

**Living on the borderline: The lived experience of young
migrants and refugees growing up on the Thailand-
Myanmar border**

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By

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Under the supervision of Professor Robbie Gilligan

Declaration

I, Derina Johnson, declare that this thesis has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university and it is entirely my own work.

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Summary

This PhD study explores the lived experience of young people growing up in contexts of displacement and lack of documentation along the Thailand-Myanmar border. Decades of political persecution and economic hardship in Myanmar have resulted in millions of people crossing into neighbouring Thailand seeking safety and opportunity. There, a minority are provided shelter in refugee camps, while the vast majority live as “illegal migrants” under Thai law. Generations of young people are now growing up in these circumstances of restricted mobility, limited access to education, narrow migrant labour market demands, and everyday vulnerability to exploitation and poverty.

These circumstances echo the evolving global dynamics of cross-border population flows and protracted displacement, in which “refugee” and “migrant” populations overlap and interweave, and young people spend their formative development years in legal and social marginalisation. To date, however, little research has been conducted in relation to the lives of these young people, particularly in non-western contexts. There remains a lack of knowledge about how growing up in these dynamic contexts of displacement and lack of documentation impacts the young people’s everyday lives. Little is also known about the young people’s own perspectives and concerns, or the strategies and resources that young people seek out and employ to manage their challenging circumstances.

The study sought *to explore the ways in which young men and women, growing up in contexts of displacement and lack of documentation along the Thailand-Myanmar border, understand and negotiate their everyday legal and social realities*. The town of Mae Sot, one of the main gateways between Myanmar and Thailand and home to hundreds of thousands of “illegal” migrants and self-settled refugees, was chosen as the main site of data collection. Data was also collected in Mae La Refugee Camp, 45 minutes’ drive from Mae Sot, as well as Chiang Mai University in northern Thailand. A social constructionist epistemology and a qualitative case study methodology were chosen to facilitate a bottom-up, person-centred approach which would prioritise the young people’s voices, perspectives and strategies, within their cultural contexts.

An initial key informant interview phase paved the way for the main data collection phase which took place between June 2015 and April 2016. During this period, 35 young men and women aged between 18 and 24, who were either born in Thailand or who arrived alone or with their families before the age of 12, were recruited. In total, 44 semi-structured interviews, facilitated by visual prompts, were conducted. Recruitment was driven by the principle of diversity in order to capture the heterogeneity of the migrant and refugee populations in the region. The qualitative nature of the study facilitated flexibility within the design and process in order to ethically and sensitively respond to the young people’s personal, cultural and contextual circumstances. The study was grounded in a

collaborative approach. An extensive advisory network, made up of key community members, young men and women, and an academic mentor from Chiang Mai University, provided feedback, guidance and aided recruitment throughout the research process. Due to the diverse ethnic makeup of the region, interviews were conducted in Burmese, Sgaw and Pho Karen and English. A comprehensive and systematic interpretation and translation protocol was employed over the course of the fieldwork.

The young men and women in the study grow up deeply aware of their “illegal” status in Thailand. Legal and social exclusion shape their worlds and, to go about their everyday lives, fear and risk are ever present. Those who are protected in the refugee camp face the same treatment outside. They face a choice between boredom and stasis in the camp, and the threat of arrest, detention and deportation, but the potential of work and income, outside.

The young people constantly seek to regularise their legal status. While some have verbal assurances of safety, others possess a myriad of different informal and official documents, providing vastly different amounts of security and access to services. Safety is never guaranteed and the young people develop an array of ways of being in the world to keep themselves safe.

Most of the young people recognise the benefits living in Thailand has meant for them and their families. While some young people hope to stay in Thailand, most envision a future in Myanmar. For some, Myanmar remains home, while for others it is a pragmatic strategy. For most of those in the refugee camp, resettlement promises a life of potential after the wretchedness of the camp.

While living in extraordinary circumstances, the young people strive for ordinary lives. The interdependent family unit underpins many of the young people’s motivations, decision-making and aspirations. While education is considered an important pathway out of poverty and precarity, in the uncertain world of the Thailand-Myanmar border, it holds no guarantees. For many young people, work—even in the informal, low-paid, unreliable migrant work sector—is the only way to a “decent” future and a better life for them and their families. Suffering and struggle are accepted and expected along the way. Hope, grounded in the reality of uncertainty, and their demonstrated capacity to overcome challenges throughout their young lives help to sustain their sense of agency.

The study provides a nuanced and detailed insight into the lived experience of growing up “illegally”, and how such labelling can have significant pervasive impacts on young people’s everyday lives, sense of self and wellbeing. Together, the concepts of liminality, precarity and “illegality” reveal the complex and multidimensional constraints these young people face. However, despite their challenges, the young people are far from passive victims and also refuse to be reduced to such terms. Their endurance, persistence and resistance extends understanding of youth agency and resilience in extreme adversity.

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Dedication

To the young men and women who dare to dream of an ordinary life.

“It’s like living in a prison sometimes... I want to go around freely. I want to go like other people go.”

(Thin, 19, born in Thailand, undocumented)

“I am not a troublemaker.... Some people are proud of the country they are from... but for me, I don't even want to belong to any country, I just, I just need opportunity to study and to work and to make my life.”

(Kwi, 22, fled conflict in Karen State when he was 11 years old)

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Introduction

“Many a researcher would like to tell the whole story but of course cannot; the whole story exceeds anyone's knowing, anyone's telling.” (Stake, 1994, p. 240)

This study is about young people growing up in contexts of displacement and lack of documentation along the Thailand-Myanmar border. The research is qualitative, adheres to a social constructionist epistemology, and through a case study methodology, examines the everyday lived experience, challenges and negotiations of young men and women living predominantly in and around the border town of Mae Sot in northwest Thailand and the nearby Mae La refugee camp. The study is necessarily partial but the emphasis on understanding the context of experience as well as the lived experience brings the research as close as possible to the whole story.

Refugees and migrants from Myanmar in Thailand are frequently discussed together as “fleeing the country’s poor economic conditions and repressive regime” (Ducanes & Abella, 2009, p. 2). While a hundred thousand people from Myanmar currently reside in refugee camps along the Thailand-Myanmar border, between two and three million others live outside the camps, considered “illegal migrants” under Thai law (Green, Jacobsen, & Pyne, 2008). As the circumstances compelling people to cross the Thailand-Myanmar border extend into decades, generations of young people in Thailand are growing up with restricted mobility, limited access to education, narrow migrant labour market demands, and everyday vulnerability to exploitation and poverty (Green et al., 2008; Petchot, 2014; Worland, 2014).

These circumstances are not unique to the Thailand-Myanmar border. At the time of the commencement of this research project, one third of the 45 million people displaced globally was aged between 10 and 24 years (UNHCR, 2014). Patterns of global displacement are becoming increasingly dynamic, with more and more people forgoing, or unable to access, refugee camps, and instead finding themselves navigating lives in new countries without appropriate immigration documentation (Brees, 2008; Chatelard, El-Abde, & Washington, 2009). Undocumented populations’ absence from population databases and their necessary “clandestine existence” in their host countries often combine to leave their realities hidden and their needs obscured (Bakewell, 2008; Chatelard et al., 2009; IOM, 2013c; Mann, 2008; UNHCR, 2013). For young people, this means spending their formative development years in contexts of extreme legal and social marginalisation (Rosalind Evans, Lo Forte, & McAslan Fraser, 2013; Guerrero & Tinkler, 2010; Mann, 2010).

Literature on the experience of growing up without documentation has to date predominately come from research in western contexts, particularly the United States (e.g. Bloch, Sigona, & Zetter, 2011; Gonzales, Suárez-Orozco, & Dedios-Sanguineti, 2013; Mendez-Shannon, 2010; Yoshikawa, Suárez-Orozco, & Gonzales, 2016). There remains a paucity of empirical or theoretical insight into such

young populations growing up in non-western contexts (Chatty & Mansour, 2011b; Mann, 2010; Raeymaekers, 2010). This study seeks to explore these under-represented realities.

My own interest in this subject area emerged over the course of three years working on the Thailand-Myanmar border developing psychosocial programmes for children and youth in migrant and refugee communities in and around the town of Mae Sot. As one of the main gateways between Thailand and the much beleaguered Karen State in eastern Myanmar, the town of Mae Sot is home to hundreds of thousands of Myanmar “migrants”, and its booming economy benefits greatly from their labour (Pollock & Aung, 2010). Quickly, it became clear to me that the discrete categorisations of “the refugee” or “voluntary migrant” were wholly inadequate to capture the heterogeneous circumstances of the young people living there. Also plainly evident were the harsh realities of lack of documentation facing young people, the difficulties accessing and staying in education, the restricted work options and often exploitative work conditions, and the extraordinary risks inherent in going about everyday lives. I noticed the dearth of research undertaken with these young people or others in similar contexts. I began to wonder what they would say about their circumstances, concerns and dreams. I wondered how they simply managed growing up in such adversity. These thoughts led me to undertake the current PhD study.

Coming from a background in play therapy and psychotherapy, I was primed to take a bottom-up, person centred approach and seek out the perspectives of young people themselves. As this approach closely aligns with social work values, which include, in addition, the principles of social justice and human rights, which further resonate with my topic, the School of Social Work and Social Policy at Trinity College Dublin offered a natural fit for my study. Professor Robbie Gilligan, whose research interests span vulnerable young populations, migration, poverty, resilience and support, across Irish and international settings, offered an informed perspective and a wealth of research experience.

Together, and in initial consultation with my previous community partners from the Thailand-Myanmar border, we explored a focus for the study that would acknowledge the complexity of the border migrant and refugee populations, and explore the young people’s challenges and concerns as they understood them, while also leave space for the exploration of their own strengths, strategies and supports. The Thailand-Myanmar border hosts a diverse migrant and refugee population. This heterogeneity exists for the young people also, differing across ethnic, religious, family, living, work, and education circumstances, as well as geographical locations. The bottom-up nature of the research and targeted diversity strategy serve to privilege realities often hidden and overlooked, and take into account the dynamic and fluid nature of “refugee” and “migrant” populations. Focusing on the young people’s own perspectives, understandings, meanings and motivations, deliberately foregrounds them as social actors actively engaged in responding to the circumstances of their lives. Their self-identified priorities, concerns, challenges, strategies and valued supports, offer insight into the nature of youth agency and resilience in the face of ongoing adversity. This focus on the lived experience

within complex contexts of displacement and lack of documentation, furthermore offers new insights to the wider discussion of the migration-displacement nexus.

The core aim of the research thus became *to explore the ways in which young men and women, growing up in contexts of displacement and lack of documentation along the Thailand-Myanmar border, understand and negotiate their everyday legal and social realities.*

At the core of the research was the acknowledgement of the multiple paradigms and world-views that came together in this intercultural study. The principles underpinning social constructionism facilitated this dialogue, emphasising the socially constructed nature of concepts such as “the refugee”, “migrant” as well as the cultural notion of “youth”. A qualitative case study methodology allowed for an in-depth analysis of the young people’s lived experience within their context. This approach supported the principle of flexibility, which necessarily informed recruitment and the informed consent and interview processes, and helped me sensitively and ethically respond to the cultural and contextual circumstances of the young men and women.

The study focuses on the elicited narratives of young people aged between 18 and 24 who were either born in Thailand or who arrived alone or with their families before the age of 12. The study’s methodological approach involved an initial preliminary key informant stage in September 2014, followed by an immersive 10-month individual semi-structured interview stage with the young people, between June 2015 and April 2016, primarily on-site in the town of Mae Sot, with visits to Mae La refugee camp and Chiang Mai University. Prior to each phase, I obtained ethical approval from the School of Social Work and Social Policy as well as permission to proceed from the Mae Sot Migrant Community Ethics Advisory Board.

