted refugees who are forced to flee due to targeted persecution and oppression. Thirdly, are the state-in-exile refugees who are highly politically organized and whose leadership will often use their refugee status as a war strategy (pp. 90-92). Lischer argues that humanitarian assistance provided to the second and third refugee typologies has the most potential to exacerbate armed conflict with the highest risk being to the latter group. While the reason for the latter group is self explanatory, Lischer proposes that the experience of persecution of the second group “helps create politically cohesive

refugee groups” that enables armed parties to the conflict to “strengthen their legitimacy and following among the refugees” (pp. 90, 92).

Lischer cites four means by which humanitarian aid potentially exacerbates armed conflict. Firstly, food can be used to feed armed combatants staying amongst the refugees; secondly, aid can sustain and protect combatants’ families and supporters thus relinquishing their responsibility to care for them; thirdly, aid especially in the form of food and medicines, can contribute to the war economy by the manipulation of refugee numbers to provide an excess of supplies and/or by theft of supplies; and fourthly, by providing legitimacy to the armed group purporting to represent and protect the refugees by increasing their profile to the international community as a persecuted group defending their human rights (pp. 82-89).

CDA (2010) states that assistance brought into a context becomes part of the context and therefore cannot be neutral. The main context into which Lischer writes is the African context, specifically the armed conflict between the Hutus and Tutsis in 1990s. While providing a useful guide for humanitarian assistance organizations to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of aid given in armed conflict situations, this researcher contends that the contexts of each armed conflict differ and the core principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and solidarity to whatever degree they are adopted by humanitarian assistance organizations need to take precedence in the delivery of aid to ensure that basic human rights are protected.

The armed conflict context in Burma is complex. From being known as the rice bowl of Asia at the end of the colonial period in the late 1940s, Burma is now ranked 138 out of 182 (on a descending scale) on the 2009 United Nations Development Program’s (UNDP) Human Development Index (UNDP, 2009). While Burma’s ruling military junta has negotiated a number of lucrative bilateral trade and assistance agreements in the form of loans, financial and security co-operation grants with China, India, Thailand and Russia and through its membership with ASEAN, its population suffers chronic economic and humanitarian deprivation. Burma’s main legitimate exports are its abundance of natural gas and timber. Further, it is well documented that it is also one of the world’s largest producers and exporters of amphetamines and heroin (IDEA, 2001; Matthews, 2005; CDA, 2010). Despite receiving large amounts of financial assistance principally from China, the junta prioritizes this money to bolster their military power at the expense of basic needs of education, health and livelihood

infrastructures. While improved infrastructure of all weather roads have been built in the remote areas of Western and Eastern Burma, this has been for the purpose of facilitating both greater control of ethnic nationality areas and to enable the building of pipelines to transport their gas supplies to China, India and Thailand causing mass displacement of people, and consequent loss of livelihoods and deforestation (Heidel, 2006; Inwood, 2008 cited in CDA, 2010; South, 2008). An excerpt of a poem entitled “In the Quiet Land” by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi (1999) aptly sums up this situation:

The Chinese want a road; the French want the oil;
The Thais take the timber; and SLORC [now SPDC] takes the spoils.

Burma’s ruling junta’s poor record of governance, human rights abuses and organized violence against the ethnic nationalities in Eastern Burma makes any humanitarian assistance engagement contentious. While Burma’s neighbours and ASEAN favour policies of engagement from which they derive considerable economic benefit while advocating the stance of non interference in the country’s domestic affairs, Western governments including the USA and the European Commission have adopted isolationist policies of economic and trade sanctions to Burma, with the USA, Britain, Australia and New Zealand recently giving support for the establishment of a United Nations War Crimes Tribunal to investigate alleged war crimes perpetrated by the junta’s generals (Buncombe, 2010).

These same governments have significant humanitarian assistance budgets that, in part, are channeled via international and national NGOs and CBOs to refugees impacted by these abuses and organized violence located on both sides of the Thai-Burma border, including the nine refugee camps inhabited predominantly by Karen and Karenni refugees (IDEA, 2001; South, 2008). When considering Lischer’s (2002) refugee typology, these refugees fit the persecuted category. Many are supporters of the KNU and its armed force, the KNLA, who maintain a military opposition to the SPDC. There is a degree of politicalization in the camps as evidenced by organized KNU national events such as Martyrs’ Day and Karen Revolution Day taking place in the camps and Karen nationalistic contemporary history being taught in the schools. However, rather than seeing this in Lischer’s (2002) negative portrayal of exacerbating the armed conflict in Burma, this researcher believes it can also be understood in the context of the nature of the organized violence which is well documented as the SPDC carrying out a genocidal military campaign against the Karen and Karenni ethnic nationalities.

There are many NGOs and CBOs with whom the researcher has had contact in the three years she has lived on the border who are providing humanitarian aid to these refugees and IDPs in Karen, Karenni

and Shan States; some operate under the ICRC humanitarian assistance principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality, while others including many Christian based agencies, advocate the principles of humanity and solidarity. In common, as she has witnessed in several meetings including strategic planning, is the strong conviction that the assistance they are providing is principally aimed at sustaining a very vulnerable population. While a number of these groups also adopt advocacy policies with these people, they do not view their actions as exacerbating the armed conflict; but rather mitigating its effects and raising awareness to the wider international community of the injustices being perpetrated against them. As evidenced in the deplorable humanitarian conditions of the ceasefire areas of Chin and Mon States, a cessation of conflict does not result in the junta providing basic infrastructure to meet the needs of its people (Hiedel, 2006; Inwood, 2008 cited in CDA, 2010).

3.4.4 Critique of Dominant Responses to Displacement

Reviewing the literature specific to displacement, a number of researchers (including Turner, 1969; Zetter, 1991; Muecke, 1992; Parker, 1992; Malkki, 1995a, b, 1996; Hyndman, 2000; Said, 2000; Long, 2001; Daniel, 2002; Rajoram, 2002; Brün, 2003; Martin, Weiss Fagan, Jorgensen, Mann-Bondat, & Schoenholtz 2005; and Clark-Kazak, 2009) have critiqued the impact of displacement on communities and individuals and advocate for a more holistic approach to this area.

Said (2000) argues that the term ‘refugee’ has become a political term, “suggesting large herds of innocent and bewildered people requiring urgent international assistance” (p. 181). Malkki (1995a) and Clark-Kazak (2009) both state that these dominant representations of refugees strip the people of their individual and community culture and identity, resulting in their non-recognition and mis-recognition in the Taylorian (1992) sense. This thinking is supported by Zetter (1991), Hyndman, (2000) and Rajoram’s (2002) dialectics that the terms ‘internally displaced’, ‘displaced’ and ‘refugee’ depoliticise, dehistoricise and dehumanise identities in the homogenous way they are portrayed in the media and reports. Malkki (1996) sums up this way of thinking when she wrote:

One of the most far-reaching important consequences of these established representational practices is the systemic, even if unintended, silencing of persons, who find themselves in the classificatory space of ‘refugee’ (p.386).

Hyndman (2000) and Daniel (2002) add to these views when they critique the manner in which refugees are processed and treated in refugee camps. Within the camp system, the UNHCR maintains

order through exercises of counting and coding refugees. Information is obtained in a systematic way to effect registration of refugees and plan for their care. Facts are then presented in standardized, quantifiable reports to facilitate operational plans and secure humanitarian assistance (Hyndman, 2000). While this is seen to be necessary for management purposes, both Hyndman (2000) and Daniel (2002) state that it occurs at the cost of understanding the impact of the refugee's experience; that their stories and histories are effectively silenced in the language of officialdom.

In many ways, the terms 'displaced' and 'refugee' are exclusive terms. While they are useful for providing a means of obtaining aid and temporary shelter, the international response tends to keep its focus there, rather than addressing the root causes of forced migration in order to bring about a situation whereby these displaced people can return to their homes and livelihoods in safety. In this way, the term has the ability to overshadow power relations as posited by Ranciere (2001, 2004), and negate the heterogeneity of the individuals labelled therein (Brün, 2003). Displaced people are in a state of statelessness – in legal terms, they have lost their former nationality and do not qualify for a new one (Martin et al, 2005, p. 7). They are in a state of liminality, betwixt and between, belonging neither to their former State nor the one in which they now find themselves (Turner, 1969, p. 95).

Martin et al (2005) refer to the concept of 'forced migration' to highlight the precarious nature of, causes and results of displacement. It is an inclusive concept that covers both those forced to migrate within their own state borders and those who cross internationally recognised borders to escape life threatening situations and/or being driven from their homes by governments intent on depopulating or shifting the ethnic, religious or other composition of an area. It also takes into account issues relating to ethnicity and culture unique to those people.

Parker (1992) and Muecke (1992) add to this critique. Parker's (1992) research focused on organized conflict in African countries and concluded that there is an absent literature regarding the mental health consequences of organized violence on displaced populations, and that an understanding of the personal and social consequences of organized violence remains ill-informed by appropriate fieldwork (pp. 263-264). Muecke (1992) agrees with Parker's findings, adding that the dominant responses to the needs of people displaced by organized violence to date have been potentially ineffective, inappropriate and disempowering. Her research encouraged a more holistic appraisal of the needs of those forced to migrate because of organized violence and raises the question of how identity is affected by organized violence and subsequent forced migration.

Sociologist, Norman Long (2001), supports the above research findings when he argues that studies to date have largely focused on the background to displacement and conditions faced at a national level, while analysis of how individuals and groups are affected by and cope with organized violence and displacement is distinctly lacking. Yet researchers from a psychology and social work background such as Gorst-Unsworth and Goldenberg (1998, p. 90) and Bowles (2002, p. 7) argue strongly that an understanding of the socio-psychological effects of people displaced by organized violence is a necessary predeterminant to empowering people and communities to process experiences and reconstruct meaning and purpose in their environment, and in so doing, contribute to maintaining their identity and rebuilding their lives. Other social work researchers including Silove, Bowles, Tarn and Reid (1991) and Bowles (2002) share the belief that the field of social work is ideally situated to provide meaningful dialogue and contribute to knowledge about psychosocial aspects of organized violence.

Critiquing both overly macro analyses and overly individualised responses, psychiatrist and researcher, Derek Summerfield (1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2002) and political scientist and researcher, Dan Smith (2004a) have consistently emphasised the need to extrapolate beyond the individual impacted by organized violence and link to social justice principles in order to work towards positive change. Summerfield is a known critic of the dominant responses to organized violence as focusing on the causes of the violence without heeding the impact of that violence on the populations therein. His research has consistently highlighted that the dominant responses, using Western assumptions, actually serve to disempower and devalue local perspectives on the impact of organized violence. Smith's (2004a) focus on social justice in relation to organized violence is highlighted in his view that "justice is the keynote for conflict analysis and for peace" (p. 13).

These many views highlight the need for a re-examination of ways refugees are represented, written and situated in academic and humanitarian circles (Hyndman, 2000, p. 120).

Anthropologist Alexander Hinton (2002) makes reference to Turner's (1969) treatise on liminality when he states that in the global present, such atrocities perpetrated by sovereign States creates diasporic communities of people, uprooted from their homeland, occupying a liminal space (p. 26). The Karen experience, historically and present day, has been likened in the literature to the original Jewish diaspora (Keyes, 1979; MacDonald, 1991; Marshall, 1997; Rogers, 2004). Beginning with their push from the north into Burma millennia ago, their push into the hills by the ruling Burmans

centuries later, and now into the jungles and across the border into Thailand and countries beyond, these diasporas correlate with Cohen's (1997) definition as "those people who live outside their 'natal' (or imagined natal) territories", categorised as "victim, homeland and cultural diasporas" (p. ix).

3.5 Resettlement

It is not acceptable that refugees spend years of their lives in confined spaces (Lubbers, 2001, cited in UNHCR, 2006, p. 142).

As the UNHCR policy of resettlement has become one more step in the Karen narrative of organized violence and displacement, it is important to explore this construct in light of contemporary migration theories to be able to more fully understand and contextualize the Karen experience in the current climate.

The phenomenon of forced migration with resultant refugee and displaced populations can be traced back to the beginnings of human history (Ingleby, 2005, p. 1). However, the social constructs of refugee and displaced persons are creations of the twentieth century state (Said, 2000, p. 181). Especially since the end of World War II, research into refugees within the disciplines of sociology, psychology, political science and anthropology has become increasingly prominent. This section will explore some of the viewpoints of these disciplines in specific relation to resettlement and identity within the wider migration theory literature. Resettlement is defined as,

... the process by which an immigrant establishes economic viability and social networks following immigration in order to contribute to and make full use of opportunities generally available to the receiving society (National Australia Population Council Refugee Review, 1988, cited in DIMIA, 2002, p. 1).

3.5.1 Migrant typology considerations

Gonzalez's (1992, cited in Brettall, 2008, p. 99) typology of migration includes conflict migration to describe those people forced to migrate because of organized violence in their country of origin. This typology adds to the literature relating to the involuntary migrant versus the voluntary migrant. In a simplified dichotomy, the voluntary migrant is synonymous with economic migration; while the involuntary migrant is linked to environmental and political induced conflict (Hein, 1993, p. 44;

Ingleby, 2005, p. 16; Brettall, 2008, p. 98). Until recently in the West, the involuntary migrant “enjoyed a sort of moral credit deserving of respect, compassion and help” (Ingleby, 2005, pp. 16-17), while the voluntary migrant, seen mostly in economic terms, was viewed with suspicion and distrust. However, with the increase in the former and globalization resulting in wealthier voluntary migration, societal attitudes towards refugees have become more negative in current times (Sales, 2002; Ingleby, 2005).

This leads to a discussion of two sociological perspectives on migration – the realist perspective and the world view perspective. In the realist perspective, migration is characterized by a push-pull effect. Refugees are those who are forcibly pushed to a host country through lack of choice; while those who voluntarily migrate are pulled by the lure of increased opportunities in the host country. In this way, refugees and voluntary migrants are seen as distinct categories requiring separate attention (Kunz, 1973, pp. 126; Castles & Miller, 2003, pp. 19-22).

Conversely, the world system perspective acknowledges that people have been moving for millennia for varying reasons, including political and economic factors, and that these often overlap. Further, refugees will often be the agent by which other family members migrate voluntarily which makes the distinct typology problematic (Hein, 1993, p. 43-45).

There is merit in both views. Regarding refugees as involuntary migrants distinct from those who migrate voluntarily recognizes that they have different pre-arrival experiences. As such, the distinction is useful for the provision of specialized health, welfare and legal services for refugees in accordance with the protective responsibilities set out for host countries in the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol on Refugees (Smith, 2004b; USCRI, 2008; Refugee Council of Australia, 2009).

Conversely, the issues relating to migration are complex and dynamic. Lessinger (1995) critiques the push-pull analogy of migration as being simplistic and that the complexity of migratory processes means that push and pull factors referred to in the realist perspective often operate simultaneously meaning that there is no single profile of a typical migrant (p. 71-72). De Haas (2009) comments that the push-pull analysis of migration negates the element of human agency – that the term involuntary migrant does not acknowledge the element of choice these people have in relation to resettlement. As a perspective, it is limited; it is useful for purposes of policy directions but not useful for analysis of the

myriad issues relating to the decision to resettle, not least why some people choose not to leave and why some who choose to come do not stay, issues relating to identity, hopes and aspirations (p. 3).

3.5.2 Psychological considerations

Many refugees have suffered significant levels of trauma resulting from organized violence and experienced significant losses in their pre resettlement phases (McGorry, 1995, p. 464). The psychological impact of such trauma and losses is complex (Mollica, Wyshak & Lavelle, 1987; Turner & Gorst-Unsworth, 1990; Summerfield, 2002; Miller & Rasco, 2004). With the increasing number of refugees resettling in Western countries, there has been increased interest by researchers in the impact of trauma experienced by refugees.

Examples of such research include a study of Vietnamese refugees resettling in Norway which found high levels of psychiatric disorders three years after resettlement and concluded that refugees are at higher risk of mental health problems than other immigrants (Hauff & Vaglum 1995). A study with Afghan refugees in the United States concluded that refugees are vulnerable to psychological disorders resulting from their uprooting and adjustment issues in their host country and that their former patterns of coping are ineffective in their new environment (Lipson, 1993). Commenting on their research with refugees in Spain, Brik and his colleagues stated that refugees are at high risk of mental health problems due to the fact that they had been forced to migrate (Brik, Colmenero, Benedicto, Martinez & Sancho, 1988, p. 179).

These findings have influenced the pathologization of approaches to refugee intervention with a trauma based approach resulting in high levels of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and abnormal depressive disorders being diagnosed amongst refugee populations in Western countries (Malkki, 1995b; Summerfield, 1997, 1999, 2000, 2002; Silove, 1999; Burnett & Peel, 2001; Ingleby, 2005; Ryan, Dooley & Benson, 2008).

Ingleby (2005) comments that prior to 1977, there was no connection of trauma and refugees in refugee research, but since that time, the connection is dominating the research in this area. He concludes that,

... it suggests that it was trauma researchers who became interested in refugees, rather than refugee researchers becoming interested in trauma ... suggesting that research in this field has been more theory-driven than problem-driven (p. 9).

Proponents of this view caution against applying Western based 'trauma models' to diverse cultures where organized violence was the norm of their everyday existence rather than isolated abnormal events. This is highlighted by the following research findings:

Thus, although many refugees have survived violence and loss that are literally beyond the imagination of most people, we mustn't assume that refugee status in and of itself constitutes a recognizable, generalizable psychological condition (Malkki 1995b, p. 510).

The whole PTSD construct is culture bound and deeply irrelevant for people in many non-Western cultures (Pittaway, 2002, p. 68).

Jeppsson and Hjern (2005) support Malkki and Pittaway's views. They cite two separate research studies with the same group of Kosovo asylum seekers in the United Kingdom, concluding two opposite sets of findings to highlight the need for caution in research methods and biases. The first study by Summerfield (2002) found only a small number displaying PTSD symptoms, finding instead a focus on concerns relating to structural issues of work, education and family, while the second study with the same cohort by Turner and his colleagues (2003) found that fifty percent had PTSD.

It is clear that experiencing trauma does not necessarily equate with being traumatized and that many other factors impact on refugees resettling to Western countries. Trauma is experienced in a life context (Coughlan & Owens-Manley, 2006, p. 94). Protective factors mitigating both the experience of organized violence for refugees as well as serving to assist in their resettlement are religious faith, sense of commitment to a political cause, identification with wider social ideals, strong social networks and proximity of family (Figley, 1987; Golding & Baezconde-Garbanati, 1990; Lyons, 1991; Basoglu, Paker, Ozmen, Tasdemir, & Sahin, 1994; Hume & Summerfield, 1994; Gorst-Unsworth, 1995; Silove, 1999; Burnett & Peel, 2001; Young, 2001; Simich, 2003; Weaver & Figley, 2003). These factors have influenced researchers and practitioners such as Muecke (1992), Bowles (2002), Aroche and Coello (2004), Bala (2005) and Westoby (2008) to advocate for an integrative clinical and community development approach that acknowledges refugees' individual and collective resilience when studying and working with resettled refugee populations, rather than the trauma approach that has dominated much of the area of refugee studies in recent times.

3.5.3 Cultural considerations

The role of culture in relation to resettlement is significant. Hattar and Meleis (1995) liken the importance of culture for resettling refugees as the “glue that holds a group together ... without losing its own identity” (p. 521).

Four perspectives of culture in relation to resettlement and identity will be explored in this section – sedentarism, acculturation, adaptation and a resource based model.

3.5.3.1 Sedentarism

Sedentarism views culture “through the lens of place, rootedness, spatial order and belonging” (Cresswell, 2006, p. 26). It is biased towards “rooting rather than travel” (Clifford, 1988, p. 338). Within this viewpoint, refugee migration and resettlement is associated with loss of one’s culture, traditions and identity; that the gulf between country of origin and host country is so wide that refugees are overwhelmed and unable to cope (Taylor & Nathan, 1980; Stein, 1981). This view has influenced modernist Western thinking at both policy and societal attitudinal levels with the refugee and asylum seeker branded as “mobile threats” who need to be controlled and disciplined (Scott, 1998 cited in Cresswell, 2006, p. 26).

Opposing this view is the concept of trans-nationalism – “a social process whereby migrants operate in social fields that transgress geographical, political and cultural borders” (Glick, Schiller, Bosch & Szanton Blanc, 1992, p. ix). With globalization and consequent improved technology and communications, migrants are able to maintain their connection to their country of origin, “making home and host society a single arena of social action” (Margolis, 1995, p. 29). In addition, the sedentarism view makes broad assumptions that negate the value of human agency and social ecology that migrants bring with them to the host country. For many refugees resettling in Western countries, they have been uprooted many times, but are able to maintain their connectedness to their place of origin and their culture. Their identities, rather than being lost, become “differently territorialized”. They are able to use their memory of place “to construct imaginatively their own new world” (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992, p. 11; James, 2001).

3.5.3.2 Acculturation

Originally, this term was defined to “comprehend those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups” (Redfield, Linton & Herskovits, 1936, p. 149 cited in Berry, 1997, p. 7). Building on the Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) stress coping paradigm, John Berry developed the concept of acculturation which states that there are two main issues relating to groups who migrate and settle in a culture different to their own, namely, cultural maintenance and contact and participation. The first relates to the extent resettling groups believe their own cultural identity and characteristics are important, and the second relates to the extent they should become involved in other cultural groups or remain primarily among themselves (Berry, 1997, p. 9). Berry’s conceptual framework demonstrates four alternative acculturation strategies relating to these two issues – assimilation, integration, separation or marginalization. In brief, assimilation involves negating attachment to one’s culture of origin and taking on the host culture; integration allows for a continuing attachment to one’s original culture while becoming involved in the culture of the host society; separation involves a commitment to one’s own culture with little or no contact with the host culture and marginalization results in a lack of connection to both one’s original and host cultures (Berry, 1997, p. 9; Coughlan & Owens-Manley, 2006, p. 18). Integration is seen as the preferred outcome for migrants resettling as it enables them to

... participate fully in economic, social, cultural and political activities, without having to relinquish one’s own distinct ethnocultural identity and culture (Valtonen, 2004, p. 74).

As a framework, Lazarus (1997) critiqued Berry’s model as being more of a meta-theory than a theory – useful for a starting place for thinking about research in this area (pp. 39-40). However, Lazarus (1997), Schonpflug (1997) and Ryan, Dooley and Benson (2008) all agree that there are many more variables to be taken into account when people dislocate and relocate. These authors argue that the complexity of individual and group dynamics and the intergroup and intragroup relationships in terms of ethnic and social identity cannot be adequately tested within Berry’s acculturation framework and therefore further considerations are required.

3.5.3.3 Adaptation

Adaptation has been described “as the process through which individuals seek to satisfy their needs, pursue their goals and manage demands encountered after relocating to a new society” (Ryan et al, 2008, p. 7). In this way, for those migrating to a new country, the concept of adaptation is more than adjusting to a new culture. It encompasses a whole range of demands that the individual encounters (ibid, p. 7). These include the systems developed by Silove (1999) of safety, attachment, justice, existential meaning and identity and role aimed at promoting personal and social homeostasis (p. 203).

Lindencrona (2008) builds on these adaptive systems in developing a holistic model for addressing the mental health needs of refugees resettling in host countries by incorporating ecological variables of policy, community, organizational, interpersonal and individual aspects into the framework (pp. 20-22). Lindencrona’s model attests that the variables relating to resources in the environment enable a fuller picture to be developed of the mental health issues faced by refugees before, during and post resettlement in a new host country.

3.5.3.4 Resource Based Model

Incorporating aspects of Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) stress and coping model, Berry’s (1997) acculturation model, Silove’s (1999) adaptation model and Hobfoll’s (2001) conservation of resources model, Ryan et al (2008) have developed their resource based model. They describe it as a “conceptual toolkit” (p. 1), to be used in presenting a workable, testable theory relating to post-migration adaptation and psychological well-being among refugees. The resource based model identifies four central issues. Firstly, the interrelated personal, material, social and cultural resources are paramount in the process of migrant adaptation. Secondly, the whole of refugee experiences including pre, during and post migration must be analyzed for psychological adaptation. Thirdly, there needs to be an acknowledgement that the migration experience is a continuum whereby resources will ebb and flow. Fourthly, while host countries have an obligation to ensure basic needs are met and opportunities provided for refugees, an awareness that this does not always happen needs to be taken into account. Negative or positive outcomes for the refugee in the host environment depend on both policies and attitudes in the host environment and the individual and collective’s ability to satisfy basic needs, pursue valued goals and effectively manage demands made upon them (Ryan et al, 2008, pp. 7, 15).

Ryan et al's model is helpful in exploring the Christian displaced Karen migration and resettlement experience to Western countries, in order to gain an understanding of how both individual and collective identity has been impacted by their move. The Christian displaced Karen leave the camps for their new lives in countries such as the USA, Australia, Canada, Sweden and Norway with the bare minimum of material resources – their traditional clothes, some Western style clothes, Bible, hymnbook, a collection of compact discs in their language and photographs, neatly packed in candy striped bags. Their reasons for leaving vary, from wanting a better opportunity for their children, to finding another way to help their people, and seeking security and freedom of movement. In common, they are leaving the known for the unknown. The degree to which they will realize their hopes and dreams in their new host countries is dependent on three interrelated factors; the personal, material, social and cultural resources that they take with them, how the host country receives them, and how they adapt the resources they bring with them and acquire additional resources once they arrive. In accordance with Horenczyk's (1997) view, the resettling Christian Karen's acculturation does not take place in a social vacuum (p. 34). It occurs within the context of their relationships with their family and wider ethnic and social networks and host societies. At times, this will be a positive experience and at others, challenges and constraints will test resilience and coping. Through it all, the reconstruction of selves and identities will unfold.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the key constructs that have guided this research – identity, organized violence, displacement and resettlement – in relation to contemporary literature and theories that pertain to them. In this way, a foundation has been laid to locate the Christian displaced Karen within these constructs, to guide the formulation of a conceptual framework and methodology that will enable the research questions to be explored.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this research is to explore perceptions of identity among Christian Karen, in the context of organized violence, displacement and resettlement. Specifically, two groups are included in the research: displaced Christian Karen living in Mae La Camp and Christian Karen who have resettled in Australia. For each group, the study participants are a small group of people recruited through the researcher's gatekeeper networks; thus representativeness of the sample is neither sought nor claimed. While each group was to be studied cross-sectionally (that is, at one point in time - in the camp for the Mae La group and in Australia for the resettled group), identity is a complex concept and participants' perceptions may well encompass experiences over time as well as multiple aspects of present day life, such as different roles (e.g. mother, wife, teacher) and different spheres of engagement (e.g. family, work, community). Therefore a conceptual framework was needed that would enable consideration of aspects of identity formation over time as well as different spheres of activity in the present day.

This chapter includes the conceptual framework guiding the research and the method, including details of engagement in the field, data collection and data analysis. The conceptual framework incorporates an ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) that enables consideration of micro systems of normal life experiences, experiences of trauma and experiences of exile and resettlement, meso systems of culture, Christian faith, nationalism and history, and macro systems relating to political and UNHCR aspects within a linear transitional model (Raphael, 1986) recognizing the chronological stages of the displacement journey. While a qualitative approach is taken for both the Mae La and Australian studies, the contexts of each study were quite different and this is reflected in the respective data collection approaches. For the Mae La study, the researcher was resident in the camp for eight months and thus had opportunity both to observe life in the camp and interview each participant two or three times. The Australian study was conducted during a brief visit to Sydney and data was collected during two events auspiced by the Karen Baptist Churches of Australia (KBCA) and the Australian Karen Organization (AKO) respectively. Thus, data collection was limited to focus groups of recently arrived refugees and interviews with key informants. Nevertheless, the opportunity to include firsthand

accounts of resettlement in the research was seen to outweigh limitations to the amount of data able to be collected.

Following discussion of the conceptual framework, the research method is presented. Specifically, the research design provides an overall structure of the research in keeping with the above conceptual framework. The role of gatekeepers is discussed followed by a discussion on various aspects of the participant selection and recruitment process. The method of data collection is detailed followed by the analysis of the data, and finally, issues of trustworthiness and rigor are outlined.

4.2 Conceptual Framework

A model is a critical component of one's vision,
as it defines the important variables to consider
and the relationship among these variables
(Huitt, 2003, p. 1).

The lives of the Christian displaced Karen are constructed multi-contextually. The contexts include their families and communities within the wider constructs of their ethnicity, faith and politics affecting their lives. Like many displaced people, their experiences and perceptions are molded by their history, their culture, opportunities and threats within these milieus.

Therefore, a conceptual framework is required that takes account of the contextual layers of their existence (family, community, etc.), as well as their transitions through organized violence, displacement, and for some, resettlement. To this end, this research has adopted a transitional ecosystems approach which draws on two models. Firstly, an ecosystems model is utilized to explore the Christian displaced Karen within their environment. Secondly, a linear framework is used to depict the stages of the displacement journey.

4.2.1 The Ecosystems Model

The ecosystems model originated from the two theoretical streams of general systems and ecological theories. General systems theory focuses on the transactional processes within and among systems (Greif & Lynch, 1983), while the ecological perspective views people and their environments as interdependent, complementary parts of a whole in which person and environment are constantly changing and shaping the other (Germain & Bloom, 1999).

Bronfenbrenner (1977) further developed the concept of the ecological environment as a nested arrangement of concentric structures each contained within the next. These structures consist of the microsystem, mesosystem, and macrosystem. Bronfenbrenner contends that these structures and the processes taking place within and between them must be viewed as interdependent and be analysed in systems terms. The value of Bronfenbrenner's theory is its attention to person, process, context and time (Yohani, 2008, p. 311) and its capacity to understand the complexity of individual and community functioning (Visser, 2007, p. 24). In this way, the model functions heuristically to identify questions, domains and possibilities believed worthy of exploration (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 518; 1979, p.15; 1989, pp. 227-228).

As the ecosystems model "was developed to arrange, integrate and systemize knowledge about the interrelationships of people with each other and with their environments" (Pillari, 2002, p. 7), it is useful to explore comprehensively the wide range of factors affecting displaced and refugee populations and their impact on identity.

Morales and Sheafor (2006) have related the ecosystems model to refugee populations by identifying concentric structures of individual, family, culture, environmental-structural factors and historical factors as critical layers of refugee lives and their environments (p. 10ff). Anderson, Hamilton, Moore, Loewen and Frater-Mathieson (2004) also found the model useful for considering the impact of personal and environmental factors on the development of refugee children (p.4).

Aroche and Coello (2004) conceived the model in relation to psychological wellbeing of refugee populations as three interlocking circles representing different aspects of their lives – the normal life cycle, traumatic experiences in the context of organized violence, and exile, migration and settlement.

The concepts of "habitat" and "niche" within ecological theory are relevant in considering issues relating to the identity of displaced people. In relation to people, habitats are "the physical and social settings within particular cultural contexts", and the related concept, niches, are "the statuses or roles occupied by members of a community" (Hepworth, Rooney & Larsen, 2009, p. 15). In this way, habitats and niches represent the physical and social environment in which people live out their normal life experiences. Their social identities are anchored there (Coughlan & Owen-Manley, 2006, p. 22). As a result of organized violence, people are displaced from their habitats and niches, sometimes many

times. This results in transitions within the ecological systems impacting on their lives and requires the person and community to constantly adapt to their changing circumstances (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 525).

4.2.2 A Model of Transition

The journey of displacement resulting from organized violence is characterised by trauma, fear and loss. It is also characterised by resilience, hope and adaptation. The journey involves human spatial, temporal, historical and symbolic relationships (Long, 2000, p. 336). As such, it is a dynamic journey spanning people's lives. To gain a more complete understanding of the meaning this journey has on displaced persons' lives, it is useful to divide the journey into stages (Coughlan & Owens-Manley, 2006, p. 17).

Raphael (1986) suggested the following five transitional stages from organized violence through to resettlement,

1. Living in a country in the midst of widespread violence and instability
2. Being arrested, attacked and/or tortured; and/or having family members and/or friends being attacked and/or tortured or killed
3. Becoming internally displaced persons
4. Fleeing the country of origin to refugee camps
5. Resettlement in a third country (pp. 130-140).

These are not necessarily discrete stages with the displaced person beginning at Stage One and ending at Stage Five. Human agency often involves a person shifting back and forth between Stages One to Four as they evaluate their circumstances and make choices accordingly. External circumstances also impact on people in these stages, potentially resulting in constraint of movement between stages. Further, Stages Three and Four do not necessarily provide any protection against the recurrence of Stage Two. Another consideration that needs to be taken into account is the fact that in the current magnitude of displacement globally, there are an increasing number of young people who have spent their whole lives in camps and therefore, have not personally experienced Stages One to Three. Finally, the USCRI (2008) and the UNHCR (2009a) report that only a small percentage of displaced people achieve the fifth stage and the reality is that a large proportion of displaced people are warehoused for decades in temporary camps, effectively stuck in Stage Four.

Notwithstanding, as a model it captures the range of circumstances in which victims of violence and instability might find themselves, and enables us to position individuals (and communities) at any particular point in time.

4.2.3 A Transitional Ecosystems Model of Christian Displaced Karen Identity

Drawing on these two approaches, a transitional ecosystems model of Christian Karen displaced persons' identity was developed. Highlighting the various systems in which a person lives within their whole of life journey, this model has become the “apparatus of recognition”¹ by which an understanding was gained of the meaning the participants in this study attribute to their identity – to enable their stories to be told from their perspective.

Figure 4.1 illustrates this model as applied to Christian displaced Karen. The model facilitates the exploration of the link between identity and organized violence and displacement in the context of Christian Karen living in displaced persons' camps as well as those who have resettled in a third country. The various aspects of this model are now discussed.

¹ I have borrowed this term from Decha Tangseefa who used it in the same manner as I have to describe the conceptual framework of his research (2003, p. 16).

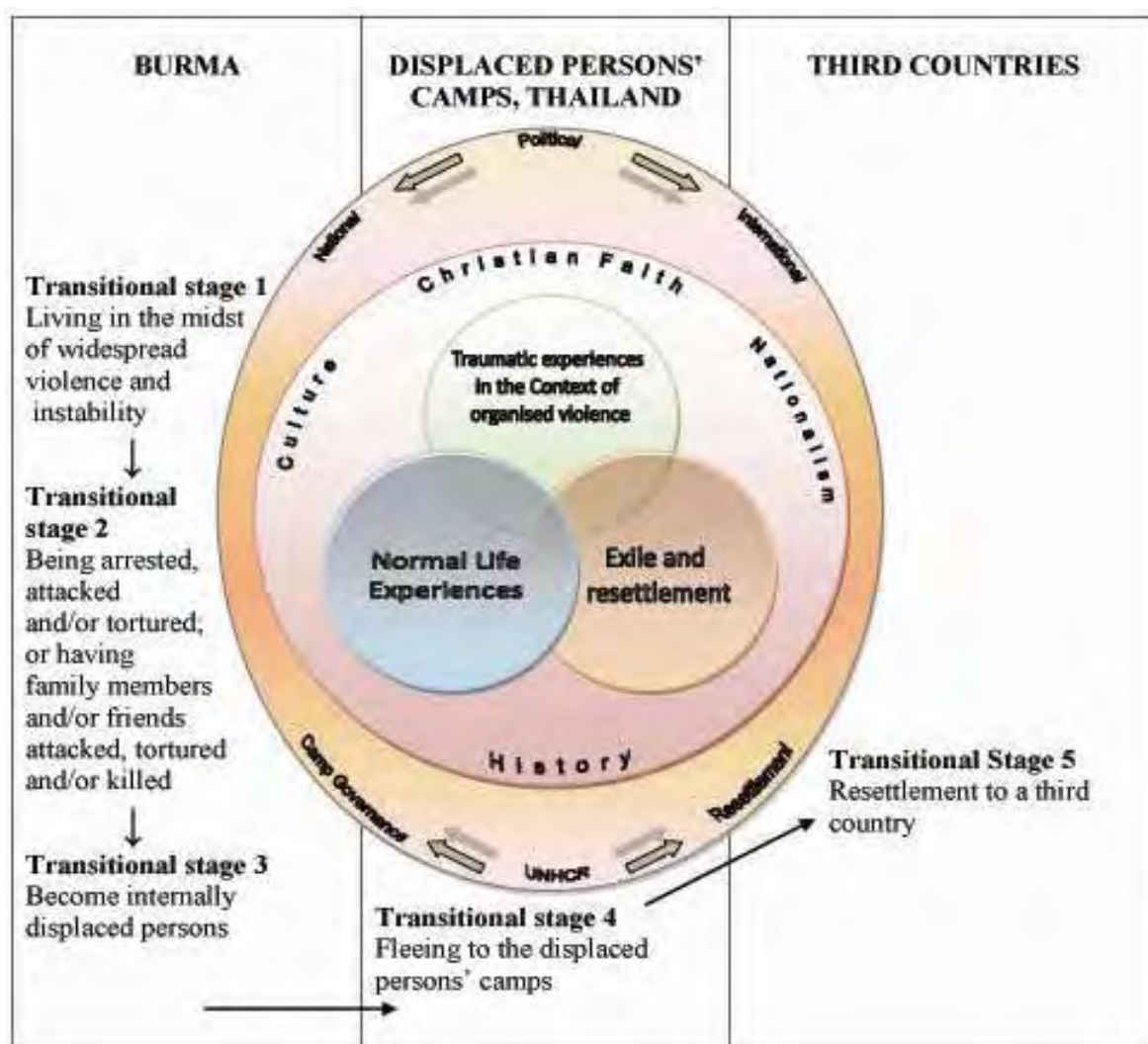


Figure 4.1 – Transitional Ecosystems Model of Christian Displaced Karen Identity
(adapted from models developed by Aroche & Coello 2004 and Raphael 1986)

Central to the model are the three ecosystems contextualised by Bronfenbrenner (1977) and utilised in research with refugee populations by Aroche and Coello (2004). Within the microsystem, three interlocking circles represent the Christian displaced Karen's normal life experiences, trauma experiences in the context of organized violence and their exilic and resettlement experiences where relevant. Their normal life experiences occur within the context of their families and communities. They entail a life span perspective recognising that roles and activities change over time (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 525-526). The participants' experiences of trauma in the context of organized violence recognises that they all have been affected by this violence resulting in loss of home, livelihoods, goals and aspirations and loved ones. The impact of these experiences occurs at

both individual and collective levels and provides meaning for their identity. The exilic experiences of the participants living in the displaced persons' camps on the Thai side of the Thai-Burma border are characterised by a series of paradoxes, transition and adaptation. Structures within this environment provide both opportunity and threat for the people living within. For many, they wait in hope of a return to their homeland and live their quotidian lives in the shadow of these structures. Others have taken up the UNHCR offer of resettlement to a third country. For these people, a further step in their journey tests their human and social capacities as they negotiate new boundaries that necessarily impact on their identity.

The normal life experiences, trauma experiences in the context of organized violence and the exilic experiences are overlapping entities in the Christian displaced Karen's life. Normal life experiences of birth, death and marriage, school, occupational and social roles are disrupted and changed by organized violence and exile but they still continue to unfold in the displaced person's life. The impact of trauma experiences emanating from organized violence does not stop when the displaced person is removed from its source in exile and even resettlement. Together, they form part of the lived experiences of the displaced person, thus informing their identity. As Dilthey (1985) says,

Lived experiences are related to each other like motifs in the andante of a symphony (p. 227 cited in Van Manen, 1990, p. 37).

The mesosystem in this model consists of the elements of history, culture, Christian faith and nationalism that provide linkages to how the Christian displaced Karen further perceive their identity. The history of the Karen in Burma has been outlined in Chapter Two. The ancient history of the Karen that has been passed down orally from generation to generation informs their culture and traditions. It also informs contemporary history especially with the connection they make of oppression and their orphan status resulting from their separation from their legendary father Htaw Meh Pa. The values and beliefs attached to Karen culture and their Christian faith permeate every aspect of their lives. Nationalism has evolved out of these elements. The Christian displaced Karen's sense of belonging to a nation within the Union of Burma is inexplicably intertwined with them. Hope is derived from these elements which give meaning to their lives and acts as an interpretive tool to make sense of their adverse environments.

The macrosystem in this model comprises those structures that are the overarching institutions that further impact on the lives of Christian displaced Karen. These have been identified as the political structures at national (Burma) and international (Thailand and third countries) levels and the UNHCR policies in relation to displaced camp governance and resettlement.

These ecosystems are encased within the linear transitional framework adapted from Raphael (1986), depicting the stages of the displacement journey in recognition that disruption and change occur in “the natural evolution of the ecosystem during times of war and displacement (Coughlin & Owens-Manley, 2006, p. 16). In this study, Stages One to Three represents the majority of the participants’ lived experiences in Burma, followed by Stage Four when these participants moved to the displaced persons’ camps on the Thai side of the Thai-Burma border. For a small number of the participants who were born in the camps, their journey began at Stage Four. Stage Five depicts the continuation of the journey to the third country that a number of the participants have now experienced.

The next section will discuss the details of the method.

4.3. The Research Design

A qualitative interpretive method underpins this research (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). This method was chosen because it has the capacity to value the Christian displaced Karen’s firsthand experience as a basis for knowledge (Beresford & Evans, 1999, p. 672). The situation faced by the Christian displaced Karen from Burma today is one of complexity affected by both historical and current events. This level of complexity ideally lends itself to a qualitative method of inquiry, in that it has the capacity to reveal rich data yielding a greater understanding of how these events have contributed to identity perspectives (Alston & Bowles, 1998, pp. 185-6). A distinguishing characteristic of qualitative research is that it “calls for the investigator to enter into the lives of the persons being studied as fully and naturally as possible” (Stainback & Stainback, 1988, p. 1). Additionally, a broadly qualitative design allows for multiple evidence sources (viz, observation, field notes, interviews and focus groups) to be used in one or more research contexts (Mae La Camp and Australia) to address one or more research questions (the understanding of Christian Karen identity). This enabled flexibility of approach, which is important in a complex context, and the resultant triangulation of data contributed to the trustworthiness of the research (as discussed at 4.9).

4.4 Gatekeepers

Very early in the research process, I identified people who would enable me to carry out the field research role and built relationships with them. I was assisted in this process by relationships formed with members and staff of both the Kawthoolei Karen Baptist Churches (KKBC) and Kawthoolei Karen Baptist Bible School and College (KKBBSC) when I acted in a short term locum teacher role in KKBBSC in 2004. I was aware that I was asking people to allow me to immerse myself in their environment, observe them and ask them questions, which led me to be conscious from the very beginning of the research of the importance to first establish rapport and trust with the people who would facilitate entry into their community (Speziale & Carpenter, 2007, p. 37). These people were among the gatekeepers who supported this study from its inception to completion. Gatekeepers are those who facilitate opportunities to interact with others in the chosen research site (Kearns, 2000, p. 114).

The consultation process began two years before arriving to live in Mae La Displaced Persons' Camp. Shortly after enrolment in the Research Higher Degree program in early 2005, I consulted by letter and email with Reverend Dr Simon, Principal of KKBBSC, who gave permission for me to proceed with this study and invited me to stay in the College to enable me to conduct the field research. Reverend Dr Simon is a respected leader of the Christian Karen community on both sides of the Thai-Burma border. His historical and contemporary knowledge of the Karen struggle for freedom is comprehensive. His commitment to his people was recognised in 2000 when he became the second recipient of the Baptist World Alliance Human Rights Award for his work in the displaced persons' camps along the Thai-Burma border (Toalston, 2000). In September 2006 following submission of my PhD Confirmation document, I travelled to Mae La Displaced Persons' Camp to further discuss the research with him. At that time, Reverend Dr Simon facilitated meetings with other leaders in both KKBC and the KRC who all gave their support to this study. These men and women assisted me throughout the research period, metaphorically opening doors and sharing their knowledge with me.

Others joined them as the research progressed in a variety of roles which included various aspects of facilitating the research process such as recruitment of sample, translators, transcribers and counsellors. These roles will be detailed further in subsequent sections of this chapter.

All gatekeepers who helped me in this study were provided with Gatekeeper Information Sheets (Appendix B3) in both Sgaw Karen and English that detailed the aims and purposes of the study and the manner in which it was planned to carry it out. They all signed an agreement which contained a confidentiality clause, to assist in the study.

4.5 Researcher's Role in the Field Research

In accepting Reverend Dr Simon's invitation to teach and live in KKBBSC, Mae La Camp for the duration of the data collection, I adopted an "active membership" role in the field research process. Characteristics of active membership include the assumption of a membership role, going through the same induction as other members, and participation in core activities that produce a high level of trust and acceptance (Adler & Adler, 1987, p. 11-12). Mays and Pope (1995) caution of the risk of "going native" when in this role; that is,

... becoming so immersed in the group culture that the research agenda is lost or that it becomes extremely difficult or emotionally draining to exit the field and conclude the data collection (p. 183).

Adler and Adler (1987) also recognise this risk and emphasise the importance for the researcher to maintain a researcher identity by periodically withdrawing from the field (p. 13).

In keeping with the characteristics of the role I had chosen in the Mae La Camp data collection phase of this research, I agreed to live and work as a volunteer 'Thramu' (female teacher) within the College campus for a period of eight months beginning August 2007. My dual qualifications in social work and Christian ministry, and experience in tertiary teaching equipped me with some basic resources to carry out this role. However, in this capacity, I recognised I was much more the "acceptable incompetent" – someone who has some skill and knowledge, but acknowledges they have much to learn (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973, p. 25). This concept of the "acceptable incompetent" is further developed in the next chapter.

However, being also mindful of the risk of becoming too immersed in the culture, I only stayed in the College from Monday to Friday, spending weekends with friends in a village near the town.

Within my active membership role, I gained the respect of the community that surrounded the College but this was not without cost. In close living such as occurs in a refugee camp, privacy is a luxury that is afforded to none. This meant that everybody in Zone C where the College is located and where most of my participants lived soon knew all about me – my family, my previous work and my research. Wherever I walked, people would come up to me and make general conversation. My Karen never improved to the point where I could hold a conversation, but it sufficed the basic pleasantries. At all points of the day, people knew where I was. When I went for a walk, invariably someone would join me. When I took a rest in my room, someone invariably would come in for a chat. Such is the way of communal living.

In relation to the participants of the research, it was not possible to remain in a completely objective researcher role. Each of the participants had the advantage even before the first interview, of knowing various aspects of my life. However, this familiarity was positive, in that trust and relationship between researcher and researched was developed from the outset (Darlington & Scott, 2002, p. 54). It assisted very much in the rapport building and made the beginning phase of the interview process flow smoothly (Farber, 2006, p. 5). More importantly, from a reflexive viewpoint, it had the benefit of equalising the power relationship in a Rancerien sense, giving a level of control to the participants (Minichiello, Aroni & Hays, 2008, p. 63).

4.6 Participants and Recruitment

It is never possible for a researcher to study all the people and events in a particular milieu (Burgess, 1984, p. 54). This obvious fact leads the researcher to select participants who will represent the phenomena under study. The word ‘participants’ encapsulates a number of attitudes about research within a qualitative paradigm including those related to inclusion, respect and willing cooperation (Mackenzie, McDowell & Pittaway, 2007, p. 306; Merriam, 2009, p. 162). With Mackenzie et al and Merriam’s ethical litmus test in mind, this section will discuss the criteria for selection and sampling procedures of the participants in this research.