The initial preliminary stage involved 20 key informant interviews, which explored the main challenges and opportunities facing young people in the migrant and refugee communities, and the current regional political fluctuations. Fourteen interviews were conducted in English and six interviews in Burmese with assistance from a local interpreter. The findings were used to refine the overall focus and design of the research study, and ground it in concerns and issues relevant to the communities. The main data collection involved a total of 44 semi-structured interviews, facilitated by visual prompts, with 35 young men and women. During this phase a further four key informant interviews were conducted for ongoing contextual insight. Extensive field notes and reflections on observations, informal conversations and my own personal research journey were recorded throughout both phases.

In line with the ethnic diversity of the context, the interviews were conducted in a number of languages: English, Burmese, Sgaw Karen and Pho Karen, with the aid of an interpreter where necessary. A comprehensive interpretation and translation protocol was applied throughout the fieldwork. A wide community advisory network, involving key adults in the community, a youth

advisory team and a locally based academic mentor based in Chiang Mai University provided critical insights and feedback over the course of the study.

The overall study was both a personal and academic endeavour. Returning to the “borderline” – the common term used by people in the migrant community – as a student and a researcher, as opposed to a practitioner, took adjusting both on my part and that of my previous community partners. The ten months of fieldwork was intense and both physically and emotionally demanding. In order to reach more hard-to-reach young people who work seven days a week and live in the remote countryside around Mae Sot, I sometimes found myself driving my scooter, with my interpreter as a passenger, in pitch-black darkness or pelting rain through unlit pot-holed country lanes. Interviews held by the riverside were interrupted by passing goats and the occasional chicken jumping up on the table in front of us. My appreciation of the complexity of the intercultural enterprise, built up over years of working in the region, meant I worked closely with my interpreters, translators and advisors in order to make sense of data and ensure the cultural and contextual congruity of my emerging interpretations. My approach to negotiating language issues exploited my own understanding of the Burmese language and ameliorated my deficiencies in the Karen languages. Establishing and sustaining the ongoing momentum of the study was challenging and required constant re-strategising. Life is never straightforward or predictable for any migrant on the border. As all my interpreters, translators and advisors were from the community themselves, their own circumstances often shifted and changed. Family illness and deaths, extended visits to Myanmar, legal issues, arrests and detention all featured in their lives over the course of my research. That these issues echoed those described by the young men and women in the study, intensified my compassion and motivation for the research.

This dissertation is organised into nine chapters:

Chapter One considers the context of the Thailand-Myanmar border, commencing with an explanation of the choice of “Myanmar” over “Burma” and other complexities in terminology in the country. The chapter moves on to look at the history of Myanmar, particularly at the factors which have contributed to the millions of Myanmar people living in Thailand, as well as at the more recent trends of reform and ongoing uncertainty at the time of the data collection in 2015 and 2016. The chapter then goes on to outline the nature of Myanmar’s migrant and refugee populations in Thailand, with specific attention given to the contexts of the town of Mae Sot and Mae La refugee camp, the two primary sites of data collection in this study.

Chapter Two reviews the relevant literature to date, commencing with that which relates to youth, migrant legal documentation and the social construction of the “illegal migrant”, and the evolving nature of displacement and “the refugee”. The chapter then explores literature which provides insight into the lived realities, challenges, concerns and strategies of young people living in contexts of

displacement and lack of documentation. Given the aforementioned paucity of research concerning such populations in non-western contexts, I draw also from wider literature related to young people growing up in adversity in the Global South.

Chapter Three describes in detail the choice of methodology and process undertaken. It provides a rationale for the choosing the epistemology of social constructionism, a qualitative methodology, the overall framework of a case study, and the methods of data collection and analysis. The chapter pays particular attention to how I went about the design of an intercultural, reflexive, ethical and collaborative study. Throughout the chapter, I highlight the nature of my own positionality, and how I sought to manage its benefits and limitations throughout the study. I describe in detail my management of language, interpretation and translation issues.

Chapter Four is the first of four chapters to report the findings that emerged from the main data collection period. It introduces the study participants, describing the nature of their legal documents, their family circumstances, their living environments, and their education and work lives.

Chapter Five turns to the young people's own understandings of the nature of their legal documentation, how they consider their challenges and the strategies they employ to overcome them. The chapter also explores how the young people discuss the emotional impacts of growing up in legal precarity.

Chapter Six explores the young people's narratives commencing with their sense of place and displacement, and the nature of their understandings of their relationship to Thailand and Myanmar in the present and in terms of their future orientation. The second half of the chapter concerns another critical anchor in the young people's life: the family.

Chapter Seven moves on to explore the strategies employed by the young people to manage and overcome the challenges in their lives. This commences with the meaning of education, and the young people's engagement in seeking out education pathways. Secondly, the chapter discusses the nature of the young people's work strategies and how they frame and reframe their decision making in terms of school drop out and work options.

Chapter Eight provides a deeper analytical lens, and considers the relevance of key concepts in the study: liminality, precarity, "illegality", and how these concepts relate to youth transitions, agency and resilience. This discussion chapter extends these concepts, through moving back and forth between acknowledging the ongoing intense adversity of the young people's lives, as well as the relentless resistance—and hopefulness—the young people demonstrate to maintain their sense of agency and demonstrate their resilience. Despite the adversity of their lives, they endure.

Chapter Nine concludes the thesis. It commences with an overview of the study and a summary of the main findings. It then turns to methodological insights around the adoption of a nuanced collaborative approach to managing language and cultural differences. The chapter considers the contribution of the research to the understanding of the lived experience of “illegality”, to exploration of the problematic binary notions of “migrants” and “refugees”, as well as to further extension of the concepts of youth agency and resilience. The chapter concludes with acknowledgement of the limitations of the study, recommendations for future research and some concluding reflections on the overall research process.

Chapter One

Migrants and Refugees on the Thailand-Myanmar Border

Introduction

“Here in Thailand, it is like we are standing on the twig. We always have to be careful, because if they want to shake the twig, we fall down.” [*Key informant C, Sept. 2014*]

In this chapter, I explore the nature of life in Myanmar which precipitated the young people’s or their parents’ departure from the country. I outline the environment in Thailand for such young people, and the ongoing challenges of life as “migrants” or “refugees”. I take a special focus on the two contexts of data collection, the town of Mae Sot and Mae La Refugee camp. Throughout the chapter, I draw on literature from academic, United Nations, governmental and non-governmental (NGO) sources as well as my own knowledge and understanding built up over years of living and being connected to the context.

Myanmar

Terminology: Myanmar vs Burma

According to David Steinberg, “No issue has been more confusing to the uninitiated, and more polarizing to those who are conversant with that society, than the name of the state.” (Steinberg, 2015, p. 3) Under the British colonial rule, the country’s name was anglicized to “Burma”, while remaining “Myanmar” in the Burmese language. In 1989, the military junta introduced a series of official terminological changes. The country became “Myanmar” and the people “Myanmars”, the dominant “Burman” ethnic group became known as “Bamar”, and the Karen ethnic group, the “Kayin”. Both versions are commonly used—and both are used throughout this thesis. Meanwhile, the language remains “Burmese” as it corresponds to the language of the main Burman/Bamar ethnic group.

With regards the Burma/Myanmar name change, within the country, under an oppressive regime intolerant to dissent, many people adapted to the new name. Some international bodies, such as the United Nations, also complied. Others, who questioned the legitimacy of the self-imposed military government to change the country’s name, continued to use the name Burma. Continuing to use the name Burma represented a point of resistance against the junta. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi led this resistance, and many of her supporters, both in-country and in exile, as well as her international supporters, including governments, such as Ireland, followed her lead. In 2012, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi explained to the international community, “I shall always refer to this country as Burma, until the Burmese people decide what they want it to be called” (McQuillan, 2012).

Since then the country has seen many changes, and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's position seems to have also softened. In April 2016, she took a light-hearted tone with foreign diplomatic corps stating,

“So it is up to you, because there is nothing in the constitution of our country that says that you must use any term in particular... I use Burma very often because I am used to using it. But it does not mean that I require other people to do that as well... And I'll make an effort to say Myanmar from time to time so you all feel comfortable” (Irish Independent, 2016).

True to her word, in her welcome speech to the IDA the following June, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, used both Burma and Myanmar during her 10-minute speech, referring to “the real Burma. The Burma of villages” and, later, “We are told that the women of Myanmar are the equal of the men”, and “Many say that we are lucky, that Myanmar is a fortunate country because we have many natural resources” (The World Bank, 2016). It seems that this approach may be the one also adopted by the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade whose country page is entitled Myanmar/Burma, and moves between both Burma and Myanmar throughout the page (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2017).

In my own experience, living on the Thailand-Myanmar border during 2010-2013, and working with exiles and other activists who opposed the military junta, I automatically adopted the name Burma. Returning to the border in 2014, I sought advice and clarity from key informants and other key partners on the border and, for the most part, they confirmed a shift towards accepting the name Myanmar. Like Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the implementation was not always hard and fast. I recall one key informant who assured me that she was now using the name Myanmar, but when listening back to the audio recording I noticed she continued to use Burma throughout the interview. In recognition of the effort to accept the name Myanmar among my local sources, as well as in the media and international discourse, I decided to adopt the name Myanmar.

Slips and oversights are common. Jonah Fisher, long-standing Myanmar correspondent for BBC, recalled how in the first email regarding arranging an interview with Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, who he dubbed as the “most powerful man in Myanmar”, he or his researchers had “foolishly” referred to the “Burmese” rather than “Myanmar” army, unsurprisingly leading to their initial emails being ignored (Fisher, 2015).

“Shwe” (Golden) Myanmar

Myanmar is a vast country in South East Asia, as rich in history and ethnic diversity as it is in natural resources, including minerals, natural gas, oil, rubies, jade and other precious gems. According to

the controversial 2014 census¹, the population exceeds 51 million people, seventy percent residing in rural areas (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2015). Asia is home to 60% of the world's indigenous ethnic peoples (United Nations, 2007) and Myanmar itself is made up of 135 distinct recognised ethnic groups (and other unrecognised groups such as the Rohingya in Rakhine State), enriching the tapestry of the country with their own languages, clothing and customs (Chaturvedi, 2012). While the 2014 census results for ethnicity remain to-date withheld, estimate figures from the US Central Intelligence Agency state that seventy percent of the country's population consist of the main Burman/Bamar ethnic group residing in the central low lands around Yangon, while the two main minority ethnic groups are the Shan in the northeast, making up nine percent of the total country population, and the Karen/Kayin—made up of two sub-groups Sgaw and Pho—in the green and resource-rich eastern mountains, making up seven percent (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017). While representing one third of the country's population, ethnic minorities occupy more than half of the total land area of the whole country, stretching deep into the country's mountains and dense forest border areas (Chaturvedi, 2012). Buddhism is the majority religion of the country, comprising 88% of the population, according to the 2014 Census, with the remainder mainly Christian and Islam, while less than one percent reportedly follow traditional Animism (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2016).

Myanmar's Past

The colourful geographical and cultural landscape of the country has been the backdrop to a painful past and persisting conflict and poverty. The country gained independence from Britain in 1948 but continued instability in the nascent nation culminated in a military coup d'état in 1962 (Chaturvedi, 2012). Effectively for the next five decades, a military dictatorship prevailed, and Myanmar turned its back on western international community, who, in turn, imposed strict sanctions on what was dubbed an “outpost of tyranny” (Condoleezza Rice quoted by Thant Myint-U, 2006, p. 40).

From the outset, the military junta implemented the “brutal” “four-cuts” strategy, intended to quash ethnic minority insurgencies in the so-called “black zones” (Moe, 2011). The strategy, which cut off all vital subsistence lines—food, funds, intelligence and recruits—in the same process cut off local populations' access to supplies necessary for survival (Moe, 2011). For decades, ethnic populations faced the Tatmadaw's (the Myanmar army) arbitrary destruction of villages; the rape of women; the killing and recruitment of children into armed forces; both subtle and overt religious persecution; and prohibitions including the use of ethnic language and growing crops. These conditions have

¹ *Controversy remains around the census due to contentious terminology and the exclusion of conflict-affected areas and the estimated 800,000 Rohingya (Drennan, 2014)*

contributed to the world's longest civil war and enduring animosity between minority ethnic groups and the majority Burman/Bamar (Chaturvedi, 2012; CPPCR, 2009).

According to Benedict Rogers (2012), between 1996 and 2011 in eastern Myanmar alone, the military destroyed over 3,700 villages and displaced over one million people. Schools were closed or barred from being built (CPPCR, 2009). Lack of healthcare services led to persistent high rates of communicable diseases, AIDS mortality, and low life expectancy in comparison to other countries the region (Chongsuvivatwong et al., 2011). Myanmar's infant and under-five mortality rates were the highest in the region and one in three children under five years of age was malnourished, with even worse health and survival outcomes in the most remote and border regions of the country (Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development & UNICEF, 2012). Two thirds of households in rural and ethnics areas of south east Myanmar were found to be "unable to meet their basic needs" (The Border Consortium, 2011). Benedict Rogers suggests that the culmination of the treatment of ethnic groups by the junta could have been described as "a form of attempted genocide" (Rogers, 2012, p. xxi). Karen State, in southeast Myanmar bordering Thailand, became embroiled in its armed struggle against from as early as 1949 as it fought for its own independence to form its "Kawthoolei" or "land without evil", as agreed in the terms of the country's independence. The subsequent decades' long protracted battle and the lasting consequences of the Tatmadaw's "four cuts" strategy has resulted in a Karen identity which may be less to do with a common language and culture than it is about a shared historical discourse of persecution and discrimination (Sharples, 2015).

During this time, the country faced ongoing political turmoil and natural disasters. Democracy movements were suppressed without mercy. The 1988 student uprising was violently subdued and the subsequent landslide victory by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and her National League of Democracy (NLD) party in the 1990 government elections was not only ignored by the junta but resulted in the house arrest of the beloved "Lady" for over two decades. In 2007 the country—and international community who for the first time had access in real time to the atrocities via Burmese underground media outlets—reeled from the ruthless treatment of students and monks by the government forces during their peaceful Saffron Revolution (Rogers, 2012). After the destruction of Cyclone Nargis in 2008, the international community was shocked once more by the junta's "systematic obstruction of relief aid, wilful acts of theft and sale of relief supplies, forced relocation, and the use of forced labour for reconstruction projects, including forced child labour" and preferential treatment of the Burman/Bamar ethnic group (Suwanvanichkij et al., 2009, p. 2).

Movement towards Reform

Despite "grossly and blatantly manipulated elections" in November 2010, the subsequent new "quasi-civilian" government embarked on an unprecedented period of political, social and economic

reforms in Myanmar (Lim & Yamada, 2012; Steinberg, 2015, p. 5). The country's beloved "Lady", Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, was freed, as were hundreds of political prisoners. Censorship was relaxed, parliamentary debating was permitted, and communication with the western world was commenced once more.

In 2012, Aung San Suu Kyi won a "free and fair" by-election and finally took her place in the parliament (Steinberg, 2015). The "ethnic problem" received attention and temporary ceasefires were tentatively reached as early as 2012. Long term negotiations led to the signing of the National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) between the Myanmar Government and the Karen National Union and the All Burma Students Democratic Front in early August 2015 (Democratic Voice of Burma, 2015b). This was followed by the official NCA ceremony in October 2015 involving eight armed ethnic groups, while seven other groups withdrew at the final moment in protest against the government's and military's insistence on the exclusion of certain other groups (Progressive Voice, 2016; Reuters, 2015).

The subsequent 2015 government elections saw Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD party win, and while denied the right to presidency by the constitution, The Lady acts as the de facto leader of the state in her self-appointed position of State Counsellor. As Myanmar continued to show improved economic performance, 2015 also saw the World Bank upgrading Myanmar from "low-income country" to a "lower-middle income country" (The World Bank, 2015).

Myanmar at Present

At the time of data collection, uncertainty regarding the continuation and expansion of reform had begun to creep in. Two peace conferences in 2016, including one led by NLD, were of "little note" (Progressive Voice, 2016). Concerning the east and southeast of the country—the main points of origin for those crossing the border to Thailand—civil society human rights groups continued to report widespread armed conflict in Kachin State and northern Shan State, as well as "ongoing and escalating" armed conflict in Karen state (Progressive Voice, 2016). Reports of instances of land mines, forced labour, arbitrary taxation, and extortion as well as the continued distrust, deterring people from accessing education and healthcare, as well as farmlands and forests for livelihood activities were ongoing (Karen Human Rights Group, 2016). As observed by David Steinberg observed in 2015, for Myanmar, "A final curtain is unknown, and even unscripted", (Steinberg, 2015, p. 1). For those living outside the country, this uncertain reality faced them when imagining possible return.

Myanmar-Thailand Migration



Figure 1: Map of Thailand-Myanmar border adapted from Progressive Voice (Dec 2016)

Myanmar's historically troublesome domestic conditions and its geographic location at the edges of emergent Asian economies have contributed to its ongoing dynamic internal and international mobility, and its designation as one of UNHCR's protracted displacement "hotspots" (IOM, 2013b; UNHCR, 2014). Benedict Rogers refers to the unenviable dilemma of Myanmar people have for decades been faced with living as "captives in their own nation" or fleeing to neighbouring countries, which is considered a crime under Myanmar law (Rogers, 2012, p. xvii). Historically, Myanmar has lacked a comprehensive policy regarding emigration, particularly regarding low-skilled workers, meaning that most people leave its borders irregularly or "illegally", sometimes independently and other times through informal brokers linked to trafficking networks and smugglers (A. Hall, 2012).

An extensive and porous 2401 kilometre-long mountainous border separates Thailand and Myanmar. Like many neighbours, the countries share a fraught past. While considered each other's "traditional enemy", Thailand remains Myanmar's second largest investor (Steinberg, 2015). Even as far back as 1947, General Aung San spoke about the countries' "strong ties" nurtured through the refuge given to Myanmar people by Thailand during World War II leading to "many in Burma who have come to regard Siam as a kind of second home" ("Looking Back At Gen Aung San's Address to a Thai Delegation," 2016). The decades-long civil conflict and economic devastation has meant that this tradition continues, and, depending on the source, there may be up to between two to four million Myanmar people living in Thailand (Dowding, 2015; A. Hall, 2012; Huguet, Chamrathirong, & Natali, 2012; IOM, 2013a).

There are three official transit and trade points or "friendship bridges" between Myanmar and Thailand, the largest situated between the towns of Myawaddy in Myanmar's Karen State and Mae Sot in Thailand's Tak Province. The towns are separated by the Moei River which enables unofficial

crossings alongside the official checkpoint. The porous nature of the whole border facilitates crossings at multiple points, by boat, car, motorcycle, truck, or by foot, often unofficially and unseen (Vungsiriphisal, Auasalong, & Chantavanich, 1999). While Karen State makes up much of the border, its permeability attracts people from all ethnic groups—including the majority Burman/Bamar ethnic group—who cross for a myriad of reasons.

Myanmar “Refugees” or “Migrants”, or phenomena on a continuum?

The United Nations differentiates very clearly between the refugee who,

“Is outside his or her country of nationality or habitual residence; has a well-founded fear of being persecuted because of his or her race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion; and is unable or unwilling to avail him- or herself of the protection of that country, or to return there, for fear of persecution (see Article 1A(2))” (UNHCR, 2011, p. 3)

And the voluntary migrant who,

“May leave his or her country for many reasons that are not related to persecution, such as for the purposes of employment, family reunification or study. A migrant continues to enjoy the protection of his or her own government, even when abroad” (UNHCR, 2011, p. 3).

Regarding those leaving Myanmar’s borders, however, these binary definitions prove inadequate. Inge Brees (2008) highlights the limitations of assumptions regarding ‘voluntary’ migrants from Myanmar:

“Although the final trigger may be a form of extreme poverty, the root causes of the displacement are political and military. They are all fleeing a pervasive climate of insecurity, human rights abuses, loss of livelihood options and lack of protection from the military government. making ‘self-settled refugee’ a more appropriate term for the substantial number of Burmese citizens outside the refugee camp” (Brees, 2008, p. 383).

Brees’ statement also highlights how Myanmar migrants, unable to rely from their government when in the country, are unlikely to be able to “enjoy” its protection once abroad. Susan Banki and Hazel Lang (2008) suggest that, due to the pervasive “underlying political factors” behind all migration out of Myanmar, it may help to consider the idea of a continuum rather than any distinct binary categorisations of migrant and refugee:

“Differentiating the [migrant] from the [refugee]... is an inherently problematic effort, because it seeks to separate those fleeing from political persecution from those fleeing economic hardship, two phenomena that are often intertwined. This division is more of a continuum than a dichotomy” (Banki & Lang, 2008, p. 64)

Thailand’s 1979 Immigration Act regards all undocumented aliens, including those in need of asylum, as “illegal migrants”, and subject to arrest, indefinite detention or deportation (Green et al., 2008; UNHCR, 2012a). Thailand is not a signatory to the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 protocol, rejecting it on the grounds that it imposes external norms on Thai sovereignty which contradict national interests (Green-Rauenhorst, Jacobsen, & Pyne, 2008). Nonetheless, since 1984, Thailand has attended to the protection needs of hundreds of thousands of people fleeing civil war and persecution in Myanmar (Sciortino & Punpuing, 2009). At the time of data collection in 2015 and 2016, over 100,000 people remain in nine refugee camps along the Thailand-Myanmar border (The Border Consortium, 2016).

These are small numbers considering the millions of Myanmar people living in Thailand, up to 50% of whom are considered to potentially warrant the consideration of “people in refugee-like situations”² (Green-Rauenhorst et al., 2008; Stanton Russell, 2002). While some people have been unable to access the refugee camps, Brees (2008) reports that most people desire to avoid the “warehousing” of the refugee camps, and prefer to have their own say over the direction of their futures. Thailand benefits greatly from migrant labour, which helps to meet the country’s economic targets in the face of an increasing deficit of Thai workers (Brees, 2008; IOM, 2013a).

Life in Thailand’s “migrant communities”

The range of documents held by migrants in Mae Sot has been described as “heterogonous, numerous and occasionally surprising” (Reddy, 2015, p. 252). Karen Jacobsen and Ruth Nichols (2012), in their report for International Rescue Committee, reflect this complexity as they sought to distinguish between “undocumented” and “documented” Myanmar migrants in Thailand. Undocumented migrants were considered:

“Those who identified as undocumented, with expired documentation, stateless, or with an informal card. In addition, we regarded those with various IDs or documents from UNHCR as undocumented because this is effectively how Thai authorities regard those

² Sharon Stanton Russell explains that “the term ‘people in refugee-like situations’ is used to describe those — such as the Bedouin in Kuwait or Iraq, and Burmese in Thailand or Malaysia — who are stateless or denied the protection of the government in their countries of citizenship or habitual residence, but who have not been recognized as refugees” (Stanton Russell, 2002, p. 2)

migrants outside the camp with UNHCR cards or papers.” (International Rescue Committee, IRC, 2012, p. 3)

In comparison, “documented migrants” were considered:

“Those who were born in Burma and had a foreign passport with valid visa, a temporary passport from the Nationality Verification process, a work permit, registration, an ethnic minority card, or permanent residency” (IRC, 2012, p. 3)

There is also considerable fluidity involved. The cost of registration for official work permits, the nature of their temporariness, and the frequency with which immigration legislation changes, leave the majority of Myanmar migrants in Thailand without legal status, or easily slipping from “documented” to “undocumented” (Green-Rauenhorst et al., 2008; IRC, 2012). Furthermore, even possessing formal migrant work permits, one’s legal status in the country can remain “illegal, pending deportation” for having entered Thailand initially without the proper documentation (IOM, 2011). Clear differentiation, therefore, between those who are “documented” or “undocumented” is far from straightforward.