4.6.1 Inclusion criteria

After discussion with my gatekeepers and advisors and reviewing the literature, the inclusion criteria for the selection of participants was four-fold. They were to be Karen who were displaced outwith of the borders of their natal country (or in the Australian study, Karen who had resettled), practice the Christian faith, include both men and women and be aged between eighteen and sixty-five. In accordance with the definition of 'refugee' being used for this research (p. 48), the criterion of displacement was met by virtue of the fact that a prospective participant was living in Mae La Displaced Persons' Camp, having previously lived in Karen State in Burma. For participants in the Australian study, they were to have resettled in Australia from displaced persons' camps on the Thai-Burma border within the past three years.

The second criterion was faith. Faith is a major factor in Karen culture. In interviews with recognised Karen Christian leaders along the border and Camp Committee personnel, it is estimated that, within the displaced persons' camps on the Thai side of the Thai/Burma border, fifty percent are Christian (predominately Baptist), twenty percent of Karen are animist, that is, they worship the ancestral spirits, and thirty percent are Theravada Buddhist. The reasons for selecting displaced Karen who identify as Christian as the focus of this research is that their position within the wider Karen community is significant and this was a community to which I had entrée.

The third criterion was that the sample be comprised of both genders. Within Karen culture, genders have ascribed roles that impact on issues of identity. From a trauma perspective, the impact of sexually based human rights violations against women (KWO, 2004, 2007; KHRG, 2006; Earth Rights School-Burma, 2007) and the impact of active combatant service and torture has on men (Summerfield, 1998; Miller & Rasco, 2004; Van de Put & Eisenbruch, 2004)) is well documented. It was therefore important that the sample reflected the experiences of both men and women.

The fourth criterion was that the sample comprises both younger and older ages. In reference to age, Martin MacDonald (1999) commented on several occasions in his book "Kawthoolei Dreams: Malaria Nights" that he observed different perceptions of the current situation in Burma and about the Karen themselves in his interviews across different age groups. With this in mind, it was decided that the

Mae La Camp study would include interviews with both younger and older participants within two separate age cohorts.

As the interviews progressed in Mae La Camp, I became aware of the significance of the new UNHCR Resettlement Policy which provided an opportunity for Karen living in the camps to migrate to third countries under humanitarian grounds. In consultation with my advisors, it was decided to conduct a second study in Australia where a number of Karen had resettled, to explore the impact resettlement has had on Christian displaced Karen identity. The scope of this study was considerably smaller than the one in Mae La Camp, entailing two focus group discussions with the aid of translators, and key informant interviews in English with recognised Karen community leaders living in the various States across Australia over a two week period. The criteria for selection remained the same as for the Mae La Camp sample (with the exception of displacement, in the case of key informants). While focus group participants were to all have previously lived in displaced persons' camps on the Thai side of the Thai-Burma border, this was not a criterion for the key informants.

A further variant in the original research design occurred after the advent of Cyclone Nargis which hit the Delta region of Burma on 2 May 2008. As an increasing number of survivors sought shelter and safety in Mae La Camp over the ensuing months, two of my gatekeepers suggested that I conduct interviews with a small number of them for the purpose of understanding their story and the interrelationship they had with KKBBS staff and students who accepted part of the responsibility of assisting them. I subsequently held unstructured interviews with three of the survivors with the assistance of one of my gatekeepers who acted as translator.

4.6.2 Sampling Process

Once the criteria for selection of the participants had been determined, consideration was given to the sampling method that would best suit the purposes of the research. A purposive sampling method was chosen to achieve typicality of the setting and in-depth analysis of the central issues being studied (Maxwell, 1996, p. 71; Patton, 2002, p. 327; Merriam, 2009, pp. 81-82). Neuman (2003) adds relevance to this choice of sampling method when he comments that purposive sampling is appropriate for selecting members of a difficult-to-reach specialised population (p. 206). Commonwealth Education Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) (2008) state that to achieve typicality within a particular setting,

samples should be selected with the co-operation of local people (p. 48). As a Western researcher entering a displaced persons' camp in an Asian context and later in a refugee community in Australia where I had limited knowledge of both populations, I considered it to be both culturally appropriate and commonsensical to engage gatekeepers for this purpose.

It was recognised that the identification of prospective participants by gatekeepers had the potential for bias. Potential risks included the sample not being mindful of all of the recruitment considerations and/or the person or group choosing the sample doing so to highlight a particular viewpoint (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p. 73), as well as the sample being selected from known contacts of the gatekeepers and thus excluding those not known to them. Given my association with KKBBSC, and this being one of my main gatekeeper sources, it was imperative that my sample be recruited more widely throughout the camp. To reduce this risk in relation to the Mae La Camp sample, I initially requested the assistance of KKBC committee members who had responsibility for the oversight of the Baptist Christian community in Mae La Camp. I later further consulted Anglican and Seventh Day Adventist church leaders in Mae La Camp. These people assisted in the recruitment process. In relation to the Australian study sample, I liaised with committee members of the KBCA and the AKO who assisted me in recruiting a suitable sample. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that those selected were from within the wider formal and informal networks of my gatekeepers, rather than from the entire Christian population of Mae La Camp. Similarly, the Australian sample was recruited from participants in two national Christian Karen events and was thus not representative of the entire Christian Karen population in Australia.

These sampling decisions were reached on the basis of a reflection of the aims of the research to gain an in depth understanding of these people and their reported experiences, and an estimation of the resources available to the researcher. It enabled the gathering of information rich, in-depth data which ensured diversity appropriate for analysis and knowledge creation.

With the support and assistance of my gatekeepers, the selection of participants in both locations was conducted in a timely and systematic manner. In relation to the sampling process, I will first discuss the Mae La Camp study and then the Australian study.

4.6.2.1 Mae La Camp Study

I took up residence in Mae La Camp in August 2007. Within days of my arrival, Reverend Dr Simon organized for me to meet with four KKBC committee members for the purposes of discussing the selection of the sample for the Mae La Camp study. Three of the members spoke fluent English while the fourth had a moderate level of understanding.

The Mae La Camp sample was capped at sixteen participants (given time and resource constraints, this was considered the maximum number of participants that could be managed). That is, eight participants from an older age group (aged between forty and sixty-four) and eight participants from a younger age group (aged between nineteen and twenty-nine), with four men and four women in each age group were recruited.

After explaining the aims and criteria of the study and providing them with a Gatekeeper Information Sheet with confidentiality clause in both Sgaw Karen and English (Appendix B3) which they duly signed, the two older committee members accepted responsibility for recruiting the older age cohort, while the two younger committee members accepted responsibility for recruiting the younger age cohort. I then provided them with Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms in both Sgaw Karen and English language (Appendices B1 & B2) to give to the people they selected. A week later, the two older committee members met with me again. They gave me the particulars of the eight people whom they had approached and who agreed to participate in the study. As each of these participants met the criteria for the sample, I agreed to their selection and thanked them for their assistance. (As discussed at 4.7.1.1, I met with these people to discuss the proposed research and their involvement and each signed a consent form prior to the commencement of interviews.)

Selection of the younger age cohort occurred in January 2008 after I had completed the interviews with the older age cohort including their transcription and beginning analyses. In consultation with my gatekeepers, the selection of this cohort rectified an identified flaw in the selection process of the older age cohort which consisted entirely of Sgaw Christian Karen of a single denomination – Baptist. While the majority of Christian Karen are Sgaw and belong to the Baptist denomination, other denominations have churches in Mae La Camp and include Pwo Karen. Accordingly, the younger age cohort selected

included representatives of the Seventh Day Adventist and Anglican denominations and one Pwo Karen participant.

4.6.2.2 The Australian Study

The Australian Study took place over two weeks from December 2008 to January 2009. Initially, I identified two gatekeepers known to me who lived in Mae Sot, Thailand and who were invited delegates to the KBCA Annual Bible Camp in Sydney, Australia beginning 27 December 2008. One of them was also an invited speaker at the AKO Youth Seminar to be held in Kincumber, Australia beginning on 8 January 2009. I met with them and discussed the aims and purposes of this aspect of the study. They both expressed their willingness to help me and contacted the organisers of these events on my behalf. Subsequently, I was invited by the KBCA Chairperson and the AKO General Secretary to attend both these events and given permission to organise focus groups and key informant interviews as needed. As these were both national events with delegates from most Australian States attending, I was provided with an ideal opportunity to interview people representing most of the Karen communities across Australia in a single location. My two gatekeepers from Mae Sot, Thailand continued to assist me in Australia and were instrumental in selecting the sample for the two focus groups and liaising with local organisers to arrange for me to interview community leaders from each State. Each participant was given either a Focus Group or Key Informant (Australia) Information Sheet and Consent Form (Appendices B2, B4 & B5) prior to taking part in the study which they duly signed. These gatekeepers also acted in the role of translators and transcribers in the focus group discussions.

The Australian sample comprised recognised Christian Karen community leaders living in Australia who were interviewed individually, and Christian displaced Karen from the camps who had resettled since 2006 within two focus group discussions. Ten community leaders representative of the majority areas where resettled Karen are living in Australia agreed to be interviewed. The number and composition of the focus group discussions was decided upon in keeping with recommendations from various researchers in this area. To optimise group interaction, it was decided to aim for six to eight participants in each group, representative of the various Australian States in which resettled Christian Karen are living (Morgan, 1997, p. 34; Brown, 1999, p. 118; Kitzinger, 2006, p. 26). The KBCA focus group comprised mixed ages and gender with four men aged twenty-two, forty, and two at fifty-one

years and two women aged twenty-one and thirty years. The AKO Youth Seminar focus group comprised three men and three women aged between twenty and twenty-four years.

4.6.3 Limitations of Sampling Processes

Specific inclusion criteria were set for the samples in both studies, in order to obtain an in-depth understanding of the displacement and resettlement experiences, and implications for identity, of a specific group of people, the displaced Christian Karen living in (or who have lived in) displaced person's camps on the Thai-Burma border. In doing so, it is acknowledged that any transferability of understandings (Padgett, 1998, p. 93) derived from the research will be limited to this group and not necessarily extend to other Karen groups, such as internally displaced Karen in Burma, non-displaced Christian Karen, both living in Burma and other countries, and displaced Karen who are not Christian. It is also acknowledged that, due to the sampling approach taken, the study cannot be generalized to all Christian Karen living in Mae La Camp or in Australia as the sample was not representative (Creswell, 2007; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). The sample was, however, purposive. In order to obtain a cross-section of Christian Karen living in the camp, both men and women were included, and within each group, there were older and younger people. The two main sub-groups of the Karen, Sgaw and Pwo, were represented as were members from three different Christian denominations. This cross-section of people provided some breadth to the sample.

A further limitation that is recognized relates to the fact that recruitment for both studies took place with the assistance of gatekeepers; whom it is noted have the potential to recruit a sample that would highlight personal viewpoints (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). However, I had to consider that in both studies, I was the 'outsider' and the gatekeepers recommended by Reverend Dr Simon and the organizers of the Australian conferences were trusted 'insiders'. In the Mae La Camp study, I was initially unfamiliar with both the camp population and physical layout of the camp. In the Australian study, I was completely reliant on my two gatekeepers who accompanied me from Thailand as I had no personal knowledge of the resettled Karen community in Australia. Hence, I was guided by Neuman (2003) and CEMCA (2008) who both advise the worth of using gatekeepers for this purpose in such situations. To reduce the risk of bias, I formulated strict criterion for the selection of participants. In the Australian study, risk of bias was further reduced when I was given an opportunity to speak on the opening night of both the KBCA Bible Camp and AKO Youth Seminar where I outlined my study and

its purposes. Hence, when people were approached the following day to participate, they were familiar with me and the study. Even so, I recognize that the older age cohort sample chosen in the Mae La Camp study which was all people who identified as Sgaw Karen Baptist Christians, neglected to represent the different denominations of the Christian faith practiced in the camp and the two main sub-groups of the Karen. In this way, the gatekeepers who chose the sample who themselves were Sgaw Baptist Christians, unintentionally “highlighted a particular viewpoint” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p. 73). It wasn’t until the interviews were completed and I was evaluating the process before meeting with different gatekeepers to choose the younger age cohort sample that I considered this oversight. Even so, I believe the integrity of the gatekeepers evidenced in their positions in the community assisted to ameliorate limitations of choosing the sample in both studies.

4.7 Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews (up to three with each participant) were the primary data collection method employed in the Mae La study. This method complemented the reflexive nature of this research. As Taylor and Bogdan’s (1998) definition highlights,

... repeated face-to-face encounters between the researcher and informants directed toward understanding informants’ perspectives on their lives, experiences or situations as expressed in their own words (p. 77).

The strength of this method was that I was able to understand and interpret social reality through the meanings that the participants attached to their life experiences (Minichiello et al, 2008, p. 69). However, to enhance rigor and to give breadth and depth to the interview data, secondary methods were also utilized (Padgett, 1998, p. 70; Darlington & Scott, 2002, p. 91). In this way, the data collection process was triangulated. Blaikie (1991) provides the following advantage for the use of triangulation:

... deficiencies of any one method can be overcome by combining methods and thus capitalizing on their individual strengths (p. 115).

The primary data collection method for the Australian study was focus groups. Secondary methods employed in both the Thai and Australian contexts were observational living and key informant interviews, and maintenance of comprehensive field notes. While not a formal data collection method, I also reviewed a number of contemporary reports relating to the displaced Karen on both sides of the Thai-Burma border. These reports were published by a variety of organizations who are working

directly with the displaced Karen, including KHRG, KNU, KRC, KWO, PRAD, FBR, Committee for Coordination of Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand (CCSDPT), CIDKP, BPHWT, TBBC and UNHCR. These reports added to my understanding of the situation of the people under study and this information was reflected in many of my field notes.

While the participant interviews, key informant interviews and focus group discussions were time specific, secondary methods of observational living and maintenance of comprehensive field notes began immediately on my arrival to live and teach in Mae La Camp on 5 August 2007 and continued throughout the data collection process. Mead (1973) remarks on the importance of this as a means of data collection:

When the field worker arrives in his [or her] field, work begins immediately; there are first impressions that will not be repeated and so must be recorded (cited in Kirk & Miller, 1986, p. 56).

Each of these data collection methods is now discussed.

4.7.1 Interviews – Mae La Camp

The participant interviews in Mae La Camp were conducted between 22 September 2007 and 20 March 2008. Speziale and Carpenter (2007) highlight the complexity of the interview process and the importance of the researcher fully engaging in this process (pp. 36-37). With this in mind, I systematically attended to various aspects of the interview process beginning with interview preparation, the interview itself and recording of same.

4.7.1.1 Interview Preparation

There were a number of considerations in preparing for the interviews to ensure that the objectives for this method of data collection would be achieved in an ethical and trustworthy manner. These considerations included an initial meeting with the interview participants, preparation of an interview guide, choosing the location for the interviews, engaging translators and ensuring support for the interview participants. Each of these will now be discussed.

- **Initial Meeting with Interview Participants**

In preparation for the interviews with the older age cohort, my gatekeepers who had selected the sample suggested that the participants chosen attend a meeting whereby I would personally explain the aims and purpose of the study and the reason they were being asked to participate. While aware of the importance of building rapport and relationship with these participants to develop trust between myself and them (Darlington & Scott, 2002, p. 54), initially, I had concerns that a joint meeting would be breaching confidentiality of their identity. However, my gatekeepers explained to me that in the close knit society in which these people lived, this was not a concern and the participants themselves had requested this as they wanted to get to know me before the interviews. This view supported the findings of Kanska's (2008) research with resettled Karen in which she concluded that "the concept of confidentiality is rather alien in a community where privacy is not highly valued" (p. 15). Hence, the following Saturday morning, the eight older age cohort participants attended a meeting in the common room of KKBBSC and with the help of a translator, I introduced myself and shared a brief life history. Only after this relationship had been established did we discuss the aims and purposes of the study and the participants' anticipated role in the research. The meeting concluded with small talk over cups of tea and biscuits, with the participants signing the consent forms and appointments made for interviews which took place over the next three months. The meeting served its purpose; the people were eager to participate, their questions had been answered and I believed it helped in the flow of the first interviews.

In relation to the younger age cohort, the gatekeepers who recruited this sample stated that it would be better to meet with the participants individually because of their varied roles and commitments in the camp making it difficult to meet at one time and place. Hence, I made times to meet with each of the participants, with a translator when needed, and discussed the aims and purposes of the study and expectations of their role. While being more time consuming, these pre-meetings had the same impact as the group meeting with the older age cohort. After each participant signed the consent form, appointments were made for interviews which took place over the next two months.

• Interview Guide

In preparation for the interviews, I developed an Interview Guide (Figure 4.2). I had decided to use a semi-structured interview process whereby the topic area guided the questions asked, yet the means of asking the questions was closer to a more loosely structured interview process characteristic of a conversational style of interviewing (Minichiello et al, 2008, p. 52). To this end, my interview guide was designed to provide general direction to the questions I would ask to elicit responses relating to the central domains of this study, that is, identity, organized violence, displacement and resettlement, without becoming a rigid ‘straightjacket’ that would disrupt the conversational flow of the interview aimed at treating the participants and their situations as unique (Padgett, 1998, p. 60; Darlington & Scott, 2002, p. 57; Minichiello et al, 2008, p. 51, 89-90). Further, the guide gave shape to the participants’ stories as they were told and allowed for flexibility of both style and order of questions asked (Richmond, 2002b).

	Self	Family	Community
Past Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Background • Self Identity • Roles • Significant events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roots • Personal history within family • Significant events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting the context • Past connections and roles
Present Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current Status • Level of awareness • Relation of past experiences to the present 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current support • Current structure • Current roles within family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current connections • Current roles in community
Future Intentions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcomes • Personal goals • Self-identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future support • Future roles within family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future connections and roles

Figure 4.2: Interview Guide (adapted from Richmond 2002b)

With reference to the interview guide, general questions were developed. These questions related to how and why the person came to live in the camp, his/her family, his/her faith, life before coming to the camp and now in the camp, what it means to be Karen and his/her hope and plans for the future. While each of the interviews covered these topics, questions were not asked in any particular order. The aim of the interviews was to remain attuned to the research questions, but at the same time, be open to what the participant was willing to share with me; to travel with them on a journey of discovery of what their story meant. Rubin and Rubin (1995) refer to this interview process as “guided

conversations” (p. 122) and in this way, I gained a deeper understanding of the participants’ experiences.

- **Interview Location**

Consideration was given of the location of the interviews. Ideally, I wanted to conduct interviews in participants’ homes as I was aware of the need to locate the interview in a setting that was private, comfortable and quiet for the participant (Richards & Morse, 2007, p. 113). Also from a holistic view, I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of participants’ lived lives and observing them in their own home setting would assist in this. However, the constraints within a displaced persons’ camp did not always lend itself to this. Some of the participants lived in dormitories and other forms of shared accommodation where privacy was not possible. Following further consultation with the gatekeepers on what would be most appropriate, it was agreed that the interviews would take place in participants’ homes where possible and where not, one of the upstairs rooms in the Bible College would be used.

- **Translators**

Sgaw Karen is the lingua franca of the Karen living in Mae La Camp. While many of the Christian Karen speak varying amounts of English, the majority are not fluent in this language. Given the focus of the study was the detailed exploration of participants’ identity, I needed to interview in the language that the participants were most comfortable using. Twinn (1997) supports this view in her health related research which found that where English is not the first language of the participants, it is more appropriate for researchers to use the language of the participants to obtain greater understanding of their perceptions (p. 419).

In the planning stages prior to arriving in Mae La Camp, I discussed the choice of translators with my gatekeeper consultants. We discussed qualities needed, including a good understanding of English, experience in translation, being trusted in the community, possessing good people skills, able to maintain the confidentiality of the information given and both male and female. During the initial meeting to discuss the sample, the KKBC committee members suggested three people they considered possessed these qualities. I subsequently interviewed these people and chose two – one male and one female. The man, Thra Ler Lay Kler Htoo was a graduate and teacher in the Bible College and the

woman was a secondary school teacher. While not professional translators in the sense that they had accredited qualifications in this area, they both had extensive experience as community based translators within the camp. Thra Ler Lay Kler Htoo remained my translator throughout the whole data collection process, but the first woman chosen resigned half way during the interviews with the older age cohort citing increased family and work pressures as the reason. The two older women still to be interviewed both knew Thra Ler Lay Kler Htoo well and requested that he translate for them. After careful consideration, I agreed to this, but determined that new female translators would need to be engaged before embarking on the interviews with the younger age cohort. For the younger female age cohort, I engaged two female translators who were recommended to me by one of my gatekeepers and who met the criteria listed above. One was a tutor with a Masters Degree and the other was a secondary school teacher.

Orientation of Translators

Initially, I provided each translator with a Gatekeeper Information Sheet in both Sgaw Karen and English which outlined their role (Appendix B3). I then organized and conducted a two hour training session in which I provided more detailed information on the research and the nature and purpose of the semi-structured style of interviewing. In the training, we discussed the difference between verbatim and meaning based translation (Esposito, 2001, p. 570). The purpose of the interviews was to explore participants' perceptions of identity in the context of their experiences. To highlight the purpose of the interviews in the context of cross-language research, I utilized Esposito's model of the Process of Cross-Language Interpretation as a basic framework for the training (Figure 4.3).

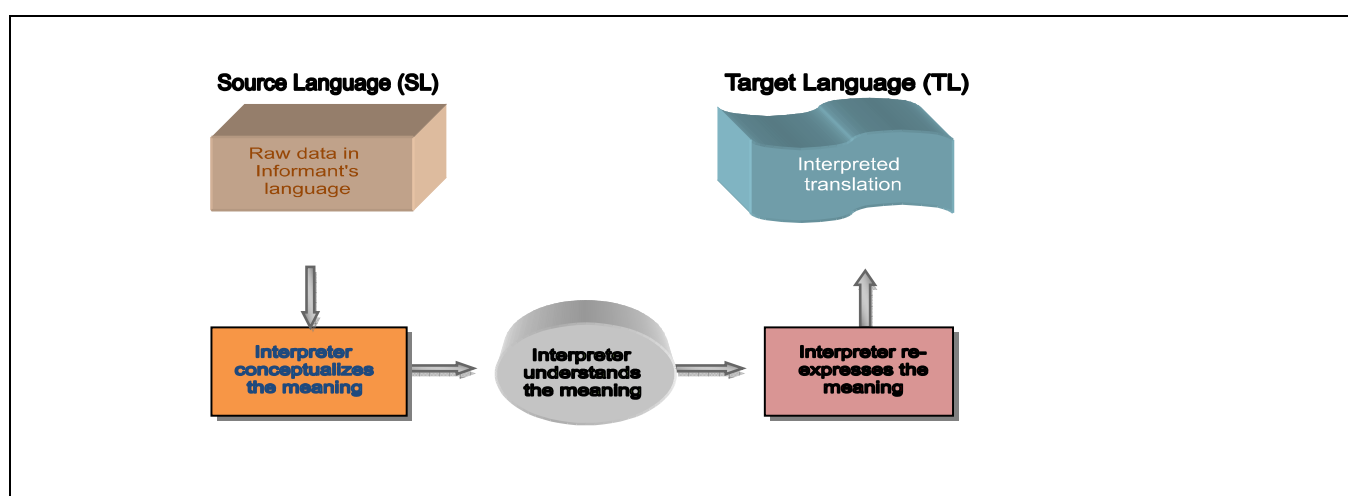


Figure 4.3 Process of Cross-Language Interpretation (Esposito, 2001, p. 571).

This framework states that translation from the source language (Sgaw Karen) into the target language (English) needs to be meaning-based rather than a verbatim account of what was being said (Twinn, 1997, p. 657; Esposito, 2001, p. 570; Shibusawa & Lukens, 2004, p. 179). The purpose of this is to achieve cultural equivalence where both connotations and contextual meaning of the translation are included (Leppihaleme, 1997, p. 3). As a student of Sgaw Karen language, I was aware that this language does not have verb tenses and personal pronouns are non gender specific. Syntax is also very different to English. Therefore, a verbatim account would be incomprehensible to a mono English speaker and meaning would be lost.

Prior to the training, I had already conducted two interviews in English and was happy with the Interview Guide that I had developed. I referred to this Interview Guide to outline how I intended to conduct the interviews and discussed the general questions I intended to ask, providing each translator with a copy. Finally, I stressed the importance of confidentiality and had them sign the confidentiality clause on their Gatekeeper Information Sheet (Appendix B3). I repeated this training session when I engaged two new translators in January 2008.

Remuneration of Translators/Transcriber

Following negotiation with my advisor and the Head of Research, School of Social Work and Human Services, University of Queensland, an agreement was reached whereby the transcriber and/or translators were paid 150 baht (approximately AUD \$5.00) per hour. While this amount may seem low from a Western viewpoint, it was determined by my consultant gatekeepers to be a fair wage in the context of employment in Mae La Camp where the maximum income of teachers is 1500 baht (approximately AUD \$50) per month.

• Support for Interview Participants – Selection of Counsellors

As this was a study of displaced people, I anticipated that the participants would have experienced varying levels of trauma and loss in their lives. The nature of the interview questions had the potential to highlight aspects of these experiences. I was conscious that my questions could open a ‘Pandora’s Box’ which I would be unable to close. While my professional training as a social worker sensitized me to the needs of the participants in the manner I conducted the interviews, I was aware that my role

in this process was to be an interviewer and that it was not appropriate for me to act also in the role of counsellor if required (Padgett, 1998, p.38; Darlington & Scott, 2002, p. 28, 57).

In consultation with my gatekeepers, it was explained to me that, within the displaced Karen community in the camp, there are no formal counsellors as such. However, there are identified people within the community who make themselves available in times of need. Two of these people, one male and one female, were approached and they agreed to be named in this role to the participants. Their names were included on the Participation Information Sheet (Appendix B1) that was given to each participant prior to their involvement in the research.

4.7.1.2 The Interviews

Sixteen people agreed to participate in the Mae La Camp study. Two of the older age cohort and one of the younger age cohort were interviewed in English without aid of translators. These participants were fluent in English having completed their graduate or secondary education in this language. While Twinn (1997) and Minichiello et al (2008) recommend that in cross-language research, interviews are best conducted in the participant's first language, these three participants stated they were comfortable speaking in English, and indeed, spoke English in the course of their working life in the camp. Of the remaining thirteen participants, twelve were interviewed in Sgaw Karen and one of the younger age cohort was interviewed in Burmese, all with the aid of translators. A total of thirty-five interviews were conducted. Four participants were interviewed three times, eleven were interviewed twice and one person from the older age cohort was interviewed just once. After the first interview, this person chose to withdraw from the study, citing increased family and work commitments as the reason but agreed that I could use the first interview in the research. The second of three interviews with one of the older age cohort participants took the form of a family interview including his wife, adult son and three adult daughters who all contributed to a discussion relating to their displacement experiences. Two or more interviews with the participants enhanced rapport between myself and them and conveyed to the participants that I was genuinely interested in their experiences of social reality while at the same time, increased my understanding of that social reality from their perspective (Minichiello et al, 2008, p. 64). Repeating the interview process also enhanced trustworthiness and credibility of the data and generated thick descriptions contextualising experience and interpretation (Denzin, 2001, p. 100).

Interviews averaged sixty minutes with no discernable time difference between first and subsequent interviews. The exception was the family interview which took ninety minutes. In the first interview, I aimed at developing rapport and began with familiar 'safe' areas such as family relationships and roles in the camps. Using the combined strategies of the recursive style of interviewing which enables concurrent interpreting and analysing of information as it is given, and active listening skills developed over time in my professional capacity, my aim was to facilitate a flexible structure whereby I followed the participant's lead (Minichiello et al, 2008, p. 87). My interview guide guided the questions, providing some structure, but I then followed the leads that were generated in the interview context (Hatch, 2002, p. 101).

I chose to begin the interviews with two of the participants who agreed to be interviewed in English. In this way, I was able to test the relevance of my Interview Guide in my own language. I have some experience working in cultures where English is not the first language spoken and was aware of the need to slow down my speech and phrase my questions in a simple way. However, despite this awareness, I still found myself regularly using obscure idioms that I would have to go back and explain. On occasions, their accent confused me and I had to ask for clarification two or three times before understanding what was being said. This disturbed the flow of the interview in parts but overall, did not take away from the story that was being told. The first two participants were very patient with me and both were keen, not only to tell me their story, but for me to understand what that story meant for them. It provided a good grounding for me when I started interviewing with the aid of a translator.

As expected, the conversational flow desired was not as successful when interviewing in Karen or Burmese. However, as my translators and I worked alongside each other more, we developed greater understanding and a more effective partnership. Developing a positive working relationship with my translators enhanced the interview process. As trusted members of the community in which the interviews were located, they assisted my credibility as a researcher with the participants and also provided invaluable explanation of background contexts and cultural concepts that helped me make sense of the stories that were being told (Jobbins, 2004, pp. 315-316). As agreed in the training session, during the interviews, my translators provided brief synopses of participants' responses which enabled a better flow than would have occurred if s/he gave full translations of each response. In the longer dialogues, they made notes, so as not to disturb the flow of the conversation. As my Karen improved, I would sometimes give a nod that indicated I understood the gist of what was being said so

that there was not the need to disturb the flow of the story being told. Immediately following each interview, the translator and myself allowed time for discussion whereby s/he would clarify and/or extrapolate on dialogue and provide contextual information that enhanced my understanding of the interaction that had taken place. I found this to be a valuable exercise which acted as a beginning data analysis.

The interval between first and second interviews was between two and three weeks. As I was concurrently teaching, I needed this amount of time to allow me to reflect on both content and nuances of what was said including non-verbals and contexts of the stories shared. Second interviews provided the opportunity for me to clarify information, and for the participants to expand on issues raised in the first interview. Second interviews generally were more participant led with occasional prompts and probes by me to encourage participants to extrapolate on particular areas relevant to the study.

Of the four participants who were interviewed three times, two of them participated in all these interviews in the camp. They were a man from the older age cohort whose second of three interviews was with his family and a man from the younger age cohort who indicated to one of my gatekeepers that he felt that he had more to share on a particular issue. Consequently, a third interview was organized. The other two third interviews and one of the second interviews were conducted by phone (with the assistance of Thra Ler Lay Kler Htoo as translator in two instances) with three of the participants who had resettled in USA and Australia. These interviews were more structured with set questions focusing on their resettlement experiences and averaged forty-five minutes each.

Many of the interviews evoked emotional responses and tears flowed freely and without apology on some occasions. Though participants were assured that access to the counsellor was completely confidential, I am aware that no-one approached either of the two counsellors named. It was explained to me by all my gatekeepers that even though the Karen have suffered intolerable haunt for decades, these feelings are mostly internalised and only shared within families, if at all. Thramu Eh Ku Lweh (2008) in her Master's thesis relating to this topic writes,

... our daily experiences are filled with separation, hurt, hatred, brokenness, revenge ... they are part of our daily existence, part of who we are ... but we do not share them (p. 15).

Thramu Eh Ku Lweh's research concerned the need for the Christian Church in the camps to encourage their church members to share these experiences within a counselling framework, so as to facilitate healing and growth.

4.7.1.3 Recording of Interviews

All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed by either myself in the case of the interviews conducted in English, or by Thra Ler Lay Kler Htoo in the interviews conducted in Karen and Burmese. Thra Ler Lay Kler Htoo and I aimed to do this as soon as possible after the interview and generally this was achieved within seven days. In relation to the interviews in English, I listened to the recordings on multiple occasions reviewing my typed transcriptions for accuracy. In relation to the cross-language interviews, Thra Ler Lay Kler Htoo repeated this process. Further, we met fortnightly during the interview process to discuss both the transcriptions and subsequent interview direction. Drisko (2004) refers to this process as part of "preening the data", ensuring that it be analysed as completely and accurately as possible (p. 197).

4.7.2 Observational Living in Mae La Camp

A secondary data collection method of the Mae La Camp study was observational living. Observational studies have the capacity to

... reveal and explain important features of life ... [and] can generate insightful and enduring concepts that can be applied to other settings and that add to our knowledge of the social world (Pope & Mays, 2006, p. 40).

Observational living occurred concurrently with the primary data collection method of interviewing. In the process of living, working and participating in various activities within the Christian displaced Karen community in the camp over an eight month period, I immersed myself in their culture aiming to "see things the way they do and grasp the meanings they draw on to make sense of their experiences" (Pope & Mays, 2006, p. 38). Observations were both general and specific. General observations involved observing how the quotidian lives of these people were lived in work, home, church, educational and recreational settings. Information was collected during informal visits in people's homes, general conversations in 'tea shops' and other places where people meet, from my role as teacher in the Bible College, involvement in Christian based activities and my living in close proximity

to a large school, orphanage and hostel for victims of landmines. Specific contexts included attending national and/or cultural events, weddings, funerals and baptisms. My observations involved all of my senses, hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting and feeling. Farber (2006) describes this as “the ‘aha’ moments of noticing. They are feelings inside you that emerge” (p. 6).

The strength of this data collection method was my ability to stay continually for an extended period of time in this place, thereby maximising the range of behaviours and people observed at all points of day and night over several months (Hatch, 2002, p. 73). In this way, I gained firsthand experience in the setting, seeing things that potentially are taken for granted by participants and therefore less likely to be revealed in interviews, and gleaning sensitive information that permitted greater contextual understanding. Reflexively, being part of this community permitted me to add my own experience in this place to the analysis of the Christian displaced Karen’s lived experiences (Patton, 2002, pp. 263-264).

4.7.2.1 Field Notes

Field notes are a recognised data collection method that provides a “wide-angle view” of the phenomena under study, creating a thick, rich description of the culture (Speziale & Carpenter, 2007, p. 211). During the Mae La Camp study, my daily observations, thoughts generated in the interview process and personal reflections were written down. Everywhere I went, I had a pocket notebook and pen, and over the eight months, many notebooks were filled with a combination of verbatim and paraphrased reports of conversations, impressions and comments of interviews, personal thoughts and feelings in relation to various things I saw, heard and read as well as descriptive accounts of various events I witnessed. The ‘aha’ moments of noticing referred to by Farber (2006) frequently occurred in the small hours of the morning when I awakened to the clicking sound of geckos and recollected a conversation, thought or something I had seen or read. I would switch on my torch and write in my trusted notebook and then with the thoughts still in my mind, drift back off to sleep. Hatch (2002) describes this process as raw field note taking entailing descriptions of contexts, actions and conversations written in as much detail as possible. He goes on to say that the next step is to convert these notes into research protocols “through a process of filling in the original notes ... organized in a consistent format (p. 77). I did this by transferring these notes to the computer on a weekly basis under the headings of general observations around the camp, interview related, Bible College related,

reflections on readings and self reflections. While I found this to be a very time-consuming process, I was rewarded over time with an increased contextual understanding of the displaced Karen in this place.

This process was repeated during the Australian study with field notes reporting on the process of the focus groups and key informant interviews, observations at both the KBCA Bible Camp and AKO Youth Seminar and personal reflections.

4.7.3 Key Informant Interviews

As a secondary data collection method, a number of key informant interviews were held in both Thailand and Australia. Le Compte and Preissle (1993) define key informants as

... individuals who possess special knowledge, status, or communication skills, who are willing to share their knowledge and skills with the researcher (p. 166).

Further, they are the key to the researcher's understanding of a culture under study (Gilchrist & Williams, 1999, p. 73). In accordance with recommendations made by Johnson (1990, p. 30), Le Compte and Preissle (1993, p. 166), and Gilchrist and Williams (1999, p. 75), I interviewed key informants who were Christian Karen, active in their community and had a reputation of being trustworthy and reflective of their culture.

As my aim was to reveal general patterns of the Christian displaced and resettled Karen experience, rather than have specific questions answered, I used a loosely structured framework in my interviews with these people. In this way, these interviews were non-directive, resulting in data being provided that was considered important by the person (Dobbert, 1982, p. 114). All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. As all key informants were fluent in English, using this language in their everyday working lives, these interviews were conducted in English. Key informants in Thailand were given a Gatekeeper Information Sheet (Appendix B3) prior to interviews, and signed the confidentiality clause section at the bottom. Key informants in Australia were given a Key Informant Information Sheet (Australia) and signed a Consent Form (Appendices B2 & B5) prior to interviews.

In Thailand, I interviewed nine key informants in both Mae La Camp and in the nearby town, Mae Sot, representing general, women's and youth ministries of KKBC (4), KNU (1), KRC (1), KWO (1), Karen

Education Department (KED) (1) and KHRG (1). In the Australian study, I interviewed ten key informants representing Karen community leaders in Queensland (2), New South Wales (4), Victoria (2) and Western Australia (2). Of these ten community leaders, one had lived in Australia for more than twenty years, one had lived in Australia for fifteen years, four had migrated under special humanitarian grounds after the fall of the KNU Headquarters in Manerplaw, Eastern Burma in 1995, and four had migrated directly from camps on the Thai-Burma border under the recent UNHCR resettlement scheme. Four of these community leaders, two each from the two latter groups of migrants, also held executive positions with State or National branches of the AKO.

In the Mae La study, the purpose of conducting key informant interviews was to expand and clarify my understanding of cultural, historical and political information specific to the displaced Karen situation (Carter & Beaulieu 1992 cited in Swart & Bowman, 2007, p. 440). While these interviews were recorded and transcribed, the purpose was for my personal clarification and information was not used for data analysis. However, in the Australian study which was smaller and shorter in duration, data collected in key informant interviews formed part of the data analysis.

A strength of this data collection method is that it provided me with the opportunity to build and strengthen relationships with important community informants, both on the Thai-Burma border and in Australia, while at the same time, collect detailed and rich data.

4.7.4 Focus Group Discussions

A recognition that focus groups are “an excellent way of identifying the needs of under-researched populations” and have the ability “to generate large amounts of narrative data from the participants’ perspectives in a short time” (Esposito, 2001, p. 569) was the principal reason for choosing this as one of the data collection methods in the Australian study. The focus group approach is a useful method to give voice to groups whose voice is often not heard in research because of the difficulties in cross-language data collection (Morgan, 1997, p. 20; Esposito, 2001, p. 569).

4.7.4.1 Preparation

My aim in the focus groups was to gain perspectives of resettlement from Christian displaced Karen who had recently arrived from the camps in Thailand and how this had impacted on their identity as Karen. In the first instance, I referred to the Interview Guide (Figure 4.2) used for the Mae La interviews to develop questions. Researchers such as Berg (1998, p. 110) and Brown (1999, p.120) contend that this is an essential first step in the preparation for focus group discussions to ensure that the interview guide accurately reflects the research question. Subsequently, general questions were developed that related to participants' life prior to migrating to Australia, reasons why they came, family, challenges and roles in Australia, connections back to the Thai-Burma border and Burma, and future plans.

At both the KBCA Bible Camp and the AKO Youth Seminar, the conference convenors invited me to address their delegates regarding the aims and purposes of my overall research and of the Australian study in particular. These talks, in part, prepared the way for the selection of the sample for the focus groups, as people were more able to make informed choice about participating when approached by my gatekeepers. Those who agreed to participate were given Focus Group Participant Information Sheets and signed Consent forms (Appendices B2 & 4) prior to commencement of the focus group discussions.

As I was aware that many recently resettled Karen had limited understanding of English language, I decided that the focus group discussions would be conducted with the aid of a translator, with participants encouraged to speak in the language in which they were comfortable. My two gatekeepers from Mae Sot, Thailand who initially facilitated the organisation of this study had previously acted in the role of key informants. Hence, they were very cognizant of my research and agreed to act in the role of translators and transcribers for this study. Prior to the focus group discussions, we discussed the aims and purpose of the group discussions and the semi-structured nature of questions to be asked. Both translators had extensive experience in translating within their organisations and were familiar with meaning based interpretation processes.

4.7.4.2 The Focus Group Discussions

Six participants agreed to take part in each of the KBCA Bible Camp and AKO Youth Seminar focus group discussions which were held during free time periods of the respective programs. The discussions took eighty and ninety minutes respectively and were digitally recorded. I began by reiterating the aims and purposes of the study and answering any questions people had in relation to this. I encouraged all participants to contribute, advising them I was keen to gain their ideas, opinions and feelings of resettlement in the context of their ethnicity as Karen. I began with opening questions of when and why they migrated to Australia as a means of getting everyone talking and proceeded to more open ended questions from there.

The discussion flowed well in both groups in a mixture of Sgaw Karen and English. While many of the people in each group had not met each other prior to their attendance at the venues, they had similar experiences in common and were comfortable voicing their views in this group setting.

4.8 Data Management and Analysis

Data management and analysis processes are a continuum that begins with the raw data, progressing in turn to descriptive statements, interpretations and the final presentation for the reader. Patton (2002) describes this continuum in both scientific and artistic terms. The scientific part is systematic, analytical, rigorous, disciplined and critical in perspective, while the artistic part is explorative, metaphorical, insightful and creative (pp. 431-460). Patton's view is supported by Denzin and Lincoln (2005) who state that "qualitative research is endlessly creative and interpretative ... [and] qualitative interpretations are constructed" (p. 26). Both Patton (2002) and Denzin and Lincoln's (2005) views are pertinent to the approach taken in this research in relation to data management and analysis.

This section will begin by outlining the processes taken in relation to translation and transcription of the interviews and the decisions made in relation to the use of pseudonyms of the research participants and some of the gatekeepers, before detailing the analysis of the data.

4.8.1 Translation and Transcription

Translation adds a layer of complexity to the data collection process. This research utilized Esposito's model of the Process of Cross-Language Interpretation (Figure 4.3) for the translating and transcribing of interviews and focus group discussions, in recognition that not all concepts are universal, nor are all words or phrases translatable verbatim (Esposito, 2001, p. 570). One of my translators, Thra Ler Lay Kler Htoo, also acted in the role of transcriber and transcribed all of the interviews in Mae La Camp not conducted in English. In a separate training session with Thra Ler Lay Ker Htoo, we discussed the issue that transcription, like translation, from the source language into the target language needed to be meaning based as opposed to a verbatim account. All interviews were transcribed firstly, from spoken Karen to written Karen and in the case of the two interviews in Burmese, spoken Burmese to written Burmese, and then written Karen/Burmese to written English. The focus group discussions were similarly transcribed. This process is known as sequential translation and is considered to provide a more careful review of the translation process, thus enhancing rigor and trustworthiness of the data (Shibusawa & Lukens, 2004, p. 185).

It is recognized that in translation and transcribing of a language not familiar to the researcher there is potential for interpreter bias (Twinn, 1997; Lopez, Figueroa, Connor & Maliski, 2008). To address this potential, back translation based on Brislin's (1980) model was utilized. Back translation ensures that the original translation "was not an exercise of mere lexical equivalence, but one of conceptual equivalence too" (Papadopoulos, 2006, pp. 94-95). It ensures that the translator conveyed correct information and meaning, did not alter or omit any of the information and used language that accurately conveyed the meaning expressed by the original speaker (ibid, p. 95).

In relation to the interviews, two independent transcribers who lived outside the camp were engaged in the back translation process. All interviews conducted in Karen and Burmese were first transcribed from the written target language (English) back to the source language (Karen or Burmese) and then this was compared to the digital recording. Any inconsistencies were noted. These were then discussed with myself and one of my gatekeepers who is literate in all three languages. While these transcribers noted some discrepancies in the original transcriptions completed by Thra Ler Lay Kler Htoo, it was agreed by both of them as well as my gatekeeper who supervised this process, that they did not alter the meaning of what had been said.

Discrepancies were grouped into two types. Firstly, there were several instances of phrases being transcribed from the written English into written Karen that resulted in a different Karen translation when compared to the digital recording, but which had the same or similar meaning. Two examples of the same meaning were Naw Htee Na's response to my question, "Do you speak English?" Thra Ler Lay Kler Htoo translated this into English as, "I can speak a little bit" but when back translated, the transcriber noted that Naw Htee Na's response, translated literally, was in the negative, meaning in English, "I cannot speak much". A second example was Naw Peh's response to my question, "Was he killed in the uprising?" Thra Ler Lay Kler Htoo translated this into English as, "No, through malaria", while the transcriber noted that the literal response translated into English was, "He died by malaria". An example of where the English translation was different but with similar meaning was the Karen word "dweh oo", which literally means "burned down", being translated as "destroyed" by Thra Ler Lay Kler Htoo in reference to a number of participants' accounts of how their villages were destroyed (burned down) by the Burmese soldiers. In all of these instances, the meaning of what was being said remained the same.

Secondly, there were four occasions where the transcriber observed a word or words spoken by the participant had been omitted in the written Karen and subsequent English translations. Three of these occasions related to the omission of the adjective "younger" or "older" to denote the position of a sister or brother in the family. For example, in response to my question to Naw Lah asking her if she had any brothers and sisters, Naw Lah answered, "I have one younger brother and one younger sister", but Thra Ler Lay Kler Htoo omitted the word "younger" in both the written Karen and English transcriptions. The fourth instance was a lengthy reply by Saw Krit to my question "What made you join the army when you were so young?" In this reply, Thra Ler Lay Kler Htoo omitted two phrases. The first clarified what Saw Krit had already said, "Because in my life, the influence of the environment ..." The omitted following phrase was "... everyone was facing the same problem" (translation). At the conclusion of this response, Saw Krit said, "Because of experiences like that, it led me to become a soldier and fight". However, the sentence prior to this had been omitted in Thra Ler Lay Kler Htoo's transcription, "Because of that, all the young people have no village and many become Karen soldiers" (translation). While it is noted that some omissions in the transcription of these interviews occurred, both my gatekeeper and myself agreed that the integrity of the meaning of what was being said was not compromised.

In relation to the two focus group discussions held in Australia, the back translation process was conducted by one of the participants and then was discussed with myself and one of the key informants who is an accredited translator. No inconsistencies were noted in these translations.

4.8.2 Use of pseudonyms

In the findings chapters, I have aimed to represent the voices of all the participants and their stories. Participants' own words are used throughout to bring to the reader the meaning of their story from their viewpoint. In support of this decision, Darlington and Scott (2002) write:

Direct quotations from participants are integral to qualitative research reports – they bring the research to life. They also show the reader the evidence upon which the researcher's interpretations are based (p. 161).

However, to safeguard anonymity of the participants and some of the gatekeepers and/or key informants, pseudonyms were used. Names in Karen are very descriptive. In most instances, the Karen do not have surnames; all words are their only name, for example, my transcriber's name in the Mae La Study was Ler Lay Kler Htoo, which when translated, means 'a strong, golden rock'. When addressing a Karen person, we use all of these words often prefaced with terms of respect such as Thra (male teacher), Thramu (female teacher), Naw (Miss or Mrs) or Saw (Mr), Pu (grandfather), Pee (grandmother), Dee (uncle), Mu Gar (aunty). In assigning each participant and two of the gatekeepers a pseudonym, I sought to give names that while they would not identify the person or misidentify another person, they would still reflect the personality of the participant. This process occurred with the guidance of Reverend Dr Simon and with the help of Thra Ler Lay Kler Htoo and Thra William (Appendix C). Aside from the obvious benefit of safeguarding the people's anonymity, another benefit is to demonstrate to the reader the patterns and themes that became evident in the research were representative of all the interviews and not just a select few participants (Holloway, 1997, p. 130).

4.8.3 The Analysis

In keeping with the reflexive nature of this research, analysis has been a circular process as recommended by Addison (1989), Hawkins (1996), Miller and Crabtree (1999) and Merriam (2009). It also has been a complex and searching process as I sought to derive sense and meaning out of the data. As part of the wider interpretive process which began when the research was first conceptualized,

analysis was both integrated into and arising out of the data collection, resulting in new understandings, self reflection, and modification of the research questions to include resettlement.