In Thailand, migrants from Myanmar by and large take on the “3D”—dirty, dangerous and demeaning—jobs (Green-Rauenhorst et al., 2008; Human Rights Watch, 2017). Human Rights Watch list the many vulnerabilities and abuses faced by migrant workers in Thailand, including “physical abuse, indefinite detention, and extortion by Thai authorities; severe labour rights abuses and exploitation by employers; and violence and human trafficking by criminals, sometimes in collaboration with corrupt officials.” (Human Rights Watch, 2017, p. 4)

There are gendered risks and vulnerabilities resulting from the gendered migrant labour market in Thailand. Young men are more likely to be exposed to physically hazardous conditions, whereas young women are often paid lower wages (Caouette, 2001). Young migrant women are considered “more compliant” by employers and therefore can find it easier than young men to access work, but are also more frequently found within “hidden” and illicit sectors, such as domestic or sex work, where employers are less likely to register workers (Caouette, 2001). Migrant women without legal documentation face heightened vulnerability to physical and sexual abuse and lack of access to protection or legal redress, particularly while being trafficked illegally within the country (Caouette, 2001; Jacobsen & Nichols, 2011; Sciortino & Punpuing, 2009).

Legal documentation impacts access to healthcare. Many migrants with work permits have benefitted from Thailand’s much lauded Universal Health Care Coverage Scheme (Gruber, Hendren, & Townsend, 2013). The scheme is dubbed the “30 baht scheme” (less than €1) in reference to the maximum a person can be charged for a single visit, and has been credited with reducing infant mortality in Thailand by thirty percent. Undocumented workers cannot access this scheme. Child-

bearing undocumented young women face heightened risks due to limited access to maternal health care during pregnancy and birth—as well as reproductive health education in general—and can face losing their job—and any associated legal documentation—when they get pregnant (Kusakabe & Pearson, 2010; Pollock & Aung, 2010). Lack of child care options due to limited social networks causes further economic strain once the child is born (Kusakabe & Pearson, 2010).

Over thirty percent of migrants have lived in Thailand for between five and nine years (IOM, 2013a). While many workers seek to establish themselves in Thailand first before sending for their children and extended families (Huguet & Punpuing, 2005), the number of migrant children being born in Thailand is increasing, currently estimated to be between forty and fifty percent (Dowding, 2015; Huguet et al., 2012). According to Thailand's Ministry of Interior figures, cited by NGOs Save the Children and World Education, there are over 390,000 migrant children living in Thailand (Huguet et al., 2012). However these figures only include the children of legally registered migrant workers and, to date, there remain no separate records of migrant children, leaving these children—and in particular those who are undocumented—even more “invisible” than their adult counterparts (Dowding, 2015; Jampaklay, 2011; VSO, 2013, p. 15). Based on the above estimates of the percentage of Myanmar migrants within the total migrant population, it could be estimated that up to a quarter of a million Myanmar migrant children live in Thailand.

Pearson and Kusakabe refer to Sylvia Chant's notion of “intergenerational transmission of disadvantage” to describe how exclusion, disadvantage and the limited rights and services available to undocumented migrant parents in Thailand is passed on to the next generation (Sylvia Chant (2004) in Pearson & Kusakabe, 2012). While all children in Thailand come under the Royal Thai Government Child Protection Act (2003), lack of identification documentation of the child or parents, fear and distrust of Thai authorities, as well as limited and unsystematic implementation of laws, often leave migrant children without the protection of the law (CPPCR, 2009).

Birth registration for migrant children born in Thailand was only introduced in 2008 under the Thai Civil Registration Act. This entitles all children born in Thailand to a birth certificate, regardless of their parents' legal status, allowing for potentially easier access to future Thai residency and work permits, although not Thai citizenship (CPPCR, 2012). Prior to this—which includes the young men and women in the current study—children born to migrants could not have their births registered (UNDP, 2014).

While children born to migrants should have the right to citizenship of their parents' country of origin, access is not always possible to those born to Myanmar migrants. To obtain Myanmar citizenship, a person must be able to provide nationality documentation details of parents and grandparents as well as information concerning the registration of great-grandparents (TNI-BCN, 2014). In many rural and conflict areas of Myanmar, previous generations never traditionally

possessed identity papers, either due to difficulty of access or lack of applicability to their daily life (Lindsay & Mort, 2015). Other times documents were lost, and cost or bureaucracy prohibited replacement (Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development & UNICEF, 2012). For those born in Myanmar, being born in the ethnic “black” zones, can greatly impact the likelihood of their birth being officially registered, while others may have lost papers when their home was destroyed or while they were fleeing danger (Lynch & Teff, 2009). These circumstances leave many young people growing up in Thailand “de facto” stateless (CPPCR, 2012; A. Edwards, 2009; Lynch, 2008; Lynch & Teff, 2009). Statelessness is to live without a legal home (Lynch, 2008). It can block access to education and essential health care, limit freedom of movement, and heighten risks of exploitation and abuse, further reduce work options and leave young people facing futures of uncertainty (Lynch, 2008).

Education is one of the top priorities for families leaving Myanmar (Green-Rauenhorst et al., 2008). However, despite Thailand’s Education for All policy, entitling all children in Thailand to a basic education, irrespective of legal status, a 2013 VSO report estimates that less than 20% of migrant children attend school in Thailand. Barriers include inconsistent education policy implementation, lack of documentation and associated fear of arrest, and parent circumstances, including the nature of transient migrant work, lack of transportation, poverty, as well as the fear of discrimination, lack of awareness of Thailand’s Education for All policy, and Thai language issues (VSO, 2013, pp. 10–11).

While Thai labour law permits the employment of children only from the age of fifteen years and under strict stipulations (Royal Thai Government, 1998), it is common for employers to simply choose not to register their child workers in order to evade restrictions (Jampaklay, 2011). It has been estimated that children may constitute up to 20% of the total migrant workforce in Thailand (Jampaklay, 2011). A 1999 Chulalongkorn University report cited migrant children working from as young as three years old, mainly across four sectors: general domestic work; “portering” or carrying in fishing, agriculture or construction sectors; textile and packing factories; and vegetable-picking or other small vendor-based work (Vungsiriphisal et al., 1999).

Thailand’s immigration policy restricts all migration to Thailand to temporary, meaning all migrants and their families are expected to depart Thailand at some point. As a result, all services for migrant workers and their families, remain provisional and limited, and integration drives are considered unnecessary (Chantavanich & Jayagupta, 2010; Huguet et al., 2012). Political tensions, security concerns and the perception of migrants’ “burden” on services, such as healthcare, are commonly cited reasons for this continued treatment of migrant populations (Brees, 2008; Chantavanich & Jayagupta, 2010; Government Public Relations Department, 2013; Human Rights Watch, 2014). Public opinion in Thailand supports this treatment (Sunpuwan & Niyomsilpa, 2012). Meanwhile, while 80% of migrants wish to return to Myanmar in the future, half have no concrete plan or

timeframe as yet (IOM, 2013a). With no memory of or links to Myanmar, it may be expected that many migrant young people will remain in Thailand despite the uncertainty of their legal status and precarity of their lives (Huguet et al., 2012; IOM, 2011).

The town of Mae Sot

As noted earlier, the town of Mae Sot in Tak Province is located across from one of the three “Friendship Bridges” representing the official transit and trade points along the Thailand-Myanmar border along Karen State. A “tough” remote border town, Mae Sot “has seen its share of armed conflict, battered refugees, natural disasters and other hurts” (Thornton, 2014). Just before data collection commenced, clashes between the Myanmar army and the DKBA (a Karen armed splinter group) occurred less than 30 kilometres from the Mae Sot district across the Thailand-Myanmar border, prompting the deployment of Thai military rangers along the border (Bangkok Post, 2015).

Mae Sot has long had a strong Burmese presence and, according to the International Organization for Migration, “Thais sometimes jokingly refer to Mae Sot ... as Mae Sot District, Tak Province, Myanmar” (IOM, 2008, p. 185). The town’s proximity to the conflict-beleaguered Karen State has given rise to three refugee camps within a few hours’ drive of the town—Mae La 45 minutes’ north, Umpiem Mai 2 hours’ south and Nu Po 5 hours’ south. In terms of a gateway to the rest of Thailand, Bangkok is 8 hours’ drive from Mae Sot through “blind bends, rugged mountain climbs, steep descents and gut-wrenching twists” (Thornton, 2014). Along this road are several security checks, particularly en route in land, whereupon buses are boarded by police checking passenger documentation, and removing—and often detaining and deporting—those whose documentation does not pass muster.

Mae Sot has strong manufacturing, construction, and agriculture sectors, making it a chief destination for many coming across the Myanmar border. The town benefits greatly from migrant labour, contributing to its designation as one of Thailand’s special economic zones (Pollock & Aung, 2010). While Mae Sot’s official population rests at 120,000, the number of unregistered migrant workers living in the town is estimated to be between 150,000 and 300,000, with children making up ten percent of the total figure (CPPCR, 2009).

A 2008 study by Green-Rauenhorst and her colleagues explored Mae Sot’s migrants’ reasons for leaving Myanmar (Green-Rauenhorst et al., 2008). While only fifteen percent of their Burman/Bamar respondents cited conflict as their antecedent for migration, with the remainder citing economic reasons only, thirty percent of other ethnic groups included conflict-related reasons for their flight (Green-Rauenhorst et al., 2008). For those citing conflict-related reasons, Green-Rauenhorst and her colleagues consider the protections provided by the migrant worker registration programme to be

“dangerously inadequate and inappropriate substitute for internationally recognized refugee protection standards” (Green-Rauenhorst et al., 2008, p. 3).

According to International Rescue Committee (IRC), more than one third of migrants around the town of Mae Sot live in unsafe or unsanitary housing and 60% of households are situated in dangerous locations (IRC, 2012). Those living without migrant worker documentation fare worst across all spheres of life: more likely to experience abusive treatment, to feel unsafe, to feel powerless to complain to the authorities or to safely access justice, to be unemployed and to face challenges accessing healthcare in Mae Sot (IRC, 2012). Undocumented young men, perceived as a security threat by the police and community, face arrest and violence at the hands of police and Thai youth gangs, particularly at night (Kusakabe & Pearson, 2010). Young migrant women, to escape potential physical and sexual assault by police and youth gangs, avoid going out and end up restricted to their homes (Kusakabe & Pearson, 2010).

A 2009 survey by Shoklo Malaria Research Unit found that over thirty percent of migrant children around Mae Sot suffered from malnutrition with rates of stunting and wasting greatly higher than Thai children and children in the refugee camps (Carrara, Canavati, & Nosten, 2009). As mentioned earlier, undocumented migrants do not benefit from Thailand’s “30 baht scheme”. In Mae Sot, Dr Cynthia Maung’s Mae Tao Clinic has since 1989 sought to address this shortfall, providing free healthcare to migrants and refugees in the area within limited resources.

To meet the educational needs of its children, the Myanmar migrant community in and around Mae Sot run a number of “learning centres” (MLCs), so-called as they—and the education they provide—are not usually accredited by the Thai government. At one stage MLCs were thought to number over 100, however recent budget cuts and drives by community overseeing organisations to standardise teaching and curriculum have reduced the figure by approximately one third in recent years. Many MLCs have boarding houses attached, providing accommodation to young people who are separated from their families for different reasons (Vungsiriphisal, Chantavanich, Khanchai, Jitpong, & Kuroiwa, 2010).

In recent years a small number of MLCs have succeeded in helping students access education accreditation by the governments of Thailand and Myanmar (Dowding, 2015). Other learning avenues, available to a limited number of students, include “post-10” schools focusing on community development training. Others prepare students for the United States’ GED exam, through which a small number of young people, supported by highly-competitive scholarships, can access third level education at universities in Chiang Mai or Bangkok. A number of other small, non-formal and vocational training opportunities prepare young migrants for the workforce in and around Mae Sot, focusing on Thai language, practical maths and other life skills as well as work experience.

However, 200,000 or 60% of migrant children are estimated to be out of school, with an almost 50% drop-out rate found across among migrant learning centres in Mae Sot in 2015, most commonly at the elementary level (around 10 to 12 years) (Dowding, 2015). Most of this drop-out is permanent, to work or help their family in the home, however drop-out can also be temporary for seasonal agricultural work, sometimes connected to family economic problems or illness (Dowding, 2015).