A general inductive analysis approach as advocated by Strauss and Corbin (1998), Miller and Crabtree (1999) and Thomas (2006) was utilized to draw out themes from the data and to highlight similarities and differences. This approach

... primarily uses detailed readings of raw data to derive concepts, themes or a model through interpretations made from the raw data by the researcher ... it allows the research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent in the raw data (Thomas, 2006, p. 238).

Commencing with the Mae La Camp study, the first stage of this process involved the reading and rereading of the transcripts and field notes. Braun and Clark (2006) state that this stage “provides the bedrock for the rest of the analysis” (p. 87). From this, themes were developed which reflected the stories told by the participants and my own personal observations. These beginning themes were recorded into a coding frame, from which the transcripts were then coded accordingly. As the interviews progressed and new codes emerged, the coding frame was amended and transcripts recoded to accommodate the changed frame. This process continued throughout the Mae La interview process and the Australian study.

An early example of a specific theme that emerged from the data was labelled ‘family’. All of the participants and many of the people with whom I had contact during the time I lived in Mae La Camp spoke of family. The following quotations from the transcripts and journal notes were coded under this theme.

My husband work for his people my husband is a soldier ... [he] died in action ... [I have] five daughters ... and 3 adopted sons ... I have to look after my mother-in- law – she is 98 years old and her daughter – she has mental problem – they stay with me (Naw May, 1st interview).

... as I want to go, Pee Pee [grandmother] don’t go, and nobody to look after Pee Pee, so I will stay (Naw Paw Gay, 2nd interview).

Other specific themes developed from the transcripts and field notes were language, “We teach our children to be proud of their language” (Words of a Karen teacher as recorded in research note, 26/11/07)); values, “the Karen people is the nation that the people that love each other, helping each other, and honest and helping other and love to live peacefully” (Saw Hsa Mu, 2nd interview); and

history, “I identify myself as a Karen because we have history about our Karen people go through and why they are moving place by place” (Saw Htoo, 2nd interview). As the relationship between these themes became apparent to me, I grouped them under the broader theme of ‘culture’.

Similarly, another early theme emerging from the data was ‘Christian faith’. This was not surprising as all the participants identified as Christian and I was living and teaching in a Christian community. Even so, as I scanned my journal notes and transcripts, different aspects of faith became apparent. Initially, I grouped these under two broad headings of ‘external faith aspects’ and ‘internal faith aspects’. Sub-headings of ‘external faith aspects’ included ‘church membership’, ‘church roles’ and ‘music’, while the sub-headings for ‘internal faith aspects’ initially were ‘values and beliefs’ and ‘hope’. The following are examples of quotations from transcripts and journal notes that were coded under these aspects of the theme of Christian faith.

EXTERNAL FAITH ASPECTS

Church Membership

Although my church members are spreading everywhere such as Australia or America or Mae La Oo or Maeramo, they are living as a church (Saw Doh Du, 2nd interview).

Church roles

In the church I am a deacon. But in the Kawthoolei Karen Baptist churches I am one of the advisers (Saw Htoo, 1st interview).

Music

Devotions as usual in the common room this morning with the children and youth living in Dr and Mrs Simon’s home. The children’s voices are amazing and they sing with such passion! I’m getting used to waking up to them shuffling in so I decided to shuffle out myself this morning – if you can’t beat them, join them. So it was that at 5.30am I was singing with the kids, “Meet God first in the morning, meet Him there to pray, and your heart will be happy, so happy, all through the day”. These kids have so little in every way yet they seem to really believe what they are singing (Field note, 29/08/07).

INTERNAL FAITH ASPECTS

Values and Beliefs

But myself, I also study, I go to Sunday School, and heard the Jesus story and we have to be careful and not to use the bad speak, to speak truthfully, to do truthfully, to live truthfully and honestly so when I hear like that, the words touched my heart, so when I was 12 years, I become Christian, so step by step like that (Naw May, 1st interview).

Hope

Now all the church members are combined together but especially for myself, I have my mother church and the others also have their mother church. Now they come to Maeramo and combine together as a church. But when the time to go back comes, we will each go to our mother church (Saw Krit, 1st interview).

An overwhelming amount of data was generated under these headings and it quickly became apparent that transcripts fitted multiple headings. In the preening process which took place over several months, these various aspects of faith morphed into three broad sub-themes of belonging, values and attitudes that better facilitated an analysis of the meaning of faith in relation to the participants' perception of identity.

In this iterative way, the seven major themes of this study, culture, Christian faith, education, nationalism, oppression, displacement and resettlement were developed inductively from the transcripts.

At the completion of the Mae La Camp interviews, in consultation with both Thra Ler Lay Ker Htoo and my principal advisor, two outcomes became apparent. Firstly, the coding frame that I had developed and which had been amended many times revealed a causal network, whereby each of the major themes caused changes in other themes (Thomas, 2006, p. 240). This will be discussed in more depth in the next chapter. I also identified interrelationships between these themes, for example:

Between education and nationalism: "Saw Ba U Gyi's 4 principles being recited in common room by the high school students for their homework tonight, with Revolution Day on Thursday" (Field Note, 29/01/08).

Between oppression and faith: "When he was killed, I look at Isaiah 52 ... God knew everything for him – God helped him face the problems" (Naw May, 2nd interview).

Secondly, the emerging data collected during both the participant interviews and in my general observations revealed the significance of the UNHCR's new resettlement policy. This resulted in the decision to extend the research design to include a study of newly resettled Christian displaced Karen in Australia where similar themes that had emerged in the Mae La Camp study data subsequently revealed themselves.

Miller and Crabtree (1999) refer to this stage as "the heart of the analysis and interpretive process" (p. 20). It was where segments of the data in the coding frame were connected to themes that answered the

revised research questions. At this time, similarities and differences were actively sought both within and between the three cohorts that comprised the research, that is, the older and younger age cohorts of the Mae La study and the participants in the Australian study.

The next stage in the process of the analysis was the representation of the data. This has involved the writing up of the research, dissemination of findings within the Mae La Camp community and the resettled community in Australia, speaking at conferences and churches nationally and internationally, and submitting a journal and magazine articles for publication.

As stated earlier, data analysis is not a linear process but rather iterative. As such, I moved back and forth between collecting, reflecting, analysing, reflecting, collecting, analyzing and writing in a continuous cycle (Addison, 1989, p. 147). Throughout the data collection and data analysis processes, I was conscious of the responsibility to interpret the findings from the participants' viewpoint, to give space for their voices to be heard, and the need to be systematic and reflexive in my approach to ensure that this occurred.

4.9 Addressing Trustworthiness and Rigor

The integrity of qualitative research is premised on trustworthiness and rigor. In relation to trustworthiness, research findings should reflect the reality of the participants' experiences, while rigor refers to the degree of authenticity and credibility of those findings. Both are required to legitimise naturalistic inquiry. Padgett (1998) cites three main threats to the trustworthiness and credibility of a research study as reactivity, researcher bias, and respondent biases. Reactivity refers to the potential of the researcher's presence to distort the normative occurrences in the research field. The potential for researcher bias can occur throughout the study from the sampling process to "filter[ing] one's observations and interpretations through a lens clouded by preconceptions and opinions" (p. 92). Respondent biases can occur when participants omit or misrepresent information for a variety of reasons or tell you what they think you want to hear. These threats are ameliorated by a combination of strategies including prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer debriefing and support and member checking (Padgett, 1998, pp. 88-103). Each of these strategies was employed in this study to enhance and promote trustworthiness and rigor. The means by which these strategies were employed in relation to the three identified threats are now discussed.

4.9.1 Prolonged Engagement

Prolonged engagement as a strategy addressed both reactivity and respondent bias. My active membership role afforded me the ability to engage with the research topic over a lengthy period of time and to develop mutual acceptance and respect. In the eight months I lived in Mae La Camp, I was able to observe the infrastructure of the camp in practice as well as interact with the participants in the context of their daily lives over a lengthy period of time. The interview process also involved prolonged engagement. Second and third interviews gave credibility to data collected as information shared in first interviews was often reiterated with greater detail in subsequent interviews.

While the Australian study was considerably shorter, prolonged engagement was achieved by actively taking part in both conferences and in both instances, sharing a dormitory with women delegates. In this process, I was able to observe delegates in both the formal and social programs over several days and also observe congruence between informal conversations over meals and social events with information provided in the focus groups and key informant interviews. My acceptance by these groups of people was assisted in part by my association with the two gatekeepers who accompanied me from Thailand to Australia and who also shared the same dormitories with me at these conferences, and also by the Karen traditional value of hospitality discussed in Chapter 2. At both venues, I met people I knew from Mae La Camp including five students I had taught at KKBBSC in 2004 and 2007. In the week between the two conferences, one of my gatekeepers arranged for me to stay with her sister and her family who were leaders in one of the Sydney Karen Baptist churches. As a guest in their home, I met many others of the Karen community in Sydney and joined with them in both the Karen New Year and western New Year celebrations.

4.9.2 Triangulation

Triangulation is a dynamic process whereby complementary methods intertwine at different times throughout the research process enhancing the rigor of the study (Presbury & Fitzgerald, 2006). The employment of a variety of data sources – interviews, observational living, field notes, key informant interviews and focus group discussions – served to ameliorate all three threats to trustworthiness and credibility of the data collected.

4.9.3 Peer Debriefing/Support

My social work experience with an emphasis on the value of professional supervision prepared me for the realization of its necessity in the research process. In a process of reflexivity, I developed a support network during both the data collection and analysis phases of this study. My peer support people were not researchers, but worked with me in the field and had extensive firsthand experience of the phenomena under study. While we all knew each other, we did not meet formally as a group. Rather, I met with them regularly but informally in either pairs or individually to debrief and give and receive feedback. A most valued support person was Dr Somboon Panyakam, Head of International Business MBA Programme, Faculty of Business Administration, Payap University, Chiang Mai. Over the months of the data collection process in Mae La Camp, I met with him monthly in a mentoring capacity and maintained contact with him over the subsequent period of writing the dissertation. Despite the remote location of the first research site, I had access to internet which enabled me to maintain regular contact with my advisors by email and conversations. During the Australian study, I met with my advisor for debriefing and support. These interactions were my lifeline, enabling me to keep perspective and focus. Further, I consciously engaged in self-reflection throughout the research in a process of seeking to understand my personal thoughts and feelings and how they impacted on the study. These processes assisted in the amelioration of researcher bias in the study (Padgett, 1988, p. 98-100; Mays & Pope, 2006, p. 89).

4.9.4 Member Checking

Padgett (1998) writes that “member checking remains one of the most important ways to lend trustworthiness to a qualitative study” (p. 101), addressing all three of the threats to trustworthiness. Member checking is used to determine the accuracy of the findings by taking what has been written and specific description of themes back to participants to determine whether they feel they are an accurate representation of the data (Creswell, 2007, p. 196). Member checking occurred on three levels in the Mae La Camp study. Firstly, second interviews with the two age cohorts provided me with the opportunity to clarify information shared in the first interview. Secondly, at the conclusion of the interviews in March 2008, I presented my initial findings at a chapel service in the camp attended by many of the participants and community in which I had been living. There was opportunity after this for discussion. Thirdly, after I had completed first drafts of my findings chapters relating to the

interviews, I made appointments to visit with as many participants as possible to review with them what I had written. This process occurred eleven to seventeen months after the original interviews. Of the sixteen participants, two from each age cohort had left for third countries. Of the remaining twelve, ten were available to meet with me for this purpose. The other two, both teachers from the younger cohort, were participating in teacher training programmes during the time I was in the camp and were not available for interviews. Where required, Thra Ler Lay Kler Htoo accompanied me and acted as my translator. We discussed what I had written. On five occasions, demographic details were corrected and on one occasion, the participant requested that I reword a comment to better reflect what he meant. Of the four participants who had migrated to third countries by that time, I was able to contact two. Over two telephone conversations with Thra Ler Lay Kler Htoo assisting as translator, we discussed the contents of the chapters. Both stated they were happy with what had been written.

In the Australian study, I made contact with all the focus group discussion participants with the assistance of a translator where needed and all of the key informants by telephone and email after completing the draft chapters pertaining to them. In this process, some demographic information was corrected but the overall presentation of findings was accepted by all contacted.

While acting as a measure to guard against inaccuracy of data analysis and researcher bias, I also employed this process to validate the participants' worth. Their willingness to partake in this process was also a validation for me that the research relationship was one of mutual trust (Padgett, 1998, p. 100).

4.10 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the conceptual framework and method employed to carry out the two studies that informed this research. The data collection procedures and attention to aspects of trustworthiness and rigor outlined in this chapter facilitated the thematic analysis of the data collected. This analysis is presented in the following three chapters. The first chapter provides an analysis of my observational living in Mae La Camp as recorded in my field notes. The second chapter introduces the research participants in both the Mae La Camp and Australian studies utilizing the micro system of the conceptual model outlined in this chapter. The final of the three analysis chapters further explores how the meso and macro systems of the participants' lives within a transitional framework impacted on their identity.

CHAPTER FIVE

OBSERVATIONAL LIVING IN MAE LA DISPLACED PERSONS' CAMP

Reflections of the 'Acceptable Incompetent'

The polyvocal world that qualitative research seeks to convey is naturalistic, complex, varied, expansive and cacophonous (Thody, 2006, p. 129).

Over the next three chapters, the analysis of data generated by this research is presented. Within the transitional ecosystems model (Figure 4.1) developed in the previous chapter, the voices of those who participated in this research will be represented. They include my voice within my active membership researcher role, the voices gleaned from the observations and the interviews conducted in Mae La Camp and the voices of the participants in the focus groups and interviews held in Australia. This polyvocality provides “a framework for allowing many voices to express many truths” (Hatch, 2002, p. 206) enabling the portrayal of a rich picture of the reality that is the identity of the Christian displaced Karen.

Through the data analysis process described at 4.8.3, seven themes arose in this research. They are culture, Christian faith, education, nationalism, oppression, displacement and resettlement. These themes are conceptually significant in two ways. To the extent that they are all present in data collected cross-sectionally for this research, they are integral to the present day conceptualization of their identity by the research participants. They can also be seen to represent a sequential development of the identity of this people group over time, as new events and experiences were incorporated into collective understandings of being Karen. As discussed in Chapter Two, Karen culture is over 2000 years old. When the American missionaries introduced Christianity to the Karen in the early nineteenth century, those who embraced this new faith incorporated its tenets into their culture. Education was a direct development from Christianity and nationalism was borne out of the newly educated Karen elite. While oppression and its consequent displacement have dogged the Karen throughout their history, it has taken on new meaning in the context of their nationalistic zeal in contemporary times. Resettlement to the Western countries is a new chapter in the Karen story.

5.1 Introduction

In this, the first chapter of the data analysis of this research, I will present my observations of the eight months I lived in Mae La Camp as recorded in my field notes. My observations occurred within my capacity as a teacher in KKBBSC and my living within the Christian community in Zone C of the camp. As a secondary data collection method, my experiences of observational living provided me with the opportunity to gain an understanding of the lives of those people around me, and in so doing, gain an insight into how these people perceived their identity.

Firstly, an analysis of the data that focuses on the lives of those living, studying and working in KKBBSC where I both lived and worked in the role of a volunteer teacher will be presented. Secondly, an analysis of the observational data collected of the wider camp will be presented focusing on the themes of culture, Christian faith, education and work, nationalism and resettlement. In Mae La Camp, more than fifty thousand people live in an area of five square kilometers. It consists of three zones – A, B and C. Zone C is largest in geographical area with Zones A and B being similar in size. The camp population is proportionately spread across all three zones. KKBBSC is located at the northern most part of the camp in Zone C.

The concept of the ‘acceptable incompetent’ developed by Schatzman and Strauss (1973, p. 25) is an apt term to describe the active membership role I assumed in this research. I arrived in Mae La Camp with some skill and knowledge gained from formal education and life experience but I also knew that I was entering a new phase of my life and had much to learn. Conceptually, my role in this research was reflexive in nature. In keeping with the transitional ecosystems approach to this research, I became part of the social system in which the participants were located (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 520). By assuming this posture of reflexivity, my ‘self’ became a source of, and location for experience and action, thus enabling an inclusive approach to the task at hand (Fook, 2002, p. 81). In so doing, my ‘self’ became located within the Karen’s existential and psychosocial reality and could not be abstracted from that reality. My identity became constructed in terms of intersubjectivity – in this frame, I could no longer illuminate the struggles of the Karen from the safe distance of my Western lifestyle (Miehls & Moffatt, 2000, p. 342).

5.2 Observations of Kawthoolei Karen Baptist Bible School and College (KKBBS)

On 5 August 2007, I began the data collection phase of this research when I changed address from my comfortable Western lifestyle in the United Kingdom to Mae La Displaced Person's Camp, Thailand. As part of my active membership role, I was now a volunteer teacher in KKBBS located in Zone C of Mae La Camp. For the next eight months, my abode from Monday to Friday of each week was a four by four metre room located within the main building of the College with my teaching taking place in classrooms located immediately underneath.

5.2.1 The Campus

The College has been in existence for twenty-seven years, twenty of those years in Mae La Camp, moving there from Kawthoolei (Karen State) after the area in which it was located was overrun by the Tatmadaw in 1990. It comprises two streams of learning – a four year Bachelor of Theology (BTh) taught in English language medium and a two or four year Licentiate in Theological Studies (LTS) taught in Karen language medium. There is also a Preparatory Class designed to prepare students whose English and/or Bible knowledge skills require further development to study in the English medium Bachelor degree. Total enrolment in the 2007-2008 academic year was two hundred and thirty-two students.

Studying and living takes place in a single structure of bamboo, wood, masonite, thatch and tin built in a ramshackle fashion. From an original temporary building of bamboo and thatch that is still standing after twenty years, a series of extensions lengthwise, sideways and upwards now provide the learning environment for the students and living quarters for the Principal and his family, guests, some teachers, some students and some of the children of an orphanage that comes under the care of KKBBS. Nearby is the student kitchen and dining hall, more teachers' houses, dormitories for students, a church that doubles for a primary and middle school, four more dormitories for the orphanage housing a total of two hundred and forty children and Care Villa, a hostel for victims of landmines. All of this is on a small piece of land between the stream and the main road, with the steep rocky cliff of the hills marking a third side.

Through a Western lens, the physical environment of KKBBSC is poorly conducive to learning. Classrooms have no walls, the floors are packed earth and desks are made of crudely constructed wood. Yet, a spirit of determination to succeed permeates this campus. It can be seen in the faces of the students, in the easy manner of the teachers and heard in the singing that the Karen love to do.

5.2.2 My Experience as a Teacher on this Campus

Before first meeting the Karen in January 2003, I attended an orientation session with PRAD in Chiang Mai. The one thing that I retained from that session is the PRAD motto, “Normal is over!” This motto aptly described my daily life in KKBBSC. It was as far removed from what I was used to in the West as possibly could be. I had planned this move for more than a year and I had previous experience of living there for short term periods. Yet as I arrived in the common room with my well travelled back pack, I remember feeling very apprehensive,

....as I entered the common room, a mixture of fear and excitement – what the hell am I doing here – I briefly heard my mother’s voice telling me where my place was and it certainly wasn’t here – she was of the old school who had strong beliefs of class and women’s responsibilities. There was no one else in sight – afternoon church service was on, so after a brief welcome from Dr Simon, I was shown my room. I looked around in the silence at the masonite walls and wooden floor – cobwebs around all the walls and dust everywhere – there was nothing else in there – a good place to start from (Field note, 05/08/07).

I had been in email contact with College staff prior to my arrival and was expecting and prepared to teach psychology and sociology. However, I had worked with the Karen long enough to know that seldom does anything go as one expects, so was not all that surprised that the plans changed. I was soon to find out that two teachers were absent and I was given their classes – English and Old Testament to BTh I, English and Church History to BTh II and Introduction to Counselling to BTh III.

In typical Karen style ... Saw Wee puts on his official hat and gives me absent teachers’ teaching schedule – 5 subjects – first one in 1 hour – it is the Karen way – no text books, no instructions, no notes, no problem! (Field note, 06/08/07)

I was aided by one of the many paradoxes in this place – fast speed internet.

The week passes quickly – teach 3 classes each morning – then prepare for the next day in the afternoon – thank God for the internet – so amazingly surreal tapping away on these computer keys on the verandah of this place – overlooking the jungle and mountain range that separates us from them, a sea of bamboo and thatched roofed huts – searching Google!

I thank God for that crazy Aussie Frank who made this happen – who else would have thought of bringing a satellite dish to this place – he had the plan even before they had electricity – once they worked out a way to purloin the electricity from the powers that be [with their knowledge] – he was here like a shot taking this place into the 21st Western century – jungle, steaming heat, rain pounding down on the corrugated iron roof, thatched roof huts, bamboo verandah, no walls, boys washing at the well, cicadas clicking away, geckos making their strange sounds + SATELLITE DISH! (Field note, 11/08/07)

In so many ways, I was constantly reminded how much of the ‘acceptable incompetent’ that I was. My students were aged from nineteen to twenty-eight. The vast majority of them were fluent in Sgaw Karen, the national language of the Karen, with many also fluent in Burmese. A small number also spoke Thai and/or other ethnic languages. For most, English was their third or even fourth language, and while it was the language medium of the College, their level of understanding and comprehension in this language varied widely. Very quickly, I realized that to be understood, I needed to use less complex English and to slow my rate of speech. While this sounds commonsensical, it was quite difficult to put into practice. Further, while students’ knowledge of the contents of the Bible and of basic theology is really good, their understanding of scholarship in the Western sense is low or even non-existent. Basic skills – like analyzing: breaking a problem down into simpler parts, referencing, organizing thought to lead towards a conclusion – that in a Western context I would assume adult learners would have some level of competence, are quite foreign for them. My teaching experience was based on interactive learning. The Karen learning experience is based on the teacher at the front of the class doing all the talking and the student doing all the listening and copying copious notes from the blackboard. This, coupled with traditional Karen introversion and cultural respect for teachers and elders, proved most challenging.

Each day was a new learning experience. In the process of reflexivity, I sought to locate myself in the picture (Fook 1999); in the picture of a participating member of this College; in the picture of being a part of these students’ lives. Critical social theory posits that we have the capacity to transform organizational situations (Ngwenyama, 1991, p. 270). In those early weeks, I adapted my teaching style, but also encouraged the students to adapt their learning style. In accordance with Goodear’s (2001) flexible learning model, I strived to develop a culturally sensitive learning environment whereby both the students and I shared responsibility for the learning (p. 13). In this way, within a process of cross-cultural exchange, mutual respect grew and I was privileged to become more than their ‘thramu’ (female teacher), I became their ‘pee pee’ (grandmother) – a title of utmost respect. The eight months

went by very fast and before I knew it, the academic year drew to a close. On 30 March, 2008, the College celebrated their Silver Jubilee and I was very humbled to be awarded a Plaque of Appreciation. On it, it read:

On this auspicious occasion of celebrating the Silver Jubilee of the KKBBSC, this Plaque of Appreciation is awarded to Pee Pee Shirley Worland in recognition of your faithful support for the teaching and equipping ministry of the College.

This award was an affirmation to me that I, the ‘acceptable incompetent’, had been accepted into their community and I looked forward to returning part-time for the 2008/2009 academic year.

5.2.3 The Students

October 2007 saw the beginning of second semester. After two months of locumming for absent teachers, I was given my own classes, BTh II – Interpersonal Relationships, and BTh III Introduction to Major World Religions. Over the next semester, I really got to know these young men and women and they became part of my life.

The majority of my students were Karen with a small number of Karenni students in the BTh II class. Some were born in the camp, some came when they were small children, many came from other camps, and many came across from Burma more recently in their teenage years. Most were separated from their family, with many not knowing exactly where their family was. Such is the life of the internally displaced who are constantly moving from one place to another trying to stay one step ahead of the Tatmadaw intent on their campaign of genocide as detailed in Chapter 2.8. In common, they had all experienced trauma. They all had experienced loss – loss of land, loss of freedom, loss of family members. Also in common, was their Christian faith. For me with my Western lens, it seemed incongruous that this faith was so strong in light of what they had experienced. As our relationship grew, they shared their stories with me. In the evening, students would visit with me, and over cups of hot chocolate, I gained an understanding of their experiences and what those experiences meant for them. It was indeed a privilege.

In most instances, the stories were told ‘matter of factly’ – without any overt emotion displayed. Story after story of how the Tatmadaw had attacked their village and they ran with their parents, stories of how while running, they became separated in the jungle, stories of witnessing a parent, grandparent or

other relative killed or injured, stories of the precarious journey over the mountains and jungle across the border into Thailand, giving up their land for the relative safety of the displaced persons' camp.

The Burmese soldier, they came – we didn't have warning – we ran, but some they couldn't run, the Burmese soldier, they shot them and they died. We kept running and when we looked back, we could see our village burning – they burnt everything. Later, I went back with my father and we buried them that died, just him and I. The others were too afraid – afraid of landmines – you know, Thramu, when the soldiers leave, they lay landmines so we can't come back (Words of a young man, recorded as a field note, 27/09/07).

The young man who told me this story was fifteen years old at the time and his father sent him across to the camp soon after so he could finish his schooling. It was now ten years later. His parents were still living in Kawthoolei and he had only seen them intermittently since then.

They also shared stories of their families – of how much they missed them and how they were worried about them. Many of my students had not seen any of their family since coming across the border. Their parents sent them across for safety and the opportunity to access education, but they themselves chose to remain in their land. I was told how some families were living in Tatmadaw controlled areas and how their fathers and brothers are forced to work as slaves for the army. Others told me their parents lived in IDP hide sites and were constantly moving to avoid detection by the Tatmadaw. The only contact they had was through messages brought across by visiting pastors and sometimes from members of the Free Burma Rangers who regularly conduct relief missions to the IDP areas.

....Pee Pee, I have not seen my parents for more than 6 years. I get message sometime about them. Last week, a pastor visited Pa Gyi [Reverend Dr Simon] and he told me my grandfather died last month. I am very sorry that I cannot be there to help my parents. They are getting old and I feel I should leave here and go and be with them, but I want to finish my study – I know they want me to do well in my study. I don't know what to do (Words of young woman recorded as a field note, 20/11/07).

....I heard my mother is very sick. She lives with my older sister, but they have no money. They have no money to buy medicine for my mother. I pray every day for her, I pray that God will keep her safe and make her better. I want my sister to bring her here. If she would come here, she could go to the hospital and they would make her well (Words of a young man recorded as a field note, 24/01/08).

These stories gave a personal face to the myriad reports I had read regarding the human rights abuses being perpetrated by the SPDC in Burma as detailed in Chapter 3.3. They highlighted the multiple forms of oppression that these students have experienced in their young lives and how these

experiences have defined, in part, their identity (Ferree, 2010). This was further emphasized in the following accounts.

When speaking of their lives in the camp, one Karenni student told me he felt like an animal in the zoo – so many ‘golawahs’ (literally ‘white persons’) coming all the time, looking and taking photographs and then leaving. In a similar vein, another student composed this poem which has been posted on a camp based web site:

We are the People! We are the Pigs!

The life of pigs is not easy in the sty because they have no chance to go outside the sty.
The other animals can come to the sty and say: “hello!”
What the pigs can do is also say “hello” from the sty.
They do not have a chance to go around outside the sty with their friends.
If the pigs try to go outside the sty, the master will hit them or his dog will bite them.
The life of the refugees just looks like the life of pigs.
We, refugees, are not supposed to go outside the camp
The camp is surrounded by concrete posts and barbed wire.
The camp has so many gates and many sections
The children don’t have a chance to play their games like children living in freedom
People are not allowed to go outside the camp and find work
They just stay in the camp and do all kind of things like planting, weaving, building,
Selling own products, learning, sporting, washing, playing guitar ...
(Saw Hsa Bwea Say, 2008).

Yet another student who has now migrated to the USA under the UNHCR Resettlement Programme, described to me how she felt:

Pee Pee, I don’t want to go to third country, but my parents, they want me to go. I have to go with them. Here, I am like an eagle whose wings have been cut off. I can’t go anywhere. If I go on the road, the police, they can arrest me, I just stay here and go from the school to my house, from the school to the church, from my house to my friend’s house. Why can’t we go back to my country, my village was so beautiful (Words of a young woman recorded as a field note, 31/10/07).

While these stories are sad, they only tell a part of these students’ lives. Those stories spoke of their experience of loss, of trauma. They also told me other stories of their hope for the future – for their own future, for their families’ future, for their country’s future. While the stories of loss and trauma were told mostly “matter of factly”, these stories relating to the future were told with passion and humour.

.... when Kawthoolei is free Thramu, I will be President and you can come and stay – I will organize for you to have a Kawthoolei permanent visa to stay and you can teach our people (Words of a young man, recorded as a field note, 06/02/08).

.... I want to go to Australia Thramu and study. I want to be a doctor and then I will come back and look after my people – my people need good medical help – I want to help them. I do not want to stay in Australia; I will come back when my country is free (Words of a young man, recorded as a field note, 09/10/07).

These accounts highlight the disparity between self ascribed and attributed identities of these students (Kaiser, 2001). To many of the visitors who come to the camp and to the Thai authorities, these students are just refugees, contained in a set geographical space and time. The failure of these people to accord them the respect of their identity as members of an ethnic nationality complete with their hopes and aspirations serves to disempower and propagate the oppression begun in their homeland and now continuing in a different form in Mae La Camp (Taylor, 1992; Glenn, 1999). While this misrecognition of their identity has the potential to lower a refugee's sense of self-worth and even see themselves as portrayed by the outsiders (Taylor, 1992, p. 27), the stories shared with me by these students, in the main, demonstrated intersectional ways of thinking in relation to their identity, enabling them to maintain their individual and collective identity as Karen complete with the hope of returning to their land to live in freedom (Hulko, 2009).

Often, I would hear the students singing. The Karen love to sing and the Christian Karen are no different. There is a poem written by the Principal of the College that has been put to music that I often heard the students sing, not only in formal meetings, but in small groups around a guitar. This poem has special meaning for me, as in 2004 when I was contemplating beginning this study, it gave me inspiration and later with Reverend Dr Simon's permission, became the basis for the title of my research. Entitled "Our Living Testimony", it speaks of meaning in the present and hope for the future and it has become a Christian anthem to the Karen struggle for freedom:

Our Living Testimony

They call us a displaced people, but praise God we are not misplaced.
They say they see no hope for our future, but praise God; our future is as bright as the promises of God.
They say they see the life of our people as a misery, but praise God, our life is a mystery.
For what they say is what they see, and what they see is temporal.
But ours is the eternal.
All because we put ourselves in the hands of the God we trust.
(Reverend Dr Simon, 2000).

Reverend Dr Simon shared the story behind this poem with me. He had attended a camp meeting chaired by the TBBC and attended by representatives of many of the NGOs who provide services in Mae La Camp. He told me he was struck by the hopelessness of the refugees' situation as portrayed in many of the NGOs' presentations; a hopelessness that he did not feel and which he said he knew was not shared by many of the other Karen community leaders who were present. On returning to his house, Reverend Dr Simon's reflection on this experience led him to write this poem. When considering the politics of identity (Taylor, 1992; Ferree, 2010), this is a further example of attributed identity relating to their status as refugees resulting in misrecognition of identity as perceived by Reverend Dr Simon and the other Karen attendees at the meeting. Both this poem and the one by Saw Has Bwea Say (above) are poignant examples of how dominant discourses on refugees may both disempower and misrepresent those who find themselves labeled as such (Malkki, 1995a; Said, 2000; Clark-Kazak, 2009).

All of my students displayed a strong nationalistic pride. It was evident in their love of their flag, their respect for their leaders, past and present, and their historical knowledge of the struggle for a free Kawthoolei (Karen State). When they sang the Karen National Anthem, it was sung loudly and with passion. What I observed in these students is that their sense of nationalistic pride and their Christian faith was intertwined and interdependent. Every day in chapel and evening worship, they joined in corporate prayer petitioning God to give freedom to Kawthoolei and Burma. Even though the war that has been going on for more than sixty years shows no sign of abating and the military might of the Karen has dwindled significantly in that time, the students and academic staff I came to know strongly believed that God will free their land in His time. They did not talk of 'if' Kawthoolei becomes free; only 'when' and they accredited the 'when' to God's timing. It was an amazing testimony to hope and faith.

Averill and Sundararajan's (2005) treatise on hope has relevance here. These authors speak of hope as a narrative structure made up of a wish for an outcome, the occurrence of which is uncertain, coping responses undertaken to achieve this outcome in spite of the uncertainty and a belief system referred to as faith. When these elements are integrated into a narrative structure, people are able to maintain a positive outlook and demonstrate an emergent feeling of hopefulness in their lives (p. 136). From my observations of the KKBBS students, their sense of identity was incorporated in this narrative

structure of hope. For me, the privileged Westerner, their positivity within the deprivations of the displaced person's life in Mae La Camp was quite amazing and inspirational.

5.2.4 KKBBSC as a Community

Attending KKBBSC in the time I was there were two hundred and thirty-two students, most of who lived in student dormitories located close to the College. Some who had other duties in relation to the orphanage located on site lived with the children in their dormitories, and a few whose families lived in Mae La Camp lived with them in their houses. A large percentage of the students were from one of the other Karen and Karenni camps along the border and can only return to family once a year. There were twenty-four teachers, most of whom lived in houses close to the College. Most of these teachers also were registered in other camps and could only return home to see family once or twice a year. The Principal and his family lived in the main building along with any guest teachers and with some of the children and youth of the orphanage. These people, including myself, formed the College community.

The key domains that determine the psychosocial wellbeing of a community are human capacity, social ecology and culture and its values (Ager, Abebe & Strang, 2005, p. 160). Except for the guest lecturers, the people making up the KKBBSC community had all experienced the vagaries of war and displacement which had resulted in the disengagement of their communities in their homeland. Yet, within the College community, a new level of engagement was evident that promoted a sense of wellbeing.

Human capacity was seen in the skills and knowledge that both students and teachers brought to the learning environment. Students enrolling in the Bachelor of Theology course must have completed Grade Ten and passed an entrance test relating to English and Bible knowledge skills to attend the College. While this is not a requirement in the Licentiate of Theology course, students must demonstrate in a pre-enrolment interview, a basic knowledge of the Bible and commitment to the Christian life. Teachers in the Bachelor of Theology programme all had post graduate qualifications. For some of the older teachers, these were gained in seminaries in Burma at a time when further study for Karen people was possible. However, this is now not an option for most graduates of KKBBSC. If they choose to pursue post graduate studies, they have to make the precarious journey, often without legal identity status, across two borders to Nagaland in India. Even so, a number of committed

graduates have completed their Masters of Theology and/or Masters of Divinity at the Oriental Theological Seminary (OTS) in Nagaland and returned to share their knowledge in the Bible Colleges in the camps along the border. At the time I was in Mae La, there were four graduates of OTS on the faculty staff. They all keenly assisted me in this research in the formal role of gatekeepers, but more so, in their wealth of knowledge about their people they so patiently shared with me, the 'acceptable incompetent', over meals in their bamboo and thatch homes, and casual conversations in the College common room, tea shop and strolls around the camp. I am truly indebted to them.

It is not only academic skills that these people possess. They have the learned skills of their former lives in their villages and the skills they gained in adjusting to their new lives within the displaced persons' camps. In the absence of formal tradesmen and women, all who live in this community are responsible for maintaining the water, sanitation and drainage systems, electricity supply and buildings. A sense of community spirit was evident prior to the 2008 monsoon season when teachers and students worked side by side to replace many of the thatched roofs of the dormitories and houses. This was followed by the backbreaking work of digging out new drainage channels aimed at preventing flooding of the lower levels of the main College building. Everyone had jobs to do including the young children who fetched and carried, and myself who joined with other women to distribute water and food.

I was constantly humbled by the outworking of the social ecology I witnessed within this community. In the absence of family, the students became family to each other. They comforted one another in their sorrow, encouraged one other in their studies and cared for one another when they were ill. While many of the students enjoyed financial sponsorship that enabled them to purchase clothes, personal items and pay their tuition fees, a number of students had no income of any kind. Yet, within the dormitories, an unspoken system operated that ensured that everyone had what they needed. Those who had simply shared with those who didn't. As one student without any form of sponsorship said to me,

Teloba [no problem], Pee Pee, God always provides, I do not worry for my needs (Words of a young man recorded as a field note, 14/02/08).

Culture and values are traditions of meaning that serve to unite and give identity to a community (Ager et al, 2005, p. 161). In April, 2008, KKBBSC celebrated its Silver Jubilee. This College has grown

from an initial enrolment of six students in 1983 to two hundred and thirty-two students at the time I was there. It has survived the destruction of their original College in Tee Ga Haw, Karen State after just two years, and has since been twice forcefully relocated (first in Walley, Karen State, and then across the border to Mae La Camp). It has further survived a mortar attack by the DKBA in February 1997 and a major flood which destroyed many of the lower buildings later that year.

The values inherent in both the Christian faith and in their Karen culture have facilitated the success of this community and given it a unique identity. Well known Christian hymns are sung alongside Karen songs that tell the story of their ancient heritage and national aspirations. Students wear Karen traditional clothes, and though my students were all studying in the English medium, they were most comfortable reading from their Karen language Bible and singing from their Karen language hymnal.

The College motto based on 2 Timothy 3:17 “Learning God’s Word to be well equipped for every good work” is operationalised in their daily lives. One way this is evident is in the way they practice hospitality to new arrivals to the camp, many of whom arrive in a traumatized state with nothing but what they can carry in their hands. At the time I was living in the camp, some of these people were initially housed in a long dormitory close to the College until they were formally processed, and students and teachers would visit regularly in those early days and provide food, clothing, household goods and encouragement. Karen hospitality is part of their culture – this is not merely out of courtesy, it is the duty of every host to provide shelter, protection, facilities, comfort and privileges even at the expense of their own family’s needs (Moo Troo, 1981, p. 6; Panter, 2008, p. 49). This Karen cultural value perfectly complements the Christian social Gospel that commands the Christian to share whatever they have with those who do not have (Gospel of St Matthew 25:31-40; 1 John 3:17).

Elements of the seven themes that arose in this study - culture, Christian faith, education, nationalism, oppression, displacement and resettlement - were all evident in the lives of the KKBBS community. Though affected by conflict and displacement, they have been able to utilize their human, social and cultural capital to create a unique community committed to the furtherance of God’s Kingdom and Karen identity.

5.3 Observations in the Wider Mae La Camp

While my work and domestic life in Mae La Camp during the eight months I lived there took place in KKBBSC and its immediate environs, I had opportunity through the process of conducting the interviews and general socialization activities to observe the wider life of the people who lived in the camp. Even so, while I was able to move freely in the camp, I acknowledge there were aspects of residents' daily lives that I did not observe. Through informal contacts that originally were initiated within my domestic locale, I was regularly invited to attend social activities such as birthday thanksgiving services and meals in people's homes mainly in Zones B and C. I also held weekly sessions in conversational English at the Leadership Management Training Centre (LMTC), a school offering Diploma and Bachelor degrees in Arts and Science located in Zone B. Informally and formally, I visited with staff of the many NGOs, CBOs and schools located in Zones B and C. The only time I visited to Zone A was to interview one of the younger cohort participants. Travelling to these venues was mostly on foot, though sometimes I would walk out to the road from where I stayed in Zone C and take a motorbike taxi up the gate nearest where I was going. The following section will explore the study themes of culture, Christian faith, education, nationalism and resettlement in the context of what I observed. An added theme of employment/unemployment is also explored.

5.3.1 The Impact of Employment/Non-employment in Mae La Camp

Employment in Mae La is one of those paradoxes that is difficult to comprehend. Official policy of the Thai Ministry for the Interior that regulates the camps states that the camps are temporary structures, and therefore employment of any kind is prohibited (IRIN, 2008). However, it is evident from the size of the market in Mae La, where one can buy anything from one kilogram of beef to tools and a guitar and which stretches over an area of approximately one and a half kilometres, that there is a thriving economy of sorts in this place. In the time I lived in Mae La, I observed several types of employment.

Every morning while it is still dark, a long line of men and women silently walk down the one kilometre track that leads out to the road from the northern most gate in Zone C. This gate is seldom guarded as it is located on the north side of the stream that forms the official boundary of Mae La Camp. On their backs, they carry their 'gu', a long conical cane basket and some carry another over their shoulder. They travel early and quickly so they can reach the forests to collect 'hta lah au lah'

leaves that are used for the thatch roofing of the houses in Mae La. In the evening just before dusk, I would observe them returning with full baskets. For their long hours of labour, they earn just fifty baht per day (about AUD \$1.50). It is grueling work as they have to trudge many kilometres on foot to reach a place where others have not stripped the forest. As one of my gatekeepers told me, “There are more workers than leaves” (Words of Thra William recorded as a field note, 29/10/07). It is also dangerous – if caught by the Thai soldiers, they will be arrested and sometimes beaten and their day’s labour confiscated.

A plethora of international NGO and Karen community based organizations (CBOs) operate within Mae La Camp – TBBC, Shoklo Malaria Research Unit (SMRU), ZOA, Aide Medicale Internationale (AMI), Curriculum Project, World Education, Handicap International, KWO, KED, KRC, Karen Teachers’ Working Group (KTWG), and the Camp Committee, to name just a few. There are sixty schools, forty orphanages and a number of training centres. All of these organizations employ Karen men and women living in the camp who are paid small stipends ranging from 500 baht (approximately AUD \$16) per month for a nursery teacher to 3000 baht (approximately AUD \$100) per month for medics in the hospital and senior Camp Committee staff.

The Karen are traditionally farmers. Their knowledge and skills have been transported to the camps and every available space of arable ground that is not used for housing, roads and other buildings is used for agriculture and husbandry. Crops grown include mustard leaves, corn, egg plant, onions, squash, tapioca and a variety of legumes. Pigs and poultry are also raised. While most of this is used to supplement the subsistence rations of the TBBC, some are able to generate income by selling their surplus in the market.

Karen based CBOs and NGOs also organize a number of income generation projects within Mae La Camp. Both the secular Karen Women’s Organisation (KWO) and the Christian Kawthoolei Karen Baptist Women’s Organisation (KKBWO) facilitate small cottage industries in weaving of traditional Karen cloth, sewing and embroidery. Both organizations provide interest free micro loans of 1500 baht (approx AUD \$50) to enable women to set up looms and purchase thread and material. Finished items are sold by the auspicing organization both locally and overseas with fifty percent of the proceeds given to the women and fifty percent remaining with the organisation to help fund their work. Women have two years to repay their original loan. The KWO also provides regular training in vocational

skills and small business management in Mae La Camp for women to enable them to start up their own businesses, with the aim of promoting self sufficiency and improving living standards of families (KWO, 2010b). The NGO, ZOA, facilitates a project whereby farming skills are taught and trainees are provided the opportunity to grow small crops for personal and marketing use (McKinsey, 2009).

While the income generated from these various employments is limited, it does provide a sense of independence in an environment that promotes dependence. While the practical benefits are obvious, in that people are able to purchase fresh vegetables, meat and household items for their families, employment is empowering people to feel worthwhile contributors of their families and communities. This supports an outcome found in a study by Mollica and McDonald (2002) whereby psychological recovery was more evident in communities where

... refugees were not treated as passive recipients of donor aid but allowed to play an active role in mitigating the stress inherent to their experience, allowing them to hold on to and/or restore the dignity that is essential to their recovery (p. 30).

While these opportunities for employment exist in Mae La and other camps, it must be acknowledged that the positions are few in relation to the number of working age adults living in the camps. Decades of warehousing and the denial of the displaced Karen's inherent right to earn a livelihood under the 1951 UN Refugee Convention has been cited as a significant contributing factor to the high incidence of drug and alcohol abuse and sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) in refugee camps globally (Walter, 2001; Miller & Rasco, 2004), including the Karen and Karenni camps (Eh Doh Wah & O'Brien, 2006; IRIN, 2009a).

A training film produced for the KWO, "The Violence that is Everyone's Secret" (Eh Doh Wah & O'Brien, 2006) highlights the extent of SGBV in the Karen and Karenni camps. With the KWO mission statement, "Karen women for empowerment, equality and freedom" (KWO, 2010b), one of their priorities is responding to this problem. Working in partnership with the SGBV Committee formed in 2003 with the support of the UNHCR, these responses involve training of support workers who provide options, counselling, support and guidance to the victims of SGBV including facilitating access to camp and Thai judicial systems and provision of 24 hour staffed safe houses for women and children in all of the camps (in Mae La Camp, there are four safe houses). Even so, the film's narrator, then KWO Secretary, Naw Zippora Sein, identified cultural, social norms and mores together with failures in both camp-based and Thai national legal systems that act to perpetuate and normalise SGBV

in the camps, recognizing that change will be slow, but clearly resolute in the KWO's commitment to strive towards this change. Her closing statement in the film – “Violence against women is violence against our community” – highlights the corporate nature of the problem with the implicit recognition that the whole Karen community have a responsibility to work together to develop responses that will protect women from SGBV.

5.3.2 Culture in Mae La Camp

Many organizations in Mae La Camp demonstrate a commitment to the maintenance of Karen culture. The KED, KTWG, Karen Environment and Social Action Network (KESAN), Karen Culture Group (KCG) and the KBBC regularly combine with the camp community to promote various aspects of Karen culture including traditional music, dance, stories and rituals.

The Karen education curriculum in Mae La Camp includes the promotion of Karen culture. Each Wednesday, children wear traditional clothes to school – the girls wear their white chemowah (a long white dress with flowing threads of varying colours), and the boys wear their chaka (a V-neck striped shirt with tassels) – and a cultural curriculum is taught including literature, music and dancing.

Too many of the children don't know their culture – they were born here – they have not been in the village. It is important we teach them about our culture; teach them what is like to be Karen ... so they can be proud and know about their land (Words of a Karen teacher in No. 1 Middle School recorded as a field note, 15/01/08).

Both the location and relational aspects of intersectionality identity theory (Glenn, 1999; Hulko, 2009; Ferree, 2010) have relevance here. While these children have experienced multiple forms of oppression, maintenance of culture is seen as an essential means of mitigating the effects of these experiences and promoting their identity as Karen, a distinct ethnic nationality within the Union of Burma.

Shortly after arriving in Mae La, on 27 August, I attended one of those Karen traditions that the KED believe so important to maintain Karen culture, ‘Lah Koo Gee Su’, (Wrist Tying Ceremony), at one of the schools. This ceremony has been celebrated for more than two thousand years at the time of the August full moon. While rooted in ancient ancestral beliefs in the need to protect children from evil spirits stealing the spirit of the child, in contemporary times, it has come to represent Karen unity and

respect of their culture. The ceremony began with community elders – parents and grandparents – washing three white threads in a glass of water and then tying them around the wrist of each of the students encouraging them to remain loyal to their families and people. It was explained to me that water is cleansing and is symbolic of the fact that everyone makes mistakes in their lives which need to be cleansed by forgiveness of others and themselves. As the elders tied the washed threads around each child's wrist, they encouraged the children to forgive others of their mistakes and to be respectful and obedient to their parents and elders. The ceremony was followed by feasting, dancing and singing to traditional music played on traditional instruments. Sticky rice, sugar cane and bananas were served and the school was decorated with 'paw wee' flowers. One of the pu's (grandfather) explained to me the special meanings of these foods and flowers for the Karen:

... this sticky rice stands for our Karen people – if we stick together, we won't be separated, we won't be defeated – we need to stick together. The sugar cane is sweet – it is always sweet, it never changes. Like our Karen people, we do not change our morals – honesty, hospitality, love for our parents and elders. These show we are Karen. Bananas represent good discipline and loyalty for our leaders and paw wee is a special flower that can grow anywhere, anytime and hardly needs any water. It is like our Karen people, we can survive anywhere, no matter what happens to us (Words of a Karen elder, recorded as a field note, 28/08/07).