Mae La Refugee Camp

The refugee camps along the Thailand-Myanmar border have been in existence for over three decades. The protection and care of the residents of the nine refugee camps—including food rations, shelter, water and hygiene, and a number of health, education and livelihoods services—are led by UNHCR and a number of NGOs, who support the Thai Government Ministry of Interior. Mae La refugee camp is the largest of all the refugee camps in Thailand with a population in 2016 of 38,000, with almost 50% under 18 years of age (UNHCR, 2016a). At first glance, before noticing the barbed wire and the armed gates, the camp is a picturesque sight of traditional bamboo huts spanning 450 acres of softly rolling hills set against a steep mountainous backdrop. Often referred to as “Beh Klaw” by its Karen residents, Mae La was established in 1984. The camp residents are predominantly Karen, and the majority religions are Buddhism and Christianity (UNHCR, 2016a).

Over the decades, thousands of young people have grown up in the camps with no experience of the outer world. Life in the refugee camp is routine, with few activities or events (Vungsiriphisal et al., 2010). Young people spend most of their time between school and family daily domestic chores including caring for siblings, pumping water, cooking and cleaning (Vungsiriphisal et al., 2010). Only since 2010, have amendments to Thailand’s Civil Registration Act entitled children born in the refugee camps to birth certificates (UNHCR, 2011). Reports indicate that implementation is not consistent, with children, born to parents who are not registered in the camps, reportedly being denied their birth certificates by Thai camp authorities (TCR, 2016).

Over the years, Mae La refugee camp has become a hub for refugee education, attracting thousands of students from other camps and inside Myanmar to study there temporarily (UNHCR, 2016a). Education in the camp is run by the Karen Refugee Education Entity (KRCEE). As also occurs in the migrant community in and around Mae Sot, during their education, many young people reside in “boarding schools” or “dormitories”—residential facilities often connected to schools. These boarding houses provide shelter to young people who have come to the refugee camp alone after losing their parents to conflict or separation, as well as those who came or were sent by their families to the camp for their safety or education (Vungsiriphisal et al., 2010).

Despite opportunities to access school until Grade 10 or partake in a range of vocational training programmes, young people in the camps find themselves with few opportunities to apply their

learning, continue their education, or earn any money (Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, 2008). After spending all their lives in the camps, many young people know little about job possibilities or market opportunities (Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, 2008). While education was stated as a priority, disillusionment contributed to a high drop-out rate as young people and their families struggled to see the benefit from attending school when work prospects were generally limited to low-skilled, often agricultural work in the "illegal" migrant sector outside the camps (Petchot, 2014; Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, 2008).

Existing educational possibilities were put under more pressure due to funding cuts in 2011 which led to the introduction of small fees to students, resulting in increased drop-out rates and some students risking arrest and deportation by leaving the camp to collect bamboo to raise money (Karen News, 2011). Other education challenges echo those of the migrant community and relate to the lack of official recognised education accreditation from the refugee camp schools (Dare, 2015). As repatriation talks commence, transferability to the Myanmar educational system has become an important issue being addressed (Dare, 2015).

A third-country resettlement programme was introduced in 2005, promising a better life while also the loss of the dream of returning home (Banki & Lang, 2007). For some, fears of a new country, new language and new culture was enough of a deterrent (Banki & Lang, 2007). During the 2005 assessment process, thousands of asylum seekers in the refugee camps were recognised by the Provincial Admission Boards (PAB) (UNHCR, 2016a), leading to the resettlement of over 105,000 people across the nine camps (ECHO, 2016). From Mae La Refugee Camp alone, as of March 2016, 30,000 people had been resettled, predominately to the USA and Australia, with a another 2,000 accepted, and a further 12,500 applications submitted (UNHCR, 2016a).

In the last number of years, the interest of receiving countries in resettling the refugee population has waned, and in 2013, the biggest recipient country, the United States, closed its programme to new applicants (Saw Yan Naing, 2016). A "Fast Track" procedure was negotiated by UNHCR commencing in 2012, with a "last chance" call out in mid-2016, helping unregistered camp residents access the PAB and join immediate family members who were already resettled and/or were in the process of resettlement (Saw Yan Naing, 2016).

One of the reasons for this slowdown in resettlement was due to initial ceasefires in 2012 which led to the opening up of the possibility of return to Myanmar. Since 2013, UNHCR has been assessing spontaneous returns of refugees back to southeast Myanmar (UNHCR, 2016b). In July 2015, building upon the more general "Strategic Roadmap for Voluntary Repatriation" released earlier in the year, UNHCR unveiled the first draft of its voluntary repatriation plan (Democratic Voice of Burma, 2015a). The plan was met with concern by members of the Karen and Karenni Refugee Committees who felt that the repatriation dialogue was coming "a little too soon" (Democratic Voice of Burma,

2015a). At the time of data collection, lack of information and rumours were fuelling camp residents' confusion, fear and anxiety over potential imminent closure of the camps (Burma Partnership & Burma Link, 2015; Progressive Voice, 2016).

UNHCR describe how the “prolonged confinement of Myanmar refugees in camps has created many social, psychological and protection concerns. The coping mechanisms of refugees have been eroded, and the restrictions imposed on them have increased their dependence on assistance” (UNHCR, 2012a, p. 221). The 2016 Thai Committee for Refugees Foundation's (TCR) submission to the United Nations highlights the UNHCR's findings of the “long-standing human rights abuse” felt by camp residents, including fear of deportation, prolonged encampment, dependence on charity for survival and the inability to work or gain an income (TCR, 2016). Those who arrived to the camps after 2005 or who were not registered during that narrow timeframe, face additional challenges due to a lack of legal status (UNHCR, 2012b). As “closed camps”, their inhabitants have no legal right to work in Thailand (UNHCR, 2012a). Nonetheless, despite risk of arrest and deportation, up to two fifths, according to UNDP, have worked outside the camps, often in the surrounding rural agricultural areas (Burma Partnership & Burma Link, 2015; UNDP, 2010). After the military coup d'état in Thailand in 2014, restrictions on the movement of undocumented people in border areas were applied more strictly, making it less easy for refugees to leave the camps (UNHCR, 2015).

In 2013, only between one tenth and one third of surveyed refugees across the camps indicated wanting to return to Myanmar one day, if peace was guaranteed, preferring to stay in Thailand or be resettled to another country (IOM, 2013b). However as repatriation increasingly becomes more a matter of *when* rather than *if*, people are increasingly anxious and concerned as conditions of conflict, insecurity, impoverishment and underdevelopment—including pertaining to education, health, land and livelihoods—persist (Banki & Lang, 2008; Progressive Voice, 2016). A 2015 report refers to the persistence of the same violence and human rights violations that compelled people to leave their homelands, including:

“Presence of armed groups, fighting, increased militarization by the Burma Army, land tenure insecurity, restricted livelihood opportunities, landmines, lack of recognition for health and education certificates obtained in the camps and arbitrary arrests and imprisonment” (Burma Partnership & Burma Link, 2015, p. 12)

The report concludes:

“The refugees embody the long history of violence, repression, trauma and human rights violations by the successive Burmese military regimes and now devised by the current Burma Government and also implemented by the Burma Army. If Burma hopes to welcome its refugees back, they must commit to deep structural changes and build

the trust lost during the decades of prolonged conflict, which still continues today.”
(Burma Partnership & Burma Link, 2015, p. 23)

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a contextual overview of the circumstances in Myanmar which have resulted in millions of people crossing its borders, as well as the conditions in Thailand awaiting them. Many overlapping factors have propelled people across the border into Thailand, and their location in the migrant community or refugee camp does not necessarily reflect their impetus for migration. Thailand hosts a hundred thousand people in its nine refugee camps, however, potentially hundreds of thousands more Myanmar people across Thailand may merit refugee protection. While Thailand offers migrants work permits, inexpensive healthcare and free basic education, this chapter has demonstrated that for many migrants and refugees these services remain out of reach. Many children and young people face similar social and legal exclusions and an “intergenerational transmission of disadvantage” passed down by their undocumented migrant parents (Sylvia Chant (2004) in Pearson & Kusakabe, 2012).

In the next chapter, I move to a review of the theoretical and empirical literature which provides further insights into, and mechanisms for guiding understanding of the lived experience of young people growing up in contexts of displacement and lack of documentation.

Chapter Two

A Review of the Literature

Introduction

In this chapter, I explore the recent theoretical and research insights pertaining to the main concerns of the study: youth, migrant legal documentation issues and protracted displacement, as well as literature which provides insights into the realities of living and managing young lives in adversity and precarity. Given the person-centred, bottom-up approach to this study, I draw in particular from research adopting a qualitative methodology and which prioritises the experiences, perspectives and voices of young people themselves. I also pay attention to research which highlights the social constructed nature of “youth”, the “migrant” and the “refugee”, and stretches understanding of the lived realities of these populations beyond homogenising generalisations. Due to the limited literature that exists pertaining to these populations, particularly that which concerns undocumented young people in non-western contexts, or the Global South, I draw on insights from literature which more generally concerns the lived experience, challenges and strategies of young people facing adversity in different non-western contexts.

The chapter begins with the concept of youth and the notion of youth-as-transition, highlighting the culturally- and contextually-dependent nature of both. I then turn to some of the debates surrounding the issues of (lack of) legal documentation and displacement, and the limitations of available terminology in the face of complex realities. Following this, I explore the concept of precarity, which is commonly applied in relation to the vulnerabilities and uncertainties of refugee and migrant populations. I then begin to outline the everyday impacts of these insecurities for young people.

The latter half of the chapter contends with young people’s negotiations of adversity. I begin with an introduction to the complex concept of resilience, outlining some of the general resilience-supporting processes that have been identified in the literature. I then move on to conceptualise young people’s agency, focusing on literature which explores the expression of agency within considerable constraints. The chapter concludes with a consideration of the overlapping concepts of identity, home and belonging in relation to migrant and displaced populations.

Youth

Defining youth and young people in non-western contexts

Deborah Durham, discussing the African context, astutely observes how attempts to define youth reveal it to be “a very shifty category that seems to fit many people at some time but no one consistently” (Durham, 2000, p. 116). While biological processes, such as puberty, are universal,

constructed concepts such as childhood, youth, as well as the transition process into adulthood, remain socially, culturally, geographically and temporally bound (Clark-Kazak, 2014; Durham, 2000; Rosalind Evans et al., 2013; Hart & Tyrer, 2006; James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998; Juárez & Gayet, 2014; Maira & Soep, 2004; Punch, 2002b). Societies' understandings of childhood or youth evolve in line with social, economic and political changes, which, in turn, change the lived experiences of young people within those societies (Boyden & Mann, 2005; Rosalind Evans et al., 2013; James et al., 1998; Prout & James, 1997).

There are few consistently agreed ideas in terms of who, what and when people are in fact “youth”. The United Nations categorise youth as between 15 and 24 years (UNDESA, n.d.). However in non-western or Global South contexts, the age range of youth can be much broader, continuing up to 35 years (Honwana, 2012). In the Myanmar context, while the 1993 Child Law stipulates youth as between 16 and 18 years of age (The Child Law, 1993), the forthcoming National Youth Policy is expected to follow recommendations from a Youth Forum in November 2016, which suggested a much broader age range of 16, or even 15, to 35 years (Eleven Myanmar, 2017; The Myanmar Times, 2017).