Teachers, children and their families all participated enthusiastically and a great day was had by all.

5.3.3 Christian Faith in Mae La Camp

While no official figures exist, Reverends Dr Simon and Robert Tway, Joint Chairperson of KKBC, stated to me that fifty percent of the population of the Karen displaced persons' camps along the border identify as Christian. Most of those belong to the Baptist denomination, with the others belonging to the Anglican, Seventh Day Adventist, Catholic and Pentecostal denominations. In Mae La Displaced Persons' Camp, there are thirty-four churches of various denominations and ethnic groups. For the Christian Karen living in Mae La Camp, worship in church is not restricted to Sundays. It is an integral part of their quotidian lives and church services are held in some capacity every day and on Sunday (or Saturday for the Seventh Day Adventists), there are five services in most churches.

In general, I observed their religiosity to be a holistic experience, composed of cognitive, affective and behavioral elements, giving meaning to what has happened in the past, what was currently happening and what will happen in the future (Beit-Hallahmi & Argyle, 1997). It is well documented that

spirituality is a traditional way through which many people develop personal values and beliefs about meaning and purpose, and that religious faith is a primary coping strategy for victims of organized violence. One such study by Weaver, Koenig and Ochberg (1996) found that the Christian act of prayer and worship was a protective factor for coping with trauma and providing a greater sense of well-being for people who had experienced trauma (p. 852).

For the most part, the form of worship in the various churches in Mae La Camp is very traditional with little change evident for example, in Baptist churches, from when the American Baptists first brought the Gospel to the Karen in 1828. While debate exists as to whether this is a good or bad thing, my observations were that the Christian displaced Karen's outward demonstration of their faith through their traditional modes of worship was congruent with their act of faith through the way they lived their day to day lives. Phrases in conversation such as "if it is God's will", "in God's time", "God knows, He understands", were not just said routinely, they were spoken with emotion and meaning. Repeatedly as I interacted with Christians of the various denominations living in Mae La Camp, people shared with me what God had done in their lives; how He had sustained them in the bad times, how He provided the hope to keep them going in the present times and how they believed He would lead them back to their land in His time. For these people, their concept of church was not confined to a building of wood, bamboo and thatch. They identified themselves as a church as highlighted by St Paul in his many epistles recorded in the New Testament, for example:

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.
(1 Corinthians 12:27)

Religiosity also correlates with one's sense of identity, at both individual and collective levels within one's environment (Bellah, 1967). An example I observed of this within the Mae La church community was their response to the victims of Cyclone Nargis that struck the Irrawaddy Delta region of Burma on 2 May 2008. The ferocity of the cyclone, combined with the ruling regime's failure to provide any warning, resulted in more than one hundred and seventy-five thousand deaths and two million people left homeless. Over seventy percent of the people living in the Delta are Karen, and of those seventy percent, more than seventy-five percent identify as Christian (Gumaer, 2008). All survivors had lost one or more family members. Most had lost their homes and means of livelihood. The sense of loss in these communities was immense.

Immediately on receiving the news of the disaster, the church community in Mae La mobilized considerable resources and distributed these to some of the communities affected.

These are our people, we must do something. I told them [church members] we have to do something more than praying, of course we were praying for people, but praying is not enough is what I said ... and they said, yes, let's do it (Personal communication with Saw Kaw Kho, KKBC Committee Member, 17/06/08).

Cyclone Nargis hit the Delta region of Burma on a Friday. Just two days later, while the military regime of Burma was frustrating all international aid efforts, more than a hundred thousand baht (approximately AUD \$3300) was collected in an impromptu collection during morning Baptist church services. Similarly, money and clothes were collected in the other denominations. Substantially more was collected over following weeks as reported to me by members of the Baptist, Seventh Day Adventist and Anglican churches in Mae La Camp. While the amount given was small in comparison to the need, it needs to be recognized that the people giving this money were displaced people themselves with limited means of support. The decision within the Baptist church community was made to focus their help on one affected community in the Delta – in this way, the little they were able to raise would achieve maximum benefit. The money was used to buy rice, noodles, fish paste, tarpaulins, canned fish and medicine. The Baptist Churches in Mae La coordinated the distribution of these goods through churches and Buddhist monks across the river who then negotiated military road blocks and flooded roads to get the aid through. Several missions like this were conducted and continued for several months. The term used was “going under the radar” – avoiding the military who were intent that no aid get to the people affected, the very people who were the subject of their genocidal policy.

Simultaneously, the churches in Mae La were collecting aid for the newly displaced Karen in Northern Karen State. In the two weeks following the Delta disaster, the Tatmadaw continued their offensive in the North and nineteen villages were completely destroyed. Several villagers were killed and thousands were forced to flee for their lives into the jungle (FBR, 2008).

It is northern Karen State – the 5th Brigade and 1st and 3rd Brigade – these areas are always targeted – a lot of IDP's, people running all the time –especially the rainy season – the churches there requested us to buy tarpaulins and food. So we decided to collect money to help. The youth organization and the Women's organisation we collect money from each of the groups and churches here – we collected money to help us with this – this is a long time issue (Personal communication with Saw Kaw Kho, KKBC Committee Member, 17/06/08).

In this way, the church communities in Mae La demonstrated their collective identity and outworking of their faith. It was very humbling for me to observe people who have so little give so much. It reminded me of the story Jesus told of the poor widow's offering in the synagogue as an example of true giving (Gospel of St Mark 12:43-44).

The Christian altruistic spirit continued when a number of survivors of the cyclone, realizing that no aid was coming, managed to make the trek across the mountains to Mae La and Umphiem Camps. In Mae La, the churches again rallied to ensure that these people were given food, shelter, clothing and household goods. Church members moved in with extended family so as to make their houses available to these new families arriving. A collection centre was organized at KKBBSC and people brought rice, yellow bean, canned fish, clothing and household items. The children were enrolled in school and where possible, the adults joined training and other income generation schemes. Some of my senior students in the Bible College counseled the survivors and ensured that their needs were being met.

Pee Pee. We talk with them, we try to show them the love of Jesus Christ. We make sure they have enough for their needs. Their story is very sad. We do as we can for them (Words of young man recorded as a research note, 10/06/08).

I met three of the families who came across. In an amazing testimony to his faith, one man told me how he thanked God for His goodness to him. This man had lost nine members of his family in the cyclone, but his focus was on his current situation.

We know that it is the God's providence and there is no doubt to have faith in Him (Record of notes taken in interview with cyclone survivor, 17/06/08).

The Christians in Mae La Camp including the newly arrived victims of Cyclone Nargis were living their faith each day of their lives. At all levels, cognitive, affective and behavioural, their faith gave meaning to their current situation and enabled them to hope for the future.

5.3.4 Education in Mae La Camp

As discussed in Chapter 2:6, since missionisation in the mid 1800s, and the subsequent compilation of a Karen written language, the Karen have placed a high value on education. For the Karen, education is synonymous with nationalism and leadership as evidenced in the mission statement of the KED which is one of the government departments of the KNU:

To build up a true and lasting peace and justice by producing graduates who are critical and creative thinkers, leaders, good citizens and proud of their ethnicity.

This value has been transported to the camps. In the period I lived in Mae La Camp, twenty thousand children attended school. There were twenty-two nursery schools, sixteen primary schools to Year 4, three middle schools (Grades 5-6), eight high schools (Grades 7-10) and eleven post ten study programmes. No. 1 Middle School (includes Primary School) is located in Htee Ger Nee Church located just behind KKBBS. Six hundred and eighty-five children were taught by thirty-one teachers in classes that operated simultaneously in this space with curtains used as dividing walls – blackboards lean against each other back to back. No. 1 High School is located across the stream. In a cacophony of voices all speaking at the same time, children learn their lessons. The anomaly is that the perception by many Karen in the camp is that the education provided in the camp based schools is of a higher standard than those in the rural Thai villages that surround these camps. The language medium to Grade Ten is Sgaw Karen, but they also have subjects in English, Burmese and Thai. Learning in the Karen language is regarded by the KED as essential in maintaining Karen identity and culture.

In most of the schools in Mae La Camp, the teachers identify as Christian and there is a strong Christian influence in the school curriculum. In many of the schools, the school day begins and ends with prayer and the singing of national songs. At morning assembly, the national song “My Nation” is sung:

Kawthoolei, our blessed nation, with your valleys, hills, rivers and mountains
Everything is so beautiful for me, that is why I will love my nation and be true to her
..... I have to give my life for you (translated).

At the end of the day, they again pray and sing the national song ‘Kawthoolei’.

Kawthoolei is the nation of my ancestors, I must be true to her, take care of her. I love you
and I will sacrifice myself for you. My whole being belongs to you forever.... (translated).

The children attending represent all three faiths practiced by the Karen – animism, Christianity and Buddhism – but in these schools, they all participate in the Christian programme.

The education system in Mae La is funded by the NGO ZOA and auspiced by the KED. Teacher training is also funded by ZOA. There is no provision for tertiary training such as is the Western model. Instead, trainees attend short term sessions of one to three weeks and then participate in on-the-

job training. Each school has a residential teacher trainer who conducts training in the evenings and weekends. The only opportunity to attend longer term training is during the summer break of April to May. To teach in these schools requires a strong commitment. All schools are currently experiencing a human resource crisis as many teachers and experienced trainers are choosing to migrate to the third country under the UNHCR Resettlement Program. This is an ongoing challenge for the KED and there are no easy answers.

However, while the KED oversee all the schools in the camps, the day to day operation of each school is organized by the community themselves. Thramu Deborah Htoo, General Secretary of the KED, explained to me that the school community in the camps is a continuation of the school community in Karen State. When a village was destroyed and the villagers forced to flee to the camps, they restructured their school and church in that place when they arrived. Hence Htee Ger Nee church and school which literally means ‘by the riverside’ was first built in Karen State in 1980, but when that community of villagers resettled in Mae La Camp, they made it a priority to rebuild the church and school which retains its original name. In essence, it is a continuation of that which existed in their village – a link with the past, a link with the land they were forced to flee, a link with the land they all hope to return to – demonstrating both cognitive and emotional attachment forming part of their identity (Hall, 1999).

While education is highly valued by the Karen, it is not surprising that the prolonged history of war and multiple displacements has resulted in a high rate of illiteracy in the camps, as many have not had the opportunity to access any formal education when living in Burma and perceive themselves too old to access it once they move to the camps (Eh Doh Wah & O’Brien, 2003; Sein, 2003; KWO, 2010b; Oh, 2010). In the 2010 Education Survey conducted by ZOA (Oh, 2010), 25% of respondents were completely illiterate and 30% of respondents had not accessed any formal education. Sixty-two percent of these respondents were women. These statistics have changed little over the past decade, indicative of the destructive impact of the long standing conflict in Eastern Burma. When considering the politics of identity, illiteracy is a form of oppression and marginalization in a people group who have experienced multiple forms of oppression and marginalization (McCall, 2005; Ferree, 2010). Sein (2003) reports that Karen women who are illiterate are less likely to participate in community activities and self report feelings of inadequacy and low self-worth.

In response to the high number of illiterate Karen refugees coming into Thailand, the KWO have prioritized programs to address this need which recognize that literacy is needed for “true and sustainable development and empowerment in the community” as encapsulated in this statement by then KWO Secretary, Naw Zippora Sein:

Literacy improves our whole country and helps to solve the problems of health and community participation that development projects try to tackle (Sein, 2003, p. 6).

To this end, the KWO is the only organization to conduct formal literacy programs in the camps. In the 2007/8 period, these programs reached a total of 1500 people, the majority of whom were women (KWO, 2010b). However, while these programs have been evaluated as being effective to the people who have accessed them, limited resources prevent them from reaching more than a small proportion of the targeted population. This is an area of ongoing concern for the KWO as they lobby for additional resources to address this serious lack.

5.3.5 The Expression of Nationalism in Mae La Camp

The displaced persons’ camps exist because of the ongoing resistance by the Karen against the ruling Burmese military junta whose genocidal campaign is displacing them from their land. Living in the camps has not dissipated that sense of nationalism that has been the means of the maintenance of the Karen struggle. Evidence of this was seen in the camp population’s participation in the many Karen National Days that are celebrated and commemorated each year. These special days include Karen New Year celebrated in December or January, Karen National Association Day commemorating the establishment of a united ‘dawkelu’ on 11 February 1881, Karen National Union Day commemorating the establishment of the Karen independent government on 5 February 1948, Karen Revolution Day marking the beginning of the Revolution on 31 January 1949, and Martyr’s Day held on 12 August remembering the fallen heroes in this war, the first of whom was the inaugural KNU President, Saw Ba U Gyi who was assassinated on this day in 1950.

While living in Mae La Camp, I was privileged to participate in these special days and thus gain a greater understanding of the impact nationalism has on the displaced Karen’s sense of identity.

Martyr’s Day 2007 was commemorated within the KKBBSC College community soon after I arrived with a holiday and formal ceremony held in Htee Ger Nee Church with its other church members. My

initial observations were that it was not unlike the Australian commemoration of Armistice Day and Anzac Day and the British commemoration of Remembrance Sunday. The ceremony was attended by KNU leaders and former soldiers who included some of the faculty staff and students. Many speeches were made and Karen national songs were sung loudly and with passion. I observed tears in the eyes of many students as the list of martyred leaders beginning with Saw Ba U Gyi, were read. As on all formal occasions, the Karen National Anthem was sung and the flag was saluted. I had spent the previous week deciphering the rounded shapes of the Karen script so I could join the community in singing their anthem – an anthem whose words so define who they are.

I am not sure why I become so emotional every time I hear this anthem sung. And now I am singing it in their language. Do I have the right to sing these words? It is not my anthem. Yet, I have become part of this place, part of their lives and this anthem speaks so much of their lives. But there is something else, something I haven't quite worked out yet. It has to do with justice – why some of us in this world enjoy freedom in our countries often without even thinking of the cost to those like my father who fought for it, and others do not. I know God is in charge of this world but it seems so bloody unfair (Field note, 12/08/07).

Simultaneously, other Martyr's Day ceremonies were held across the camp with the largest being held in the football grounds located across the stream in Zone C and attended by the Camp Leader, other camp administrative staff, students and teachers of many of the schools and a number of NGO and CBO camp based staff.

On 7 January 2008, another Australian volunteer teacher and I were invited by a graduate of KKBBSC, Pastor Peacefully and his family to join them on a trip to the Sixth Brigade area in Karen State to celebrate 'Pwa K'nyaw Nee Htaw Thaw' (Karen New Year). The Karen have celebrated Nee Htaw Thaw for more than two thousand years in either December or January. It is a time when the Karen celebrate their ancient culture and in more recent times, it is also a time when they celebrate their unity as a nation.

Karen New Year is the day to let all the Karen people to know their own culture and know they have their own nation. It is a reminder for us to maintain our culture, to speak our own language and wear our traditional clothes. We have our own special history, be proud of this (KNU, 2008).

At that time, the Sixth Brigade was one of seven remaining brigades of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) who were at the forefront of the resistance against the SPDC. Despite diminishing

territory and limited resources, they used guerrilla tactics to protect the remaining villages under their control. The following are excerpts from my research notes written contemporaneously that both describe the physical and emotional journey for me at that time.

How to describe this time – Pwa K’nyaw Nee Htaw Thaw – Karen New Year – the most important celebration in the Karen calendar – regardless of one’s faith. Kirsty and I joined Pastor Peacefully and his whole family and drove the 5 hours inside Kawthoolei – to Gologaw where the 6th Brigade operate out of. So amazing – such a poor place – SPDC have repeatedly destroyed it – Christmas 2006, New Year 2004, but the hardy villagers just rebuild it – they are just poor farmers – this is their land – and they are not going to give it up. No toilets, no electricity, no running water, no beds, no problem! Huge concert on the Monday night – mostly in Pwo Karen – very beautiful costumes and dancing with the help of a generator (Field note, 09/01/08).

Formal ceremony Tuesday morning – watched the soldiers go through their paces. There was this ceremony of rewarding the soldiers – all the unmarried girls wearing their chemowahs lined up with garlands in their hands – and the soldiers marched in single file past them and received the garlands offered by the girls – then at the end of the line was a senior official of the KNU with envelopes that I presume contained money and each soldier regardless of rank received an envelope (Field note, 09/01/08).

Then there was a ceremony honouring the older people – all the grandparents came up on stage (they decided I should join them – what a laugh) – and the young people came up and gave each a bag of groceries and a mosquito net. It made for a good photograph. I know that Karen culture is very respectful of its elders – this ceremony showed me how much. And I am now considered one of their pee pees – as I was helped off the stage with my bag of groceries by a teenage boy keen to practice his English with me, I became quite overwhelmed by the whole sense of community here – and they have included me in this community. I was laughing as I stepped down but the laughter was hiding the tears I didn’t want anyone to see. So much to process (Field note, 09/01/08).

Later that month, on 31 January 2008, the fifty-ninth anniversary of the Karen Revolution was celebrated. I was invited by my students to go with them to the Seventh Brigade area in Karen State to observe the ceremony. In the week leading up to Revolution Day, the children living in the Bible School were reciting Saw Ba U Gyi’s Four Principles that launched the Revolution in 1949 as part of their homework.

Saw Ba U Gyi’s 4 principles being recited in common room by the high school students for their homework tonight, with Revolution Day on Thursday – **** [one of my BTh students] is helping them – I talk to him after and he says that this is still as true today as when it was first recited – also that he has learnt more about his culture and peoples’ struggle here than when in his town – another paradox of this place – come to a refugee camp to learn about your own people (Field note, 29/01/08).

The following day, I climbed into a truck and joined the convoy of over three thousand Mae La Camp residents as they drove out of the camp with full permission of the Thai authorities whose duty it is to keep them in. In just one more of the many paradoxes I experienced while living in Mae La Camp, the Principal of one of the Post 10 colleges who came with us gave me his explanation of why the Thai authorities allowed this temporary migration across the river to Kawthoolei.

The Thai Government is very worried about the SPDC – they see the Karen as a buffer between them and the SPDC. If the SPDC didn't have to fight the Karen, then they would have total control of all the border trade and that would put the economy of this area in great jeopardy. So while the Thai authorities don't like the Karen either and make life quite hard for us at times, they want to protect their border and find that we have our uses, so they let us be free for just this time each year (Words of a man recorded as a field note, 30/01/08).

Many of the educational institutions in Mae La were represented among those three thousand that left. Teachers told me that they considered it most important that Karen youth know and understand their history. Some of the youth travelled across with their families, others went as groups with their school, in a school camp atmosphere. Many of the Bible School students and teachers went including a fully equipped brass band! Former soldiers went including those living in Care Villa who are visually impaired and missing limbs due to landmines. They wore their uniforms proudly. I rode in the boat with these men. One of the men who is completely without sight and limited use of one arm and speaks a little English was worried that I might have trouble walking through the jungle! Not surprisingly, I was thinking the same thing in relation to him and his comrades.

After camping in a village just across the river overnight, we made the forty-five minute trek in the dark through the jungle in the early morning to arrive at the Headquarters of the Seventh Brigade of the KNLA in time for the opening ceremony at seven a.m. It was quite a spectacle. Hundreds of soldiers in full combat uniform paraded in the main compound. Patriotic speeches were made by the leaders of the KNU including the General Secretary, Padoh Mahn Sha. Karen dignitaries, some of whom had travelled from overseas for the occasion were among the special guests. Speeches were also made by both Buddhist and Christian religious leaders. In my observation, there was always Buddhist and Christian representation at formal meetings such as this one, as well as more informal occasions such as sports' carnivals. On this day, Buddhist monks and Christian pastors sat side by side, conversing informally after the ceremony, demonstrating a respect for each other's faith and unity in their struggle.

National songs were sung by school choirs from the camp, and students in full national costume performed traditional dancing. The Four Principles of Saw Ba U Gyi were recited by all and many people attending wore a T-shirt with his picture and the principles written in Karen on them. The veteran soldiers from Care Villa marched in formation. No sight, no problem. They marched four abreast, linking arms with a child in the middle of each row being the eyes for them. At the end, to the accompaniment of the KKBBSC Brass Band, over five thousand spectators, one thousand soldiers and one hundred leaders and special guests stood to attention and saluted the flag as the Karen National Anthem was sung. A spirit of unity was in that place on that day – but it was a tenuous spirit. All attending were aware of the many splits and betrayals within the Karen military. Only one year before, many of the Seventh Brigade defected to the SPDC under the leadership of their commander, Brigadier General Htin Maung calling themselves the KNU/KNLA/Peace Council. Many of those soldiers returned within a few months and a new commander was installed, but the memory of that and previous betrayals were still very much in the forefront of many people's minds. The following day, Htin Maung's second in command and son-in-law was murdered in Karen State and a fortnight later, the KNU General Secretary Padoh Mahn Sha was assassinated in his home in Mae Sot, Thailand. Many believe that this was a retribution killing but his daughter wrote in her autobiography that there had been several previous attempts on her father's life over the previous year (Pahn, 2009).

Despite all of these intrigues, the Karen Revolution continues. The youth from the various schools in Mae La attending that day gained an insight into the reason for the Revolution. After the ceremony, they were encouraged to interact with the soldiers and I observed many having their photos taken proudly holding the soldiers' weapons. They all ate sticky rice, symbolic of Karen unity. And in the fading light of day, they boarded the long boats to cross the Thoo Mwee (Mooei in Thai) River back to the Thai side and resume their lives as displaced people in the confines of Mae La Camp.

The following week, I was talking to one of high school students who lived in the Bible School orphanage. I asked him what his impressions of Karen Revolution Day were. He replied:

Pee Pee, I very glad I went. I am Karen and I will always be Karen. God will help us get back our land and I will go home and help my people, do you understand, Pee Pee?

There were tears in my eyes as I answered this adolescent whose experiences have made him wise beyond his years,

Yes, lee kwa (grandson), I think I do (Field note, 07/02/08).

I was still the ‘acceptable incompetent’ in this place – there were still so many things I did not understand – but through the lives of those around me, I believe I was becoming more ‘Karen’ in my thinking, reflexively becoming part of their existential reality (Miehls & Moffatt, 2000, p. 342), an existential reality that expounded the ‘being’, ‘feeling’, ‘doing’ and ‘knowing’ aspects of Verkuyten’s (2005) ethnic identity theory.

5.3.6 The Impact of Resettlement in Mae La Camp

At the time of writing, Mae La Displaced Persons’ Camp has been in existence for twenty years. The UNHCR’s durable solution of resettlement designed to reduce the numbers of displaced Karen living in the camps has been in practice since early 2006. The policy has impacted on every aspect of life in the camp with many of those leaving being those who were educated and working in the various infrastructures of the camp and many more arriving who are uneducated having spent most of their lives in IDP situations unable to access education because of the long term precarious nature of their situation.

During the time I lived in Zone C of Mae La Camp, wherever I went in the camp, resettlement was a constant topic of debate. Both extremes of views were expressed; from being a God given opportunity, to being an evil plan devised to separate the Karen and destroy their culture and identity. A common phrase I heard was “The UNHCR is doing the dirty work for the SPDC”. The view of these people was that what the SPDC had failed to do in sixty years, the UNHCR was accomplishing in less than a decade. However, many others quoted the last verse of the Karen National Anthem:

Y’wa, the Lord of our Fathers, our supreme hope of the ages,
We worship thee,
Thine chosen disciples we would be,
Thine Holy Gospel we will always bear,
To every place on earth,
Oh! Bless us Lord. (Aung Hla, 1932, trans. Tamla Htoo, 2004, p. 57),

believing resettlement to be an opportunity to undertake this task. Many also viewed resettlement as an opportunity to educate their children and gain higher education for themselves, thus securing their future. Commonly, these people spoke of coming back to help their people when they had achieved this.

Whatever one's viewpoint on UNHCR's resettlement policy, it is obvious the mass exodus of the Karen from Mae La Camp is causing many challenges for those who remain. Educational and health institutions are losing valuable trained staff with no time to train people to replace them; churches are losing their pastors and leaders. The Camp Committee had several vacant posts causing disruption to the camp infrastructure and gaps in leadership (IRIN, 2009b). While it was expected that the resettlement policy would reduce the number of people in the camps, it has had the opposite effect. Though more than eighteen thousand left Mae La Camp between January 2006 and September 2009, a similar figure arrived (KRC, 2009a, b). Coupled with the ongoing genocidal campaign of the SPDC in Kawthoolei causing continual displacement of Karen villagers, news of the opportunity to resettle to third countries has proved to be an irresistible lure to many Karen who until this program, lived in areas throughout Burma. This sudden influx is causing a whole new set of problems to a community beleaguered by decades of warehousing.

In December 2007, I attended a Christian wedding. The pastor had just pronounced the happy couple man and wife with the traditional adjunct "what God has joined together, let no man pull asunder". My Karen friend sitting next to me, jokingly whispered to me another interpretation of this: "what God has joined together, let not the UNHCR pull asunder". While he said this in jest, it was my observation that sadly the UNHCR policy designed to give the Karen an opportunity to start new lives, is causing the disintegration of many families. One partner wants to go, the other wants to stay. When they can't agree, difficult decisions are made, often resulting in further trauma, separation and loss.

Shortly after I arrived in Mae La in August 2007, I was told of a family living close to the College who wanted to resettle in the USA. However, the husband's elderly mother lived with them and was too infirm to travel. This caused a conflict in the family between the obligations to an aged relative and the desire to start a new life in the USA. Not wanting to be a burden to her family, the aged mother settled the conflict by completing suicide. Sadly, this is not an uncommon story.

As more of the displaced Karen in Mae La and other camps avail themselves of the opportunity to begin new lives in third countries, it is certain that the UNHCR's policy of resettlement is going to continue to cause challenges to those choosing to remain and for those who are newly arriving, with no ready answers.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to provide a picture of the quotidian lives of the inhabitants of Mae La Displaced Persons' Camp on the Thai-Burma border through the lens of myself, the acceptable incompetent researcher.

The transitional ecosystems model of Christian displaced Karen identity posits that all aspects of their life journey need to be taken into account to gain a true understanding of who they are – that the combination of their traumatic experiences, their normal life cycle and their exilic experience within the wider meso and macro systems of their history, culture, Christian faith and nationalism and the national and international political and NGO systems affecting their lives form who they are individually and collectively. When I reflect on the stories my students shared with me and my overall observations in Mae La Camp, I gained an insight of how the inhabitants of Mae La perceive their identity. The Karen living in Mae La Camp maintain their identity as 'Pwa K'nyaw' – Karen from Kawthoolei. There was a strong sense of community amongst the Christian Karen in Mae La Camp as evidenced in the themes of culture, Christian faith, education and nationalism. Resettlement has proved to be both an opportunity and a threat. These themes will be explored in greater detail in Chapter Seven in the context of the interviews with the research participants in Mae La Camp and Australian studies. The following chapter will introduce these participants by exploring the microsystems affecting their lives within a transitional framework.

CHAPTER SIX

INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

6.1 Introduction

In this, the second of three chapters presenting the analysis of my research data, the research participants are introduced. In so doing, a beginning picture of who they are is painted, enabling them to be accounted for in the Rancierian sense. Continuing in a spirit of polyvocality, in this and the following chapter, the participants' voices are accorded space and analysis, where previously they have been silenced and invisible to much of the outside world (Ranciere, 2001, 2004; Thody, 2006, p. 129).

This chapter builds on the demographic profiles presented in Appendix D to present a synthesized account of the three entities that comprise the microsystem of the participants' lives within their transitional journeys. These entities which have been adopted from Aroche and Coello's (2004) model are firstly, their normal life experiences; secondly, their trauma experiences in relation to organized violence; and thirdly, their exilic experiences including those relating to resettlement where relevant. In recognition that it is the microsystem that has the most immediate and earliest influence in the ecology of human development in which identity is constructed (Huitt, 2003), this introductory chapter to the participants will focus on these three entities. Similarities and differences of the participants' experiences within and in relation to each of these entities are highlighted.

This research consisted of two studies, firstly, the Mae La Camp study and secondly, the Australian resettled study. In the Mae La Camp study, sixteen participants took part. These were equally divided into an older age cohort aged between forty and sixty-four years of age, and a younger age cohort aged between nineteen and twenty-nine years of age. Each age cohort comprised four men and four women. In the Australian resettled study, two focus groups comprising newly resettled Christian displaced Karen from the camps on the Thai-Burma border numbered six each and varied in age from twenty-one to fifty-one years with five women and seven men participating. There follows a description of each of these 28 participants, with the Mae La older group presented first, followed by the Mae La younger group and then the Australian study participants. These descriptions were developed from data collected through interviews and focus groups. Within each group, they are presented according to the analytic structure of normal, traumatic and exilic life experiences (Aroche & Coello, 2004). Thus, each

of the two Mae La cohorts and the Australian focus group participants will be presented within the conceptual framework encompassing the normal life, traumatic and exilic experiences within their transitional stages. Demographic information relating to each participant is presented at Appendix D. Pseudonyms have been used for each participant. In keeping with Karen culture, women's names are prefaced with 'Naw' and men's names are prefaced with 'Saw'.

6.2 Older Age Cohort – Mae La Camp

The men in this cohort (Saw Eh Lay, Saw Taw Taw, Saw Htoo and Saw Doh Du) were aged between forty and sixty-four and the women (Naw Law Eh, Naw Peh, Naw May and Naw Htee Na) were aged between forty-one and fifty-eight at the time of the interviews. All eight were Sgaw Karen and identified as Baptist Christians. They had lived in displaced persons' camps on the Thai side of the border for between eight and twenty years (not necessarily consecutive years). At the time of the interviews, two of the men and three of the women lived in Zone C of Mae La Camp and two men and one woman lived in Zone B of the camp. Three men and one woman were married and three women and one man were widowed. They all had children with four having grandchildren. Two men and three women had graduate qualifications, two more had attended secondary school and one had attended primary school. Four women and one man were employed in education, one man was a pastor, one man was an administrative officer with the KNU and another participated in activities in Care Villa, a care centre for victims of landmines and tended a few pigs and small crops. Two men and two women had formal roles within their church and church organizations. However, all eight participants were active members in their churches. All were fluent in Sgaw Karen, the lingua franca of the Karen, six were also fluent in Burmese with two of those also fluent in English, one of whom had an intermediate competency in Thai.

6.2.1 Normal Life Experiences for the Older Cohort

The normal life experiences of these eight participants centered around their families and education as children and later, their jobs, faith, marriage and their own children, both within Burma and as displaced persons on both sides of the Thai-Burma border. This section will present these experiences leading up to displacement. There were both similarities and differences in these experiences.

All except Saw Taw Taw and Naw Law Eh were born in villages in Karen State, Eastern Burma and spent some or all of their childhood living with their families on rice or small crop farms. In relation to the exceptions, Saw Taw Taw was born in a village close to the former Burmese capital, Rangoon where he lived with his parents and grandparents who were rice farmers, and Naw Law Eh spent her childhood and adolescence in Rangoon. Naw Law Eh was the only participant who grew up in a city. Naw Peh was the only participant who was an only child. The other seven participants had between four and nine siblings. Saw Htoo was the only participant who experienced the death of a parent in childhood with his father dying of fever when he was four.

As children, those born in Karen State began their schooling in Karen based schools using the Sgaw Karen language medium that were operated by the Baptist churches in their villages. However, only Saw Doh Du completed his schooling uninterrupted in this way and later went to Insein, a town near Rangoon, to study theology at a Karen based Seminary, after which he returned to his village. Saw Eh Lay left school at fifteen, having only attained Grade Three level in his village that was continually attacked by the Tatmadaw, with villagers forced to labour for them. As the situation in their villages became increasingly unstable, the parents of Saw Htoo, Naw Peh and Naw Htee Na, sent their children to nearby towns where they stayed with extended family or in dormitories so they could complete their education in Burmese language medium. Following graduation from Grade Ten, Naw Htee Na went to Teachers' Training College and Naw Peh returned to her village and married shortly after. Saw Htoo struggled to pass Grade Eight level in Burmese and then went to College to learn secretarial skills. Naw May completed her secondary education in Karen and English language mediums in a KNU military base camp where her father was stationed. Saw Taw Taw completed primary school in Karen language medium and then his parents sent him to extended family in Rangoon to enable him to complete his secondary education in Burmese language medium, after which he completed a Bachelor of Education in a university there. Naw Law Eh was the only participant to complete all her schooling to Grade Twelve in Burmese. After graduation, she began a Theology degree at a Karen Baptist Seminary in Insein. However, it would be some years before she finally completed this degree as her study was disrupted when her family first moved to Karen State and then to Mae La Camp.

All except Naw Law Eh began their working life in Burma. Saw Taw Taw and Naw Htee Na became teachers, Saw Taw Taw in a Burmese secondary school in Rangoon and Naw Htee Na in a Karen language based village school in Karen State. Naw Peh, Saw Eh Lay and Saw Doh Du all worked for a

time on their family farms. Naw Peh and Saw Doh Du both remained in this role until their villages were destroyed some years later, while Saw Eh Lay enlisted as a KNLA soldier when he was seventeen and Saw Doh Du took on the dual role as pastor of his village when the incumbent pastor there died. Naw May trained as a nurse in a KNU military based hospital and Saw Htoo took up administrative duties with the KNU in their military headquarters in Karen State.

The exception, Naw Law Eh, completed a Bachelor of Theological Studies degree as a displaced person in Mae La Camp and, on graduation, accepted the position of Assistant Pastor in a Thai Karen village. After marriage, she returned to Mae La Camp where she trained as a teacher and subsequently worked as a primary school teacher in the camp.

All except Saw Eh Lay (who was Buddhist until his marriage), were baptized as teenagers and became members of the Baptist churches in the places they were living at the time. While five of these participants were born into Christian families, three (Saw Eh Lay, Saw Taw Taw and Naw Htee Na) were born into Buddhist practicing families. Saw Taw Taw's parents and grandmother converted to Christianity when he was four years old and he followed their Christian faith as he grew older. Naw Htee Na became a Christian as a teenager while she was boarding with her aunt and uncle in the town. Saw Eh Lay converted to Christianity in his mid twenties soon after meeting his wife who was a Christian and was baptized shortly before his marriage to her.

All except Naw Law Eh were married in Karen State. Only two of these participants, (Naw Peh and Saw Doh Du), began their married life in their home villages, while Naw Htee Na married the pastor of the village in which she was teaching. The remaining four participants, (Saw Htoo, Naw May, Saw Eh Lay and Saw Taw Taw) married whilst serving in KNU positions in military held areas. Naw Law Eh married a former KNLA soldier whom she met in the Thai Karen village in which she was the assistant pastor. Except for Naw Htee Na, Naw Peh and Saw Doh Du, all the other participants had experienced displacement by the time they married. Only Naw Htee Na and Saw Doh Du's eldest child and Naw Peh's five children were born before their parents became displaced. Naw Htee Na's second child, Saw Doh Du's seven other children (three of whom died in infancy), and all the children of the other participants were born while their parents were displaced.

Three of the participants (Naw May, Saw Htoo and Naw Htee Na) were widowed within eight years of marriage. Naw May was pregnant with her fifth child at the time her husband, a KNLA officer, was killed in action. Saw Htoo's wife and Naw Htee Na's husband both died of fever. In common, they were all left with young children to raise. Also in common, none remarried. Naw Peh's story was different but the outcome was the same as for Naw May, Saw Htoo and Naw Htee Na. With five children under the age of ten, her husband became involved in the democracy movement in Burma during the late 1980s. In August, 1988, he left their village to participate in the student uprising in the capital and never returned. For many years, Naw Peh and her husband's family of origin had no news of what happened to him. However, in 2006 when she was living in Mae La Camp, Naw Peh heard through a friend that he had died of malaria, though did not know any other details.

The other five participants were still married to their original spouses. At the time of our interviews, the participants' children varied in age from Saw Doh Du's eldest daughter who was thirty-five to Saw Eh Lay's youngest son, aged four months. Saw Doh Du, Naw May, Naw Peh and Saw Htoo had children who were married and had children of their own. In common, each of these extended families lived together.

Such is an overview of the normal life experiences that informs part of the identity of the older cohort. For all of these participants, these experiences have been impacted by their experiences of trauma resulting from organized violence perpetrated against them by the ruling Burmese military junta. The next section will present an overview of their trauma experiences.

6.2.2 Trauma Experiences Resulting from Organized Violence for the Older Cohort

The reality is that all of these participants were born into a state of armed conflict. Saw Doh Du, the oldest, was born when Japan and its ally, the Burmese Independence Army occupied Burma. Saw Htoo, Saw Taw Taw and Naw Htee Na were born in the period that the Karen began their Revolution to attain recognition of their homeland, with Naw May born soon after. Naw Peh was a baby when Ne Win's coup d'état resulted in increased persecution of the Karen, with Naw Law Eh and Saw Eh Lay born at a time when the full force of Ne Win's Four Cuts Strategy as detailed in Chapter 3.3.3.3 was being realized in the Karen occupied areas. The impact of this was that their normal life experiences were intertwined with experiences of trauma resulting from organized violence.

Five of the participants told of traumatic experiences witnessed as children. Naw Law Eh and Naw May's fathers were both KNU officials which resulted in them having a heightened awareness of the Karen struggle for freedom of their land from early childhood. As a small child, Naw Law Eh witnessed her father's arrest by the Tatmadaw and talked of the family's anguish during his subsequent imprisonment. Naw May, Saw Eh Lay and Naw Peh witnessed their villages attacked and burned by the Tatmadaw when they were children. For Saw Eh Lay and Naw Peh, this was a recurrent experience as their communities rebuilt their villages each time they were destroyed. Saw Taw Taw, Naw Htee Na and Naw Law Eh suffered a different type of persecution as children in Burmese urban schools. They each spoke of discrimination against them for being Karen with Naw Law Eh saying that the School Board refused to issue her with her High School Certificate even though she had passed all her subjects, thus denying her access to University.

By adolescence, all participants except Saw Taw Taw had experienced trauma resulting from organized violence perpetrated by the Tatmadaw. Saw Doh Du and Saw Eh Lay had been forced to labor for the Tatmadaw and suffered beatings during this time. As teenagers, Saw Doh Du, Saw Htoo, Naw May, Naw Peh and Saw Eh Lay had witnessed murders of family members and friends with Saw Htoo's village destroyed for the first time when he was fifteen and Saw Doh Du when he was nineteen.

While not personally experiencing organized violence by the Tatmadaw as a teenager, Saw Taw Taw talked about a growing awareness of the suffering of his people when he was at University. He talked about the high taxation levied against his parents and the struggle with his conscience when sitting examinations, aware that to pass, he had to answer in ways that he believed were untrue.

Trauma experiences continued for the participants into their adulthood. While there were many similarities of these experiences, three main contexts were revealed in the data. These were: living and working in KNU military bases, living for extended periods of time as displaced people in temporary camps and hide sites, and making their way to an established camp in Thailand after their village was attacked and destroyed.

In relation to the first context, five participants (Saw Htoo, Naw May, Saw Taw Taw, Naw Law Eh and Saw Eh Lay) had lived and assumed differing roles in KNU military bases in Karen State. In roles of administration, nursing, teaching, study and as a combatant, they experienced war first hand on a daily

basis. In 1990, Naw Law Eh was among the thousands of civilian and military personnel forced to flee when the military base where they were living was attacked and destroyed. Saw Eh Lay was a soldier for ten years. He was injured twice in battle before being blown up by a landmine and suffered permanent and total visual impairment. Saw Htoo, Naw May and Saw Taw Taw witnessed the destruction of the KNU Headquarters at Manerplaw, Karen State in February 1995 and spoke with emotion both of the loss for the Karen cause and of the anguish of being separated from their families in the confusion that followed the retreat.

In relation to the second context, Saw Doh Du and Naw Htee Na lived as displaced persons on both sides of the Thai-Burma border with their families and communities for many years before they moved into Mae La Camp. Saw Doh Du was first forced to flee his village in 1975 with his wife and baby daughter. For the next fifteen years, they lived in a variety of makeshift camps along both sides of the Salween River that divides part of Burma and Thailand's northern border. These camps were frequently attacked by the Tatmadaw forcing the people to move and set up again. During this time, Saw Doh Du and his wife had seven more children, two of whom died from fever in infancy. After fifteen years of uncertainty and insecurity, Saw Doh Du's family and members of his village decided to move back to an isolated jungle area in Karen State in the vicinity of their original village. For the next five years, they moved continually with the longest they were ever able to stay in one place being six months. Their children were frequently sick and another child died. After the fall of Manerplaw, the situation became increasingly untenable until the day when they came face to face with Burmese soldiers shooting directly at them. While miraculously no-one was injured, Saw Doh Du recalled the panic they all felt when his family was separated into four groups in the jungle for two days without food or water before they were able to find each other.

Naw Htee Na also lived in the makeshift camps along both sides of the Salween River after her village was destroyed in 1982. Over the next fifteen years, she experienced several occasions when the place she was staying was attacked. Twice she was forced to flee again. On the second occasion in 1995, in

circumstances reminiscent of those of missionary Gladys Aylward, made famous by the movie “The Inn the Sixth Happiness”¹, Naw Htee Na led her own family and forty-eight orphans who were entrusted to her care over the steep mountain range to safety in Mae La Camp.

In relation to the third context, Naw Peh’s experience was somewhat different from the other participants. While her village had been destroyed many times since she was a child, she explained to me that they would hide in the jungle until the soldiers left and then come back and rebuild and resume their village way of life. However, when the attacks became more frequent and the village was again destroyed in 1999, Naw Peh joined a group of villagers to cross over to the safety of Mae La Camp. However, this move was traumatic in more ways than one. Having already lost the livelihood of her farm, Naw Peh made the decision to only take her youngest daughter, leaving her four older children aged between fifteen and twenty-one to assist in the care of her parents and parents-in-law who chose to remain. It would be another seven years before her family would be reunited.

While occurring at different stages of these people’s lives, the eventual outcome of these experiences of trauma was exile from their homeland. Their journey to Mae La Camp was a culmination of the normal life and trauma experiences which both shaped their identity and provided a link to the manner in which they lived their lives in this place. The next section will present an overview of these people’s lives in exile.

6.2.3 Exilic Experiences of the Older Cohort

In many ways, the normal life experiences of these participants have continued in a similar way in exile, in displaced persons’ camps in Thailand. Evidenced in the manner their quotidian lives revolve around their families and communities, the participants in this older cohort have sought to replicate the lifestyles they had prior to becoming displaced. Even so, the degree to which they have achieved this varied among the participants.

¹ Directed by M. Robson and starring Ingrid Bergman, *The Inn of Sixth Happiness* produced by 20th Century Fox in 1958 relates part of the story of British missionary to China during the 1930s and 40s, Miss Gladys Aylward, who in the face of the invading Japanese forces in 1938, led 94 orphans on a one month arduous journey over the mountains from Shansi Province to safety in Sian Province, a journey of more than one hundred miles (one hundred and sixty kilometres).

In common, they all spoke positively of their family life in the camp. Naw May and Saw Taw Taw told how their adolescent and young adult children were studying and boarding outside the camp with the help of scholarships and how much they looked forward to them coming home for school holidays. Saw Eh Lay and Naw Law Eh, whose children are similar ages, spoke proudly of how well they were doing in school and of hopes they had for their futures. Naw Peh, who had been separated from her older children for many years, spoke of the joy of having the whole family reunited in her home. Saw Htoo, Naw Htee Na and Saw Doh Du spoke with pride of the achievements of their adult children and of their commitment to help their people.

All of these older cohort participants all held various formal and informal roles in the camp. Though displaced, they used the skills and knowledge learnt in their years prior and subsequent to displacement to contribute to the infrastructure of life in Mae La Camp. In relation to formal roles, the four women had paid positions within KED. Naw Peh was a middle school teacher, teaching science and Christian studies. Naw Law Eh taught English and Burmese in a primary school class. Naw May was a teacher trainer in one of the high schools and Naw Htee Na was a headmistress of one of the schools. Saw Htoo and Saw Taw Taw both held formal roles in the KNU – Saw Htoo in an administrative capacity and Saw Taw Taw as an Education Officer for one of the Districts within Karen State. Saw Taw Taw also was Principal of one of the Post Ten Colleges in the camp. Saw Doh Du assisted in pastoral duties in Htee Ger Nee Church. Naw May and Naw Law Eh also held formal positions within the women's ministry of KKBC and were responsible for empowering women church members spiritually and practically through a variety of training and micro credit programmes and publication of a Christian women's magazine in Sgaw Karen. Saw Htoo was a deacon and church advisor.

Informally, Saw Taw Taw, Naw Peh and Naw Htee Na were active in youth and mission activities in their church. Saw Eh Lay was a member of his church choir and attended classes at Care Villa in music and English.

For Saw Taw Taw, Naw Htee Na, Saw Doh Du and Saw Htoo, their current roles were similar to those they held prior to their displacement in Mae La Camp. In contrast, the situations of Naw Peh, Naw May, Naw Law Eh and Saw Eh Lay bore considerable differences.

Prior to displacement, Naw Peh was a farmer of a small landholding. When forced to migrate to Mae La Camp in 1999, she found it very difficult to manage on the camp rations supplied by the TBBC. Her decision to train as a teacher was based on the fact that this is one of the few legal paid employment options in the camp. However, she stated that she did not really enjoy teaching and wished she could go back to farming.

Naw May and Naw Law Eh had also changed roles since coming to Mae La Camp. However, unlike Naw Peh, they both stated they are happy in their current positions and grateful for the opportunity to serve their people.

Saw Eh Lay had in some ways come full cycle since his adolescent years. Starting his working life as a farmer, and then serving as a soldier for ten years until his injury, in Mae La Camp, he tended a few pigs and chickens and grew small crops to earn a modest income to supplement the camp rations.

Participants differed in their views of the UNHCR's resettlement policy currently having a significant impact on the displaced Karen living in the camps along the border. Naw Htee Na and Naw May spoke strongly of their view that this policy is detrimental to Karen unity, diverting the focus away from their goal to return to their homeland. Saw Taw Taw and Saw Eh Lay were nonchalant in their view while Naw Law Eh was ambivalent, stating that it was a good opportunity for the young people but recognizing that it was causing many difficulties in areas of camp management for those who choose to stay. The other three participants spoke positively of the policy, but Saw Doh Du and Saw Htoo stated they themselves were not personally interested in leaving. Since the completion of the interviews, Naw Peh and Naw Law Eh have migrated to the USA under this scheme.

Regardless of their differing views on resettlement, their goals for the future were highly congruent. Five spoke of freedom for their land with all eight stating they wanted to return to their villages in peace. In a later telephone interview with Naw Law Eh after she migrated to the USA, she said her original goal had not changed.

6.3 Younger Age Cohort – Mae La Camp

The men in this cohort (Saw Gaw Tha, Saw Hsa Mu, Saw Moo and Saw Krit) were aged between twenty-four and twenty-nine years of age and the women (Naw Day Mu, Naw Lah, Naw Eh Wah and

Naw Paw Gay) were aged between nineteen and twenty years of age. Three of the men and all four of the women were Sgaw Karen. The other man was Pwo Karen. Two of the men and all four of the women identified as Baptist Christians. The man who was Pwo Karen identified as Seventh Day Adventist Christian and another man identified as Anglican Christian. At the time of the interviews, two men lived in Zone A and Zone B of Mae La Camp respectively and two men and all four women lived in Zone C of the camp. One man and one woman were students studying in KKBBSC. They were all active in their respective churches. All eight of this cohort had lived in displaced persons' camps on the Thai side of the border for between two and twenty-four years at the time of the interviews. One man, Saw Krit and one woman, Naw Lah were married. Saw Krit had two children and Naw Lah had a small baby. Another man, Saw Hsa Mu, married shortly after our interviews.

With regard to education, one of the men had a graduate qualification in Karen language medium in Theology, and another had completed Grade Twelve in Burma and a Teacher Preparation Course in Mae La Camp. Four participants had completed Grade Ten and two others were near completion of Grade Ten at the time of our interviews. Of the six who had completed their secondary education including the two who had completed further studies, Saw Hsa Mu, Saw Gaw Tha, and Naw Paw Gay were employed in primary and middle school education with the latter two concurrently participating in on-the-job teacher training. Saw Moo was a missionary. Naw Eh Wah and Saw Krit were undertaking further studies in theology. One of the women who was still in high school (Naw Lah) worked part-time as a nursery teacher and operated a small shop with her husband from the front of their house. All were fluent in Sgaw Karen, the lingua franca of the Karen, one also was fluent in his mother tongue, Western Pwo, English and Burmese, three more were fluent in Burmese with the other four having an intermediate level. Four had intermediate level of English with the other three able to speak a little bit and all could speak some Thai.

6.3.1 Normal Life Experiences for the Younger Cohort

Similarly to the older cohort, the normal life experiences of these eight participants centred on their families, both within Burma and as displaced persons on both sides of the Thai-Burma border. Less similar were their education experiences as only three of the men reached adolescence and adulthood in Burma; the other man and the four women had been forced to flee to the camps on the Thai side of the

border when they were between four and twelve years of age. This section will present these experiences leading up to displacement, recognizing their similarities and differences.

All except Saw Hsa Mu were born in villages in Karen State and spent a portion of their childhood living with their families on rice or small crop farms. In relation to the exception, Saw Hsa Mu spent his early childhood in a village in the Delta region of Burma. Naw Paw Gay was the only participant who was an only child. The other seven participants had between one and nine siblings. Three of the participants experienced the loss of a parent or parents in childhood – Naw Paw Gay was orphaned at age ten, Saw Gaw Tha's mother died when he was five and Saw Hsa Mu's father left the family when he was six. Neither Saw Gaw Tha's father nor Saw Hsa Mu's mother remarried.

As children, all except Saw Gaw Tha, Saw Hsa Mu and Saw Moo began their schooling in Karen based schools using the Sgaw Karen language medium that were operated by the Baptist churches in their villages. In relation to the exceptions, Saw Gaw Tha and Saw Hsa Mu began school in Burmese controlled areas, learning to read and write their own language in church based schools on weekends and school holidays, and Saw Moo attended only nursery school in his village before being forced to flee to the Thai side of the border with his village community when he was four years of age.

Similarly, as in the older cohort, after finishing Grade Four in their villages, Saw Hsa Mu, Saw Gaw Tha, Saw Krit and Naw Eh Wah's parents sent them to nearby towns to further their education. There they lived with either extended family or friends and studied in Burmese. Naw Eh Wah could only study in this way for one year as her parents struggled to find money to pay the fees. Saw Krit completed Grade Eight but could not return after his village was destroyed by the Tatmadaw. Saw Gaw Tha returned to his village after graduating from Grade Ten and Saw Hsa Mu gained a scholarship to attend an Adventist College in Burma where he completed Grade Twelve in English.

A significant difference from the older cohort is seen in areas of employment. Whereas seven of the eight participants in the older age cohort had worked in some capacity in Burma by the time they were aged twenty, only Saw Gaw Tha and Saw Krit had similar experiences. After leaving school, Saw Gaw Tha returned to his village that was under the control of the Tatmadaw and assisted his father on the family farm. Saw Krit lied about his age and joined the KNLA at age thirteen. After six years, he left the Army, completed his Grade Ten and became a teacher for two years before moving to Mae La

Camp to study theology. The other six participants had all moved across the border to the displaced persons' camps as children and completed or were completing their education in the camp based system at the time of our interviews.

Six of the eight younger cohort participants were born into Christian families. These six accepted the faith of their parents as they grew older and remained active in the camp based churches where they lived. The exceptions were Saw Krit and Saw Moo whose parents were Animist and Buddhist respectively. Prior to his birth, Saw Krit's mother had suffered several miscarriages and had been unable to carry a baby to full term. Saw Krit told the story of how a missionary team came to their village and prophesied over his mother that she would have a son and that he would become a missionary to his people. Exactly nine months later, Saw Krit was born safe and well. His parents converted to Christianity and he believes his life has been guided by that prophecy ever since. Saw Moo grew up in a Buddhist practicing family, converting to Christianity in his older teenage years when working illegally outside of the camp.

Such is an overview of the normal life experiences that partially inform the identity of the younger age cohort. As in the older age cohort, these experiences have been impacted by their experiences of trauma resulting from organized violence perpetrated against them by the Tatmadaw. The next section will present an overview of these experiences.

6.3.2 Trauma Experiences Resulting from Organized Violence for the Younger Cohort

As in the older cohort, all of these participants were born into a state of armed conflict. The Karen Revolution aimed at gaining recognition of their homeland was into its fourth decade and life for the Karen living in both the Delta and Eastern Burma was becoming more and more difficult as the Tatmadaw's military might far outweighed that of its main adversary, the KNU. Organized violence was the norm for all of these young people from birth which is somewhat different from the older cohort, three of whom enjoyed peace and safety in their villages until at least their adolescent years.

All except Saw Gaw Tha and Saw Hsa Mu witnessed the destruction of their villages as young children. All had either witnessed or known of the murder of family members and friends. Naw Paw Gay's parents were killed by the Tatmadaw when she was ten, and Naw Day Mu's brother was tortured and killed when she was nine. Saw Moo spoke of how even though he was only four, his memory of

that time was still very vivid. For the families of Saw Moo, Naw Lah and Naw Paw Gay, the initial destruction of their village caused them to cross the border with their families into the displaced persons' camps in Thailand. While Naw Pay Gay and her grandmother made their way directly to Mae La Camp, Saw Moo and Naw Lah lived in makeshift camps on both sides of the border before moving to Mae La and experienced further trauma as these places were under constant threat of attack. In relation to the exceptions, Saw Gaw Tha witnessed the destruction of his village when he was twenty-one, whereas Saw Hsa Mu did not experience this type of trauma.

All except Naw Lah and Saw Moo had either directly been forced to labor for the Tatmadaw or witnessed members of their families being forced to labor. Such forced labor, which was frequently accompanied by beatings, was typically for several days a week, resulting in disruption to schooling and farm management.

As a teenage soldier, Saw Krit continued to experience first hand the organized violence against his people. He was part of the retreating force that burned their Headquarters at Manerplaw ahead of the advance of the Tatmadaw assisted by the recently defected DKBA in February 1995. Like Saw Htoo, Saw Taw Taw and Naw May from the older cohort, Saw Krit talked of feelings of both incredulity and sadness at losing their main Headquarters and what that portended for the Karen cause.

Naw Lah, Saw Moo and Naw Paw Gay experienced further trauma after moving to Mae La Camp when Section C where they lived suffered a mortar attack by the DKBA in 1997.

Similarly to the older age cohort, the eventual outcome of these experiences of trauma resulting from organized violence for this younger age cohort was exile from their homeland. Their identity that had begun to be formed at an early age by the intertwining of their normal life and trauma experiences was further impacted by their experiences of exile. An overview of these people's exilic experiences is presented in the next section.

6.3.3 Exilic Experiences of the Younger Cohort

The four women in this cohort had spent approximately half of their young lives in displaced persons' camps. Of the four men, Saw Moo has spent the majority of his life in camps, while Saw Hsa Mu, Saw Gaw Tha and Saw Krit came across as young adults.

The similarity of their circumstances can be seen most in the area of education. All spoke of the belief that they had more opportunities for education in the camp than they had in Burma. Four had completed Grade Ten in the camp system with two more completing this level shortly after our interviews. Except for Naw Lah and Naw Day Mu who were still in Grade Ten at the time of our interviews, the remaining six participants had all undertaken or were undertaking some form of further study. For Naw Paw Gay, Saw Hsa Mu and Saw Gaw Tha, this was in the area of teacher training and for Naw Eh Wah, Saw Krit and Saw Moo, this was in the area of theology. Naw Lah, Naw Day Mu, Saw Gaw Tha, Saw Hsa Mu and Naw Paw Gay all spoke of aspirations to further their study beyond what they were currently doing. This emphasis on education was mirrored in the older age cohort where five of those participants were involved in the delivery aspect of education with four of them having completed further study themselves within the camp system.

While seemingly incongruent, Saw Gaw Tha and Naw Lah stated that they were very happy with their lives in Mae La Camp. Naw Lah told of how in the camp, she had all the things she considered important for her life – family, church, income from a small shop she operated with her husband and vocation. Saw Gaw Tha similarly spoke of being happy in Mae La, perceiving that he had more freedom there than he had in his Tatmadaw controlled village in Karen State. The others were more ambivalent. All six spoke positively of safety and being free from fear. However, three (Naw Eh Wah, Saw Hsa Mu and Saw Krit) also spoke of their worry for family members still in Burma, while four (Naw Paw Gay, Naw Day Mu, Saw Moo and Saw Hsa Mu) spoke about the uncertainty of the future.

In common with the older age cohort, all eight participants were active in their camp based churches. Six (Saw Gaw Tha, Naw Eh Wah, Naw Paw Gay, Naw Lah, Saw Moo and Saw Krit) taught Sunday School. Naw Paw Gay also led a childrens' choir and Naw Eh Wah, Saw Krit and Naw Day Mu were active in the Kawthoolei Karen Baptist Youth Organisation. Saw Hsa Mu was active in the youth ministry of his church and did occasional preaching. Saw Moo was a missionary with the KKBC and made regular trips to the internally displaced areas of Karen State.

An area where they differed was their views on resettlement. Saw Hsa Mu, Saw Gaw Tha and Naw Paw Gay were the only ones who stated openly they wanted to go to the third country. Conversely, Saw Krit's views were similar to those voiced by Naw Htee Na and Naw May from the older age cohort. He strongly stated that he believed that resettlement was disadvantageous for the Karen, resulting in further disunity and weakening the Karen cause to regain freedom in their land. Naw Lah

and Naw Eh Wah both said they personally did not want to go but believed it was a good opportunity for some. Naw Day Mu and Saw Moo voiced no opinion on the subject, but have both since migrated to the USA – Naw Day Mu with her family and Saw Moo on his own to join his brother and his family who had left some months previously. Saw Hsa Mu who married shortly after our interviews has also since migrated to Australia with his wife and her family.

However, their goals for the future were highly congruent, mirroring those of the older age cohort. All spoke of the goal to return to their villages, with six specifically adding a wider political goal of returning to a free and democratic Burma. In further telephone interviews with Saw Hsa Mu and Saw Moo who have migrated to Australia and USA respectively, as with Naw Law Eh in the older age cohort, they both stated their goals had not changed.

6.4 Resettled Cohort – Australia

The information for this section has been gathered through two focus groups and supplementary follow-up telephone calls and emails. These data collection methods were principally focused on the participants' resettlement experiences and were not as in-depth as the interviews with the two age cohorts in Mae La Camp. Consequently, the data is not as comprehensive in relation to normal, traumatic and exilic experiences as it was in the two Mae La age cohorts. Nevertheless, the information provided gives a beginning picture of who these participants are and how their life history prior to their migration to Australia has impacted on their identity.

A total of twelve people (seven men and five women) participated in the two focus groups. The data analysis of the two groups is presented together. At the time of the focus groups, the seven men (Saw Poe Kwa, Saw Plo, Saw Hsa Thaw, Saw Dae Dae, Saw Eh Taw, Saw Wah and Saw Kler) were aged between twenty-one and fifty-one years. The five women (Naw Sei Sei, Naw Say Mu, Naw Eh Th'Blay, Naw Paw Wee and Naw Ni Thaw) were aged between twenty and thirty years. Four of the men and four of the women were Sgaw Karen. Two men and one woman were Pwo Karen and one man was Karenni. Five of the men and all five of the women identified as Baptist Christians with the other two men identifying as Anglican Christians. They were all active in their respective churches both prior to and subsequent to arriving in Australia.

Prior to migrating to Australia, the twelve participants lived in various of the nine displaced persons' camps situated along the Thai-Burma border for between nine and twenty-two years. Beginning from the northernmost camp, one lived in Karenni Camp Two, five lived in Mae La Camp, one in Umphiem Camp, one in Noh Poh Camp, two in Ban Don Yang Camp and two in Htam Hin Camp. In these places, three held camp leadership positions, three were teachers (including one of those holding a camp leadership position), one worked for a CBO in the camp, four were students and two had no specific role. Three of the men and one of the women were married and had between two and seven children and one had grandchildren.

At the time of the focus groups, these participants had lived in Australia for between three months and two and three quarter years. The four married men migrated to Australia with their wives and children and for the man whose daughter is married, her husband and children came also. The married woman came with her husband and son as well as the entire family of origin of both herself and her husband. Of the seven single participants, one came alone, two came with extended family, three came with one or both parents and siblings and two came with a sibling and their family. Two were living in Brisbane, Queensland, two were living in Perth, Western Australia, two were living in Sydney, New South Wales, one was living in Canberra, Australian Capital Territory, one in Mt Gambier, South Australia and four were living in Melbourne, Victoria.

In Australia, one was working in a CBO, one was working as a laborer, six were undertaking various ESL Certificates at TAFE and four were completing their Higher School Certificate, two of whom were also working part-time. One of these and another who was studying for her Higher School Certificate were concurrently studying Certificate II in Nursing at TAFE. All were fluent in Sgaw Karen; two of the Pwo Karen and one of the Sgaw Karen were also fluent in Eastern Pwo. Nine were fluent in Burmese with the other three having an intermediate level. All except Saw Eh Taw could speak some Thai. Nine were fluent in English, one had elementary level competency, and two of the more recent arrivals were just beginning to learn.

6.4.1 Normal Life Experiences of the Resettled Cohort

For nine of the participants, their normal life experiences prior to displacement were in many ways similar to the Mae La Camp cohorts. The other three (Saw Poe Kwa, Saw Plo and Naw Say Mu) began

their lives as displaced people; their parents crossed over into the camps on the Thai side of the Thai-Burma border before they were born. Because of their age differences, these experiences varied considerably. The normal life experiences of the nine who were born in Burma (Saw Wah, Naw Ni Thaw, Saw Kler, Naw Sei Sei, Saw Eh Taw, Saw Dae Dae, Naw Eh Th'Blay, Naw Paw Wee and Saw Hsa Thaw), are presented here, highlighting similarities and differences. Saw Poe Kwa, Saw Plo and Naw Say Mu's normal life experiences will be incorporated into the analysis of the exilic experiences of this cohort.

Eight of these nine participants were born in villages in Karen State and spent part or all of their childhood with their families on rice or small crop farms. The exception, Saw Eh Taw, is Karenni and was born in a village in Karenni State located to the north of Karen State. They had between one and five siblings. Three of the participants experienced the loss of a parent/s in childhood. Naw Sei Sei's father died of fever when she was seven, while Naw Say Mu's father died when she was eleven. Naw Paw Wee's father who was a Karen soldier died in action when she was four and her mother died of illness when living in Htam Hin Camp when she was eleven.

Except for Saw Eh Taw and Saw Dae Dae, these participants began their schooling in Karen based schools using the Sgaw Karen language medium that were operated by the Baptist churches in their villages. The older participants, Saw Kler and Saw Wah, completed their primary schooling in this way and then moved to larger towns to continue their secondary education in Burmese. In this way, they completed Grade Eight and Ten respectively. Saw Kler later completed a Licentiate in Theology Studies in Karen at the Karen Baptist Theology Seminary, Insein, Burma. Similar to the younger age cohort in Mae La Camp, the education of the younger six of these participants in their villages was disrupted by displacement and they completed their middle and secondary education in the camp system. In relation to the exceptions, Saw Eh Taw had no formal schooling and Saw Dae Dae began school in a Burmese controlled area in the Burmese education system, completing his secondary education in the camp system. Both, however, learnt to read and write their own language in classes organized by their churches.

Only the older participants (Saw Wah and Saw Kler) had experience of working and marriage after completing their education before becoming displaced. Saw Wah worked on the family farm and Saw Kler was an evangelist inside Karen State prior to displacement. Saw Eh Taw, who was internally

displaced for many years before crossing over into the camp, eked out an existence in the jungle with his family and village community growing what they could as they moved from place to place to avoid contact with the Tatmadaw.

All nine of these participants were born into Christian families and accepted the faith of their parents as they grew older.

Such is an overview of the normal life experiences that partially inform the identity of the resettled cohort who were born in Burma. As in the Mae La Camp cohorts, these experiences have been impacted by their experiences of trauma resulting from the organized violence perpetrated against them by the Tatmadaw. The next section will present an overview of these experiences for this cohort.

6.4.2 Trauma Experiences Resulting from Organized Violence for the Resettled Cohort

As in the two Mae La cohorts, all twelve of these participants were born into a state of armed conflict. They were all either born post Ne Win's coup d'état (1962) or were small children when he took power, which meant that organized violence was the norm for all of these people from childhood.

All of the participants said that they had come across to the camps because their villages had been destroyed by the Tatmadaw. This included the three who were born in the camp (Saw Plo, Saw Poe Kwa and Naw Say Mu). Although they had never actually lived in Burma, they still spoke of how their villages were destroyed. In using the personal pronoun, they were acknowledging their connection to the home of their parents and extended families. Saw Eh Taw spoke of being forced to porter for the Tatmadaw from when he was a boy and escaping into the jungle where he lived internally displaced with other members of his village community for five years. Saw Kler and Saw Hsa Thaw also lived with their family and village communities internally displaced for two years before coming across the border into Mae La and Ban Don Yang Camps respectively. Saw Wah, Naw Sei Sei, Naw Paw Wee and Naw Eh Th'Blay also were internally displaced for varying amounts of time before crossing to the safety of the displaced persons' camps on the Thai side of the border. Naw Ni Thaw and Saw Kler also told of how people in their villages were tortured by the Tatmadaw and Naw Paw Wee told of the fear she felt when their small community of IDP's were strafed by Tatmadaw aircraft as they tried to hide

under trees as they were making their way to the border. While they did not elaborate on these experiences, each said that this was a very difficult time for them.

For some, their trauma experiences did not cease when living in the displaced persons' camps on the Thai side of the Thai-Burma border. Saw Kler, Saw Wah, Saw Plo, Saw Poe Kwa and Naw Say Mu witnessed mortar attacks by the DKBA on the camps in which they were living in 1997 which resulted in the first three having to move again to the safety of the larger camps at Mae La and Umphiem. Saw Plo, who was twelve years old at the time, told of his memory of the flames and helping his mother carry his younger sisters and the few possessions they could grab from their house before it was engulfed by the fire that reduced the whole camp of three thousand people to ashes overnight. Saw Eh Taw spoke of the constant threat of attack on his camp by the Tatmadaw and how this caused him to be afraid for himself and his family.

As with the Mae La Camp cohorts, the eventual outcome of the trauma experiences of the nine participants born in Burma was exile from their homeland; their sense of identity formed by the intertwining of their normal life and trauma experiences. In exile and subsequent resettlement, their identity was further developed. The three who had been born displaced in the camps began their lives in exile; their only experience of their homeland being in the stories told by their parents and their history lessons at school. Their identity too was shaped by their normal life experiences in the camp and both personal and vicarious experiences of trauma evidenced in the way they spoke of villages they have never lived in being destroyed. The next section will present an overview of these people's exilic and resettlement experiences.

6.4.3 Exilic Experiences of the Resettled Cohort

All participants spent varying amounts of time in exile in the camps. Three came across as adults, two of these (Saw Kler and Saw Wah) with their wives and children. Saw Eh Taw married shortly after moving to the camp. Six more were between eleven and thirteen years of age and as previously mentioned, three were born in the camps. These age differences necessarily impact on their experience of exile. Even so, except for their roles in the camp, the participants spoke little of their lives there.

In common, the younger nine participants all attended secondary schools in their camps with eight of these completing Grade Ten. Six had continued on to further study. Naw Ni Thaw completed a camp based Bachelor of Theology in English and was working as a secondary school teacher when she migrated. Naw Eh Th'Blay undertook on-the-job teacher training and was also teaching in a secondary school when she migrated. Saw Dae Dae had completed a three year camp based Arts degree and was training to be a journalist when he migrated. Saw Plo and Naw Say Mu had partially completed a camp based Theology and Arts degree respectively while Saw Poe Kwa was attending a Post Ten program similar to the Australian Higher School Certificate when they migrated. Naw Sei Sei completed Grade Nine in her camp and began working for one of the CBO's in that place.

The three older participants had all worked in areas of camp management. Saw Eh Taw and Saw Wah were Section Leaders and Saw Kler was a member of the Camp Committee in Mae La Camp responsible for the overall running of the camp and also worked as a teacher. They also held informal roles in their churches.

Another area of similarity was these participants' explanations of why they had decided to migrate. All participants echoed the opportunity for freedom that was not available in the camps or in their own country. The three older participants stated that their decision was based on the opportunity for education for their children and grandchildren. This view was shared by the other nine who all said they chose to come so they could further their education.

However, nine of the participants also voiced a desire to return to a free and democratic Burma and to be able to live in peace in their own country. Of these, Naw Sei Sei, Saw Plo, Naw Say Mu, Saw Dae Dae and Naw Eh Th'Blay stated they planned to return to the border after completing degrees they believed would be useful for them to help their people. Saw Wah, Saw Kler and Saw Eh Taw all stated they hoped that one or more of their children would also do this when they completed their education.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the participants' normal life, trauma and exilic experiences. In all, a total of twenty-eight participants took part in the two studies. While similarities and differences within each cohort have been highlighted, a number of these were evident across all three cohorts.

In relation to the participants' normal life experiences, similarities across the three cohorts were observed in areas of living and faith backgrounds. Eighty-six percent (N=24) of the participants came from an agrarian background in Burma and seventy-nine percent (N=22) spent at least part of their childhood growing up in Christian families in Burma. Both similarities and differences were observed in the area of education. A similarity observed is the value attributed to education with seventy-nine percent (N=22) having completed secondary or higher level of attainment (including Naw Lah and Naw Day Mu of the younger cohort in Mae La Camp who completed Grade Ten shortly after our interviews). However, differences were observed in the location of that education with sixty-three percent (N=5) of the older age cohort from Mae La Camp completing their secondary education in Burma, compared with twenty-five (N=2) and eight percent (N=1) of the younger cohort, Mae La Camp and Australian study cohorts respectively. A further similarity was seen in the number of participants across the three cohorts involved in educational activities in both student and employment roles at the time of the interviews with eighty-eight percent (N=7) in the younger age cohort, Mae La Camp, followed by eighty-three percent (N=10) in the resettled cohort and sixty-three percent (N=5) in the older age cohort, Mae La Camp.

In relation to the participants' experiences of trauma, all participants (including those born in the camps), had experienced trauma resulting from organized violence perpetrated against them by the Tatmadaw and/or their proxy army, the DKBA. Only four participants, one from the younger age cohort, Mae La Camp and three from the resettled cohort, had not witnessed the destruction of their villages within Burma, but all had either personally experienced forced labor, and/or knew of family members whom had been forced to labor for the Tatmadaw, suffering beatings in the process. There were participants in each cohort who had experienced further attacks by the Tatmadaw's proxy army, the DKBA, resulting in destruction by fire of their homes in the displaced persons' camps to which they had moved. There were no notable differences observed in relation to this entity across the three cohorts.

In relation to the participants' exilic experiences, similarities were observed across the three cohorts in the reasons they became exiled from their country of origin, with the overwhelming reason being organized violence perpetrated against them. Of those who have resettled in the third country (including those from the Mae La Camp study), the desire for freedom and security and access to

further educational opportunities resonated across them all. A further similarity across all three cohorts was the participants' goals to live with their families in their villages in a free, democratic Burma.

Differences were most observed in the number of camps in which people had lived and the number of years they had lived in exile. These varied considerably within and across all of the cohorts. In the older age cohort, Mae La Camp, seventy-five percent (N=6) of the participants had lived in more than one camp on the Thai side of the Thai-Burma border compared to fifty percent (N=4) in the younger age cohort, Mae La Camp and fifty-eight percent (N=7) in the resettled cohort. The length of time participants had spent living in exile in the camps on the Thai side of the border varied in each of the cohorts. They ranged from eight to twenty years in the older age cohort, Mae La Camp to two to twenty-four years in the younger age cohort, Mae La Camp to nine to twenty-two years in the resettled cohort.

The similarities observed within and across the normal life, trauma and exilic experiences of all three cohorts are indicative of both the values held by the Christian displaced Karen and the civil war that has continued unabated in their country for sixty years. They point towards an ecology of hope described by Rycroft (1979) as "a social, cultural quality engendered within a social historical matrix and transmitted from one generation to another" (p. 12).

The differences observed are largely related to the age of the participant. As the ruling Burmese junta has intensified its genocidal military campaign in recent decades, more and more Karen have become displaced from their homeland resulting in increasing numbers fleeing to the displaced persons' camps on the Thai side of the Thai-Burma border. Consequently, the youth and young adult camp populations are increasingly being made up of people who have little or no physical experience of living in their homeland and whose normal life and exilic experiences are one and the same.

The meaning these participants attribute to these experiences that define their identity is further explored in the following chapter through the themes of culture, faith, education, nationalism, oppression and displacement.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE ONGOING TAPESTRY OF THE PARTICIPANTS' LIVES INFORMING IDENTITY

7.1 Introduction

Building on the descriptions of the primary participants' lives in Chapter Six, this chapter brings together the recurring themes of culture, Christian faith, education, nationalism, oppression and displacement. The data sources drawn on in this chapter include the interviews conducted in Mae La Displaced Persons' Camp, Thailand and the focus groups and key informant interviews conducted in Australia. The interviews with the Australian key informants are included because of their unique position, as previously resettled Karen, in assisting the transition of newly resettled Karen from the camps to life in Australia and the insights they have developed from this. Demographic profiles of these key informants are presented in Appendix E.

In both the Mae La and Australian studies, the findings highlight the lived experiences of the participants as expressed in the stories they shared with me. In this chapter, each of the major themes – culture, Christian faith, education, nationalism, oppression and displacement – will be discussed separately, with the understanding that they are intertwined and interdependent (Morris, 1996, p. 238). While resettlement arose as a discrete theme in the research with most of the Mae La group expressing views about resettlement, this was also clearly a temporal stage in the lives of the Australian group. For this group, however, the six themes of culture, faith, education, nationalism and displacement were also apparent. Thus, I have decided to incorporate the experiences of the resettled group within these six themes. Specific talk about resettlement by the displaced group is included as a subset of the theme of displacement.

7.2 Culture

Culture in its most natural form is like an everflowing current
of a river that overcomes or embraces every obstacle and
adjusts its direction accordingly without stopping the flow
(Akhand Jhoti, 2003, p. 2).

The Karen have suffered oppression for millennia; yet their distinctive culture has remained intact and continues to give meaning to who they are (Keyes, 1979; Marshall, 1997).

It is worthy of observation that, although residing in the midst of the Burmese and Peguans, they not only retain their own language, but even in their dress, houses, and everything else are distinguished from them... (Father Sangermano, writing of the Karen of Burma at the end of the 18th Century cited in Keyes, 1979, p. 1).

Haviland (1990) defines culture as:

... a set of rules or standards, that when acted upon by members of a society, produce behaviours that falls within a range of variance the members consider proper and acceptable (p. 30).

As such, culture does not refer to the behaviours that are observed, but rather to the values and beliefs that generate the behavior. It is these values and beliefs that are the stable, essential element of culture and which maintain the identity of those within (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 21).

Kramsch's (1998) definition of culture as

... membership in a discourse community that shares a common social space and history and common imaginings (p. 10),

gives an added understanding of the values and beliefs inherent in a culture, in that they can be maintained wherever members live.

Karen culture is collectivist in nature. Newman and Grauerholz (2002) define collectivist cultures as "those in which individual goals are subordinated to the goals of the larger group, and obligation to others is emphasized over personal freedom" (pp. 54-55). Inherent in the values and beliefs of Karen collectivist culture that define their identity are the constructs of filial piety in family, language and place. Through the interviews and focus groups, all of the participants confirmed the centrality of these constructs in relation to their identity. However, when I initially asked the Mae La participants to define what it meant for them to be Karen, the typical answer was – "pwa k'nyaw may pwa k'nyaw may pwa k'nyaw" (Karen is Karen is Karen) – being Karen was enough; no explanation was required. Yet, when I probed further, they each made reference to the varying constructs of culture and the meaning each had for them.

Because the Karen people is the nation that the people who love each other, helping each other, and honest and helping other and love to live peacefully (Saw Hsa Mu, 2nd interview).

I know I am a Karen woman Karen lady, we have to keep our culture and our language and to love our people (Naw Eh Wah, 2nd interview).

In this way, being Karen can be seen to be part of each participant's self identity and critical to their sense of self-worth (Druckman, 1994, p. 49; Taylor, 1999, p. 25; Turner, 1999, pp. 11-12). As participants spoke of their life experiences, this sense of being Karen was espoused in the context of three interrelated aspects of their experience – filial piety in family, language and place. Each of these aspects of culture is now explored further.

7.2.1 Filial Piety in Family

In collectivist societies, the concept of family is one that involves interdependence whereby it is believed that by maintaining the group's wellbeing, the individual's wellbeing is guaranteed (Newman & Grauerholz, 2002, p. 55). Filial piety is a means of maintaining the family group's wellbeing in such societies; it encompasses obedience to and respect for parents, honoring of ancestors and practical support to parents and other family members (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, pp. 80-81). Filial piety is evident in Karen culture. Of note in both studies were participants' descriptions of extended family living and challenges to maintaining filial piety. Of note also in interviews conducted with resettled Karen was their commitment to the practical support of those family members remaining in the camps.

7.2.1.1 Extended Family Living

The Karen values regarding family mean that all extended family members including those related by marriage, are at all times welcome to stay in one's home (Moo Troo, 1981, p.6; Panter, 2008, p. 49). In both studies, this value was evident.

In the Mae La study, five of the older cohort and seven of the younger cohort were living in extended family situations at the time of our interviews. The paradox I observed in these homes was that even though their bamboo and thatch houses were mostly small, there was no sense of overcrowding in the Western sense. One reason for this is that these houses are mostly devoid of furniture and personal belongings are very limited. People sleep, eat and socialize in the same open space. Mats are laid down at night for sleeping and rolled up and stored in the exposed rafters during the day.

In terms of both men and women in the older and younger age cohorts, there were no observable differences in relation to acceptance of extended family living as the norm in Karen society. As the following examples illustrate, the younger cohort were just as committed to the values of filial piety in relation to extended family living as the older cohort.

Naw Lah, who was newly married with a young baby, shared her home with her husband and extended family of both herself and her husband. The number of people staying at any one time varied from five to ten as her husband's family lived on the other side of the camp and various members regularly stayed over when they visited. Naw Eh Wah had been separated from her family of origin for more than eight years. At the time of our interviews, she was living in Reverend Dr and Mrs Simon's home with two of her younger siblings. Also living in this home were thirty other young people. Naw Day Mu stayed in her cousin's home together with other cousins. In Saw Gaw Tha's home, lived his aunt, uncle, two cousins, father, sister, her husband and daughter. Naw Paw Gay lived with her grandmother.

Saw Hsa Mu had spent most of his teenage life living with extended family in Burma, in order to complete his secondary school education. When arriving at Mae La Camp, he lived for a time with his aunt, uncle and cousins. He then built and moved into his own house. This subsequently became home to a number of cousins, sisters, their families and more recently, his mother. Now resettled to Australia, Saw Hsa Mu lives with his wife and child in close proximity to his wife's family, with members of that family regularly staying with them. When first interviewed, Saw Moo was living with his widowed mother, a number of his brothers and sisters and their spouses and children. He also has since resettled to the USA where he shared an apartment with his brother and his wife and two children and a cousin.

Amongst the older cohort, the value of extended family living was evidenced in several of the participants' stories. Naw May's husband was killed more than twenty years ago, yet she continued to be the primary caregiver to his aged mother and intellectually challenged sister. Naw May shared with me that this was more than obligation; they were her family, and as such she would provide whatever support was needed for them.

Naw May – I look after my mother-in-law, she is 98 years old and her daughter, she has mental problem – they stay with me.

S – In this house?

Naw May – No, not in this house, just there [pointing to house immediately behind]. Because with people she gets upset easily, so if the guests come, many sometimes, it is not good so I keep them quietly. So I look after them, I take time to visit them, see what they need, pray for them, have morning devotion, evening devotion (Naw May, 1st interview).

At the time of our interviews, Naw May was also sharing her home with her daughter and her husband and child, and with her niece, her husband and child and two adopted sons. Saw Taw Taw and his wife's sons were all living and studying away from their home but two of their nieces were living with them. Saw Htoo who was widowed early in his marriage, shared his home with two of his adult children, nieces, nephews and widowed sister. Naw Peh shared her home with her son and daughters, son-in-law and granddaughter. Four generations of the one family lived in Saw Doh Du's home. Shortly after our interviews, Naw Law Eh resettled with her husband and two children to the USA. They now live in their own apartment but within the same building as other members of their family who have also resettled.

I love being near Mummy ... and my sons they missed Pee Pee [grandmother] too much ... now they see her all the time (Naw Law Eh, 3rd interview).

The value of extended family living was also evident in the Australian study. Of the twelve focus group participants, half were living in extended family situations. Naw Ni Thaw and Saw Wah both arrived in 2006 with their immediate and extended families and continued to share their homes with extended family. Six of the eight single participants continued to live with their parents and/or extended family. Of the other two, one resettled without any family but was living with a Karen family. The other was living with an Australian family for the purpose of improving her English but maintained regular contact with her extended family who lived nearby.

Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) in their dialogue on filial piety cite that this style of living is a major source of identity for the group members and provides security and protection against the hardships of life (p. 75). This would certainly appear to be true of the participants. All of them have experienced severe hardship in their lives; yet they all spoke positively of their current situation.

7.2.1.2 Challenges to Filial Piety

Although all participants were committed to the value of filial piety, five participants, three from the Mae La study and two from the Australian study, shared stories of how external circumstances had challenged their ability to fulfill their family obligations.

Saw Moo was a younger age cohort participant in the Mae La study. He was one of ten children. As a teenager attending the Mission High School in Mae La Camp, Saw Moo wanted to become a Christian. However, Saw Moo's role identity as a son took precedence to his individual desire to change his religion from Buddhism to Christianity. As such, he had to first have the permission of his parents. When this was denied, he accepted their direction. Nearly ten years later, when working illegally away from his parents, Saw Moo was once again faced with the conviction of becoming a Christian. On this occasion, he went against his parents' direction and changed his religion. The result was that his father informed him by letter that he could never return to his family. It was only when his father was dying, that his mother relented and allowed him to return. I was told by key informants that Saw Moo's situation is relatively uncommon and that most times, parents practicing the Buddhist and Animist faiths accept the decision of their children to change their religion.

Many aspects of all three cohorts' stories reflected a sense of sacrifice. A sense of sacrifice which presented challenges to filial piety was particularly evident in the accounts of four participants, one from each of the older and younger Mae La cohorts and two from the Australian study.

From the older cohort, Mae La study, Naw Lah's sense of filial piety led her to become separated from four of her five children when she made the decision to cross the border into Thailand as a displaced person. After her village was destroyed by the Burmese Army, she joined other villagers on the trek across the mountains into Mae La Camp. Naw Lah was a sole parent, and with the destruction of her village, she lost her only source of livelihood, a small farm. However, her parents who were missionaries, and her parents-in-law, chose to remain and help the people staying behind. Faced with an untenable dilemma – the choice between obligations to her elders and securing a livelihood for herself and her children – Naw Lah left her two eldest children with her parents and the next two children with her parents-in-law to help them and made the trip across with only her youngest daughter who was thirteen at the time. While there was no contact between Naw Lah and her four older children

for the next seven years (with Naw Lah never being really certain where they were), they were reunited when both sets of grandparents passed away. Released from their obligation to help and care for their grandparents, all four children, the eldest married with one child, made their way to Mae La Camp to live with their mother.

From the younger cohort, Mae La study, Naw Paw Gay had lived with her grandmother since the murder of her parents by the Tatmadaw when she was nine years old. Naw Paw Gay reported that she had a goal to relocate to a third country to further her education, but had put that goal on hold as her grandmother wanted to remain as close as possible to her homeland. As she was the sole remaining family for her grandmother, her role identity took precedence over her individual aims. For the time being, she had readjusted her goal to enable her to meet her filial responsibilities. At the time of interviews, Naw Paw Gay planned to enroll in a Bachelor Degree course within Mae La Camp which would enable her to stay with her grandmother and partially fulfill her goal of further study.

Two of the younger focus group participants in the Australian study (Saw Dae Dae and Naw Say Mu) struggled with the decision to resettle and the inevitable separation from family members. This choice was heightened as both had already lived apart from their parents and siblings for many years, having been sent away by their parents to study. Saw Dae Dae had seen his parents only intermittently since and chose to resettle with his sister and her family. As the oldest daughter of a widowed mother, Naw Say Mu also struggled with the decision to resettle to Australia. In both instances, the goal of pursuing tertiary education that was not available in the camps determined their decision to resettle in Australia.

7.2.1.3 Practical Support of Family Members by Resettled Karen

The collectivist nature of Karen culture was evident in the way filial piety in family was perceived by resettling Karen in relation to practical support of family. Family was perceived to be more than just their family of origin; it included the 'bwadawer' – the wider Karen community. Five people in the Australian focus groups spoke specifically about this. In each instance, other members of the focus groups nodded and added their agreement. In the AKO Youth Seminar focus group, Saw Dae Dae spoke of how he and his friends had made a VCD of Karen music and money raised from its sale was being sent to his mother church in his camp to help the people there which included some of his extended family. Saw Kler from the KBCA focus group and Naw Say Mu and Saw Hsa Thaw from the

AKO Youth Seminar both spoke of how their tithes and special offerings to their churches in Australia were being used in part to help their people back on the border.

As we are Karen we have heart for our people. As a Christian we keep our tithe¹ ... help in different ways because with the people and with the church we belong in the camp, we can't leave them ... even though we don't send much money, we still send money to help as we can (Saw Kler, KBCA).

In our church we make a fund to support our Karen people (Naw Say Mu, AKO Youth Seminar).

In my church we collect \$10 or \$20 every month for each person and then we send to IDP and border (Saw Hsa Thaw, AKO Youth Seminar).

The three participants from the Mae La study who have resettled in the USA and Australia also spoke to me of how they are sending remittances back to their churches and family in the camps.

... [as] Karen we organized ourselves together we have a worship service and I serve as a worship leader. We have collection during the service. We have a purposes for the collection; 1. for the IDP's in Kawthoolei and 2. for the KKBC (Naw Law Eh, 3rd interview).

Newlands (2004) and de Haas (2009) confirm in their research that international remittances result in positive outcomes for places from where migrants have left in the form of household welfare, nutrition, health and living conditions. This was evident in Mae La Camp in the time I lived there. Many of my students who had family living in third countries received regular remittances enabling them to purchase goods such as laptops and mobile phones. Many of the families I knew spoke of how remittances from family members who had migrated enabled them to purchase vegetables and meat from the market to supplement the TBBC rations that significantly improved their children's health. One of the teachers was able to raise his house with money provided by his brother who had migrated so as to avoid being flooded out each rainy season. The community value was also evident as many of these same people also spoke of how they tithed their remittances so that they could help those who had less than them.

¹ Tithing is a Biblical concept of giving one tenth of one's income to the church for support of its ministry (Deuteronomy 12:5-7, 1 Corinthians 16:2, 2 Corinthians 8:5)

7.2.2 Language

Language is a central way in which social lives are conducted and cultural identities constructed. As Kramsch (1998) says:

It is widely believed that there is a natural connection between the language spoken by members of a social group and that group's identity (p. 65).

A number of writers have linked language with the social identity of a group (Deschamps, 1982; Edwards, 1985; Paasi, 1991; Kramsch, 1998). Kramsch (1998) further links language to cultural reality in three aspects – that of expression, embodiment and symbolization. The words people use to each other express their common experiences, their attitudes and beliefs in the world in which they live and of which they have knowledge. Meaning is given to these expressions of language, both verbal and non-verbal, thus embodying cultural reality. As a system of signs that is seen as providing cultural value, speakers view their language as a symbol of their social identity (p. 3).

7.2.2.1 Language Expressing Cultural Reality for the Karen

The Karen have maintained their language for millennia. Two main Karen languages are spoken – Sgaw Karen and Pwo Karen, each unintelligible to the other. Within each of these languages, there are dialects that are distinctive yet mutually intelligible. Sgaw Karen is the accepted national language and all of the participants in both studies were conversant in this language, though four were Pwo Karen (Saw Hsa Mu from the Mae La Study is Western Pwo Karen and Western Pwo is his mother language and Naw Sei Sei, Saw Dae Dae and Saw Poe Kwa are Eastern Pwo). While conversant in Sgaw Karen within the wider community of Karen speakers, Saw Hsa Mu, Saw Dae Dae and Saw Poe Kwa speak their Pwo Karen dialect within their own Pwo communities. The exception was Naw Sei Sei who told how she grew up in a Sgaw Karen community and did not learn Pwo Karen. The importance of the expression and maintenance of Pwo language by Pwo Karen is highlighted in this statement by Keyes (1979),

The Pwo language ... is significant in their own definition of their ethnic group and services to locate them within the larger family of Karen speakers (p. 10).

However, the Burmanisation policy of the ruling military junta of Burma aims to threaten the expression of Karen language especially in the urban areas. While the vast majority of the participants stated their preferred language was Karen, Saw Gaw Tha, one of the younger cohort participants in the

Mae La Study who had spent all his schooling and early working life in Burmese communities, stated that he was more comfortable speaking in Burmese. Interestingly though, when asked what distinguishes the Karen from other ethnic groups in Burma, he included language in his answer (Saw Gaw Tha, 2nd interview). Saw Gaw Tha was the only participant who voiced his preference for speaking Burmese instead of Karen.

In the Australian study, it was evident that language continues to be an important indicator of Karen culture. Both focus groups were conducted in Sgaw Karen with the help of translators. While there were a number of people in the KBCA focus group that did not speak English, all of the participants in the AKO Youth Seminar focus group had an intermediate or high standard of English proficiency. Even so, when given the option of conducting the focus group in English or Sgaw Karen, they all stated they would prefer to speak in their own language.

Both the focus group participants and the key informants in the Australian study spoke with enthusiasm of the multicultural policies of Australia that encouraged the maintenance of culture including the expression of language.

We can maintain our language, our culture ... because we when we arrived here, we have our right, because this is a multicultural country, we can speak our language in our community, we can study our literature ... this is the beauty of this country (Saw Tamla Gaw).

7.2.2.2 Language Embodying Cultural Reality for the Karen

Further to the expression of cultural reality through language, experiences are also created by language, thus embodying cultural reality (Kramsch, 1998, p. 3). In the Mae La Study, three of the older cohort and five of the younger cohort were involved in teaching activities in the camp where the principal language medium of the schools is Sgaw Karen. Saw Taw Taw from the older cohort, while teaching in an English medium college in the camp, provided teacher training to educators in Karen State in Sgaw Karen language. The emphasis placed on the maintenance of Karen oral and written language in schools in the camp is one example of how language embodies Karen culture for these displaced Karen. This is supported by writers such as Edwards (1985) who states that the education system is often perceived as “the central pillar in group-identity maintenance, providing an essential support for linguistic nationalism and ethnic revival” (p. 118).

7.2.2.3 Language Symbolizing Cultural Reality for the Karen

Five of the older cohort and four of the younger cohort of the Mae La study specifically related Karen language to their cultural identity. Kramsch (1998) states that when a people's language use is threatened by a dominant force, speakers will often go to great lengths to preserve their language as it is seen to be a threat to their overall culture (p. 75). Kramsch's view was confirmed by these participants.

Both Sgaw and Pwo Karen have different written scripts, similar in style to the Burmese script, but distinctive to the tonal sounds of the two Karenic languages. One of the major losses for Karen people of the Burmanisation policy of the ruling junta in Burma is the abolition of Karen language teaching in schools. Under British rule, the Karen were encouraged to set up and run their own schools in which Sgaw or Pwo Karen were the primary language medium, with English and Burmese also taught. However, in Burmese controlled areas which are now the vast majority of the areas inhabited by the Karen inside Burma today, this is forbidden (Smith, 1993, p. 11).

They do not allow us to teach our Karen subjects. They do not want us to learn in our own language (Saw Taw Taw, 1st interview).

In order to preserve Karen literacy in the face of this policy, many Karen communities throughout Burma organize Karen literacy classes outside of formal school hours (Thawnghmung, 2008, pp. 12-13).

Naw Law Eh spent her childhood in the city and completed all her schooling in Burmese. However, she learnt to read and write Sgaw Karen at home:

... my mummy teach [Karen literacy] me at home ... some are learning at home by their parent and some are initiate by the church and study in summer camp for a month or two months (Naw Law Eh, 1st interview).

Saw Hsa Mu who is Pwo Karen and completed all his schooling in both Burmese and English, also learnt to read and write in his language in his village. In response to my question regarding whether he had ever studied in Pwo Karen, he answered in the affirmative:

When I stay at the village, the older women and men they give us the training to remember our language; to be able to read our language (Saw Hsa Mu, 1st interview).

Naw Htee Na, who had been a teacher for more than thirty years, spoke of her concern that Karen language was being lost amongst the Karen living in Burma and Thailand and those who have migrated to the third country. She worried that if the language was lost, so would be the culture. Many of those who have resettled in Western countries shared her concern. Naw Law Eh and Saw Moo, who now both live in the USA, voluntarily teach Karen children to read and write in their language within their communities on weekends and school holidays.

The situation is similar in Australia where language was highlighted as an essential component of culture by both focus group participants and key informants. All of the community leaders (key informants) interviewed cited the necessity to maintain Karen language – in both written and spoken forms – within their new lives in Australia. They spoke of how volunteers within the Karen churches began Karen language schools in the mid 1990s with volunteer teachers. (At that time, a small number of Karen who had escaped the destruction of the Karen political headquarters in Manerplaw, Eastern Burma, were granted refugee status in Australia). Today, every Saturday and during school holidays, these schools teach Karen literacy skills to the children. While this continues to occur on a voluntary basis in many of the cities and towns where Karen live, the AKO has now negotiated with local government in Melbourne and Sydney for funding to operate Karen language schools in the community. Thra Thataw Kunoo proudly told me of how the Melbourne City Council was fully funding the first ever Karen language school outside of Burma and the border which was being attended by more than two hundred children and youth from Year One to Ten every Saturday and school holidays. A similar program that was being partially funded was operating in Sydney with an average of one hundred children attending.

The commitment to the preservation of language was shared by both older and younger generations of Karen; by those still living in Burma and on the border as well as those who have resettled to third countries. This commitment highlights the collectivist nature of Karen identity in general.

7.2.3 Land/Place

Place is defined as both the external realities within which people shape their existence, and the object of human thought and action (Fullilove, 1996, p. 1518). In this way, the concept of place is rooted in both geographical and psychological processes. It is also linked to history, culture and identity (Agnew, 1987; Paasi 1991; Rodman, 2003).