Across cultural contexts and societies, youth can often seem to occupy the “ambiguous” position between children-in-need-of-care and independent self-sufficient adults (T. Hall & Montgomery, 2000; Honwana, 2012; Valentine, 2003). While often considered a third intermediate category between childhood and adulthood, “youthhood” is also a nebulous one, possessing an “awkward” unknown quality which engenders an “anxious, suspicious” public response to its constituents (T. Hall & Montgomery, 2000). While children have become the “idealised other”, and their special status, rights, needs and place in society enshrined within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, youth are often treated less sympathetically, or at least more ambiguously (Bourdillon, 2006; Clark-Kazak, 2009; Durham, 2000; Rosalind Evans et al., 2013; T. Hall & Montgomery, 2000; United Nations, 1989). In her focus on Israeli and Palestinian youth, Siobhan McEvoy breaks down the choice of terminology by international intervention frameworks in terms of differentiation between a “focus on vulnerable ‘children’, whose rights should be protected, ‘excess youth’ who destabilize regions and pose insurgency threats and ‘young people’ who are ‘assets’ that can be developed” (McEvoy-Levy, 2014, p. 313). Hall and Montgomery (2000) point out the “tactical terminology” utilised by NGOs and other such bodies to rally public sympathy by reframing youth in non-western contexts as powerless young victims, requiring support and intervention. However, when such young people resist, push back or seek their own way, they are perceived as ungrateful or “bad” (T. Hall & Montgomery, 2000). Gendered assumptions and stereotypes also pervade, presenting young women as “at risk from society” and young men “a risk to society” (Rosalind Evans et al., 2013). This discourse can hide young women’s strengths (Clark, 2007) as well as young men’s needs (Brun, 2000)

What is youth, and how it is experienced, differs greatly across cultures, contexts and time. War and displacement can transform traditional processes. Rosalind Evans and her colleagues, in research for UNCHR, quote one Afghan young man as saying, “As refugee youth in Iran, we don’t experience ‘youth’, neither have we experienced ‘childhood’ in its real sense” (Rosalind Evans et al., 2013, p. 26). Youth is often considered to represent an intermediate liminal stage, which resolves into adulthood (Valentine, 2003). However, I discuss next, the concept of youth-as-transition can also be problematic.

Youth as Transition

Commonly inherent in understandings of youth are ideas of transitions from childhood to adulthood. Within an otherwise flexible definition, the United Nations identifies youth as the “period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood’s independence” (UNDESA, n.d.). This transition commonly refers to changes across multiple life domains, particularly within education (departure from school), work (entrance into the job market), residency (independence), and family formation (marriage and parenthood) (Juárez & Gayet, 2014).

Like many other aspects of the concept of youth, the notion of youth-as-transition is culturally constructed and neither universally uniform nor static (Maira & Soep, 2004). Understandings of young people’s transitions into adulthood have been largely driven by western ideologies, and a number of aspects can be found to differ in nature across non-western settings. The linear transition from education to employment, for instance, while emerging now also as problematic in western contexts, has long been far from linear in many non-western contexts of social inequality and poverty (Juárez & Gayet, 2014). The evidence of working children shows that entry into the workforce is a problematic indicator of the transition into adulthood (Bourdillon, 2006; Juárez & Gayet, 2014). Cynthia Lloyd (2005) points out that in many non-western contexts, young women, who get married and have children before the age of 18, are not considered as yet adults, problematizing also the transitional marker of marriage and parenthood.

Similarly problematic is the notion of a transition from dependence to independence. The literature points to how in many non-western cultures and contexts, adulthood is in fact not defined by independence, but rather by interdependence within one’s family network, based on critical “intergenerational contracts”, relational obligations, responsibilities and sense of “duty” (Jolliffe, 2016; Kabeer, 2000; Punch, 2002b, 2015; Suárez-Orozco, Yoshikawa, Teranishi, & Suárez-Orozco, 2011). The lack of state welfare systems available in non-western contexts, particularly for marginalised groups, demands these intergenerational contracts or “shared understandings” within families in which “parents look after their children when they are young and expect to be looked after by them in their old age” (Juárez & Gayet, 2014; Kabeer, 2000, p. 465; Punch, 2015). Pia Jolliffe (2016) discusses the centrality of interdependence and “intergenerational solidarity” within Karen

families in Thailand—one of the main ethnic groups in the current study—for whom reciprocity underpins relations between adults and children and being the “good” child involves willingness to support one’s family. Jolliffe quotes a Karen saying that “you have to pay back the milk you drink from your mother” (Jolliffe, 2016, p. 42). This “pay back” commences even during childhood where young people’s work is not considered work but assistance and occupational aspirations reflect communal family values and needs. While school is highly valued, so is young people’s contribution to the household (Jolliffe, 2016).

In many non-western contexts, it is not unusual for young people to continue to live with parents even after commencing work, getting married and entering parenthood, thus consigning residential independence as another questionable marker of adulthood. While economic independence may come earlier for young people in non-western contexts, interdependence within the family is frequently sustained throughout the life-course (Punch, 2002b). Drawing from her longitudinal ethnographic study with Bolivian young people, Samantha Punch (2015) discusses the “negotiated and constrained” interdependences of young people and their families which are shaped by a number of contextual and cultural factors, including birth order and gendered family dynamics, as well as educational and socio-economic circumstances. Young people move “back and forth” between work and education, relationships and migration, balancing their duty with finding their own way in the world. Their transitions are far from linear, nor based on the eventual goal of independence.

The experience of youth is constantly changing and evolving. In response to the evolution of youth in western “industrialised” contexts, Jeffrey Arnett introduced the concept of “emerging adulthood” to capture the period of “prolonged [...] independent role exploration... when little about the future has been decided for certain” (Arnett, 2000, p. 469). Such a life stage, Arnett emphasised, is only possible in contexts where adult responsibilities and roles *can* be postponed to the late teens and, therefore, is not universal. Indeed, with regards to undocumented young migrants facing “illegal” adulthoods in the United States, Suárez-Orozco and her colleagues (2011) refer to their experience is more of a “submerging” adulthood.

Within non-western contexts the notion of a “prolonged” period between distinct stages of childhood and adulthood has also been discussed, but with greatly different emphases. Honwana (2012) introduced the term “waithood” to explain the liminal “twilight zone” in which increasing numbers of youth in Africa find themselves suspended, unable to access decent education, develop transferable skills or establish secure livelihoods:

“[The young people] are forced to live in a liminal, neither-here-nor-there state; they are no longer children who require care, yet they are not yet considered mature social adults. They lead a precarious existence; their efforts are centred on trying to survive each and every day.” (Honwana, 2012, p. 3)

While Honwana's research focuses on youth in Africa whose adulthoods are "on hold", she points out how this "waithood generation" can be seen to be emerging globally as youth find themselves, for different reasons and in different ways, marginalised and lacking prospects for their future. Honwana suggests that the "precarious and improvised life that waithood imposes" may in fact become a longer term reality for many young people, eventually leading into representing a new form of adulthood (Honwana, 2012, p. 6). Elements of waithood are evident also in Evans and her colleagues' (2013) research for UNHCR related to the experiences of displaced young Somali men in Ethiopia. The authors discuss how the young men, faced with a lack of livelihood options, find themselves considered unsuitable and unready to marry, leaving them feeling trapped in youth. The young men's inability to progress in one dimension of life has knock on implications for other dimensions (Rosalind Evans et al., 2013).

Siobhan McEvoy-Levy (2014) applied the concept of waithood to describe the lives of young Palestinians in Israel. These young people, through economic exclusion and other forms of structural and direct violence, become "stuck in their transitions to adulthood", in prolonged or permanent social, cultural and economic limbo, unable to become adults in the "traditional" sense (McEvoy-Levy, 2014, p. 312). Notions of "going places" and "thwarted motion" were key themes throughout young Palestinians' narratives in McEvoy-Levy's study, relating to both to the young people's life trajectories and everyday restrictions on physical mobility. This "limited motion" affected the young Palestinians across multiple domains of their lives, including physical, social and psychological, as well as in relation to their economic and employment opportunities, leaving them with "limited room for manoeuvre" (McEvoy-Levy, 2014, p. 325).

The concept of liminality was adopted by Gonzales and Chavez (2012) and Suárez-Orozco and her colleagues (2011) with regards undocumented migrant youth in the United States. In such a context, the transition from childhood into adulthood can mean a step into "interminable liminality", "where the boundary between their everyday lives *in* the nation and their lives as *part* of the nation is maintained as a way of ensuring their control and social regulation" (Gonzales & Chavez, 2012, p. 256 italics in original; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011, p. 443). Suárez-Orozco and her colleagues (2011) consider the young men and women to be in a type of "(sub)merging adulthood", "trapped in a labyrinth of liminality", "in the shadows" or "below the surface of legality" (p.455). The young men and women must readjust their everyday lives, social relations, future aspirations and identities (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011).

Youth is an awkward, ambiguous category, experienced differently by young people across societies and contexts. As an intermediate liminal stage between cultural and societal notions of childhood and adulthood, it is constantly shifting and changing over time and across contexts. It can be perceived to have evaded some young people altogether, while others remain stuck in its liminality, their adulthood unresolved. As a result, it has become a broad uneasily defined concept. When

researching young people, therefore, it is important to avoid a-priori fixed notions, definitions and expectations of what “youth-hood” should look like, and remain open to diverging realities.

In the next section, I commence with a discussion of problematic terminology pertaining to the legal status of migrant populations. I then move on to discuss the also problematic nature of essentialist conceptualisations of “the refugee” and displacement.

The “Illegal” Migrant

Many countries, like Thailand, consider those without the correct legal documentation to be in a country to be “‘illegal’ aliens”. The “‘illegal’ migrant” is a social construction, created through the “discursive power of immigration law” which serves to frame migrants as “invasive violators of the law, incorrigible ‘foreigners’, subverting the integrity of ‘the nation’” (De Genova, 2002, p. 423, 2004, p. 161). Anthropologist and social theorist, Nicolas De Genova, explains how this construction is embedded through limiting individuals’ access to various essential everyday state-issued documents, such as driver’s licences, culminating in a form of “everyday ‘illegality’” in which there is “virtually no way for undocumented migrants to not be always already culpable of some kind of legal infraction.” (De Genova, 2004, p. 178) Through constant and targeted policing and surveillance, these policies and practices produce the “‘illegal’ alien”, and a naturalised association of illegality—and criminality—with the migrant, in both the public view and migrants’ own sense of identity (De Genova, 2004; Sigona, 2012; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011).

The notion of the “illegal” individual is undoubtedly highly problematic. The late Nobel Prize winner and Holocaust survivor, Elie Wiesel, is frequently credited with saying:

“You who are so-called illegal aliens must know that no human being is ‘illegal’. That is a contradiction in terms. Human beings can be beautiful or more beautiful, they can be fat or skinny, they can be right or wrong, but illegal? How can a human being be illegal?”

Indeed, no person can be “illegal”, only acts (Kubal, 2013). In the case of the present study, this labelling is possibly even more misleading when used in relation to some young people whose “illegal” status is not brought about by their own volition or independent actions, but is inherited through the migratory decisions of their parents (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011, pp. 440, 441). Some may never have even crossed a border in their lives, making even the label of “migrant” problematic and inaccurate.

How to handle this provocative terminology in scholarship is an ongoing debate. On the one hand, lies the argument that reproducing such terminology can serve to unwittingly legitimise such constructions; on the other hand, lies the argument that the omission can obscure the very real

everyday realities—the social exclusion, stigmatisation and implied criminalisation—of such political terminology in people’s lives (De Genova, 2002; Willen, 2007). De Genova (2002), and others, such as Sigona (2012), opt to signpost and denaturalise such terminology by using quotation marks when needing to refer to “illegal”, “legal” or “illegality” in relation to migrants. This approach maintains emphasis on the socially constructed nature of the “‘illegal’ migrant”, while allowing the focus to shift onto how such political labelling can impact the lived realities of those to whom it is assigned (De Genova, 2004; Sigona, 2012).

There are a myriad of associated alternative terms used across the literature, whose acceptability or unacceptability are regarded differently among scholars. De Genova considers the label “undocumented” favourable to both “illegal” and other, what he terms, “less obnoxious but not less problematic proxies”, including “‘extra-legal’, ‘unauthorized’, ‘irregular’, or ‘clandestine’.” (De Genova, 2002, p. 420). Conversely, Carola Suárez-Orozco and her colleagues (2011) consider the term “unauthorized”, to be “more neutral, descriptive term as opposed to undocumented, as many immigrants have some form of documentation but may find themselves in limbo pending a formal legal outcome” (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011, p. 440).