McKinnon's (2003) research found that the Karen of Burma's close relationship with place is an integral part of their identity and embedded in cultural meaning (p. 64). A model developed by Agnew (1987) has the capacity to incorporate the definition provided above and explore McKinnon's findings in relation to the research participants' concept of place. It comprises three elements – location, locale and sense of place. Location refers to the geographical area of place, locale refers to the settings in which social relations are determined and sense of place refers to the “structure of feeling or common frame for experiences” (cited in Paasi, 1991, p. 248).

7.2.3.1 Location

In the Mae La study, thirteen participants' original abode was within Kawthoolei, one participant came from a village in the Delta area of Burma, and two from towns close to Rangoon (Refer Map in Appendix A). The two participants from towns near Rangoon were both in the older cohort and moved to the KNU controlled area of Kawthoolei to actively participate in the revolution movement – one as a young woman who came with her parents and siblings, and the other as a young man convicted of a need to actively help his people who came alone. Of the remaining fourteen participants, two in the younger cohort moved away for fear of their lives within their Burmese Army controlled villages in their late teenage years and twelve witnessed the destruction of their original places of abode. Of these twelve, eight had witnessed subsequent destruction of places to which they moved before settling in Mae La Camp. In common, they had been displaced from their place before coming to Mae La Camp.

In the Australian study, nine of the twelve focus group participants were born in Kawthoolei. The other three were born in camps on the Thai side of the border. Of the nine born in Kawthoolei, all had lived as internally displaced persons before crossing the border for varying amounts of time and four had lived in more than one camp on the Thai side. One young person came to Mae La Camp as an

unaccompanied minor at the age of eleven for the specific purpose of accessing education not available in his Burmese controlled village. All nine of these participants had witnessed the destruction of their original villages. Of the three born in the camps, two had witnessed the destruction of their homes during cross border enemy attacks.

7.2.3.2 Locale

Proshansky, Fabian and Kaminoff (1983) suggest that past experiences of places become integral features of self concepts, establishing a sense of place identity for communities and individuals within their present circumstances (p. 60). All participants in the Mae La study shared stories of their place of origin which included stories of village life. Naw May nostalgically spoke of her village as:

... but one day if we have free, I want to go back to my village, my village is very pleasant – the water is very cold and beautiful – the river have big waterfall so we can get electric fire from this waterfall (Naw May, 2nd interview).

Her face was bright as she spoke. Even though she had been displaced from her village for more than twenty years, Naw May maintained attachment and familiarity with this place. Similarly, most of the other participants talked of their village life prior to displacement as being encompassed around the family, church and farming.

Saw Doh Du and his family were first displaced from their village in 1975. After living in various temporary shelters along both sides of the border for fifteen years, the family made the decision to return with their former village community to the area near where their village had been and rebuild it. His reasoning was that he hoped that things would improve and they would be able to return to the normality of village life in their own land. Sadly, this did not happen and they were forcibly displaced again many times within their land before again making the decision to cross back over to the Thai side and eventual safety of Mae La Camp in 1999.

Saw Htoo and Naw Peh both spoke of their villages being rebuilt many times over several years after they were destroyed by the Burmese Army, before being finally forced to abandon them for fear of their lives.

Saw Eh Lay spoke of how his brother and his family had recently left the camp and returned to Karen State to live as internally displaced persons. When I asked him why, he simply replied, “They prefer to live in their own land” (Saw Eh Lay, 2nd interview).

For each of these people, the village setting was an important part of their self-concept that influenced their actions. For those who had decided to stay in Mae La Camp, their past experiences of their village life was reflected in the manner in which they lived their lives currently. Vertuyten’s (2005) ethnic identity theory has relevance here. The ‘being’ and ‘feeling’ aspects of Vertuyten’s theory can be seen in the stories shared by the participants in relation to their previous life in the village setting; whereas, the ‘doing’ and ‘knowing’ aspects of the theory can be seen to influence the way they live their lives in Mae La Camp.

While the Australian study did not specifically explore this area, one of my key informants summed up this sense of “locale” when speaking of how the young Karen who have resettled in Australia maintain a connection with their original place.

They still connect to camp or inside Burma where they have relative or long time ago their mother and father tell their story of their village even if they have never been there. No matter good or bad, naturally people love their origin – that is natural – every nation every human being you love your origin (Thra Thataw Kunoo).

In another key informant interview, Naw Hay Rae recognized that land and the meaning attached to it was important to those who are coming and that when they first arrive, they miss their old place and everything that is familiar to them – traditional vegetables and leaves not available in Australia and rituals such as relating to childbirth that are unable to be practiced in the Western health system. She said that most Karen who are coming now do not actually want to resettle in Australia; they come because they feel they have no choice – “they don’t want to come but they can’t go back”. She spoke of the importance of supporting the newcomers in every way – practically, emotionally and spiritually – to help them reestablish their concept of place identity within their new environment.

7.2.3.3 Sense of Place

Paasi (1991) expounds that place is more than just a geographical location,

... but a unique web of social and material spatiotemporal life connections and associated meanings emerging on the basis of the life world (p. 248).

Low (1991) adds to this when he states that:

A cultural definition of place attachment implies that for most people there is a transformation of the experience of a space or piece of land into a culturally meaningful and shared symbol, that is, place ... there is a symbolic relationship between the individual/group and the place (p. 166).

The participants in the Mae La Study had lived in Mae La Camp for between two and twenty years. All participants had been internally displaced before crossing the border to camps on the Thai side. Six of the older cohort and three of the younger cohort had lived in other camps before coming to Mae La. Despite their many dislocations of place, the participants' stories indicated that each maintained a connection to their place of origin which provided meaning for them in their current life. Stories from each of the age cohorts in Mae La and the Australian studies reflect this.

Saw Moo, a younger age cohort participant from the Mae La study, resettled in the USA and was striving to build a new life there. When I asked him generally about his life there, Saw Moo answered:

Although physically I live in America, my heart is back home in Kawthoolei (Saw Moo, 2nd interview).

Saw Moo left his village as a young child more than twenty-five years ago when it was destroyed by the Tatmadaw, yet he remained symbolically connected to this place. His personal sense of place remained rooted in his past and shaped his attitudes, beliefs and actions in the present (Lawrence, 1992, p. 228). In this way, his social, role and person identities were all intrinsically linked to his concept of place identity. Even though geographically separated from Kawthoolei, an important component of Saw Moo's social identity was maintained there. In the USA, Saw Moo lived and worshipped within his Christian Karen community, taught Karen literacy and Sunday School within his Karen church. In this way, his person based identity provided the resources for him to maintain his hope of being able to return to Kawthoolei.

Naw Law Eh, from the older age cohort, Mae La study, also migrated with her family to the USA and was carrying out similar roles to Saw Moo within her Karen based community. When talking about her connections with the people she left behind, she said similarly to Saw Moo:

Although we live here, our heart is with our own people ... we hope that one day we will go back and live among our people (Naw Law Eh, 3rd interview).

Saw Kler and Saw Dae Dae, focus group participants in the Australian study, further mirrored Saw Moo and Naw Law Eh's viewpoint. Despite having arrived in Australia only five months before the focus group, Saw Kler and his family were fully involved in their Karen based church in similar roles to which they had in the camp. Speaking of his people still living in Burma and on the border, he said:

As we are Karen we have heart for our people ... we can't leave them and we keep in touch
(Saw Kler, KBCA).

He further talked about how he hoped his children would return to the border to help his people once they had completed their education and acquired Australian citizenship. Saw Dae Dae demonstrated his connection to his people in the camps and inside Burma by repeatedly speaking of 'our community' when referring to the Karen along the border.

Even we still live here we still miss them and they are still our community (Saw Dae Dae, AKO Youth Seminar).

In this way, their sense of place's symbolic meaning verifies their identity within their social structure (Stets & Burke, 2005, p. 48).

7.2.4 Summary

Two contrasting views of displacement from place exist. One states that a person's place provides a cognitive map and once that is lost, they become paralyzed without direction (Wallace, 1957, p. 25). The other states that people "have reflexive relationships with places". When people become displaced, they often see their new landscape in relation to previous familiar ones (Rodman, 2003, p. 212). Rodman (2003) refers to this process as a "multilocal way of sorting out meaning" (p. 214). Fullilove (1996) refers to it as empowered collaboration, where people working together as a community take the rituals, the familiarity and attachment of the 'old place' to stabilize place identity within their new environment (pp. 1521-1522).

It seems that the participants in both the Mae La and Australian studies have been able to adopt the latter view. From a locational intersectional viewpoint, the identity of the participants in this study in relation to their sense of place can be seen in the way that the historical influences the present; though forced from their places of origin, they have maintained many of the original aspects in their current mode of living. (Knudsen, 2006; Hulko, 2009). In Mae La Camp, the physical structure of their

houses, the roles that they played and the hope that they maintained of the ability to return to their original place attest to this. In the Australian study, both key informants and focus group participants repeatedly talked about returning to help their people after gaining education and citizenship. As in Mae La Camp, these people were fulfilling various roles in their churches and communities which in many ways reflected those roles they had in the border camps they had left. While the structure of their houses was different from the camps, the community nature of their living reflected the lives they had left behind. Paasi (1991) states that “culture is action” (p. 244). Through the exploration of the cultural concepts of family, language and place, the logic of Passi’s statement is relevant for the participants in this study. Though displaced from their homeland and for some, resettled in countries far away, they have actively maintained their culture in all its forms and demonstrated the truth of the statement – “Karen is Karen is Karen”!

7.3 Christian Faith

One essential feature of a living religion is the community, the feeling of partnerships and belonging (Beit-Hallahmi & Argyle, 1997, p. 243).

All participants in both studies identified as Protestant Christian. In the Mae La study, fourteen participants were members of the Baptist denomination, one was a member of the Seventh Day Adventist denomination and one was a member of the Anglican denomination. In the Australian study, ten were members of the Baptist denomination and two were members of the Anglican denomination. A history of how the Karen came into contact with Christianity has been provided in Chapter 2:4. Within Mae La Camp, key informants told me that fifty percent of the Karen living there identify as Christian with the vast majority of those belonging to the Baptist denomination. In the Australian study, three of my key informants, Thra Toka Han, Saw Daniel Zue and Pu Paul Kyaw, stated that the majority of the Karen who are resettling in Australia identify as Christian. Their statements were echoed in a recent report made to the Annual Gathering of the Baptist World Alliance in The Netherlands which stated that the majority of the Karen refugees resettling in Australia identify as Baptist Christian and are active in Australian based churches (Wilkinson-Hayes, 2009).

Three sub-themes that arose in the data relating to Christian faith are a conviction of belonging to a community of believers known as Christians, values relating to belonging to this group and attitudes

held by members of the group to both themselves and those who do not share the same beliefs. These sub-themes parallel Tajfel's (1981) definition of social identity as,

... that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his [or her] knowledge of his [or her] membership of a social group together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership (p. 255).

Further, Baker (2008) refers to this definition to describe three aspects of social identity: cognitive, evaluative and emotional. Firstly, the cognitive aspect relates to the recognition of belonging to a group; secondly, the evaluative aspect relates to the value a person attaches to a group; and thirdly, the emotional aspect relates to the attitudes group members hold towards themselves and those outside the group. In this way, Tajfel's theory

... concerns itself with the way group members understand themselves as part of the group and differentiate their group from others in order to achieve a positive social identity (Baker, 2008, p. 05.2).

In this section, I will utilize Baker's (2008) model of social identity to analyse and discuss the impact that Christian faith has on the participants' perception of identity. Building on from the findings relating to the participants' experience of culture, the collectivist nature of Karen society necessarily impacts on their faith experience.

7.3.1 Recognition of Belonging to the Group (Cognitive Aspect)

In the Mae La Study, every participant was asked to share their experience of being a Christian. While the majority (twelve) of the participants was born into Christian families, four were born into families practicing a different faith – two Buddhist and two Animist. Of these, Saw Taw Taw's family converted to Christianity when he was four years old. The families of the other three were still practicing their original faith.

For the participants who had grown up in a Christian family, there was a strong sense of belonging attached to their identification as a Christian that was also linked to their identity within their families and kinship structure. Their decision to be a Christian was connected to their parents' and grandparents' beliefs and in some instances, those of their whole village. This was evident in both age cohorts, illustrated in the following accounts:

I became a Christian because as I said the whole villager is Christian. Because my village is one of the first villages that founded the church (Saw Htoo, 1st interview).

... because my grandmother was a Christian, so I was taken by my grandmother (Naw Paw Gay, 1st interview).

... the whole family like grandmother and grandfather are Christian so I became a Christian (Naw Day Mu, 1st interview).

In this way, their Christian identity reinforced the antecedents of their identity, that being their identity within the family into which they had been born (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p. 22).

In all instances, being a Christian meant belonging to the wider church community in which they lived. This provided them with role identities – church member, church advisor, deacon, Sunday-School teacher, pastor, choir leader, choir member, women's church committee member, missionary, Bible School student – as well as a group identity of belonging to the wider church community in that place.

Three participants who have since resettled in the USA and Australia spoke about joining a Karen church as soon as they arrived. This had been a priority for them; their identity as both Karen and Christian being contingent and interdependent, and providing a strong sense of belonging in their new environments. Almost immediately, they took on similar roles to which they had within the church they belonged to in Mae La Camp.

In the Australian study, there was consensus in both the focus groups and key informant interviews that the church was central to their life in Australia. Karen based churches were formed by the group who came in the mid to late 1990s after the fall of Manerplaw. In all communities where Karen live, churches have been formed for Karen to worship in their own language and tradition. Most of these are Baptist in denomination, but also include Seventh Day Adventist and Anglican. Some are extensions of established Australian churches; some are independent. Pu Paul Kyaw explained to me that prior to larger numbers of Karen arriving in the 1990s, Christian Karen who had migrated earlier (these were planned migrations occurring in the years following Burmese independence in 1948 and Ne Win's 1962 military coup d'état) would attend Burmese based churches, but that they would also worship in small home groups in their own language. In 2000, the Karen Baptist Churches of Australia Inc (KBCA) was formed to oversee and support the members and activities of the Karen Baptist churches across Australia.

From both the interviews and my observations, for Christian Karen in Australia, the church emerged as more than a place to hold Sunday services in a language understandable to all. It was a place of belonging, where information was shared, where needs were identified, where support was given, where cultural programs were delivered, and from where remittances were channeled via their tithes back to missions and churches in Burma and along the border. In essence, the church was the hub of the community.

... we meet at the church every week with the Bible study, with the prayer groups, we can share information so that our information flow is very good (Saw Daniel Zue).

As in the Mae La study, for the resettled Christian Karen in Australia, involvement in their churches brought individual role identities as well as a group identity of belonging to the church community.

In both studies, role identities within the church were inclusive of both genders. Amongst the Christian Karen who are Baptist and Anglican, it is acceptable for both men and women to occupy leadership positions. In the Mae La study, two women and two men in the older age cohort occupied leadership positions in their church, while in the younger age cohort, one man and one woman were both studying in the Bachelor of Theology programme with a view of becoming pastors. In the Australian study, two male and one female focus group participants and three female and five male community leaders had leadership positions in their churches.

7.3.2 Recognition of the Value Attached to the Group (Evaluative Aspect)

For the Christian displaced and resettled Karen in this study, the values relating to their faith and their culture were in many ways synonymous. The belief in a monotheistic divine being who controls all actions in the universe is common in both traditional and Christian belief systems for the Karen (Marshall 1997; Rogers 2004). These beliefs are deeply held and have become the basis for dependence on God for guidance in all things temporal.

In both studies, various participants discussed what being a Christian meant to them. Two examples from the older age cohort in the Mae La study are:

I know that God is a living God, hardships and difficulties are nothing to me ... I can call Him Abba Father ... the future is in the Hand of God – wherever God will lead I will go ...

wherever God leads me I will go and serve my people – I will serve God as I can (Naw Htee Na, 1st interview).

God is my Lord and Saviour so I always rely on Him and trust in Him so I can run my house in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Naw May, 2nd interview).

Two examples from the younger age cohort in the Mae La study are:

... we will return to our land in God's plan (Naw Lah, 2nd interview).

I am proud to be a Christian because Christian faith can get salvation. After we die we have eternal life (Saw Gaw Tha, 1st interview).

An example from the Australian study is:

We know we are going to the church once a week, but in the meantime, we do have the women's group, prayer group and also we have the youth group and they also pray and the faith is in every house they have the daily devotion, morning devotion, night devotion means that even though we are physically away from the church, our heart and life we try to improve our faith and belief (Naw Say Wah).

In this way, study participants linked their group identity to a higher power which they named as God or Jesus Christ. Their values were expressed in their belief in this higher being and in so doing, extended beyond the group known as Christians or the church. This belief gave meaning and purpose to their lives. These values guided the way they carried out their various roles and interacted with each other and the wider community in which they lived.

However, while these values resulted in congruence within the role identity of most of the participants, the stories shared by one participant from each of the age cohorts in the Mae La study (Saw Doh Du and Saw Moo) and two of the key informants in the Australian study (Thra Toke Han and Saw Daniel Zue) showed how their values became a source of role conflict for them.

Saw Doh Du's role identity included that of pastor, husband and father. As a pastor, he maintained strong values of commitment to his church members. After the destruction of his village, they first all moved to the border, but when his church members decided they wanted to return to their land and live as internally displaced persons even though they would be continually on the run from the Burmese Army, Saw Doh Du felt a strong obligation to lead them in his role as a pastor. He spoke with emotion of this conflict:

... at that time I was a pastor, I have to visit my church members and go around and I cannot always look after my family ... we cannot meet together, because we are spread out, so I have to take the service this week in one place and next week another place. Always I have to go around to my church members ... sometimes my family is sick and I cannot be there ... so many problems (Saw Doh Du, 2nd interview).

Similarly, the values Saw Moo attributed to being a Christian resulted in a costly role conflict between that of being a Christian and as an older son within his strong Buddhist practicing family. His decision to turn away from the faith he had grown up with to Christianity resulted in alienation from his family.

... it happened like that my family is Buddhist and as well, they are strong Buddhist. I want to be a Christian but my father and mother do not allow me to be a Christian. They say if you are a Christian, don't call me mother and father, and you don't need to come back to this home, just go to another place (Saw Moo, 1st interview).

Thra Toke Han and Saw Daniel Zue, who resettled to Australia in 1997 and 2007 respectively, were Karen community leaders who were active in their Karen church and national communities. They spoke of a different type of role conflict affecting those resettled Karen in their community with good English skills. While both their Christian and cultural values encouraged them to be of assistance to their people wherever possible, Saw Daniel Zue and Thra Toke Han believed that the demands for the assistance of English speaking Karen by community members including themselves, had become a burden for many as they struggled to maintain their personal work and family commitments while being available to their community whenever the need arises. While raising this as a concern in the interviews, both men acknowledged that as Christian and Karen, this was a means of communicating God's love to their community and while it had become a burden for many, they were obligated to continue to help in this way.

As Cheek and Briggs (1982) highlight, it was not Saw Doh Du's identity as a pastor and husband and father, Saw Moo's identity as a Christian and son, nor Saw Daniel Zue and Thra Toke Han's identity as family members and community leaders per se that were in conflict, it was the values, beliefs, norms and demands inherent in those identities (p. 406).

7.3.3 Attitudes Held by Group Members Towards those Within and Those Without the Group (Emotional Aspect)

A common thread amongst the participants was their perception of how God related to them as Karen Christians. In the Mae La study, this perception echoed a strong ethnocentric sentiment which was

most strongly voiced by the younger age cohort, with two participants in particular directly connecting the Karen as God's chosen people.

Karen people belong to God. In the creation we are belonging to God and we have to belong to God. So, as for me I am chosen by God and our people belong to God. So we have to live for God (Saw Krit, 2nd interview).

... our Karen people – God choose our Karen people to be Karen Nation. Our Karen people like the Israelite, got problem, but God help them (Naw Eh Wah, 1st interview).

The younger age cohort were also stronger in their views that God is responsible for the Karen gaining freedom of their homeland, with five younger participants voicing this opinion as opposed to three in the older age cohort. Inherent in this view was a sense of hope that has been transmitted from one generation to another, providing meaning, purpose and faith in the present (Rycroft, 1975, p. 12; Averill & Sundararajan, 2005, p. 136).

In the Australian study, Thra Toke Han added to these views when he stated to me with passion in his voice:

If we put God first, He will bless us with our identity – He will even raise up people who will lead us to bless us and keep us on track both nationalistically and spiritually (Thra Toke Han).

In relation to resettlement, a common thread in both the Mae La and Australian studies was of a benevolent God who would always care for the Karen. Interestingly though, in the Mae La study, only the older age cohort directly connected their faith beliefs with their views on resettlement, with three people (Saw Htoo, Naw Law Eh and Saw Doh Du) voicing a belief that God was opening the way for the Karen to settle in third countries.

... now I believe God opens the way for Karen to settle in third country (Saw Htoo, 2nd interview).

Now God open the way for Karen people to go to third country ... I believe the world belongs to God, where He sends me I will go (Naw Law Eh, 2nd interview).

Now a time God is working for Karen people to go to third country (Saw Doh Du, 3rd interview).

Later, after he had resettled, Saw Hsa Mu from the younger age cohort voiced similar sentiments:

God goes before us in everything ... everything has been made good for us here, we are very thankful to God and for Australian people for all the blessings we have received here (Saw Hsa Mu, 3rd interview).

Hope was inherent here also, in these participants' faith in a God whom they believed was directing their lives, providing them with meaning and purpose in their current situation.

Saw Krit, a younger age cohort participant in the Mae La study, debated the temporal and divine views of resettlement at length with me over two interviews. Temporally, he said, the UNHCR resettlement policy was a mistake; he viewed a more efficient option would be for foreign governments to invest their resources in ousting the Burmese military government. This, he believed would result in the Karen people being able to be repatriated to their homeland and live in freedom and peace. However, from a divine view, Saw Krit saw resettlement "like a star in the East leading people to God" and that while it would weaken the political struggle for freedom from a human perspective, he had faith "that God will return it to a good way for the Karen people" (Saw Krit, 3rd interview).

Participants in the KBCA focus group in Australia spoke of God's guidance in their new lives in Australia. Two participants' comments received assent from other members when they spoke of God's provision for them in their new environment.

God give us special thinking and special dealing with us ... the Karen people are blessed by God (Saw Eh Taw, KBCA).

The Government is God's provision – God's plan for us, God provided the Government as the mediator for us to look after us (Saw Wah, KBCA).

When considering the participants' attitudes as Christians towards those who practice other religions, one person in each age cohort in the Mae La study made comment:

Being a Christian is ... I think better than other religions, because in the Bible, it shows me how to behave, and that show everything how to live in the world, how to get salvation at last ... we know where to go ... we know our future and we know how to get eternal life – We totally believe God – we only trust God (Saw Hsa Mu, 1st interview).

... with the Christian faith I can understand clearly about what the Bible says. But in Buddhist I did not understand clearly (Saw Eh Lay, 1st interview).

Saw Eh Lay also spoke of his experience of Christians when he was still a practicing Buddhist in the KNLA as well as his relationship now he is a Christian with his family of origin who are Buddhists. In relation to the first, Saw Eh Lay said:

Most of us in my unit, we are Buddhist but there were some Christian also. It was not a problem. They worshipped and we worshipped – just different ways. We all ate same rice and fought same enemy (Saw Eh Lay, 2nd interview).

In this quite profound statement, Saw Eh Lay demonstrated that religion was not a divisive factor in his military experience. Saw Eh Lay also spoke of the trip he made back to Karen State with his brother to see his family the previous year. Unlike Saw Moo's family, Saw Eh Lay said that his parents, brothers and sisters and their families were fully accepting of his change of faith. He told how both Christian and Buddhist families live side by side in their village and that this had always been the way in his experience.

Others in the Mae La study voiced how their faith provided a bulwark against the difficulties of life and an example for those who do not share their belief. Naw Htee Na stated that the way she lived her Christian life in the face of difficulty and hardship has provided encouragement for those who do not believe in her God. Saw Taw Taw and Naw May gave similar testimonies. In the Australian study, Thramu Tamla Paw acknowledged that God gave her the strength to cope with all the adjustments she had to make in her new life in Australia.

... because there is a lot of stress and lots of new things to learn – as a Christian we have faith and we believe that God give us strength to go through and we just pray God help us to go through these things (Thramu Tamla Paw).

Given that the majority of the Karen leadership have identified as Christian since the beginning of the Revolution in 1949, the connection made by the participants between their faith and themselves as belonging to a nation give insight into why the Karen have maintained their fight for the Four Principles of the first KNU President, Saw Ba U Gyi, which include “we have the right to our own land” and “we shall never surrender”. Le Vine and Campbell (1971) support this view by saying that ethnocentrism is supported by the cognitive, value and behavioural aspects of social groups that perceive themselves distinct from others (p. 2).

7.4 Education

Education is above all an inner journey whose stages correspond to those of the continuous maturing of the personality (Delors, 1996, p. 95).

The Karen of Burma have valued education since the American Baptist missionaries introduced a written script in 1836. During the time of British rule, many schools in the Karen language medium existed throughout Karen State and towns and cities in Burma. However, the ruling military junta has made it illegal to teach in the Karen language, and with the ongoing human rights abuses in Karen State, many villages have no school and many others only go to Grade Four. The questions arise, “What effect has this had on Karen identity?” and “What relationship does education have with Karen identity?”

In the Mae La study, five of the sixteen participants had completed or were studying post secondary education within the camp system, all in theological studies. Two participants had post graduate qualifications in education gained in Burma, whilst another had completed Grade Twelve in Burma. Three had completed Grade Ten, two in Burma and one in the camp, and two were near completion of Grade Ten at the time of our interviews. One of these has since resettled in the USA with her family. The other three were in the older age cohort and completed Grades Three, Seven and Eight within Burma.

Half of these participants were working in the education system in the Camp and another four were studying in it at the time of the interviews. While this may seem to be a skewed sample biased towards those in the role of teachers, teacher trainers and students, it needs to be understood that the most prevalent area of legal employment in the camp is in education and that within the Christian community, education is highly promoted (KWO, 2010b; Oh, 2010).

In the Australian study, prior to resettlement, three of the twelve focus group participants had completed post secondary education, two in theological studies (one in Burma and one in Mae La Camp), and one in a Bachelor of Arts degree within the camp system. Of these, the first had worked with his church, the second had become a teacher and the other was undertaking further study at the time he resettled. Three more had begun post secondary studies but had resettled before completion. Four more had completed Grade Ten, one in Burma and three within the camp system, with one

working in administration, one as a teacher and the other two unemployed. Another had completed Grade Nine and worked in a camp based CBO. Another had no formal schooling and worked in camp administration.

Three sub-themes that arose in the data relating to education are struggle and sacrifice, education as identity and education related to nationalism. Each of these themes will now be explored further.

7.4.1 Struggle and Sacrifice

In common with all of the participants in both studies was a sense of struggle and sacrifice to achieve the education they have. In the Mae La study, in the absence of schools, Saw Doh Du and his wife and Naw Day Mu's parents taught their children the basics under trees in the jungle. It is a sign of the value placed on education by these people that Naw Day Mu and Saw Doh Du's children had all completed Grade Ten and three of Saw Doh Du's children had graduated from Post Ten studies. These children only began their formal education as young teenagers in the camps.

Saw Hsa Mu struggled to complete Grade Eight while being forced to labour for the Tatmadaw up to three days a week. His mother then sent him away to a safer place to enable him to complete his studies to Grade Ten. Later, he was awarded a scholarship enabling him to complete Grade Twelve, but when this area also came under the control of the Tatmadaw, he felt he had no option but to flee to the camp.

Naw Htee Na and Saw Krit were the only people in their villages to proceed past Grade Four. To do this, they had to leave their villages and move to the town, seeing their families only once a year. Even though Saw Krit's village was only eight kilometres away, travel in Tatmadaw controlled areas was restricted and he was not allowed to travel to and fro. Saw Krit was home during the annual holiday when his village was attacked and destroyed by the Tatmadaw.

Naw Eh Wah's parents first sent her, and then their younger two children to Mae La Camp as unaccompanied minors for the express purpose of accessing education that was not available in their Tatmadaw controlled village. Naw Eh Wah had only seen her parents intermittently since and was unsure when next she would see them.

Saw Taw Taw and Naw Law Eh talked about having to study in Burmese and not being allowed to speak their own language at school. They also spoke of perceived injustices against them and their Karen friends by the teachers and not being free to express opinions that might be considered controversial to the ruling military junta. Saw Htoo and Saw Eh Lay spoke of the difficulty in staying at school with the frequent fighting. Saw Htoo's mother eventually sent him away to the town where he struggled to learn in Burmese, a language he did not previously speak. Naw Peh and Saw Gaw Tha also had to leave their villages to live in dormitories in the town to complete their schooling. Naw Paw Gay, Naw Lah and Saw Moo all had their education disrupted by the destruction of their villages and their flight with their families to the displaced persons' camps.

Stories relating to the struggle and sacrifice involved in accessing education prior to resettlement in the Australian study bore many similarities to those in the Mae La study. As with Naw Eh Wah, Saw Dae Dae and Naw Say Mu were sent by their parents to Mae La Camp for the specific purpose of accessing education. Both had very little contact with their families of origin since that time. Saw Eh Taw's only education was provided under trees in IDP hide sites in the jungle while fleeing from the Tatmadaw. Saw Wah spoke of how that even though education was provided for the children in the camps, there was still a need for money to pay for uniforms and shoes that were not provided in the TBBC rations and that this was very difficult for the majority of the families who did not have legal employment in the camp.

All of the focus group participants spoke of the struggle, upon resettlement, to achieve in the Australian education system. For the older participants who had little or no English prior to migrating, they spoke of the difficulty of learning this new language.

The hard thing that challenges me most is speak English, I cannot speak English, especially in my old age ... it is very hard (Saw Wah, KBCA).

My friend in my class in Level IV even though they are from other country, they already speak English so it is very challenging for me ... but I do not want to give up so I try hard (Naw Ni Thaw, KBCA).

Despite their struggles to learn English, they spoke positively of their achievements. Saw Kler spoke with pride of how he was beginning to understand English after just five months of classes:

... before I did not learn any ABCD, but if I compare my life in Burma, the camp and now, I can understand a little bit English and I can write and read alphabet and read the people's name like the things, animals, now is like the light is starting to shine (Saw Kler, KBCA).

Naw Sie Sie spoke of her determination to succeed in Australia. A younger participant, she was concurrently studying Grade Eleven and Certificate II in nursing, and working part-time.

.... we are refugee, we don't have high education, so we come to Australia ... we have to try hard (Naw Sie Sie, KBCA).

The stories related in both the Mae La and Australian studies demonstrated that access to education was valued by both genders and was viewed as a goal worth striving for.

7.4.2 Education as Identity

For all of the participants in both studies, education was an identity standard. It is one of the resources that function to sustain both their group and personal identity (Stets & Burke, 2005). It also fulfills the function of Delor's (1996) Four Pillars of education, that is, learning to live together, learning to know, learning to do and learning to be (pp. 85-97), which parallel the tenets of Verkuyten's (2005) ethnic identity theory of being, feeling, doing and knowing.

In relation to their personal and group identity, the value placed on education was prominent. This was evident in the sacrifices they made and the struggles they overcame in order to attain their education. For the two participants whose formal education was very limited because of the constant fighting (Saw Eh Lay of the older age cohort, Mae La Camp, and Saw Eh Taw of the resettled cohort), the value they attached to education was evident in the goals they expressed for their children to access educational opportunities that were denied to them. For many of participants in the Mae La study, education extended to their role identities as they strove to provide education to the children and young adults in Mae La Camp. Naw Htee Na, who had been forcibly displaced on three occasions, told how her students and her own children were her first priority.

... because I am a teacher, wherever I go, I go with my students (Naw Htee Na, 1st interview).

Saw Taw Taw was both a principal of a Post Ten College and a teacher trainer with the KED. As a teacher trainer, Saw Taw Taw risked his life to make regular trips into the internally displaced people

areas of Karen State to provide training and subsidies to the teachers who struggle under very difficult circumstances to provide basic education to the children of those internally displaced.

The Karen people when they are oppressed by the Burmese government, they are willing to have a life – to find education – so every village wants to open their school, but it is so hard to support them – villagers try to build building and then try to find teacher, but very hard – for example, some teacher only have 4th standard – but they try – on summer holiday, I try to give training to help (Saw Taw Taw, 1st interview).

Two of the participants in the Australian focus groups (Naw Ni Thaw and Naw Eh Th'Blay) who were teachers prior to resettlement continued to maintain this role identity in a voluntary capacity to teach Karen literacy within their church run programmes.

7.4.3 Education and Nationalism

Education was cited by many of the participants as a means to help their people. In the Mae La study, five participants specifically linked education with nationalism – as a means of achieving freedom and recognition of their beloved Kawthoolei. In this way, education was linked to both their group and national identity. The concept was voiced similarly by both genders of the older and younger age cohorts. The following views were expressed by three members of the older age cohort,

Education is needed for the success of our revolution (Saw Taw Taw, 2nd interview).

I want my Karen people to have their own country. To get their own country, I want them to have high level education (Naw Peh, 1st interview).

... if we have education, we can be a good leader to lead our people and to organize the children how to do, how to serve (Naw May, 1st interview).

with similar views voiced by two younger age cohort participants.

Education is needed to improve our lives ... when we return (Naw Lah, 2nd interview).

... for our Karen nation to have our own land own country, Karen people need to develop and get high education and unity (Naw Paw Gay, 2nd interview).

While links between education and nationalism were not specifically addressed in the Australian focus groups, comments in relation to this were made by one key informant and one participant. Saw Daniel Zue spoke positively of how he viewed resettlement in Australia to result in a “brain gain” for the Karen people in the long term with a significant number becoming educated and returning with those

skills to help in the Karen struggle along the border. His view was supported by Naw Paw Wee in the AKO focus group:

Right now we can't fight. We have no strength but we came here, we can find the education and one day we can go back and we can help our community in many ways (Naw Paw Wee, AKO Youth Seminar).

This congruence of the link between education and nationalism across both studies is an indication that the nationalistic aspirations of the first educated Karen such as Dr T Thanybah and Dr San Po in the late nineteenth century are still relevant for the Karen in current times.

7.5 Nationalism

Karen people fight for their revolution,
for their federal union, for their right
(Saw Hsa Mu, 1st interview).

It is recognized in literature concerning nationalism that a common feature of post colonial society is the tendency for ethnic, linguistic and religious groups to fight for recognition of their own identity, if not for national independence (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 18). As discussed in Chapter Two, the Karen people identify themselves as an ethnic nationality within the Union of Burma. Contextually, all the participants had been born into their nation's struggle for recognition of their homeland, Kawthoolei, within the Union of Burma.

In the process of the Mae La Camp interviews, it was clear that all participants in both age cohorts demonstrated a strong connection to this struggle, and that they derive social identity from the national goals and aspirations determined by the political body representing their nation, the KNU. This can be seen by the following comments made by a participant in each of the age cohorts.

... the KNU are our people, they demand our rights and our freedom (Saw Doh Du, 1st interview).

... the KNU is fighting for the democracy ... they do their best for all Karen people (Saw Hsa Mu, 1st interview).

Klanderman's (2005) politicized collective identity theory highlights that group identity is one of three fundamental reasons people participate in political protest, with the other two being a desire to change their circumstances and to express their views and feelings (p. 155). Hope theory also has import here, in that hope has the capacity for changing lives, "enabling people to envision a future in which they are

active participants” (Jevne, 2005, p. 268). The impact of nationalism on the participants’ perception of identity is discussed with reference to these theories.

At the base of Klanderman’s (2005) theory is that a strong collective identity, such as is found in nations, fosters a preparedness to act, and that this in turn leads to participation in action to change the circumstances causing grievance. This triad functions as a self reinforcing mechanism, in that it further strengthens the collective identity that led to the action (p. 153). Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) confirm Klanderman’s view when they say that patriotism is considered the ideal in collectivist societies (p. 109). From the stories shared by the participants, the shared grievance was clearly the lack of freedom of their land, Kawthoolei. Saw Eh Lay, Saw Htoo (older age cohort) and Saw Krit (younger age cohort) shared common stories of witnessing murder, destruction and oppression in their villages and making conscious decisions as children and teenagers that they would fight for the freedom of the Karen nation as a result.

When I was a child the military came to my village when they saw men they killed them all. Because of that I decided if I finish my high school I will do for my people what I can (Saw Htoo, 1st interview).

The participants’ preparedness to be involved in action took the further step of actually participating in action to bring about change to their circumstances as illustrated in these accounts by Saw Eh Lay and Saw Krit who enlisted in the KNLA as teenagers.

I choose to be a soldier because the Burmese military killed my uncle and my aunty, my grandfather, and two of my cousins. Then they killed one of the women in my village and they killed several men in my village (Saw Eh Lay, 1st interview).

... because in my life, the influence of the environment, at my village most of the villages were burn down one or two times. Because of experiences like that led me to become a soldier and fight (Saw Krit, 2nd interview).

Though Saw Krit was only thirteen at the time, the multiple forms of oppression he had witnessed in his short life shaped his identity as wanting to do something to improve the circumstances for his people. At thirteen, he saw this as becoming a soldier. In conversation, he told me he had no concept at the time of the inappropriateness of a person his age being a soldier. Their village had been destroyed together with his parents’ farm which was their sole means of livelihood. There was now no income for his parents to pay for his education in the town. His parents, younger sister and other villagers were living in a makeshift camp in the jungle. With two friends, he decided that since he could not finish his schooling and there was no farm to help his parents with, he would be most useful

fighting the oppressors who had taken away his family's normal way of life. In his six years of active service, he continued to witness the oppression against his people. Saw Krit explained to me that as he became older, his thinking changed as to how he could best improve the circumstances for his people. This change led him when he was nineteen to request permission of his commanding officer to leave the KNLA so he could complete his Grade 10 certificate with a view of attending theological studies.

... being a soldier was part of my serving my people. But now I change my role – it was needed. Now I study the Word of God so I can help my people spiritually (Saw Krit, 1st interview).

Saw Krit shared that he didn't experience any difficulty in his transition from soldier to civilian. He explained that he first went to a camp on the Thai side of the border where other members of his village community were living to complete Grade Ten. He said "It was the right time, God's time. God guided me in all things" (1st interview). As incongruous as this would seem, from his account, the combination of Saw Krit's sense of community and faith provided him with a sense of direction enabling him to successfully mediate two very different lifestyles.

Saw Taw Taw heard of the suffering of his people in Kawthoolei as a student when living in Rangoon and made the decision to actively join the revolutionary movement to help soon after graduation.

I will fight in my way til death ... do my best for my people in my lifetime (Saw Taw Taw, 2nd interview).

Naw May and Naw Law Eh's understanding of the situation began as children with their fathers working in the KNU and its army the KNLA. This understanding influenced the choices they made to help their people – Naw May initially as a nurse and later as a teacher trainer, and Naw Law Eh as a teacher.

From my father, I understand the suffering of my people and I want to help as I can (Naw Law Eh, 1st interview).

Naw Htee Na chose very early in life to become a teacher as a means of helping her people. Naw Lah's story demonstrated a similar commitment to Naw Htee Na. Naw Day Mu and Naw Paw Gay spoke with passion of the need to be educated further so that they could serve their people and were both participating in training for this purpose. Saw Doh Du, Saw Gaw Tha, Naw Eh Wah and Saw Hsa Mu spoke of the need of all Karen to work toward the freedom of their land in unity.

... we need peace and justice and freedom in our land (Saw Gaw Tha, 1st interview).

I think one day our country will be free because if our leaders and all our people live in unity, we can live in our country (Naw Eh Wah, 2nd interview).

Hope theory also lends understanding to the Karen political struggle as told by the participants. Defined by Snyder, Irving and Anderson (1991) as

... a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful
(a) agency – goal-directed energy, and (b) pathways – planning to meet goals (p. 287),

hope dovetails the tenets of Klanderman's (2005) political collective identity theory. Hope underpins action and runs before it (Marcel, 1966, p. 33). Further, it is a means of non-capitulation (Nowotny, 1979, p. 46) evident in some of the stories of the participants including the following one from the older age cohort:

We cannot win but we will not surrender. Because we are oppressed by those who are unjust. So we will continue to fight this fight (Saw Eh Lay, 2nd interview).

There were no noticeable differences between men and women or between the older and younger age cohorts in this expression of identity. In this way, the participants demonstrated a strong national identity characterized by a commitment to work in a collective manner to achieve nationally agreed goals as encapsulated in Saw Ba U Gyi, first President of the KNU's Four Principles of the Karen Revolution (p. 17 of thesis).

The ecology of human development makes connections between families, communities and the society in which they function (Klein & White, 2002). In the context of how the Mae La study participants perceived their group identity in relation to their concept of nationalism, a dual identity was evident – a strong super-ordinate identity together with a sub-group identity that seemed to maintain cohesion for them as Christians in their displaced lives within Mae La Camp (Klandermans, 2005, p. 170). Being Karen – identifying as a nation – was the super-ordinate identity observed. Intrinsically connected to this, their sub-group identity was also strongly voiced in the way they talked of their families and communities (Refer 7.2 and 7.3 in this chapter).

Klandermans (2005) argues that “a strong national identity in combination with strong subgroup identities seems to be beneficial to a political system” (p. 171). Looking at this in the Karen context in which nationally, they have been actively fighting for the sovereignty of their land for more than sixty

years now, Klandermans' argument lends understanding to the situation (see, Chapter 2). Contextually, all the study participants were born into this struggle – this was not a free choice. However, the collective nature of their identity has shaped their response to the struggle and their future collective aspirations are connected to this struggle. Theorists such as Huddy (2001) and Klandermans (2005) state that such a strong identity with a group makes it more likely that the group will participate in political action.

While the Australian study was limited in time in comparison with the Mae La study, and focused more specifically on resettlement, the sense of nationalism was evident. All the key informants spoke passionately of their belief that their homeland – Kawthoolei – would eventually gain its freedom from their oppressors with Saw Tamla Gaw stating that the genocidal campaign of the Burmese Government against their people would never succeed because the Karen Revolution will not stop until their rights are recognized. This view was echoed by participants in both focus groups who spoke of how they love their nationality and though in Australia, have not forgotten the Revolution and still maintain a hope that their country will gain its freedom. Six focus group participants (Saw Plo, Naw Ni Thaw, Saw Poe Kwa, Naw Say Mu, Naw Paw Wee and Saw Dae Dae) and all of the key informants spoke of how through the AKO and Karen churches, Karen national days of remembrance such as Karen Revolution Day, KNU Day and Martyr's Day are celebrated in all Karen communities in Australia. Saw Daniel Zue's comment was pertinent to this view:

With so many difficulties and hardships and struggling, we try to survive as a Karen ... I think when we exclude the political awareness, the political stand of the Karen people, I think our core value will be weakened, this is what I believe (Saw Daniel Zue).

He spoke with enthusiasm of the upcoming AKO Youth Seminar as a means of maintaining the political awareness of the Karen struggle with both resettling Karen youth and those born in Australia. In a separate interview, Victorian Chairperson of the AKO, Thra Thataw Kunoo, explained to me the purpose of the AKO Youth Seminar which has been held every two years since 2001 was four fold – to maintain identity as Karen by promoting language, culture and history within their adopted country, to understand and not forget their background, to know their duty and responsibility to both Australia, and as Karen, to their people back in their homeland, and to build friendships and fellowship among Karen youth. Karen culture and Karen nationalism are interdependent in those purposes. More than three hundred young Karen attended the three day Seminar with delegates from all States representative of the more recent arrivals from the Thai based camps as well as Karen youth who had been born in

Australia or had come as small children in the 1990s. In our interview, Thra Thataw Kunoo stated that all these young people have connections to the struggle for freedom of their homeland and was confident that the reason that has caused them to be in Australia will not be forgotten in the younger generations of Karen people resettling in Australia.

There is civil war because we want to maintain our identity ... the young people ... they know that ... their people are suffering, so they also suffering (Thra Thataw Kunoo).

The Karen Flag hung in the lounge rooms of all the Karen homes I visited during my stay in Sydney. It was hung at the Karen New Year celebrations in the Parramatta Town Hall, at the Karen Baptist Bible Camp and the AKO Youth Seminar. In all these places, an Australian flag was also hung. As discussed in Chapter Two, the Karen Flag is synonymous with Karen nationalism and an important symbol of Karen identity. Key informants and focus group participants spoke of the flag as:

Our flag is a good flag – it has good meaning (Saw Plo, KBCA).

The flag means we are Karen (Saw Htoo Sah Wah).

This is our belonging flag that can show everyone what it means to be Karen (Naw Say Wah).

NSW State Secretary of the AKO, Saw Tamla Gaw spoke at length about how the flag represents everything that is Karen and was confident that the Karen resettling to Australia will remember their flag and its meaning. At this time, his confidence seems to be validated.

From information gained in the focus groups, key informant interviews and personal observations, it was apparent that transnational links to their homeland are being maintained by Karen resettling in Australia. Both Wahlbeck (2002) and Ostergaard-Nielsen (2003) recognize these links as creating both a sense of duty and belonging between their society of origin and country of current settlement. In accordance with Hall's (1999) view of collective identity, the resettled Karen have reformed their identity within their new environment, maintaining their connection to their origins within their current situations.

From a relational intersectional identity perspective, it can be seen that the identity of the participants of both studies has strongly impacted their sense of nationalism. Borne out of the non-recognition of their ethnic nationality and their homeland by the successive governments of Burma since

independence in 1948, every aspect of their lives has been affected. The collective nature of the participants' identity has shaped in part, their response to this non-recognition in the form of a nationalistic struggle, which in turn, has further shaped both their individual and group identities to reflect their commitment to the continuation of this struggle to achieve justice for their people (Taylor, 1992; Glenn, 1999; Ferree, 2010).

7.6 Oppression

The protests of the poor are the voice of God
(Potts, 1994, p. 2, cited in
Watts, Griffith & Abdul-Adil, 1999, p. 260).

The participants in both studies have all suffered varying degrees of oppression at the hands of the ruling Burmese military junta. In the Mae La study, oppression in their home country for the eight younger participants was the norm from birth until they were forced to migrate with their families to the refugee camps in Thailand. While most of the eight older participants lived in peace with their families in Burma in their early childhood, they all had experienced oppression first hand by the time they were teenagers. Similarly to the younger cohort of the Mae La study, nine of the twelve focus group participants were born in the midst of oppression in Kawthoolei. The other three were born in the camps, their families having already fled from the oppression they had suffered.

Oppression operates at individual and group levels, and while oppression can be perceived as a negative construct, it is known that people adapt themselves to it in varying ways (Sonn & Fisher, 2003, p. 117). This section will explore the implications of oppression for the identity of the participants. Being mindful that the dynamics of oppression are external as well as internal (Prilleltensky & Gonick, 1996, p.130), this section will explore the participants' experience of oppression from both these viewpoints, followed by discussion of ways in which their experiences of oppression have impacted on their faith and on their conscientization as Karen.

7.6.1 External Experiences of Oppression

When Ne Win took power of Burma in a military coup d'état in 1962, he initiated the very effective Four Cuts Policy in the Karen dominated strongholds in Eastern Burma by cutting Karen revenues, information, recruits and food supply (Khin Maung Win, 2001; Tharckabaw & Watson 2003; South

2008). The oppression suffered by the Karen people as a result of this policy has been manifested in the destruction of their villages, persecution of those suspected of actively helping the KNU, restriction of movement and knowledge acquisition in Tatmadaw controlled villages, and forced portering, labour and high taxation. Across all study participants, repetitious stories of these forms of oppression were related, reflecting a commonality of experiences.

7.6.1.1 Destruction of Villages

In the Mae La study, all participants had lived at some time in Kawthoolei. All except Saw Hsa Mu in the younger age cohort had witnessed the destruction of the place where they were staying by the Tatmadaw – some many times. Four of the older cohort and six of the younger cohort had first experienced this as children.

In 1971, my village was burnt down by the military for first of many times. (Naw Peh, aged 11 at the time, 1st interview).

I saw it with my own eyes. Burmese soldier came and attack the village and the villagers spread everywhere (Saw Moo, aged 4 at the time, 1st interview).

Only three of those participants, all in the younger age cohort, made their way to the border with their families following the destruction of their village the first time. The remaining participants spoke of rebuilding and/or relocating to nearby areas in the hope of being allowed to live in peace and only making the decision to cross the border when they felt there was no hope of this happening. The significant catalyst for this was the fall of the KNU Headquarters at Manerplaw in February 1995 when five of the older age and one of the younger age cohorts moved across to camps in Thailand.

In the Australian study, all except one participant had witnessed the destruction of the place where they were staying. For the nine who were born in Kawthoolei, the Tatmadaw destroyed their original abode as well as subsequent homes their families had tried to establish in IDP areas.

We are homeless, we don't have home because of fighting so in 1998, we had to come to the refugee camp (Naw Eh Th'Blay, AKO Youth Seminar).

For the three who were born in displaced persons' camps on the Thai side, two had witnessed the destruction of their camp based homes by DKBA cross border attacks in 1997.

7.6.1.2 Persecution of Those Suspected of Actively Helping the KNU

Families of known KNU supporters are targeted especially by the Tatmadaw. Those who are suspected of supporting the KNU in any way are arrested, tortured and/or killed (Rogers, 2004; Thawngmung, 2008; South, 2008; KHRG, 2008, Pederson, 2010). In the Mae La study, some participants talked about their experiences in relation to this. Naw Day Mu described how a raid on her village resulted in the capture, torture and death of her teenage brother who was home on leave from the KNLA, and the arrest of her pregnant mother who later escaped.

... my brother came with the other KNU soldiers ... they watch video ... the Burmese soldiers know the KNU soldiers come to my village ... and they catch the villager, also my brother and my mother, at the time my mother was pregnant and my brother was killed. Later my mother lost the baby, so my mother ask the soldiers not to kill her ... later she escaped (Naw Day Mu, 1st interview).

Saw Eh Lay was only fourteen when he witnessed the murder of his uncle and his family in their village.

... my uncle lived in his farm outside the village. Sometime the Karen soldier came and they kept the food supply in his house, when the Burmese military knew that they killed him (Saw Eh Lay, 1st interview).

After Saw Taw Taw left his home in the city to join the Revolution, his family lived in fear of repercussions against them for his actions.

When I arrive in army area, my mother told me my name in the church was scratched out because Burmese army if they know, they make problem for my family. So they took me out as church member (Saw Taw Taw, 1st interview).

Naw Law Eh's father was a senior member of the KNU living in Rangoon. After his capture and subsequent imprisonment and house arrest when Naw Law Eh was still a child, her family lived under the scrutiny of the Burmese authorities until they made the decision to move to the KNU controlled area in Eastern Burma after the 1988 uprising in Rangoon.

Persecution of this type by the Tatmadaw and its proxy army, the DKBA, does not necessarily stop when the Karen and Karenni move into the camps. In the Australian study, Saw Eh Taw who held an administration position on the Camp Committee spoke of how the security of his camp was continually threatened as the Tatmadaw believed that KNPP and its army personnel and supporters were living there. The reason given for the attacks on the camps where Naw Say Mu and Saw Plo lived in 1997 was also because of suspected KNU support and personnel living there.

7.6.1.3 Restriction of Movement and Knowledge Acquisition in Tatmadaw Controlled Villages

The Tatmadaw's policy of destroying villages and forcing surviving villagers to move to army controlled areas has been effective in reducing the amount of knowledge Karen villagers have about the resistance and overall situation in Karen State. Villagers are forced to build high fences around the whole village with the aim of restricting the movement of villagers (KHRG, 2008). Saw Gaw Tha from the younger age cohort of the Mae La study spoke of how he was restricted from leaving his village area.

In my village, there is no freedom for me and there are so many restrictions. SPDC say don't go there and don't do that (Saw Gaw Tha, 1st interview).

Karen run schools are forbidden and access to Burmese controlled schools is cost prohibitive to the majority of village Karen. This also has the effect of reducing knowledge for Karen villagers forced to live in these areas. Naw Eh Wah, a younger age cohort participant in the Mae La study lived in a Tatmadaw controlled village until her parents sent her as an unaccompanied minor to Mae La Camp to be able to access education. She spoke of her lack of knowledge of her own peoples' history and current situation when living in her village.

Before when I stay in Karen State, I didn't understand anything about education or my country's situation but now I come here, I can learn so many things ... Here I can know everything and before I do not know the situation of Karen historical background, come here I know everything (Naw Eh Wah, 2nd interview).

7.6.1.4 Forced Labour, Portering and High Taxation

The Burma Army's food, equipment and building needs are largely dependent on their ability to extort same from the villages over which they have control and those which they destroy and plunder (KHRG, 2008; Amnesty International, 2008; K'Chay, 2009; FBR, 2010; BPHWT, 2009; Pederson,

2010). This theme was evident in both age cohorts of the Mae La study with three of the older cohort and three of the younger cohort speaking of their experiences of this form of oppression. Saw Eh Lay and Saw Doh Du from the older age cohort shared the following experiences:

... since I was 14 and 15 I had to work for the Burmese military to confine the yard for them always ... As for those who are 16 or above they had to carry food supply for them. For me is several times, sometime I went but sometime I escaped. Not only that my parents were not rich, every month they had to pay the tax. It means that we are paying for our lives, my parents selling the cattle and the other they had to pay for the tax (Saw Eh Lay, 1st interview).

If they can arrest us they force us to work for them as porter ... they captured me for several times and they beat me a lot but I can survive (Saw Doh Du, 1st and 2nd interviews).

which was echoed by Saw Hsa Mu from the younger cohort:

I left because of porter – I was afraid of soldier. My village is surrounded by Burmese soldiers. They came and made their camp in my village, so often they make us go as forced labour – they collect the money – they take everything they see (Saw Hsa Mu, 1st interview – first forced to labour for the Tatmadaw at age 12).

In the Australian study, two participants from the KBCA focus group referred to forced labour by the Tatmadaw in their villages as torture.

... the Burmese, they torture, oppress us a lot ... when we stay in our village, we are afraid of the torture, so we move to Thailand (Saw Wah, KBCA).

When asked about the torture further, Naw Ni Thaw explained:

They force us to work for them and even when we do this they beat us. It make us afraid so we leave (Naw Ni Thaw, KBCA).

7.6.2 Internal Experiences of Oppression

Many of the study participants were very forthcoming in talking about their external experiences of oppression. Less spoke directly of their internal experiences. However, Bartky (1990) states that “we cannot speak of one without the other” (p. 22). The external modes of oppression have deprived the participants of justice and freedom in their own land. Social researchers such as Allport, (1979); Bartky, (1990); Lerner, (1991); Philleltensky & Gonick, (1996), purport that these experiences necessarily impact on the person internally, that is, psychologically.

Psychological oppression is the internalized view of self as negative, as not deserving more resources or increased participation in societal affairs (Phillips & Gonick, 1996, p. 130).

The most potent weapon of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed (Biko, 1978, p. xix).

In some of the interviews, there was evidence of this expressed as a lack of control and fear.

7.6.2.1 Lack of Control

‘I/We can do nothing’ – this was a phrase used by seven of the Mae La study participants at some time during our interviews. Each time it was used in the context of their running from their villages and/or living in the displaced persons’ camp. There was resignation in their voices as they spoke these words; a belief that they had no control over what was happening to them. It was a phrase I heard many times when I lived in the camp. Saw Doh Du’s statement,

Being Karen is like a dog. When the dog is beaten by men many times it runs away. When we live in the village although we are good person if they saw us they killed us (Saw Doh Du, 2nd interview),

further emphasizes this sense of lack of control and challenges his sense of self-worth.

7.6.2.2 Fear

Fear was also an emotion evident in some of the participants’ stories - fear of the Tatmadaw and their proxy army, the DKBA, and fear of the Thai authorities. In the Mae La study, Saw Htoo, an older cohort participant disclosed feelings of fear when his village was attacked when he was a teenager:

... the village was destroyed I got afraid and shock ... we run away (Saw Htoo, 2nd interview – Saw Htoo was 15 at the time).

An attack by the DKBA on the camp in 1997 and an unrealized threatened attack by the DKBA on the camp in May 2007 resulted in heightened fear levels linked to previous experiences of attack. Three of the participants spoke of how these events resulted in flashbacks to previous experiences inside Karen State. In response to the question “What is the most significant event/s in your life?” Naw Lah, a younger age cohort participant, made reference to the 1997 attack:

I feel sometime sad and afraid. Because Burmese army they came and made me strong pressure ... the Burmese army ... they came here and shoot (Naw Lah, 2nd interview).

Two others from the older cohort shared their feelings of fear in relation to the threatened attack in May 2007:

... I am so afraid. Because I know I have to run again ... I can't do nothing. Just running in the hot sun and Thai soldier force us to run under the hot sun (Naw Peh, 1st interview).

... we afraid of it ... I decide that if they come and attack the camp I will run. Because I already experience about that (Saw Doh Du's wife, 3rd interview).

In the Australian study, four participants spoke of feelings of fear prior to migrating to Australia. In the KBCA focus group, Saw Wah and Naw Ni Thaw spoke of how the fear of further torture from forced labour in their Tatmadaw controlled villages was the motivating factor in their move to the displaced persons' camps on the Thai side of the border. Saw Eh Taw spoke of how the camp in which he and his family lived was under constant threat of attack by the Tatmadaw causing fear for him and his family.

I come because in the camp not good for security because soldier like the Burmese soldier make afraid for us in the camp – so we decide to go to Australia (Saw Eh Taw, KBCA).

Naw Paw Wee of the AKO focus group spoke of the fear that still haunted her of the time when as IDP's fleeing the Tatmadaw, they were strafed by Tatmadaw aircraft.

7.6.3 Outcomes to these Experiences of Oppression

While there was some evidence of negative psychological impact of the experiences of oppression (as seen in the above reports of lack of control and fear), this was not the general finding of this study. Even for those people who disclosed feelings of fear, sadness and lack of self worth at points in their story, these feelings were outweighed by stories of hope, happiness, achievements, future goals and their pride in being Karen. This finding is supported by researchers such as Spencer and Markstrom-Adams, (1990); Watts et al (1999); Sonn and Fisher (2003) and Dovidio, Gaertner, Pearson and Riek (2005), whose findings concur that oppression does not lead to only negative outcomes; that experiences of oppression also have the ability to mobilize individuals and communities to social change and strengthen the identity of the oppressed group. Hulko (2009) supports this finding when she states that the lived experiences of oppression potentially enable those affected to implement intersectional ways of thinking to address the injustices perpetrated against them (p. 49)

The participants' sense of faith, their strong sense of Karen-ness and the connected conscientization of the source of their oppression were indicators to how they coped and functioned with the oppression they experienced.

7.6.3.1 Faith

In the Mae La study, eleven of the sixteen participants directly linked their faith in God to their experiences of oppression. When Naw May's husband, a KNLA officer, was killed in action, she said:

When he was killed, I look in Isaiah 52 ... God knew everything for him – God helped him face the problems (Naw May, 2nd interview).

Naw Htee Na speaking of her first forced migration said:

I know that God is a living God, hardships and difficulties nothing to me (Naw Htee Na, 1st interview).

Naw Law Eh who was forced to flee with her family as a teenager, studied and worked in IDP areas before again being forced to flee to the camp, and now lives in the USA, displayed a strong conviction that God was in control of the Karen situation.

Before I graduate from Bible School I ask God about what the future is for Kawthoolei? And I heard the voice from heaven; the Karen people will be a nation because of God (Naw Law Eh, 1st interview).

Other participants in both studies spoke generally of how God was in control and even though the Karen were being oppressed by their enemies, they believed that God still had a plan for His Karen people which would result in freedom and return to their land.

For these participants, their faith would seem to serve as a “bulwark against pessimism and disillusionment when the rational mind would conclude the cause is hopeless” (Watts et al, 2005, p. 259). This view is supported also by other researchers in this area (Weaver et al, 1996; Weaver & Figley, 2003) who link positive survival and coping strategies of those who experience organized violence with their faith commitment.

7.6.3.2 Karen-ness and Conscientization

Participants in both studies without exception spoke of being Karen. In keeping with Turner's (1987) social categorization theory, the term 'we/our' was used more often than 'I/my' in describing what it meant for them to be Karen. For many, their voices became quite animated when speaking about their Karen-ness with corresponding body language. This has been discussed in greater detail earlier in this chapter in relation to Karen culture and nationalism. Suffice to add here that it would appear for the participants that their strong identification with being Karen has further provided them with a buffer to cope with significant experiences of oppression over lengthy periods of time (Branscombe, Schmitt & Harvey, 1999; Fischer & Shaw, 1999), and that, psychologically, their social collectivity of being Karen is inextricably linked with their self identity (Turner, 1999, p. 12).

Further, Friere's (1996) construct of conscientization is illuminating in relation to the stories shared by the participants of this study. Watts et al (1996) provide the following definition of this construct:

Conscientization is the process whereby individuals and groups achieve an illuminating awareness of the socioeconomic, political, cultural, and psychological factors that determine their lives and their capacity to transform that reality (p. 139).

Participants in the Mae La study shared stories of how they had understood their oppression from childhood. Saw Htoo's conscientization was demonstrated in his political awareness gained from his childhood experiences of oppression:

Since I was a child I knew that KNU is of the organization stand for the Karen people and working for the Karen people. So I decided when I grow up I will involved in KNU and work for the Karen people (Saw Htoo, 1st interview).

Participants in the AKO focus group demonstrated their conscientization in their response to the reason they were attending the Youth Seminar. In particular, two participants, Saw Hsa Thaw and Saw Poe Kwa, stated they wanted to know more about their Karen history, the oppression of their people and the present situation so they could be of greater use to help their people. In general discussion about the reasons for resettling in Australia, participants in both focus groups talked of the war being waged against them in their country, of the denial of freedom and justice and their forced migration to the camps where they were still denied freedom. While happy to be in Australia, participants in both focus groups spoke of the need to keep informed of the situation 'back home' so they could help their people.

While the participants of both studies had suffered direct oppression for most of their lives, their sense of being Karen has enabled them to transform that reality into a means of helping their people wherever they were.

7.7 Displacement

One day we were walking down a familiar path
All of a sudden that path has changed
We cannot return to the familiar path
No matter how hard we try
Therefore we must learn to walk
down a different path
(Anon).

This short poem speaks of adjustment and is apt when considering the participants' experience of displacement. The Sgaw Karen word for refugee is 'bwa ba gaw ba kair'. Its literal meaning is those who face oppression. There is no single Karen word for displaced; rather 'bwa ba gaw ba kair' is used. The Karen have a long history of being an oppressed people and of resulting displacement. Yet, in all of these moves, they have adjusted to their changed environments while maintaining their culture and identity as Karen (Rogers 2004; South, 2008; Pederson, 2010).

The Karen in both studies have been displaced from their homeland, and with the intransigence of the ruling Burmese military junta, there seems to be little hope of their return in the near future. At the time of writing, the majority of the participants in the Mae La study remain displaced in Mae La Camp while five have accepted the UNHCR's offer of resettlement to third countries. This section will explore the study participants' experiences of displacement from two viewpoints. Firstly, it will explore the Mae La study participants' perception of being displaced and the impact this has had on their perception of identity. Secondly, it will explore how the Australian participants' experience of displacement led to their decision to migrate to Australia and the impact this decision has had on their perception of identity.

7.7.1 Mae La Study

In the first interview, I asked each participant to tell me what it is like to live in the camp. Responses varied but, in common, they all talked initially about what they do – weave cloth, teach, study, help in

the church, help in the house. The similarity of these roles was evident in both older and younger age cohorts. Only three participants, two in the older age cohort and one in the younger age cohort, referred to themselves at any time as a refugee.

After the fall of Manerplaw ... moved to refugee life ... poor refugee life (Saw Taw Taw, 1st interview laughing as he said the latter bit).

I now live as a refugee (Saw Doh Du, 1st interview).

Some refugees do like that (Saw Hsa Mu, 1st interview, referring to himself working illegally outside of the camp when he first arrived).

However as the stories progressed, some of the participants' stories moved from the descriptive elements of what they do to what they felt and thought about their life in the camp and its meaning for them.

7.7.1.1 General Thoughts of Displacement

Saw Hsa Mu shared that living in the camp was like a dream – a dream that was both positive and negative. While the camp provided safety from the dangers of Burma,

If I stayed in Burma ... maybe dead or dying (Saw Has Mu, 2nd interview),

he also talked about the difficulties of having enough food and money to buy household goods whilst living in the camp.

Yet another's memories of her arrival at the age of seven were positive from the outset because:

All the villagers come here so not difficult to make friends (Naw Lah, 1st interview – aged 7 when she came to the camp).

Two participants, one from each of the age cohorts (Saw Doh Du and Saw Krit) likened their stay in the camp to the Jewish exile of the Old Testament, speaking of a hope of a post-exilic time when they would return and build up their country as the Jewish exiles did.

7.7.1.2 Displacement and Loss

Four participants shared feelings of loss in relation to the move to the camp. The stories shared by the two older age cohort participants were very detailed and related with emotion. Telling the story of her second forced migration in less than four years, Naw Htee Na with tears in her eyes said:

... I take my Bible and radio and pray to God ... I took some photographs ... I took some cloth for going to church, but the other things I cannot take (Naw Htee Na, 2nd interview).

Later in the interview, her manner brightened as she spoke of the co-operation and support she received when she moved into Mae La Camp:

By the grace of God in 1997 ... headmistress provided for me wood, bamboo and the orphans and others working together build my house (Naw Htee Na, 2nd interview).

Naw May had many experiences of loss prior to her move to Mae La. When relating this particular story, her voice began with sadness - it was only five weeks since she had fled from another burning house. However, there was resoluteness in her manner evidenced by her tone of voice and body language that became stronger as the story progressed:

... I haven't finished my house, but then the DKBA burnt my house, I have nothing left just our clothes ... so I prayed and come, I have friends here ... so I asked them to give me blanket, some clothes, pot ... day by day ... manage – everything burnt down in Mae Ra Mu, now everything complete as we need by the grace of God (Naw May, 1st interview).

In the younger age cohort, two participants spoke of their experiences of loss when they first came to Mae La Camp. These stories were less detailed but the emotion displayed was similar to that shown by Naw Htee Na and Naw May. In this short account, Saw Gaw Tha's voice began sadly but he smiled as his story moved on to his current work in the school.

When I first came, I am not happy, because here is not our place and not our village ... but after I work in the school with the children it is better (Saw Gaw Tha, 1st interview).

Naw Paw Gay began by telling me what it was like when she first arrived in Mae La Camp,

First, I come here is problem and trouble, terrible, later on we get ration and I can go to school. No need to worry about food and everything become better (Naw Paw Gay, 1st interview – aged 10 when she came to the camp),

but it was only later in the interview when she shared with me the reason for her coming, that the story voiced in those earlier words and non-verbal gestures of lowered head and tears gave a greater understanding of her feelings of loss:

... the soldiers called mother and father after they did not come back home. Later I know that I will not see them again (Naw Paw Gay, 1st interview).

7.7.1.3 Displacement and Community

A common thread in all of the participants' stories was their sense of community and family and how that related to their life as displaced people in the camp. These following examples illustrate this sense of community in the context of the participants' displacement:

Here in the community all the people help and the other people we help as we can (Naw Paw Gay, 2nd interview).

... my mother church moved from the village to the camp ... everyone is combining together and working together (Saw Krit, 2nd interview).

... in this place ... we love each other and respect one by one (Naw Lah, 2nd interview).

... we work together as God's family to help the new people ... we live and work together in this way (Naw May, 2nd interview).

A survivor of Cyclone Nargis who made it to Mae La Camp with the remnant of his family attested to this sense of community in the camp:

When we arrived in Mae La Camp, we know that everything is enough for us ... We know it is God's providence (Interview with Cyclone Nargis survivor).

7.7.1.4 Displacement and Adjustment

Saw Htoo provided a short history lesson in his narrative that highlights how the Karen have adjusted in their displaced situation:

... We have history about why our Karen people moving from place to place – because of food sometimes, sometimes persecution. So we move to another place but when we move we organize ourselves as Karen, we speak Karen and we know our culture and identify ourselves as Karen (Saw Htoo, 2nd interview).

In this brief account of the Karen history of displacement, Saw Htoo talked about how the Karen organize themselves wherever they go as Karen.

One of my key informants, a senior official of the KNU, explained to me how the governance of his organization has helped in this process. Showing me an organizational chart of the KNU, the official pointed out to me the various departments and how these are active in the displaced persons' camps, for example, KED and KWO. Ms Sally Thompson (2008), Deputy Executive Director of TBBC, affirmed these statements when speaking of the Karen first coming to the camps:

The refugees used systems that they had brought with them. They set up camp committees and health and education departments ... built up their community networks for justice and social welfare. Teachers from within the communities taught in their own languages (p. 30).

These views were confirmed in my observation of Mae La Camp where an effective infrastructure of housing, schools, health and faith centres operates and people have adapted their skills and knowledge to live in this environment.

7.7.1.5 Displacement and Resettlement

Fourteen of the participants discussed their views regarding resettlement. In interviews with Naw Htee Na and Naw May, two of the older age cohort, the usefulness of skills and knowledge in the third country was discussed. They both stated that while their skills were useful in the camp, they would be of no use in the third country and this influenced their decision not to go.

I live here I can help my people ... if I go I can't do anything (Naw Htee Na, 2nd interview).

I cannot work in the third country, so as I can, I will stay and work for my people (Naw May, 1st interview).

Naw Htee Na and Naw May's views were the topic of debate amongst many NGOs and CBOs responsible for infrastructure in the camps. In a recent report, KWO spokesperson stated, "Resettlement has become a love/hate issue for us" (Fuller, Pittaway & KWO, 2008, p. 46). The spokesperson goes on to discuss the difficulties of replacing the skilled people who are leaving and questioning the usefulness of those skills for those people in the third countries to which they go:

From what we hear, their skills will be of little use to the country they are going to but they are important here. People think that if they have been teachers in the camps they can be teachers in the new country but it does not happen like that. And for those left in the camps it is having a terrible impact on health and education (ibid, p. 46).

Naw Eh Wah who was noncommittal about the merits of resettlement for herself, spoke of friends who have left –

...some go to third country and they have to work hard and then they have to struggle. If they go to third country, it is okay but they have to struggle (Naw Eh Wah, 2nd interview).

Naw Paw Gay, Saw Moo, Saw Hsa Mu and Saw Gaw Tha, four of the younger age cohort participants, were keen to resettle to access higher education for themselves – to increase their skills and knowledge so as to be of greater use to their people when they return.

If I go, I will come back and help my people (Naw Paw Gay, 2nd interview).

We need to know what is happening around the worldif we stay in the camp, it is not good for us ... I want to study English and computersand then I can help my people (Saw Gaw Tha, 2nd interview).

Naw Law Eh who has since resettled with her family to the USA shared Saw Gaw Tha's views when she said:

...in the camp, we are confined ... no chance to go out and see the other views, but if we go and come back, we can help our Karen people (Naw Law Eh, 2nd interview).

However, Saw Moo and Saw Hsa Mu, who have resettled to the USA and Australia respectively, had different views now they had left. Saw Moo stated to me that after eight months in the USA, he was discouraged with his life because he had to work full time in a laboring job and there was no time for study. Conversely, Saw Hsa Mu who had been in Australia for three months when interviewed stated that he was very positive of the future for himself and his wife and expected to be attending university to study nursing within a year. One of the differences for these two young men is that Saw Moo does not speak English while Saw Hsa Mu is fluent in English. Both were educated and had responsible roles in Mae La Camp. One had been able to transfer his skills and knowledge to the third country in the way he envisioned before leaving, the other had not. However, both these men have transferred their skills and knowledge in other ways. Both were active in children's ministry within their churches on a volunteer basis and Saw Moo was also teaching Karen literacy to the children in his spare time.

Naw Law Eh was also utilizing her teaching skills in the children's ministry in her church and was positive of the contribution she was able to make in this way. While reticent to leave, Naw Law Eh and her husband made the decision to resettle primarily to improve the educational opportunities for their two primary school age children with a long term view that they would be better equipped to return and help their people.

As for me, I am not willing to go but if I look at my children, we have to go and get knowledge and education and after they finish school, we come back and help – it is better (Naw Law Eh, 2nd interview).

For both those who have left, and those who have stayed, their human capacity is central to both their individual and group identity. It has influenced their decisions to stay or go and is also linked to their sense of self worth. Even though Saw Moo was discouraged and his individual dream to study had not come true, his group identity remained prominent, leading him to utilize his teaching skills where needed amongst his own youth.

7.7.2 Australian Study

My interviews with key informants and focus group participants in Australia focused on the reasons for resettlement and the challenges and strengths in their new environment. The responses to these issues in both focus group and key informant interviews showed considerable commonality in relation to resettlement experiences and notions of identity.

7.7.2.1 Reasons for Migration

In the two focus groups, the opportunity for education for either themselves and/or their children was cited by eight of the twelve focus group participants as the primary reason for migrating to Australia. While the participants all agreed that education was provided in the camps, they talked about the lack of opportunity to study further and of limited options to utilize the skills learnt in a meaningful, productive way:

Before I came here I finished grade ten and I would like to continue my further study but I couldn't, so I just stayed and taught in the school for two years (Naw Eh Th'Blay, AKO Youth Seminar).

... main purpose is for the children's benefit for education and for me and second for my country for us to be good for our people. To get education to help my people (Saw Eh Taw, KBCA).

The link between the acquisition of education and helping their people was strong in both focus groups with three in each group stating they and/or their children would return to the border once they had completed their education.

Participants in both groups also talked about the lack of freedom and security that they experienced as displaced people, with three people citing this as their main reason for resettling.

I didn't have freedom and no rights. That's why I came to Australia. When I arrive here, I get freedom, good education, good job and my good future life (Naw Say Mu, AKO Youth Seminar).

We stay in the camp and Thai treat us as outcast and we cannot go back to our place in Burma ... it makes me feel something like not good for my life because I have no freedom (Naw Ni Thaw, KBCA).

I was born in Mae La and I lived there for 19 years. As we know in refugee camp we couldn't go outside freely, as for me I had never gone outside for 19 years, I just stay in the camp. If I went out, the Thai police would arrest me (Saw Poe Kwa, AKO Youth Seminar).

In the KBCA focus group, discussion took place on the value of citizenship as a means of both being seen as no longer being a displaced people and providing the opportunity to return to the border to help their people. Naw Sie Sie's comment:

I will take citizenship as soon as I can – next year – then I will no longer be a refugee (Naw Sie Sie, KBCA)

received assent from the other five participants as did this comment by one of the older participants Saw Wah:

... if they have citizenship, I want my children to go back to the border and help our people over there – with citizenship they can travel back and forth (Saw Wah, KBCA).

In this way, education and Australian citizenship were seen by the participants as a means of both transcending their identity as displaced people and enabling them to help their people who have remained behind on the border.

7.7.2.2 Challenges of New Environment

All of the community leaders interviewed cited lack of English as the major challenge to those resettling. Many discussed how displacement had resulted in many of those coming not having accessed education in their own language and that this was a significant barrier to them being able to learn English in the Western style of teaching. Pu Paul Kyaw, Saw Daniel Zue, Naw Say Wah and Naw Hay Rae all agreed with this comment by Pee Bella:

Some of them are very frustrated, whatever they were taught they said that they couldn't grasp what they are teaching ... I have told the lecturers from TAFE, you can't teach these people like you teach the high school students – some of them have never been to school ... you have to start from the very beginning (Pee Bella),

with Naw Hay Rae adding that the reason why so many of the adults who are coming have not accessed any formal education is because they have spent their whole childhood running through the jungle to escape the Tatmadaw. This is just one of the legacies of displacement challenging many of the Karen who are resettling in Australia.

The older participants in the KBCA focus group attested to this problem linking it with their inability to secure employment.

... challenge for me most is speak English ... if I learn English, if I can speak English, I think I can stand in the future, because there is lots of opportunity here (Saw Kler, KBCA).

... problem is I can't speak the language so I can't find the job – when I try to find job, I go to the interview, people always ask for CERTIFICATE, CERTIFICATE, CERTIFICATE [laughter] – I can't get certificate because I can't speak English, it is a problem (Saw Wah, KBCA).

Other challenges for displaced Karen resettling in Australia raised by some of the key informants related to their cultural mores and norms. Both Thra Toke Han and Pu Paul Kyaw spoke of the challenge for the Australian Karen Christian Church in relation to adultery and divorce – issues that are very rare in Christian Karen communities inside Burma and along the border where monogamy is highly valued in families, but have begun to arise in Karen communities in Australia. Naw Say Wah and Pu Paul Kyaw both spoke of some young people adapting to Western culture in ways not seen to be acceptable to their parents in the areas of dress, choice of friends and use of alcohol and both agreed it was the responsibility of the church to help both parents and children to be discerning and make right

choices. Thramu Tamla Paw discussed the concept of the extended family in Karen culture where it is normal for multiple generations to live in one house and where young people remain living in the family home at least until marriage. However, she understood that this is not the norm in Australian culture and was concerned that some of the young people in her community may want to leave the family home before marriage and the effect this would have on family unity.

7.7.2.3 Strengths of New Environment

Two related concepts of Karen culture and community were cited by key informants and focus group participants alike as significant strengths for the displaced Karen resettling in Australia, namely, maintenance of Karen culture and their strong sense of community.

Maintenance of Karen culture was perceived to be essential in maintaining Karen identity in Australia. The collective nature of this identity was seen in the repeated referrals to ‘my people’, ‘our people’ during the interviews and focus groups. People interviewed praised the Australian Government’s multicultural policies that promote culture and integration of the Karen resettling in Australia with the wider Australian society.

The Australian Government encourages every ethnicity every community to maintain and promote their identity and also at the same time living in harmony with the other community or the other ethnicity ... that is why we are happy ... we can maintain our culture, our identity and also now we are Australian (Thra Thataw Kunoo).

As discussed in 7.5, both focus group and key informant interviews praised the Australian based Karen cultural and national organizations – the AKO and Karen Culture Development Organisation (KCDO) – for organizing cultural and national days of celebration and remembrance such as Karen New Year, Wrist Tying Ceremony, Karen Revolution Day and Martyrs’ Day.

Our Karen leaders here, they always make Karen special day (Naw Paw Wee, AKO Youth Seminar).

Several of the key informants also spoke of their sense of community as a strength for the displaced Karen resettling in Australia. Naw Hay Rae’s comment in this regard was very apt:

Very easy to bond everywhere we go as long as we know we are Karen people we are Htaw Meh Pah’s grandchildren ... that is very easy for Karen people (Naw Hay Rae).

(As discussed in Chapter 2.3, according to Karen ancient folklore, Htaw Meh Pah is the father of the Karen race and credited with fostering the values by which the Karen live). In both focus groups, participants spoke in a collective way of sharing with each other because of their concept of Karen community. They spoke of how there were no problems in relation to housing and income as in Karen families, all resources are shared.

Our Karen people love hospitality very much and like to help each other. Even they never see you before they still are good in hospitality. So I really value and appreciate that (Naw Say Mu, AKO Youth Seminar).

For Naw Say Mu who came as a young single person with no family or friends here in Australia, the value of community has meant that she has never felt isolated. On arrival, the local Karen community organized a family for her to stay with and she joined in with the local church community.

All interviewed spoke of how those who have been here longer help those who arrive.

So through the community and connections, it is not a problem to get involved, gather around other Karen people (Thra Thataw Kunoo).

Many spoke of how those who speak English are especially in demand to help those who cannot. While two informants cited this as a burden as it becomes a 24/7 responsibility, others saw it positively as a way to serve their people. Thramu Tamla Paw, a post ten graduate in English from Mae La Camp, was only twenty-two when she arrived with her parents and siblings in 2006. She spoke of how she was the only one in her community who was confident in speaking English, and as there were no accredited Karen translators in Brisbane at that time, she became the unofficial translator for the whole community from the day she arrived.

Yes because most of the people here who live surround us not speak English ... and we even don't have Karen worker from the service provider ... so I just start work as a volunteer and help lots of families ... that is very difficult for me but as a Christian, I think I just got the strength from God (Thramu Tamla Paw).

Three years later, Thramu Tamla Paw was still in this role. She told me how her main aim for resettling to Australia was to study but her people's needs took precedence. As more people in the community are competent in helping and official Karen translators are now available, Thramu Tamla Paw shared how she planned to begin tertiary study the following year. Her story is typical of many Karen who have put aside individual goals for the collective needs of their community and further highlights the collective nature of Christian Karen identity.

It is well known that social networks are vital in providing social capital in the migration journeys of displaced people (Simich, 2003, p. 577). Successful transition during migration and resettlement is dependent on good social support within family and community (Golding & Baezconde-Garbanati 1990; Young 2001). From the information gained in the focus groups and interviews in Australia, it would appear that the Karen's strong sense of culture and community is facilitating the successful transition of the displaced Karen from the camps to their new lives in Australia.

7.7.3 Summary

Displacement has the capacity to complicate and change people's relationships with objects and places (Dudley, 2008, p. 23). It potentially leaves people in a state of statelessness (Martin et al, 2005, p. 7). For many affected, their sense of identity is violated leaving them unable to cope (Blackwell, 1989). However, while the participants in both studies have experienced significant oppression, consequent displacement and resettlement for some, it would appear that the collectivist nature of their identity characterized by their strong sense of culture, history, nationalism, faith, community and family have served to ameliorate the negative aspects of displacement, enabling them to adapt to their changed environments in a positive way.

This finding is supported by researchers such as Hall (1999) who states:

In societies where collective identity is the norm ... it is therefore likely to be reproduced (p. 37),

Vertovec (2003), who states:

Identity is upheld, reproduced and reinforced through a system of narratives, public rituals, institutions, education, social relations and behavior (p. 975),

and others (such as Cusano, 2001; Mollica & MacDonald 2002; Ager et al, 2005; Craig & Lovell, 2005) whose findings concur that human capacity, social ecology, culture and values are sources of strength and resilience in displaced communities.

7.8 Conclusion

This chapter has shown the interconnectedness and interdependence of the themes of culture, Christian faith, education, nationalism, oppression and displacement through the stories told by the participants in two studies. Within each of these themes and their corresponding sub-themes, both older and younger age cohorts in the Mae La study and the participants in the Australian study demonstrated a similar consistency of thoughts, feelings and action. Differences were few and seen most notably in the sub-themes of culture involving role identity conflict and challenges to filial piety. These similarities of themes inform notions of Christian Karen identity.

In accordance with Stets and Burke's (2005) identity control theory, Karen culture, their Christian faith, the prominence placed on education and nationalism are identity standards that attribute meanings to who the participants are as individual persons, within their individual roles and within their wider community. These identity standards are evident in the value given to family, language and place; in the manner in which they live and practice their Christian faith; in the struggle and sacrifices made to access education; and in the loyalty and pride shown in being Karen, part of the Karen nation with their homeland Kawthoolei within the Union of Burma.

In the past sixty years, these standards have given rise to oppression and subsequent displacement by the successive ruling governments in Burma. All the participants had experienced oppression for many years, some for decades, resulting in displacement in camps on the Thai side of the Thai-Burma border. Some have made the decision to resettle in third countries. In all of these experiences, the participants have had to reflect and appraise their meaning in relation to their personal, social and group identities.

While the participants' experiences of oppression and displacement have caused emotional and physical angst to varying degrees, in all cases, the dominant meanings attributed to culture, Christian faith, education and nationalism have remained. As in previous generations of Karen who also experienced oppression and displacement, the interviews revealed that the participants had learned to adapt to their changed circumstances and had established lives within Mae La Camp, USA and Australia that accommodated their original identity standards, enabling them to maintain their Karen-ness and hope of being able to return to their homeland Kawthoolei.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

Thramu, do you really think your people are interested in my story? I do not think it is interesting for them ... Thramu, thank you for listening to my story. I hope your people will try to understand about my people and that God will bless them as they read what you write (Saw Doh Du, recorded as a field note, 20/03/09).

8.1 Prelude

I introduced this thesis by saying that a reflective journey never ends. This research journey has taken five years, and in that time, I have learnt a great deal about myself as the researcher as well as about the people who were researched. The lessons I have learnt will remain with me for my lifetime.

In specific relation to this dissertation, the writing has been an amazing journey of discovery, of frustration and sadness at times and joy at others, but above all, it has been a journey of revelation. At a personal level, Rilke's (1984) words that opened this thesis are most relevant. While not yet "living my way into the answer" for all the ambiguities of life on the Thai-Burma border, I believe I have grown in personal patience and acceptance of people as they perceive themselves. Epistemically, I have learnt that the answer to one question inevitably leads to another question and then another. Hence, while I have gained greater understanding of the situation affecting the lives of one group of Christian displaced Karen both on the Thai-Burma border and in Australia, I realize that this is a continuing journey of discovery, the end of which I know not where or when. In the process of writing, the stories of the participants, key informants and other people I have met have revealed a tapestry of the lives of Christian displaced and resettled Karen. To those who have entrusted their stories to me, I pray that in the writing of these stories, a greater understanding of who you are will be made known.

8.2 Introduction

This research has sought to add to the knowledge base of identity of people affected by organized violence, displacement and resettlement through a qualitative study conducted among the Christian displaced Karen of Burma. Although the Karen are well studied in the literature, research that

specifically explores identity of the Christian displaced Karen in relation to these constructs is limited. This concluding chapter includes an overview of this research, a summary of the main findings and their implications for Christian displaced Karen identity, and recommendations for social work practice emerging from the research.

8.3 Overview of the Research

The principal purpose of this research has been to find out how identity is perceived by those Christian displaced Karen living in the Thai-Burma border displaced persons' camps as well as the small percentage who have migrated to third countries under the UNHCR Resettlement Scheme, and to determine the factors that influence the maintenance of that identity. In so doing, the aim has been to make the invisible visible, the inaudible audible and the unsayable sayable of a people group whose lives and history have been largely unaccounted for in the 'distribution of the sensible' (Ranciere, 2004) within the country of Burma.

A qualitative methodology was used in this study. The conceptual framework and research design reported in Chapter Four provided the foundation and direction for the data collection and analysis phases. Adopting a transitional ecosystems approach based on Bronfenbrenner's (1977) Ecosystems Model and Raphael's (1986) Phases of Refugee Trauma Model, a Transitional Ecosystems Model of Christian Displaced Karen Identity (Figure 4:1) was developed. This model guided two studies, the first conducted in Mae La Displaced Persons' Camp, Thailand and the second in Sydney, Australia. The research framework and design, with the combination of researcher observations and interviews and focus groups with participants, became an 'apparatus of recognition' (Tangseefa, 2003), enabling participants to tell their stories from their own perspective. In this way, insights into participants' perspectives revealed rich data which facilitated the achievement of the stated aims and purposes of this study.

Three contextual constructs were explored to gain an understanding of the central construct of identity; organized violence, displacement and resettlement, thus guiding the research in addressing the research questions relating to how identity of Christian displaced Karen living in camps on the Thai-Burma border and in third countries is perceived and maintained. Identity was the overall organizing

framework, with organized violence, displacement and resettlement forming the context in which participants' identities were explored.

Interrelated theories pertaining to identity including Tajfel's (1972) social identity theory, Turner's (1987) social categorization theory, Hall's (1999) theory relating to collective identity, Verkuyten's (2005) ethnic identity theory, Stets and Burke's (2005) identity control theory and the political identity theories of intersectionality (Taylor, 1992; Glenn, 1999; Hulko, 2009; Ferree, 2010) were examined. These theories were useful in gaining an understanding of the collective nature of Karen identity and its impact on the individual living within an environment of oppression and marginalization.

A substantial body of literature defines organized violence and highlights its implications (Blackwell, 1993; Cotley, 1994; Duffield, 1994; Deng, 1998; Burnett & Peel, 2001; Otunnu, 2002; Cronberg, 2003; Kaldor, 2007; Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, 2009). A number of researchers including Blackwell (1993), Weaver et al (1996), Summerfield (1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2002) and Weaver and Figley (2003) have focused their research on the impact of organized violence on the community affected and found that how communities value culture and spirituality impacts on their response and coping.

A direct result of organized violence is displacement of people. Under international law, all peoples who meet the criteria set down in the United Nations 1951 Refugee Convention and associated 1967 Protocol on Refugees, are recognized as refugees. However, the UNHCR in several of its reports (Cohen & Deng, 1998; Barutciski, 1999; Borton, Buchanan-Smith & Otto, 2005; Mooney, 2005) also recognize that the needs of the different classifications that include refugee, IDP's, complementary refugee status and stateless peoples, are distinct. To this end, separate principles and policies have been developed to address the distinct needs of each of these classifications (UNHCR, 1992; Kälin, 2008). Globally, many people displaced as a direct result of organized violence are not afforded the protection automatically granted to those who seek it in countries who are signatories to the 1951 Convention and its associated Protocol; they either remain in the country in which the violence has been perpetrated or cross borders to countries that are not signatories to the Convention. Consequently, recognition of their distinct needs under international law is essential.

A number of writers have referred to specific words or phrases to highlight the special needs of those people displaced by organized violence. These include 'liminality', a state of betwixt and between by Turner (1969), 'diasporic communities' by Hinton (2002), 'forced migration' by Martin et al (2005) and 'warehousing' in relation to those living in the displaced persons' camps by Smith (2004b). All of these are pertinent to the current displaced Karen situation. The campaign against them by the ruling Burmese military junta has caused them to forcibly migrate from their villages and towns in Kawthoolei, leaving the majority of them in a liminal space. Hundreds of thousands are warehoused in camps, some for decades. Overall, this has created diasporic communities stretching from the jungles of Burma to countries near and far.

It is interesting that neither the Karen nor Burmese language distinguishes between refugee and displaced person. Rather, they both associate the situation in socio-psychological terms; with oppression – 'bwa da gaw ba kair' in Sgaw Karen – or suffering – 'dukkha-tha' in Burmese. These are outcomes of displacement resulting from organized violence and a number of researchers such as Gorst-Unsworth and Goldenberg (1998), Bowles (2002) and Mollica and McDonald (2002) have connected the socio-psychological outcomes of displacement with how those affected process their experiences and reconstruct meaning and identity in their new environment. Yet, it has been identified that specific research into this area is lacking (Muecke, 1992; Parker, 1992; Long, 2001). With the specific focus on identity of a particular people group affected by displacement resulting from organized violence, this research has sought to address this lack.

The displacement of the Karen people of Burma is now entering its seventh decade with no indication of an amelioration of the situation that has caused this. This has led the UNHCR to engage Western countries to provide the durable solution of resettlement for those displaced Karen warehoused in the camps on the Thai side of the Thai-Burma border. Between January, 2006 and August, 2009, forty-two thousand displaced people from these camps have accepted the offer of resettlement to third countries including the USA, Canada, Norway, Sweden and Australia (KRC, 2009a, 2009b).

The Karen situation is not an isolated phenomenon. Over the past half century, there have been an increasing number of displaced persons globally, reflecting the political and economic instability in several regions of the world. A small percentage of these people are given the opportunity of

resettlement in third countries. This has led to a growing body of literature exploring the impact of resettlement on these populations.

An area of interest is the dichotomy in the literature relating to trauma and resettlement. One view is that the traumatic experiences of displaced people prior to resettlement necessarily place them at high risk of mental health disorders in their host countries (Brik et al, 1988; Lipson, 1993; Hauff & Vaglum, 1995; Turner et al, 2003). The opposing view is premised on the notion that “trauma is experienced in a life context” (Coughlan & Owens-Manley, 2006, p. 94) and that for many displaced people resettling to Western countries, trauma has been the norm of their daily existence (Malkki, 1995b; Silove, 1999; Burnett & Peel, 2001; Ingleby, 2005; Jeppsson & Hjern, 2005). The latter view cautions against the pathologization of trauma amongst resettled displaced populations and takes a whole of life perspective that explores the many factors that makes up a person’s life, for example, social and cultural values, kinship systems, faith and political allegiances when researching the impact of resettlement (Figley, 1987; Lyons, 1991; Hume & Summerfield, 1994; Young, 2001; Simich, 2003; Miller & Rasco, 2004).

A further area of interest was the literature relating to the processes of acculturation and adaptation of resettled displaced people in third countries. Berry’s (1997) research on acculturation is well known. He identified two main issues relating to groups who migrate and settle in a culture different to their own, namely, cultural maintenance and contact and participation. From these issues, four acculturation strategies are possible: assimilation, integration, separation or marginalization, with integration being the optimum strategy. Berry’s model has been critiqued by several researchers in this area who believe that while the model is a useful place to generate thinking in this area, it fails to take into account the complexities of the transitional and life journeys of displaced people who resettle as well as their inter and intra group relationships within their host society (Lazarus, 1997; Schonpflug, 1997; Ryan, Dooley & Benson, 2008). When exploring the impact of resettlement on the identity of the Christian displaced Karen resettling to third countries, this research has been guided by Ryan, Dooley and Benson’s (2008) resource based model which posits that the interrelated concepts of the person’s resources, his/her whole of life journey, and policies in the host country all contribute to the acculturation and adaptation processes of the displaced person resettling to third countries.

8.4 Understanding Christian Displaced Karen Identity

Through the reflexive process of listening, reading and rereading transcripts and discussions with my translators and transcribers, combined with observational living, I was able to integrate the spoken language of the participants and those others with whom I had contact with what Gee (1999) terms “non-language stuff” such as different ways of thinking, valuing, feeling and believing (pp. 12-13), to make meaningful connections of the lived experiences of the Christian displaced Karen. Utilizing the transitional ecosystems model encompassing the micro, meso and macro systems of the people’s lives across the two studies conducted in Mae La Camp and Australia, themes of culture, Christian faith, education, nationalism, oppression, displacement and resettlement that informed notions of Christian displaced Karen identity became evident. Twenty-eight participants took part in both the Mae La and Australian studies. Alongside observations made during the time I lived in Mae La Camp and while attending two national Karen residential seminars in Australia, it is interesting that the findings across both studies bore many similarities. Some differences in role identity within these themes were observed. However, though indicated in the literature (MacDonald, 1999; KWO, 2004, 2006; KHRG, 2006; Earth Rights School-Burma, 2007), no significant differences were noted between gender and age. This is not to suggest that these differences do not exist, it simply states they were not apparent in the data collection (and subsequent analysis) for this research.

Across both studies, this research has found that the collective nature of Christian displaced Karen identity is evident across all seven themes; culture, Christian faith, education, nationalism, oppression, displacement and resettlement. Within this collective nature, a dual identity of the Christian displaced Karen is present. Firstly, being Karen, that is, identifying as a nation is the super-ordinate identity, with the subordinate identity being community.