When placed within the context of the Thailand-Myanmar border, all of these binary terms are problematic as individuals’ legal position frequently changes, due to frequently vacillating immigration regulation and deportation practices, short-term amnesty programmes, and temporary work or stay permits (Thame, 2014). These circumstances imply that migrants may often find themselves between “legality” and “illegality” or straddling both.

The descriptive term “semi-legality” as discussed by Agnieszka Kubal (2013) offers intriguing nuance. In her study with migrants in Europe, Kubal discovered that few could be said to be fully “documented” or fully “undocumented”, but instead could be placed simultaneously in both categories, compliant with the law one some ways and in other ways non-compliant. For instance, an individual may have the legal right to stay in the country, but not the right to do the particular job they were doing (Kubal, 2013). Kubal’s participants were often keenly aware of their semi-legality, many recounting ways in which their realities required actions both within and outside the law, actions sometimes tacitly tolerated by authorities, while at the same time exposing the migrants to potential future sanctions (Kubal, 2013). Kubal was struck by how much migrants actively sought out ways to regularise their position, willing “to do whatever it takes to get closer to legality, in the sense of rightful and regularized status” (Kubal, 2013, p. 566).

Another interesting concept is that of “liminal legality”, proposed by Cecilia Menjívar (2006) to capture the extended uncertain and temporary legality of the experience of Central American immigrants in the United States. For this, Menjívar draws on Victor Turner’s work on liminality and Susan Coutin’s concept of “legal nonexistence”. According to anthropologist Victor Turner (1969,

1979) individuals become “liminal entities” during cultural transitions or “rites de passage” while they inhabit a temporary “ambiguous” status, in which they “elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space” (V. Turner, 1969, p. 95). According to Turner, “Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” (V. Turner, 1969, p. 95). In Turner’s conceptualisation of the state of liminality, an individual may experience invisibility, humiliation, “submissiveness and silence”, before he or she emerges, empowered, into resolution and re-stabilisation (V. Turner, 1969, p. 103, 1979). Coutin’s concept of “legal nonexistence” describes the subjugation of a group which is “physically present and socially active, but lacking legal recognition” (Menjívar, 2006, p. 1007). Such an ambiguous state can increase migrants’ vulnerability and their “erasure of rights and personhood”, leading to the legitimisation of the use of violence against them (Menjívar, 2006, p. 1008). Drawing the two concepts of liminality and “legal non-existence” together, Menjívar’s concept of “liminal legality” captures the ambiguous, extended temporariness and disempowering nature of migrants’ legal positions (Menjívar, 2006). Within liminal legality, the migrant is never fully documented nor undocumented and, unlike Turner’s liminal individual, their status never truly resolved nor their ultimate empowerment ever realised (Menjívar, 2006, p. 1001).

Kamowan Petchot (2014) considers Menjívar’s concept of liminal legality applicable to the status of some Myanmar migrant children attending Thai schooling under Thailand’s Education for All policy. These young people are issued 10-year “stay permits”, which, while retaining the young people’s “illegal” status in Thailand, provide them with temporary amnesty from deportation. The continued uncertainty regarding what happens once they leave education or once their temporary permit expires, Petchot (2014) concludes, sustains the young people in a state of liminal legality.

A final and alternative perspective comes from Bridget Anderson and Martin Ruhs (2010) who provide a useful reminder that the “status mobility” of migrants does not always result in an “illegal” end state, nor does it only hang on state policies. They point out that individuals can also demonstrate their own agency within their circumstances, even choosing to become “illegal” while waiting for more favourable long term legal opportunities.

The above literature demonstrates that the non-reflexive adoption of provocative labels such as “legal” and “illegal”, as well as other binary categorisations such as “documented” and “undocumented”, can obscure the real-world messy legal circumstances facing many migrants. Alternative terminology such as semi-legality and liminal legality may allow for a richer and more accurate reflection of people’s realities. However, I agree with De Genova’s point that to explore the lived experience of growing up with such contentious labels as “illegal” does necessitate their (careful) application. Following his lead, I use quotation marks in my discussion of “illegal”, “legal” or “illegality”, as necessary.

“The Refugee”

Human displacement due to conflict and disaster has always existed. However, it was only during post-World War II in Europe, that the “social category and legal problem” and the “knowable, nameable figure” of “the refugee” was created and subsequently enshrined by the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol (Malkki, 1995, pp. 497–498). Liisa Malkki (1995) points out that while definitions exist, there is no “proto-refugee”, no quintessential “type” of person that is a refugee, but that the term reflects “a broad legal or descriptive rubric that includes within it a world of different socioeconomic statuses, personal histories, and psychological or spiritual situations.” (Malkki, 1995, p. 496) Despite this, she highlights that, over time, both the political management and scholarly interest in refugees have functioned to, in fact, essentialise “the refugee” and the “refugee experience”. Such a treatment has led to the “construction-in-progress” of a generalised—and misleading—homogenised refugee “culture”, “identity” and “community” (Malkki, 1995). One consequence has been for “the refugee” to become synonymous with the “defenceless victim”, incapable of sustaining themselves (Brees, 2010). As I discuss below, the reality is vastly different.

Malkki (1992) highlights how refugees and human displacement have been “pathologised” through the naturalisation of the nation-state. The everyday use of metaphors for countries and nations, such as the “land”, “soil” and “roots”, linking people and place, mean that “people are often thought of, and think of themselves, [as] being rooted in place and as deriving their identity from that rootedness” (Malkki, 1992, p. 27). “The refugee”, who is “uprooted” from his or her motherland, represents an aberrant from the accepted “national (read: natural) order of things” (Malkki, 1992, p. 33). Drawing from Mary Douglas, Malkki describes the symbolic danger posed by “the refugee”, who as “matter out of place” becomes “liminal in the categorical order of the nation-states” (Malkki, 1992, p. 34). Simon Turner similarly discusses the perceived threat of the out-of-place refugee, who, “by belonging neither here nor there, [...] challenge[s] the assumed link between nation, state and citizen.” (S. Turner, 2016, p. 140).

If “the refugee” has any “place”, it is the refugee camp. Turner points out how the refugee camp represents the main accepted strategy “to deal with populations that disturb the national order of things” (S. Turner, 2016, p. 139). Turner argues how the “exceptional” space of the refugee camp confines and quarantines “matter out of place”, “prevent[ing] the contamination of the nation and its citizens” (S. Turner, 2016, pp. 140, 141). The guarded barbed wire perimeter of the camp, while often porous in practice, is a critical defining characteristic of the camp, shaping and defining the lives of those within its boundaries, and continually reaffirming categories of inclusion and exclusion (S. Turner, 2016). As the years stretch out, people find themselves in a state of “protracted

uncertainty” and “permanent impermanence”, “limbo” or “liminality” (Brun, 2015; Brun & Fábos, 2015)

The dynamics of displacement are continually evolving, particularly as displacement becomes increasingly protracted. After decades of steady displacement over the Thailand-Myanmar border, as in many other similar contexts, more and more displaced people are not to be found living in refugee camps nor seeking asylum, but pursuing their own destinies, blending in with other migrant populations, often in urban areas (Brees, 2008; Chatelard & Morris, 2011; Chatty & Mansour, 2011a; IOM, 2013c). As discussed in the previous chapter, in relation to Myanmar displaced populations in Thailand, while this choice means forfeiting the protections of refugee status and often entering into the world of “illegal” migration, many “prefer to have no support than to lose their freedom of movement and self-reliance” in the “cages” or “prisons” of refugee camps (Brees, 2008, p. 381; Chatty & Mansour, 2011a; Mann, 2010). While, as Inge Brees (2008) considers, these individuals may be best described as “self-settled refugees”, she points out how their lived reality is one of the “illegal migrant”.

Brees highlights additional dynamics of displaced populations that can render a “strict refugee/migrant categorisation useless” (Brees, 2008, p. 383). Many Myanmar families split up in order to diversify their livelihoods and minimise risks, with some moving within Myanmar, some crossing the border to work in towns, villages and rural areas in Thailand, and others, often the more vulnerable members, moving to refugee camps (Brees, 2008). Who is a “migrant” and who is a “refugee” in such contexts becomes blurred.

Furthermore, Brees demonstrates how displaced populations often continue to be mobile. Brees highlights that all displaced people “are in need of an income, regardless of choice of settlement” (Brees, 2008, p. 389). Basic rations in the refugee camps along the Thailand-Myanmar border often do not meet the full scope of food and non-food needs of families and, due to the very limited number of jobs available within the camps, many people must leave to earn money (Brees, 2008). Upon leaving the refugee camp, they revert to being considered and treated as “illegal migrants” under Thai law.

Finally, displaced populations often maintain ties with their countries of origin. On the Thailand-Myanmar border, some refugees return across the border to their villages to visit family, as well as exchange financial and other forms of remittances (Brees, 2010). Temporarily returns to their country of origin are common among displaced populations, providing opportunities to monitor the ongoing security situation, check on relatives, and manage personal and financial affairs, which can help them make informed decisions on if, when and where to relocate in the future (Chatty & Mansour, 2011a; Eastmond, 2006; Zetter, 2011). While such movements can cause their “fitness” within the category of refugee be called into question, they remain widespread as important strategies for people seeking

to improve their life opportunities and protect their families (Chatty & Mansour, 2011a, p. 105; Van Hear, 2003)

The evolving dynamics of displacement and displaced populations fit uneasily with available terminology and frustrate discreet definitions and categorisations of “the refugee”. Refugees are not only found in refugee camps. And migrants are not always “voluntary”. In contexts such as the Thailand-Myanmar border, as described both in this chapter and the previous chapter, these populations flow around each other and overlap, often inextricably intertwined and interacting. While governments and non-governmental organisations may find discreet categorisations useful, when applied in research, this approach risks treating diverse populations as an “undifferentiated mass”, leaving differing realities, motivations, needs and challenges of individuals and groups hidden and muted (Crisp, 2012). Furthermore, relegating displaced populations to “defenceless victims... who lack the capacity to sustain themselves... does not correspond with the reality” (Brees, 2010, p. 282). The agency of displaced populations should not be underestimated, nor should these populations be relegated to simply “choice” or “victimhood”. Scholarship which seeks to understand the lived experience of these populations has a duty to take “a denaturalizing, questioning stance” towards any fixed naturalised social constructions (Malkki, 1995, p. 517).

An irony exists in the myriad of descriptors and qualifiers which have evolved in the attempt to more closely capture the realities of migrant and displaced populations. Instead of providing more clarity, the variety can confuse matters further. Individuals whose legal status as a migrant is precarious are associated with a multitude of terms, including undocumented, “illegal”, extra-legal, irregular, informal, unauthorized, clandestine, semi-legal, liminal-legality, and so on. In contexts of displacement, an individual who resides outside refugee camps may be considered a self-settled refugee, an urban refugee, a displaced person, an out-of-camp refugee, an asylum seeker, an undocumented refugee, or refugee-like, and so on. Some researchers select terminology based on her or his own assessment of the context (e.g. Brees, 2008), while others choose theirs based on the self-identification of participants (e.g. Clark-Kazak, 2014). In some literature, including that relating to the Thailand-Myanmar border, the terms “migrant”, “forced migrant” or “refugee” are often used without distinction, assumedly for simplicity, although potentially overlooking the diversity that can exist, as has been discussed here.

When exploring literature pertaining to the lives, challenges and strategies of young people born and growing up in these contexts of displacement or parental migration, labels such as “migrant” or “refugee” become even more complex and erratically applied. Likewise, their associated descriptors. These complexities make choosing what literature is relevant—and how to search for it—challenging. A thorough search of the literature using a combination of all of these above terms, together with other search terms related to young people’s lived experience, strategies, aspirations,

agency, resilience, identity, and so on, particularly focusing on non-western contexts, the Global South, informed this review.