As the Karen Revolution enters its seventh decade with continuing defeats and diminishing territory within Kawthoolei under KNU control, the strength of this nationalistic identity displayed by participants in both camp based and Australian studies seems paradoxically incongruous. Yet, when one considers the subordinate identity of community, an understanding of this paradox is possible. As highlighted in Chapter Two, prior to the arrival of the American missionaries in the first half of the nineteenth century, the life of Karen people in Burma centred on village and kinship systems. This was their community which was collective in nature. There was no sense of unity outside of these systems.

The causal relationship between the acceptance of Christian faith by many Karen post 1828 and subsequent provision of formal education, directly led to the formation of the 'dawkelu', a Karen nationalistic identity whose leadership from the outset was and still is predominantly Christian. This 'dawkelu' extended the Karen's concept of community by creating a sense of Karen-ness across all Karen people in Burma regardless of their faith. With specific relation to the Christian displaced Karen, the value of community (the subordinate identity) has not diminished in that time; rather it has been reinterpreted to incorporate aspects of their corporate faith and their sense of 'dawkelu' into the original community concepts of village and kinship systems.

A brief summary of the seven primary themes, culture, Christian faith, education, nationalism, oppression, displacement and resettlement, and the implications of each for Christian displaced and resettled Karen identity are now presented.

8.4.1 Culture

In both the Mae La Camp and Australian studies, the collectivist nature of Karen culture was strongly evident (San Po, 1928; McKinnon, 2003; Rogers, 2004). Newman and Grauerholz, (2002) and Hofstede and Hofstede's (2005) research into culture in collectivist societies guided an analysis of filial piety in family. The adherence of filial piety in family was congruent in all three cohorts evident in values of extended family living and practical support of family remaining on the border by those who have resettled. Challenges to this concept of filial piety were noted in five instances. In the Mae La study, one challenge related to choice of faith and two related to care of older relatives. In all three instances, the collective value of filial piety in the family took precedence over individual goals and wishes. However, in the case of the challenge relating to choice of faith, while the young man involved initially followed his parents' directive, some years later, he made a decision that went against their wishes. In the Australian study, two instances related to family obligations. In both cases, the desire for opportunities not available in the camp influenced their decision to leave their family and migrate to Australia.

In relation to language, both studies found that language and culture were synonymous, supporting research by Deschamps, (1982); Edwards, (1985); Paasi, (1991) and Kramsch, (1998). With the policy of Burmanization threatening the expression of Karen language within Burma, all participants voiced a

strong belief that their language must be maintained. Only one participant in the Mae La study demonstrated incongruence in this belief when he stated that his preferred spoken language was Burmese, yet also stated that Karen language was symbolic of his culture. Sgaw Karen is the language medium of most of the schools in Mae La Camp, and in both Tatmadaw occupied areas of Karen State and in third countries where Karen have resettled, Karen literacy classes are organized by the Karen Christian churches.

The participants' connection to their land Kawthoolei was evident across both studies. All except six participants were born in Kawthoolei and all except three participants had lived at some time in Kawthoolei. The findings of this research validates previous research (for example, Agnew, 1987; Paasi 1991; Fullilove, 1996; Rodman, 2003) revealing that a continuing connection to place provided meaning and purpose in the participants' current lives in both Mae La camp and third countries. It was particularly evident in how Christian villagers forced to migrate to the camps maintain their identity as a community by physically reconstructing their 'place' in the form of churches, schools and social groups which bear the same name and practice similar functions as they did before their villages were destroyed.

Across both studies, cultural values were expressed in the practice of filial piety in family, maintenance of language and connection to place of origin. However, within the resettled cohort, some threats to Karen cultural mores and norms were raised by some of the community leaders interviewed. These were noted to be in relation to incidences of divorce and young people not behaving in ways considered appropriate to their parents, for example, use of alcohol and relationships, and a concern that young people may choose to live separate from the family as they become older, thus challenging the cultural values considered foundational for identity by the Christian Karen community. While those who raised these threats to Karen culture stated that currently, these are isolated incidents within their communities, these leaders acknowledged that they need to work together within their churches and families to find positive ways to negotiate these realities in their new environment.

8.4.2 Christian Faith

The collective identity of the Christian displaced and resettled Karen was further evidenced in the demonstration of their faith, a fact noted by ethnographers and historians such as Smeaton (1887),

Purser (1911), Morrison (1947), Keyes (1979), Marshall (1997), and Rogers (2004). In both studies, the findings revealed that the Christian church was central to the participants' lives. There was a strong ethnocentric sentiment evident voiced by camp based and resettled Karen in this research in the belief in a benevolent God who will always care for the Karen. The outworking of their faith was especially evident in the response of Mae La Camp based churches to the victims of Cyclone Nargis, in raising funds for emergency relief, in providing practical and emotional support of victims who sought refuge in the Camp some weeks later, and in their ongoing support to help rebuild Karen communities in the Delta area of Burma. It was also evident in both studies with the Christian church's ongoing support of IDP communities inside Kawthoolei and practical and emotional support of new arrivals both in the camp and in Australia.

In this way, participants' value of community and their Christian faith were synonymous in their concept of identity. Further, the strong growth of both Karen based and integrated mainstream Christian churches in places to where Christian Karen have resettled (Wilkinson-Hayes, 2009), implies that Christian Karen faith related identity remains strong in their new environments.

8.4.3 Education

Both studies in this research revealed that the Christian displaced Karen place a high value on education. As such, education is an identity standard whereby it functions to sustain both collective and individual identity (Stets & Burke, 2005).

A significant proportion of participants in both studies were active in both the provision and acquisition of education. There was a strong sense of struggle and sacrifice to acquire education; from learning the basics under trees in the jungle while on the run as IDPs in Kawthoolei, to living for extended periods of time apart from family to access education in the camps, to the struggle to gain qualifications in Australia in unfamiliar systems and a language that is their second, third or even fourth learnt. The ability to access education for themselves and/or their children was cited as the principle reason for resettling both for those in the Mae La study who have since resettled to third countries as well as the participants in the Australian study.

There was also a strong link between education and nationalism in both studies with participants connecting the acquisition of education as a means of achieving good leadership of their people and freedom of their land. Especially in the Australian study, education acquisition was seen as a way of helping their people back on the border and inside Kawthoolei.

In this way, education will continue to shape Christian displaced Karen identity both along the Thai-Burma border and in third countries and will be a vehicle for transnational links between the two places.

8.4.4 Nationalism

Contextually, all participants were born into the Karen struggle to regain freedom in their land and all aspects of their lives have been significantly impacted by it. In both studies, a strong overt sense of nationalism was evident.

In the Australian study, several indicators were observed of how transnational links to the participants' homeland evidenced a continuing nationalistic identity in resettlement. Participants spoke passionately of how they looked forward to the time their nation of Kawthoolei would regain its freedom; they were vocal in their support for the efforts of Karen national leaders in Australia in maintaining Karen National and Cultural days; and the Karen flag which is symbolic of Karen nationalism since it was first raised in 1937 hung in all Australian homes and venues I visited. The formation of the Australian Karen Organisation in 1997 with the aim of promoting Karen national and cultural identity, and support of same by study participants, is a further indicator of how Karen identity through transnational links to their homeland is being maintained. This finding supports the findings of a recent field study by Kanska (2008) which explored transnational links of recently resettled Karen in Sweden, and wider research into refugee resettlement by Wahlbeck (2002) and Ostergaard-Nielsen (2003).

In the Mae La study, indicators of the strong sense of Karen nationalistic identity were evident in the determination of participants to adhere to the Four Principles of the Revolution set down by the first KNU President, Saw Ba U Gyi in 1949. They were further observed in the wider camp community including the participants' active role in Karen National Days both inside Kawthoolei and in the camp, as well as in the Karen based educational curriculum, where national songs are sung at the start and

conclusion of each school day. A further indicator within the Christian community was observed in how Karen national leaders and their quest for freedom in their land are prayed for daily, corporately in church and chapel services, and within private family devotions.

A direct implication of this strong sense of nationalistic identity for the displaced Karen of Burma in general is a continuation of the Karen Revolution to gain freedom in their land of Kawthoolei, despite the overwhelming odds against their ability to achieve this within the current political milieu.

8.4.5 Oppression

Oppression as an identity standard of the Karen has its roots in their ancient oral traditions beginning with their orphan status when they were separated from their legendary father Htaw Meh Pah to when they lost their Golden Book of Knowledge given to them by Y'wa. It has continued to contemporary times where they have been persecuted by the Burman rulers to the time of British colonization and since Independence in 1948.

All except two participants, one in each study, had externally experienced oppression through destruction of their villages and/or subsequent places they had lived at the hands of the Burmese Tatmadaw. All had experienced other forms of external oppression. However, only a few participants voiced their internal experiences of oppression in the form of feelings of fear and lack of control of their lives. The significant impact on identity resulting from these experiences of oppression for many of the participants has been a sense of conscentization; a sense of Karen-ness which has enabled them to transform the reality of their oppressed state enabling them to effectively function in their present circumstances in a collective way.

8.4.6 Displacement and Resettlement

Though a considerable body of literature states that displacement fractures identity of people resulting in trauma and loss (Blackwell, 1999; Martin et al, 2005; Dudley, 2008), this finding is not supported in this research. Only four people in the Mae La study spoke specifically about loss in relation to their journey of displacement; yet these accounts were all followed by positive stories of how they rebuilt their lives in Mae La camp. The main findings in this research in relation to displacement (and

subsequent resettlement for some) supports a number of research findings including Hall (1999), Vertovec (2003) and Craig and Lovell (2005) concluding that a strong sense of community identity has facilitated a positive adjustment in their changed environments. This was evidenced in Mae La where an effective camp infrastructure using systems previously in place in their homeland is in place. It was evidenced in a similar way in the Australian study where it was observed that Karen based churches and the AKO work together to ensure that all Karen resettling are supported within a community based structure.

With no indication of any peaceful resolution between the SPDC and the KNU, Karen people in Kawthoolei are going to continue to be displaced from their land with many seeking safety in the displaced persons' camps on the Thai side of the Thai-Burma border. Hence, while the UNHCR's durable solution of resettlement was intended, in part, to reduce the numbers of Karen living in the camps, this has not occurred with more people living in the camps now than when the programme began in 2006. The related implication is that with limited alternate options, many more displaced Karen in these camps will apply for resettlement for third countries over coming years. Both of these implications present challenges for provision of effective camp based services and increased responsibility of those educated people who choose to remain.

Through the combination of favourable Governmental multicultural policies and the strong national and community networks and the sense of Karen-ness that Christian displaced Karen bring with them to Australia, the practical implications for these people would indicate that they will successfully integrate into Australian society while maintaining their culture and transnational links to their homeland and border communities.

In summary, each of the seven themes of culture, Christian faith, education, nationalism, oppression, displacement and resettlement speak of Christian displaced Karen identity. Together, they weave an intricate tapestry that highlights the uniqueness of this people group enabling them to be accounted for in the Rancerian (2004) sense.

8.5 Limitations of the research

As with all research that focuses on detailed understanding of one phenomenon or group of people, the findings of this research can not be generalized beyond the specific group studied. Thus it is within the strength of (largely) qualitative research – its potential for rich understanding of phenomena – that its major limitation (limited capacity for transferability) lies. The findings of the present study clearly can not be generalized to refugee groups other than the Karen or to Karen of different faiths. Further, significant limitations in the sampling process, as discussed in detail at 4.6.2 preclude generalization to all Christian Karen who are either living in Mae La Displaced Persons Camp or have resettled in Australia. Given the researcher's outsider status, limited resources, and the necessity to rely on known gatekeepers to recruit study participants, these limitations could not have been avoided; they must simply be declared.

8.6 Recommendations for Social Work and Related Practice

We live in a world where organized violence and subsequent displacement are the norm for millions of people. For many of us, there is limited or no understanding of these people, of the social injustices perpetrated against them, of their struggle to not only survive in these circumstances, but more so, to rise above the dominant powers inflicting the organized violence to maintain their integrity as distinct ethnic peoples with their own distinct history, culture and identity.

While the findings of this research which has focused on a microsection of a single people group, namely Christian displaced Karen from Burma, cannot be generalized to wider displaced people and refugee populations, the theory, conceptual framework and method upon which the research was based, is transferrable for study, practice and further research. The findings of this research have relevance at a number of levels for social work and related professions.

As a starting point, a broad social justice framework is recommended for practitioners working with groups such as Christian displaced Karen in third countries. Finn and Jacobson (2003), for example, have developed a “Just Practice Framework” with a focus on five key themes: meaning, context, power, history and possibility. By incorporating these themes into practice, Finn and Jacobson believe social work as we know it will be transformed into

... social justice work through the democratization of the processes of knowledge development and the promotion of human forms of partnerships and participation ... need[ing] a fundamental rethinking of the nature and direction of social work practice as we come to grips with the rapidly changing environment in which we live (p. 58).

Similarly, Solas (2008) encourages a collaborative approach between social workers and those who are oppressed and excluded in society in order to work towards social justice in reality as highlighted in the following quote:

Injustice resides in the social order, not in people. It is the (dis)order of things that is responsible for turning the natural diversity of human beings into oppressive hierarchies. One passage of this problem is to call on the ingenuity of the oppressed to describe, if not quantify, their suffering. Anything less places the quest for full social justice in question (p. 821).

With social justice being one of the defining values of the social work profession embedded in national and international codes of ethics (Schott, 2007; Solas, 2008), social work educators have an inherent responsibility to facilitate transformative learning of social orders that give rise to oppression and the response of people groups to this oppression. In this way, the generation of knowledge can lead to an increased awareness, development of culturally competent practice skills and social action. This is in accordance with the International Federation of Social Workers policy statements on displaced persons and refugees which highlight the need for social work education to include courses in the area of refugee studies, cross-cultural counseling and access to specialized training for counseling of refugees and victims of torture and trauma (IFSW, 2010a, b).

With resettlement to Western countries being the durable solution pursued by the UNHCR in many of these prolonged oppressed situations globally, an understanding of how both group and individual identity of displaced people encompassed within a transitional ecological systems approach is important for social work and human services' professionals. While in Australia, newly arrived persons who have experienced torture or trauma may be referred to counseling programs as part of the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy for each refugee funded by the Commonwealth Government (Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, 2006), it is argued that this may not be the best approach to working with resettled groups. Rutter (2006), for example, cautions against regarding refugees as merely victims. Further, Mupedziswa (1997, cited in Harrison & Melville, 2010, p.65) argues that some refugees exhibit a great deal of creativity and resilience in

establishing themselves in third countries. As this research has demonstrated, the Christian Karen, in displacement and resettlement, have maintained a strong sense of community and individual identity.

For social workers involved in service delivery with resettled people, a community capacity building practice framework based on ecological principles, rather than a pathology-based model, is recommended. Capacity building incorporates knowledge enhancement, leadership, network building, valuing community and place, and support of information and analysis (Garlick, 1999, cited in McGinty, 2003). Utilizing ecological principles which are integrative and valuing of the communities and kinship systems in which people live and their cultural mores and norms is arguably more effective than practice within a strictly clinical setting (Miller & Rasco, 2004; Gray & Coates, 2008). This framework is congruent with Christian Karen experiences of community, as evidenced in the transference of integrated systems of kinship, educational, religious and political bodies, both in displacement and resettlement that have to varying degrees ameliorated traumatic experiences providing some level of meaning to them.

8.7 Directions for Future Research

This research has explored the impact on identity of Christian displaced Karen of Burma by sixty years of organized violence. Its findings have highlighted the centrality of nationalism and community as factors both at the heart of their identity and the means of maintaining it in both displaced persons' camps on the Thai-Burma border and in third countries to which some have resettled.

In specific relation to the displaced Karen, two areas for further research could be considered. The first area relates to the changing face of the camps along the Thai-Burma border resulting from the UNHCR's resettlement policy. Recent reports by NGO and CBO's such as CCDPT (2007), Fuller, Pittaway & KWO (2008), TBBC (2009), and KRC (2009b) highlight the challenges resulting from resettlement are having on infrastructure and general populations in the camps but to date, have not explored in any detail beyond this. With no hope of resolution of the situation in Burma likely in the near future, further research that explores the impact on identity has on those who actively choose to remain is encouraged.

The second area to be considered is an expanded study of identity factors of displaced Karen resettling to third countries, especially in the USA where the majority of the displaced Karen from the camps have resettled. A brief field report conducted in the USA by TBBC's Executive Director, Mr Jack Dunford (2008), raised a number of issues relating to identity of resettled displaced Karen that are worthy of further exploration. Kanska's (2008) Minor Field Study exploring experiences of displaced Karen resettling in Sweden also raised a number of issues relating to trans-nationalism and identity that encourage further in-depth research.

In relation to displacement globally, the transitional ecosystems model developed in this research has the ability to facilitate an in-depth understanding of the themes that comprise the myriad of aspects of displaced people's lives in the context of the community in which they live. From the micro to the macro, from the start of their journey of displacement to its current location and future hope, the model enables both researchers and practitioners to learn and understand aspects of humanity and to gain a sensitiveness of the diversity of culture and its implications for practice.

8.8 Epilogue

Pwa K'nyaw Nee Htaw Thaw (Karen New Year) was celebrated on 16 December 2009. I attended the celebration together with approximately seven hundred others, most of whom were Christian displaced Karen youth from the camps attending a Youth Conference at Thoo Mweh Khee Migrant School, Phopra, Thailand. One of my gatekeepers, Saw Kaw Kho, delivered the Pwa K'nyaw Nee Htaw Thaw message. The following is a translated synopsis of that message.

Today is the first day of the year 2749. Our history in Burma dates back to 739 BC. The Burman didn't arrive until 825 AD. We are a people with a rich heritage, a unique culture. When Saw Ko Tha Byu accepted Christ in 1828, we were reunited with our lost book of knowledge – the Living Word of Y'wa. We can be assured by the promises in this book. Psalm 33:12 is a promise I want you to always remember:

Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people He chose for His inheritance.

When the British left Burma in 1948, U Nu and his government denied us our rights as a nation. We marched peacefully demanding that the Government give us our Kawthoolei, that they show Burman one kyat and Karen one kyat [meaning give equality between the

Burmese and Karen], and stating clearly that we did not want communal strife or civil war. But U Nu denied this to us and we have been fighting for our Revolution ever since.

We are victims of colonialism, victims of genocide, victims of divide and rule policies and victims of slavery. But our culture and our people have survived all of this victimization for 2749 years in Burma and it will continue to survive and flourish because we are a nation blessed by God.

Saw Law Doh, a revered Karen teacher said: "We are the evidence of the past, we are the entity of the present and we are the eternity of the future". As long as this world survives, so also the Karen will survive.

Next year in Kawthoolei!

Everyone attending stood and shouted in unison, "Ler kee ter nee Kawthoolei!" [Next year in Kawthoolei!] They then sang the National Anthem and saluted the flag. The Karen youth attending that day shared a common identity of victimization, oppression and displacement. However, Saw Kaw Kho's message was a message of hope; valuing their identity as Karen and affirming a belief that God will make a way for them to return to their beloved Kawthoolei where they can live in community and peace.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Map of Eastern Burma and Thailand showing the boundaries of the Eastern Ethnic States within Burma and the Location of the Displaced Persons' Camps on the Thai side of the Thai-Burma border.

Source: TBBC (2009)



APPENDIX B:

Participant, Gatekeeper, Focus Group Participants and Key Informant Information Sheets and Consent Form in English

- **B1 – Participant Information Sheet, Mae La Camp**
- **B2 – Participant Consent Form, Mae La Camp and Australia**
- **B3 – Gatekeeper Information Sheet, Mae La Camp**
- **B4 – Focus Group Information Sheet, Australia**
- **B5 – Key Informant Information Sheet, Australia**

APPENDIX B1 – Participant Information Form, Mae La Camp



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PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Research Study Title

Displaced and Misplaced or Just Displaced: The Christian Karen Experience of Six Decades of Organized Violence

What is the purpose and duration of the study?

I am conducting this research for doctoral studies through the School of Social Work and Applied Human Sciences, University of Queensland, Australia.

This study seeks to discover the effects of the prolonged violence perpetrated by the Burmese military junta on the Christian Karen of Burma. It will look at how the Christian Karen perceives his/her sense of identity, both as an individual and as a member of his/her wider community in the face of the brutality of the regime.

It is expected that the study will take six months. During that time, I will be living at Kawthoolei Karen Baptist Bible School and College (KKBBSC).

Invitation

You are being invited to take part in this research study. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please feel free to ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Why am I being asked?

Rev Dr Simon, Rev Newton and members of Mae La Camp Committee know that I am doing this research and have agreed to help me find people to be interviewed for the study. You have been suggested as someone who may be interested in participating in this study.

If you agree to take part, you will be one of 16 people, each of whom identify as belonging to the Christian faith and who live in Mae La Camp.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in the study is entirely voluntary. Even though you have been suggested as someone who might like to participate, the decision to do so is entirely yours. No offence will be caused if you decide not to participate.

If you decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep. You will also be asked to sign a consent form indicating your willingness to take part. A copy of this signed consent is also yours to keep. Further, if you decide to take part, you still retain the right to withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. Again, no offence will be caused if you withdraw.

What will be my involvement if I take part?

If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to join me in a number of interviews that will be digitally recorded. In these interviews, I will ask you to tell me how you came to live in Mae La Camp and the impact this has had on your life. I will ask you to tell me your story of who you are and how you see yourself in the wider Karen community.

Interviews will be conducted with the help of translators from the camp community. If you decide to participate, you can converse in Karen, English or a combination of both – whatever you feel most comfortable with.

It is anticipated that there will be two interviews over a period of six months. The interviews will not take more than 2 hours each and may take less. After the second interview, we will decide whether there is other information you want to share. If so, we will arrange another time suitable to you to enable you to continue telling your story. However, if you decide not to continue after the first interview, you are free to withdraw from the study.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

All information, which is collected from you during the course of the study, will be kept strictly confidential. Any information about you, which is to be used by me in any way, will have your name and any other identifying details (eg. Where you came from, family names etc) removed, so that you personally cannot be recognised from it.

A number of security measures will be used to safeguard all data collected during the course of the study, for example, digital recording of interviews, written notes and electronic records. Digital recording of interviews will be transferred to a computer programme. All electronic records will be protected by password, written notes will be stored in locked cabinets in the first instance, and then posted to the School of Social Work, University of Queensland, Australia for safekeeping and future reference until the end of the study. All data will be destroyed when the research is completed.

What are the possible risks of taking part?

Telling your story may invoke painful memories. If you decide to take part, and this happens, Thramu ***** and Thra ***** [the real names of these people were included in the sheets handed to participants] from the KKBBS will be available for debriefing and/or to just talk with you. Thramu ***** or Thra ***** will not receive any information from myself. They will only know what you want to tell them. Neither will they be feeding back to me. Whatever you decide to share, will be kept confidential between yourself and them.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

It is hoped that the stories told by the participants will help the outside world understand what is happening to the Karen people and what the Karen people hope for their future.

What will happen to the results of this study?

During the six months that I will be collecting the data by interviews, I will be available to share with participants what I have discovered through the interviews. If you decide to participate, you are free to contact me at KKBBS where I will be staying.

When the interviews are completed, I will compile all the information collected and then will contact those who participate again to share what I have written relating to them. If you decide to participate, this will be an opportunity for you to tell me if you are not happy with something I have written and/or to tell me if there are any mistakes in the information I have written. I will then delete or change anything you are not happy with and correct any mistakes I have made.

Finally, I will record my findings in a detailed essay which will be submitted to my University – University of Queensland, Australia – for marking. A copy of this essay will be given to Rev Dr Simon who has said he will make available in the College library for anyone in the Camp to borrow and read at his or her leisure.

I will also seek to report my findings to wider international forums, eg journals, conferences and workshops.

Who has reviewed and approved the project?

This study has been cleared by one of the human ethics committees of the University of Queensland in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council's guidelines. You are of course, free to discuss your participation in this study with myself – contact details below.

If you would like to speak to an officer of the University not involved in the study, you may contact the Ethics Officer on +61 7 3365 3924. Ms Sonya Claase, Field Director, Partners, Mae Sot, has been approved by the University to act as their representative should you have any further questions regarding the research. She can be contacted on 0899974072.

My contact details for further information

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APPENDIX B2 – Participant Consent Form, Mae La and Australian Studies



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CRICOS PROVIDER NUMBER 00025B

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Research Project Title: Displaced and Misplaced or Just Displaced:
The Christian Karen Experience of Six
Decades of Organized Violence

1. I have read the Information Sheet for this study and have had details of the study explained to me.
2. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.
3. I also understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time.
4. I understand that any information collected during the study will be kept confidential.
5. I agree to participate in digitally recorded interviews with the researcher.

Participant's Name: _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Contact details: _____

Researcher's Name: Shirley Worland

Researcher's Contact Details: C/- PO Box 79 Mae Sot, Thailand
Email: shirleyworland@gmail.com
Ph: +66 852588913

Researcher's Signature:

APPENDIX B3 – Gatekeeper Information Form, Mae La Camp Study



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INFORMATION SHEET FOR GATEKEEPERS, TRANSLATORS, TRANSCRIBERS AND COUNSELLORS

Research Study Title:

Displaced and Misplaced or Just Displaced: The Christian Karen Experience of Six Decades of Organized Violence

What is the purpose and duration of the study?

I am conducting this research for doctoral studies through the School of Social Work and Applied Human Sciences, University of Queensland, Australia.

This study seeks to discover the effects of the prolonged violence perpetrated by the Burmese military junta on the Christian Karen of Burma. It will look at how the Christian Karen perceives his/her sense of identity, both as an individual and as a member of his/her wider community in the face of the brutality of the regime.

It is expected that the study will take six months. During that time, I will be living at Kawthoolei Karen Baptist Bible School and College (KKBBSBSC).

Recruitment criteria

The study I am undertaking requires 16 participants. Each of these participants must live in Mae La Displaced Persons' Camp and profess the Christian faith.

Eight of the participants will be women and eight will be men. Of the eight women and eight men, four of each gender will be aged between 18 and 25, and four of each gender will be

aged between 40 and 60. Of the eight people of the younger age group, it would be useful to include some who were born in the camp.

How will the study be conducted?

I will conduct interviews with the 16 participants that will be digitally recorded. In these interviews, I will ask each participant to tell me how s/he came to live in Mae La Camp and the impact this has had on his/her life. I will be asking each participant to tell me the story of who they are and how they see themselves in the wider Karen community. Interviews will be conducted with the help of translators.

It is anticipated that there will be two interviews over a period of six months. The interviews will not take more than 2 hours each and may take less. After the second interview, the participant and myself will decide whether there is other information s/he wants to share. If so, another time will be arranged to enable the participant to continue telling his/her story.

Role of Gatekeepers:

The nominated gatekeepers will assist me to recruit the 16 research participants according to the criteria listed above.

Role of the Counsellor:

I am mindful that the interviews may cause participants to recollect painful memories that may cause them distress. Counsellors will be available to provide counselling within a safe and confidential environment should this occur.

Referral to Counsellors:

Research participants will be given the names of available counsellors. The process of referral will be either self-referral or, with the participant's permission, I will make a referral if requested.

Any information shared with the counsellor by the participant is strictly confidential and not to be shared with anyone else, including myself Shirley Worland.

Role of Translators:

Each participant will be encouraged to tell his/her story in whatever language medium s/he is most comfortable with. This could be in English, Karen only or a combination of both languages. In the case of the latter 2 options, the translator will be required to translate my questions from English to Karen and the participant's responses from Karen to English.

Role of Transcribers:

There will be 2 transcribers, each with a different role.

The first transcriber will transcribe the digitally recorded interviews where Karen has been used as the language medium firstly into the Karen language and then into English.

When all interviews are finished, a second transcriber will check for accuracy of the first transcriber by back translating from the written English to the original recorded interview.

I will provide training for translators and transcribers.

Confidentiality:

It is essential that all information pertaining to research participants be kept confidential, and not shared with others under any circumstances.

What will happen to the results of this study?

During the six months that I will be collecting the data by interviews, I will be available to share with participants what I have discovered through the interviews.

When the interviews are completed, I will compile all the information collected and then will contact those who participate again to share what I have written relating to them. This will be an opportunity for participants to correct any information they do not believe reflects what they have said and/or to say they are not happy for something that has been written to be included. At that time, I will delete and/or change information as they advise me.

Finally, I will record my findings in a detailed essay which will be submitted to my University – University of Queensland, Australia – for marking. A copy of this essay will be given to Rev Dr Simon who has said he will make available in the College library for anyone in the Camp to borrow and read at his or her leisure. I will also seek to report my findings to wider international forums, eg journals, conferences and workshops.

Who has reviewed and approved the project?

This study has been cleared by one of the human ethics committees of the University of Queensland in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council's guidelines. You are of course, free to discuss your participation in this study with myself – I can be contacted at KKBBSC or by phone 0852588913. If you would like to speak to an officer of the University not involved in the study, you may contact the Ethics Officer on +61 7 3365 3924. Ms Sonya Claase, Field Director, Partners, Mae Sot, has been approved by the University to act as their representative should you have any further questions regarding the research. She can be contacted on 0899974072.

I have read the Information Sheet for Gatekeepers, Translators, Transcribers and Counsellors. I understand the nature of my role in this research and the importance of confidentiality in all circumstances.

☐

I agree to abide by the confidentiality provisions for this research, as set out above.

Name:

Role:

Signature:

Date:

APPENDIX B4 – Focus Group Participant Information Form, Australian Study



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CRICOS PROVIDER NUMBER 00025B

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Research Study Title

Displaced and Misplaced or Just Displaced: The Christian Karen Experience of Sixty Years of War in Burma.

What is the purpose and duration of the study?

I am conducting this research for doctoral studies through the School of Social Work and Applied Human Sciences, University of Queensland, Australia.

This study seeks to discover the effects of the prolonged violence perpetrated by the Burmese military junta on the Christian displaced Karen of Burma. It will look at how the Christian Karen perceives his/her sense of identity, both as an individual and as a member of his/her wider community in the face of the brutality of the regime.

I have completed a study in Mae La Camp, Thailand with 16 participants. From these interviews, the importance of the UNHCR's policy of resettlement was realised. It was then decided to conduct a second study which will comprise of focus group and key informant interviews with Christian displaced Karen from the camps who have resettled in Australia.

The purpose is to understand how resettlement has impacted on the identity of those who have resettled. Focus groups with Karen who have resettled in Australia since 2006 will be held at the KBCA Bible Camp in December 2008 and AKO Youth Seminar in January 2009. It is planned that participants will represent all the States in Australia where Karen have resettled.

Invitation

You are being invited to take part in this research study. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please feel free to ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Why am I being asked?

Committee members of the KBCA and AKO are supportive of my doing this study and have invited me to attend both the Bible Camp and Youth Seminar. You have been suggested as someone who may be interested in participating in this study.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in the study is entirely voluntary. Even though you have been suggested as someone who might like to participate, the decision to do so is entirely yours. No offence will be caused if you decide not to participate.

If you decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep. You will also be asked to sign a consent form indicating your willingness to take part. A copy of this signed consent is also yours to keep. Further, if you decide to take part, you still retain the right to withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. Again, no offence will be caused if you withdraw.

What will be my involvement if I take part?

If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to join in a group of five other Christian Karen who have resettled in Australia since 2006. I will be asking questions about the reasons you decided to come to Australia and about your life in Australia now and encouraging you to join the others in answering these questions. You also are encouraged to comment on what others in the group say. The group interview will be digitally recorded.

Interviews will be conducted with the help of a translator. If you decide to participate, you can converse in Karen, English or a combination of both – whatever you feel most comfortable with.

It is anticipated that the focus group will take no longer than 90 minutes and will be held during free time at either the KBCA Camp or AKO Youth Seminar.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

All information, which is collected from you during the course of the study, will be kept strictly confidential. Any information about you, which is to be used by me in any way, will have your name and any other identifying details (eg. Where you came from in Burma, family names etc) removed, so that you personally cannot be recognised from it.

A number of security measures will be used to safeguard all data collected during the course of the study, for example, digital recording of interviews, written notes and electronic records. Digital recording of interviews will be transferred to a computer programme. All electronic records will be protected by password, written notes will be stored in locked filing cabinets

within the School of Social Work, University of Queensland, Australia for safekeeping and future reference until the end of the study. All data will be destroyed when the research is completed.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

It is hoped that the stories told by the participants will help the international community understand what is happening to the Karen people and what the Karen people hope for their future.

What will happen to the results of this study?

When the interviews are completed, I will compile all the information collected and then will contact those who participate again to share what I have written relating to them. If you decide to participate, this will be an opportunity for you to tell me if you are not happy with something I have written and/or to tell me if there are any mistakes in the information I have written. I will then delete and/or change anything you are not happy with and correct any mistakes I have made.

Finally, I will record my findings in a detailed essay which will be submitted to my University – University of Queensland, Australia – for marking. An electronic copy of this work will be available for those who request it.

I will also seek to report my findings to wider international forums, eg journals, conferences and workshops.

Who has reviewed and approved the project?

This study has been cleared by one of the Human Ethics Committees of the University of Queensland in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council's guidelines. You are of course, free to discuss your participation in this study with myself – contact details below.

If you would like to speak to an officer of the University not involved in the study, you may contact the Ethics Officer on +61 7 3365 3924.

My contact details for further information

In Australia

Ms Shirley Worland
PhD Candidature
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Email: shirleyworland@gmail.com

Phone contact between 27 December 2008 and 8 January 2009: 0421652596

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APPENDIX B5 – Key Informant Information Form, Australian Study



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Internet www.uq.edu.au/swahs
CRICOS PROVIDER NUMBER 00025B

KEY INFORMANTS PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Research Study Title

Displaced and Misplaced or Just Displaced: The Christian Karen Experience of Sixty Years of War in Burma.

What is the purpose and duration of the study?

I am conducting this research for doctoral studies through the School of Social Work and Applied Human Sciences, University of Queensland, Australia.

This study seeks to discover the effects of the prolonged violence perpetrated by the Burmese military junta on the Christian displaced Karen of Burma. It will look at how the Christian Karen perceives his/her sense of identity, both as an individual and as a member of his/her wider community in the face of the brutality of the regime.

I have completed a study in Mae La Camp, Thailand with 16 participants. From these interviews, the importance of the UNHCR's policy of resettlement was realised. It was then decided to conduct a second study which will comprise of focus group and key informant interviews with Christian displaced Karen from the camps who have resettled in Australia.

The purpose is to understand how resettlement has impacted on the identity of those who have resettled. I will conduct key informant interviews with recognised Christian Karen community leaders representative of all States in Australia where Karen are living during the KBCA Bible Camp in December 2008 and AKO Youth Seminar in January 2009. I will also conduct interviews in between these two venues in Sydney if it is convenient to participants.

Invitation

You are being invited to take part in this research study. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please feel free to ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Why am I being asked?

Committee members of the KBCA and AKO are supportive of my doing this study and have invited me to attend both the Bible Camp and Youth Seminar. You have been suggested as someone who may be interested in participating in this study.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in the study is entirely voluntary. Even though you have been suggested as someone who might like to participate, the decision to do so is entirely yours. No offence will be caused if you decide not to participate.

If you decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep. You will also be asked to sign a consent form indicating your willingness to take part. A copy of this signed consent is also yours to keep. Further, if you decide to take part, you still retain the right to withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. Again, no offence will be caused if you withdraw.

What will be my involvement if I take part?

If you decide to take part in this study, I will be asking questions concerning the recent resettlement of Christian displaced Karen to Australia – exploring issues for these people and the impact of resettlement has had on their identity as Karen. The interview will be digitally recorded.

Interviews will be conducted in English. It is anticipated that the interview will take no longer than 90 minutes and will be held during free time at either the KBCA Camp or AKO Youth Seminar or at another venue in the week between these two events, for example, your home, if that is convenient.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

When I am writing up my findings from all the interviews, I will take advice from you regarding the use of your real name. If you are happy for me to use your real name, I will do this. If you have any concerns about this, I will arrange to use a pseudonym and any identifying information, for example, your role in the community will be deleted.

A number of security measures will be used to safeguard all data collected during the course of the study, for example, digital recording of interviews, written notes and electronic records. Digital recording of interviews will be transferred to a computer programme. All electronic records will be protected by password, written notes will be stored in locked filing cabinets within the School of Social Work, University of Queensland, Australia for safekeeping and

future reference until the end of the study. All data will be destroyed when the research is completed.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

It is hoped that the stories told by the participants will help the international community understand what is happening to the Karen people and what the Karen people hope for their future.

What will happen to the results of this study?

When the interviews are completed, I will compile all the information collected and then will contact those who participate again to share what I have written relating to them. If you decide to participate, this will be an opportunity for you to tell me if you are not happy with something I have written and/or to tell me if there are any mistakes in the information I have written. I will then delete and/or change anything you are not happy with and correct any mistakes I have made.

Finally, I will record my findings in a detailed essay which will be submitted to my University – University of Queensland, Australia – for marking. An electronic copy of this work will be available for those who request it.

I will also seek to report my findings to wider international forums, eg journals, conferences and workshops.

Who has reviewed and approved the project?

This study has been cleared by one of the Human Ethics Committees of the University of Queensland in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council's guidelines. You are of course, free to discuss your participation in this study with myself – contact details below.

If you would like to speak to an officer of the University not involved in the study, you may contact the Ethics Officer on +61 7 3365 3924.

My contact details for further information

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APPENDIX C
Participant Pseudonyms and their Translated Meanings
from Karen to English

	Gender	Pseudonym	Meaning
Older Cohort	M	Saw Htoo	Golden
(Mae La Camp)	M	Saw Eh Lay	Shining Love
	M	Saw Taw Taw	Faithful
	M	Saw Doh Du	Very brave
	F	Naw May	Affirmative
	F	Naw Law Eh	Lovely
	F	Naw Peh	Necklace
	F	Naw Htee Na	Living Water
Younger Cohort	F	Naw Day Mu	Younger sister
(Mae La Camp)	F	Naw Eh Wah	Pure love
	F	Naw Lah	Green – life
	F	Naw Paw Gay	Beautiful flower
	M	Saw Hsa Mu	Living star
	M	Saw Moo	Life
	M	Saw Krit	Like Christ
	M	Saw Gaw Tha	Patience
Resettled Cohort	M	Saw Plo	Tender
(Australia)	M	Saw Poe Kwa	Beloved son
	M	Saw Hsa Thaw	New Star
	M	Saw Dae Dae	Younger brother
	M	Saw Eh Taw	Everlasting Love
	M	Saw Wah	White, pure
	M	Saw Kler	Strong
	F	Naw Ni Thaw	New day
	F	Naw Sei Sei	Petite
	F	Naw Say Mu	Living silver
	F	Naw Paw Wee	Always flowering
	F	Naw Eh Th’Blay	Unconditional Love
Gatekeepers	M	Saw Kaw Kho	General
	M	Saw Wee	Prophet

APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS – Mae La Camp and Focus Group Discussions in Australia

Older Cohort, Mae La 2007-2008	Gender	Age	Education	Length of time in Mae La Camp	Occupation/role at time of interviews	Languages spoken	Karen Sub-Group	Church Denomin-ation
Saw Taw Taw	M	58	Bachelor Education (Burma)	12 years	Principal Post 10 College	Sgaw Karen, Burmese, English, little Pwo and little Thai	Sgaw	Baptist
Saw Eh Lay	M	40	Grade 3 (Burma)	12 years	Tends pigs and small crops Participates in Care Villa Activities	Sgaw Karen, intermediate Burmese and little English	Sgaw	Baptist
Saw Doh Du	M	64	Grade 7, LTS (Burma)	6 years	Pastor	Sgaw Karen, Burmese, little English	Sgaw	Baptist
Saw Htoo	M	59	Grade 8 (Burma)	12 years	Administrative Officer, KNU	Sgaw Karen, Burmese, little English and Thai	Sgaw	Baptist
Naw Law Eh	F	41	Bachelor Theology (camp)	15 years	Teacher in Camp	Sgaw Karen, Burmese, moderate English and little Thai	Sgaw	Baptist
					Hotel Housekeeper in USA			
Naw May	F	55	BTh (camp), Nursing Certificate (Burma)	12 years	Teacher Trainer	Sgaw Karen, Burmese, English and Thai	Sgaw	Baptist
Naw Peh	F	47	Grade 10 (Burma) Teacher Prep.Cert. (Camp)	8 years	Teacher in camp	Sgaw Karen, Burmese, moderate English	Sgaw	Baptist
					USA - unknown			
Naw Htee Na	F	58	Dipl Education (Burma)	12 years	Head Mistress	Sgaw Karen, Burmese, moderate English	Sgaw	Baptist

Younger Cohort, Mae La Camp 2007-2008	Gender	Age	Education	Length of time in Mae La camp	Occupation/role	Languages spoken	Karen Sub-Group	Church Denomin-ation
Saw Hsa Mu	M	27	Grade 12 (Burma) Teacher Prep. Cert. (Camp)	8 years	Teacher in camp	Pwo & Sgaw Karen, Burmese, English, intermediate Thai	Pwo	Seventh Day Adventist
					Student in Australia			
Saw Gaw Tha	M	24	Grade 10 (Burma)	2 years	Teacher	Sgaw Karen, Burmese, intermediate English	Sgaw	Anglican
Saw Moo	M	28	LTS (Karen) (Camp)	20 years	Missionary in IDP areas, Karen State	Sgaw Karen, intermediate Burmese, little English and Thai	Sgaw	Baptist
					Laborer in USA			
Saw Krit	M	29	Grade 10 (Camp) 1 st yr BTh	9 years	Student, BTh	Sgaw Karen, Burmese, English, little Thai	Sgaw	Baptist
Naw Eh Wah	F	20	Grade 10 (camp) 2 nd yr BTh	8 years	Student, BTh	Sgaw Karen, Burmese, English, little Thai	Sgaw	Baptist
Naw Paw Gay	F	20	Grade 10 (camp)	10 years	Trainee Teacher	Sgaw Karen, Burmese, intermediate English	Sgaw	Baptist
Naw Day Mu	F	19	Was in Grade 10 at time of interviews	7 years	Student in camp	Sgaw Karen, Burmese, little English and Thai	Sgaw	Baptist
					USA - unknown			
Naw Lah	F	20	Was in Grade 10 at time of interviews	13 years	Student, P/T Nursery Teacher, co-owner small shop	Sgaw Karen, intermediate Burmese, little English and Thai	Sgaw	Baptist

Resettlement Cohort Australia - KBCA Focus Group 2009	Gender	Age	Education		Length of time in camp/ Aust.	Occupation/role		Languages spoken	Karen Sub-Group or Other Ethnic Group	Church Denomination
			Camp	Aust.		Camp	Aust.			
Saw Wah (Qld)	M	51	Grade 10 (Burma)	ESL	16 yrs	Section Leader	Student	Sgaw Karen, Burmese, intermediate English and Thai	Sgaw	Baptist
					2 yrs					
Naw Ni Thaw (citizenship 25/1/09) WA	F	30	Grade 10 + BTh (Camp)	Cert. III ESL TAFE	19 yrs	Teacher	Student	Sgaw Karen, Burmese, English	Sgaw	Baptist
					2.75 yrs					
Saw Plo Vic	M	22	Grade 10 + 2 nd yr BTh (Camp)	Grade 11 TAFE	21 yrs	Student	Student	Sgaw Karen, Burmese, English, intermediate Thai	Sgaw	Baptist
					6 mths					
Saw Kler Vic	M	51	Grade 8 (Burma) LTh (Burma)	ESL	18 yrs Camps, 2yrs IDP	Camp Committee Officer, Church Worker and teacher	Student	Sgaw and Pwo Karen, Burmese, Intermediate Thai, little English	Sgaw	Baptist
					7 mths					
Naw Sei Sei NSW	F	21	Grade 9 (Camp)	Grade 11 + Cert II Nursing TAFE	10 yrs	Working with a CBO	Student + p/t work	Sgaw Karen, English, Thai, little Burmese	Pwo	Baptist
					1.5 yrs					
Saw Eh Taw SA	M	40	No formal schooling, learnt to read and write in Sunday School	ESL	15 years, IDP 5yrs	Section Leader	Student	Sgaw Karen, intermediate Burmese, little English	Karen ni	Baptist
					3 mths					

Resettlement Cohort – Australia AKO Youth Seminar Focus Group 2009	Gender	Age	Education		Length of time in camp/Aust.	Occupation/role		Languages spoken	Karen Sub-Group	Church Denomin-ation
			Camp (comple-ted)	Aust. (under-taking)		Camp	Aust.			
Naw Paw Wee	F	20	Grade 10	Enrolled Grade 11, 2009	9 yrs 1.75 yrs	No specific role	Student	Sgaw Karen, English, intermediate Burmese and Thai	Sgaw	Baptist
Saw Dae Dae (planning citizenship) Victoria	M	24	Grade 10 + LMC + 1 st yr BA	Cert. III ESL	11 years 2.5 yrs	Student	Laborer	Pwo & Sgaw Karen, Burmese, English, intermediate Thai	Pwo	Anglican
Saw Poe Kwa (planning citizenship) Victoria	M	21	Grade 10 + 2 nd year FSP	Cert IV ESL	19 years 2 yrs	Student	Student	Pwo & Sgaw Karen, Burmese, English, intermediate Thai	Pwo	Anglican
Naw Eh Th'Blay (citizenship 26/1/09) Queensland	F	24	Grade 10	Dip Account ing TAFE complet ed	11 years 2.5 yrs	Teacher	Admin. Asst, CBO	Sgaw Karen, Burmese, English and little Thai	Sgaw	Baptist
Naw Say Mu WA	F	23	Grade 10 + FSP + 2 nd yr BA	Cert. IV TAFE	22 years 7 mths	Student	Student	Sgaw Karen, English, Burmese, intermediate Thai	Sgaw	Baptist
Saw Hsa Thaw (citizenship 26.01.09) ACT	M	22	Grade 10	Cert. II English finished – To begin Grade 11, 2009	9 yrs and 2 yrs IDP before	No specific role	F/T Grade 11 student + working p/t cleaner	Sgaw Karen, Burmese, Thai and English	Sgaw	Baptist

APPENDIX E: COMMUNITY LEADERS' DEMOGRAPHICS – AUSTRALIAN STUDY

Name	State of Residence	Gender	Role in Relation to Karen Community in Australia	Year of Arrival in Australia	Age Group
Saw Daniel Zue	New South Wales	M	Secretary General, AKO	2006	40s
Naw Hay Rae	New South Wales	F	Volunteer community worker; TISS interpreter; Church Secretary, Karen Baptist Church	1996	20s
Pee Bella	Queensland	F	Volunteer Community Worker	1964	60s
Pu Paul Kyaw	Western Australia	M	Settlement Officer; Volunteer Community Worker; Deacon, Karen Baptist Church	1994	50s
Naw Say Wah	Victoria	F	Volunteer Community Worker; Church Secretary, Karen Baptist Church	1999	30s
Thramu Tamla Paw	Queensland	F	TISS Interpreter; Community Worker; Assistant Pastor, Karen Baptist Church	2006	20s
Thra Thataw Kunoo	Victoria	M	State Chairperson, AKO; Chairperson, Karen Anglican Church	1997	40s
Thra Toke Han	New South Wales	M	Pastor, Karen Baptist Church	1997	40s
Saw Htoo Sah Wah	Western Australia	M	National Youth Leader, AKO; Chairperson, Karen Baptist Church	2006	20s
Thra Tamla Gaw	New South Wales	M	State Secretary, AKO; Principal, Karen Language School; Auditor, Karen Baptist Church	2006	50s