While I prioritised research in non-western contexts, much research to date in the area of young “undocumented” migrants has been limited to western contexts, particularly the United States—an imbalance I sought to address in the present study (See Yoshikawa et al., 2016 for a comprehensive review of this literature to date). Context greatly shapes the impacts legal status may have on young people, and these western contexts are greatly different from that of the Thailand-Myanmar border. While I acknowledge this caveat, the literature also offers useful insights into how the “externally imposed border” of migrant legal status can “enclose, penetrate, define, limit, and frustrate” the lives of young men and women at multiple levels and in multiple ways (Gonzales & Chavez, 2012, p. 256). It also reveals the ways in which young people in such circumstances are far from “passive subjects” of “illegality”, but often demonstrate remarkable adaptability and resourcefulness in the face of adversity.

Lives in Precarity

In the previous section, I interrogated the problematic constructions of the “illegal” migrant, the “migrant” in relation to young people who have never crossed a border in their lives, and “the refugee”. I also discussed how the lived experience can be much more fluid and dynamic than narrow definitions and categorisations often allow. In this section, I turn to consider the concept of precarity which is often pervasive across the literature pertaining to the experience of refugees and migrants (Banki, 2013b).

With its primary origins in the study of precarious labour and the work of Guy Standing, precarity refers to the experience of “teetering on the edge”, of lack of autonomy or control, leaving people commonly experiencing the four “A”s: angry from feeling cheated; anomic through constant defeats; anxious from constant vulnerability; and alienated by their lack of personal autonomy (Standing, 2011, pp. 19–21). Standing relates to the precarity of the undocumented migrant worker, the provider of cheap dispensable labour, who can “be fired or deported if necessary or if they prove recalcitrant” (Standing, 2011, p. 91). Standing refers to the “precaritised mind” which is “defined by short-termism”, leaving the individual unable to think long term or to their futures (Standing, 2011, p. 18). Similarly, Cecilia Menjívar (2006) points to how the precarity of perpetual legal liminality produces “suspended lives”. The research and activist initiative, *Precarias a la Deriva*, describes how the precarious life is in “permanent construction”, shaped by a “vital uncertainty with respect to the sustained access to the essential resources for the full development of the life of a subject.” (*Precarias a la Deriva*, 2005, p. 1)

Regarding the precarity of “migrant” and “refugee” populations along the Thailand-Myanmar border, Susan Banki’s work is particularly insightful (Banki, 2013a, 2013b). Banki (2013b) points to how the literature related to the precarity of refugees—particularly in relation to non-western or Global South contexts—has to-date been primarily limited to three aspects of the experience: firstly, the experience of “warehousing” in refugee camps, where the non-native population are quarantined away from the native populations and, thereby, opportunities to integrate; secondly, the “geographic, legal, temporal, and identity-related” precarity arising from protracted displacement contexts; and thirdly, the existence or absence of social networks, shaping worlds and opportunities. Banki argues that these discussions inadequately capture the full extent of precarity as experienced by these populations (Banki, 2013b, p. 7).

Banki brings attention to contexts such as the Thailand-Myanmar border where migrant legal status and access to useful social connections brings in another type of precarity into people’s daily lives. Banki (2013b) distinguishes between four levels or “shades” on a continuum of precarity, which ranges from low all the way to extreme, and with grey zones in-between. Firstly, low precarity is enjoyed by those, migrants or refugees, who possess formal legal permanent status—often citizenship—of their host countries. Mid precarity relates to those who enjoy the ability to “reside, move and transact openly”, either temporarily or informally due to documentation or social networks. High precarity corresponds to limited ability to “reside, move and transact openly” but where vulnerability is moderated by the protection of local or international agencies, as may be experienced by registered camp refugees and some urban undocumented refugees. Finally, the category of extreme precarity is reserved for those who have access to neither documentation nor effective social networks, such as unregistered camp inhabitants and undocumented urban refugees, and, according to Banki, some urban undocumented migrants in the global north (Banki, 2013b, pp. 8–9).

These levels of precarity relate closely to Banki’s (2013a) “precarity of place”, which she describes as the particular precarity experienced by the noncitizen who lives a life “not yet deported or detained” but vulnerable to both (p.454). Precarity of place sits on a continuum, with citizenship on one end and the noncitizen on the other. Where a person is placed on the continuum is dependent on their possession of “appropriate” documentation, pointing out that the possession of documents does not automatically signify a non-precarious existence, as well as “useful” social connections (Banki, 2013a). Precarity of place links “the idea of insecurity of residence with an individual’s fear of mobility” (Banki, 2015, p. 5). This insecurity and fear have both practical and psychological implications, from the fear of taking public transport, entering social spaces or accessing public offices, to the inability to plan or imagine one’s future. Banki points to the Thailand-Myanmar border, where while the Thai government’s migrant registration processes retain people in the legal category of “illegal, pending deportation” and facing restrictions on movement and access to services and social protections (Banki, 2013a, p. 458). Banki places social connections as important mitigators of

this precarity through the provision of safe environments and sharing of goods, services and information, such as legal aid. Banki cites examples from the Thailand-Myanmar border which illustrate how while social networks may not mitigate precarity fully, they serve often to “stand between” the individual and risk of immediate deportation (Banki, 2013a, p. 459).

The concept of precarity provides a potentially important mechanism for understanding the pervasive insecurity, vulnerability and “vital uncertainty” which can go hand in hand with contexts of displacement and lack of documentation in the lives of the young people in the study. In the next section, I turn to the literature which provides insight into the impacts on young people of a life “characterised by the unforeseen” (Mann, 2010, p. 264).

Everyday young lives in displacement and lack of documentation

Young people living in contexts of displacement and lack of documentation face multiple overlapping challenges affecting their day-to-day lives including poverty, family and community division, loss of social and material networks and support, lack of access to education or social protections, fear, restricted movement, ostracism and marginalisation. Recent research indicates that, over time, these everyday experiences can “erode” young people’s coping resources and impact their mental health in more pervasive and long-lasting ways than even early exposure to traumatic events of war or civil conflict (e.g. Fernando, Miller, & Berger, 2010; Mann, 2010; Meyer, Murray, Puffer, Larsen, & Bolton, 2013; K. E. Miller & Rasmussen, 2010). For instance, Sarah Meyer and her colleagues (2013), drawing on research on the mental health and well-being of young refugees from Myanmar living in a refugee camp along the Thailand-Myanmar border, found that young refugees identified the economic and social conditions within the refugee camp and their own disrupted family structures as the most critical issues in their lives, impacting social withdrawal, school drop-out, and alcohol use (Meyer et al., 2013).

For those living “illegally” outside refugee camps, everyday precarity and anxiety can often predominate young people’s everyday lives and concerns. In her ethnographic study with undocumented Congolese refugee young people living in the city of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, Mann (2010) reports how, rather than struggling with the memories of war-related experiences, the young people’s main preoccupation was surviving the economic and social conditions of their present everyday lives. In addition to managing their daily physical survival, the young people faced constant fear of deportation, daily social exclusion, discrimination, harassment, insecurity and unpredictability in their lives as “illegals”. Mann found that more so than even their considerable poverty, it was these multiple factors, through undermining their sense of humanity, self-worth, dignity and sense of purpose, which threatened to overwhelm them. The young people felt treated like “animals”, their worth reduced to “garbage”, leading them to even question their own humanity: “Am I a person?” asked one young man (Mann, 2010, p. 266).

Insight from young displaced Iraqis in the Middle East, highlights how the risks inherent in living “illegally”—such as the continuous threat of deportation—are magnified for those who had to flee for their safety (Chatty & Mansour, 2011a). They also point out how unskilled young refugees can find themselves “stuck” in their host countries, neither able to find a pathway out of the exploitative informal migrant work sector, nor back to a potential livelihood in their country of origin (Chatty & Mansour, 2011a).

Anxiety and fear are part of the everyday experience of people living without documentation. In Jeanne-Marie Stacciarini and her colleagues’ (2014) in-depth case study of a young woman brought to the United States by her parents when she was five years old, the young woman reported depression, social rejection and discrimination as part of everyday life, with chronic fear pervading all aspects of her life. Sarah Willen (2007), in relation to undocumented migrants in Israel, discusses how the everyday anxiety of living without documents can endure through the life course, becoming internalised within the individual. This embodied “illegality” is manifested in heightened bodily vigilance, sleep disturbances and altered experiences of space, time, sociality and self, forming a distinctive mode of “being-in-the-world” (Willen, 2007). Willen demonstrated that this embodied “condition of migrant illegality” persists even when in possession of legal documents. This experience crosses contexts. Drawing on her own ethnographic study with undocumented migrants in the United States, Cecilia Menjívar quotes one young man who reflected, “I am a [U.S.] citizen now, but I’m marked for life” (Menjívar, 2006, p. 1029).

Young people’s social and cultural worlds can be severely constrained by the physical and emotional restrictions of their precarious legal statuses. Drawing on research with young migrants in the United Kingdom, Sigona discusses the borders only visible to the undocumented young people, restricting their daily lives and limiting their ability to visit people or find safe spaces to meet (Sigona, 2012). These realities impact their existing relationships and their capacity to establish new connections. Fear of being reported to the authorities as well as language issues blocked many young migrants’ from forming relationships within their host community, while the “habit of secrets and lies” built up by the young person can even threaten established relationships (Sigona, 2012, p. 56). Sigona discusses how the world of isolation, secrecy and deceit, which are critical to stay safe, can develop into a deep sense of shame, leaving young people questioning their own morality (Sigona, 2012). Other studies reveal the struggles undocumented young people face relating to their peers with documentation, particularly as they observe the growing disparity between their life and that of their documented peers (Gonzales et al., 2013; Sigona, 2012; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011).

Lack of documentation can exacerbate and reinforce other existing systems of stratification and discrimination, such as gender (Menjívar, 2006; Petchot, 2014). For instance, isolation and lack of access to justice can severely impact undocumented young women’s ability to combat domestic violence (Menjívar, 2006). Gendered cultural traditions can also often follow migrant communities

to their new environments, leading to new vulnerabilities. For instance restricted mobility due to one's legal status can be intensified by traditional cultural constraints on the mobility of women, culminating in the further isolation of undocumented young women (Bloch, Sigona, & Zetter, 2009; Mendez-Shannon, 2010; Sigona, 2012).

As discussed earlier in this chapter, within both the migrant communities and refugee camps of the Thailand-Myanmar border, many young people find themselves living separated from their families as result of purposeful strategies by the family (Brees, 2008). The literature indicates that this separation from one's family can intensify young people's sense of isolation. Christina Clark (2006), in her ethnographic study with young separated Congolese refugees in Uganda, highlights how parental separation also often means separation from one's extended family and community network, leading to a deeper and more profound sense of "aloneness". Hirut Tefferi found that, for separated displaced adolescents in eastern Africa, missing out on daily family and community social practices and traditional rituals, can lead to weaker social ties linking the young person with their culture of origin (Tefferi, 2007).

In many contexts of poverty, lack of documentation, and displacement, including on the Thailand-Myanmar border, education is often considered essential to break the cycle of poverty, access sustainable livelihoods, facilitate upward social mobility, as well as help young people learn to manage their difficult and uncertain environments (Rosalind Evans et al., 2013; Inchauste, 2012; Mann, 2010; Vungsiriphisal et al., 2010). However, academic aptitude and motivation are often inadequate in the face of precarious legal status, leading to frustration, disillusionment and resentment (Gonzales, 2011; Mann, 2010; Menjívar, 2006; Petchot, 2014). In their study, Dawn Chatty and Nisrine Mansour quote one displaced young Iraqi man living Lebanon, who, despite holding a computer maintenance diploma, found himself unable to afford the extortionate cost of a work permit. The young man instead works as a hotel housekeeper: "Is that a job for me? No it's not, but what can I do?" (Chatty & Mansour, 2011a, p. 105).

In this section, I explored some of the literature providing insights into the ways in which living and growing up in contexts of displacement and lack of documentation can impact young people. This includes the erosion of coping skills through everyday hardships, the lasting impact of daily fear, the strain on social connections and limitations on developing new ones, as well as the frustration of future aspirations. Having explored these challenging issues, it is important to turn to look at how young people may respond to and engage with such potentially overwhelming circumstances. For this, the concepts of resilience and agency are particularly helpful.

Managing adversity

Young People's Resilience

In the current study, the concept of resilience offers insights into what processes and resources may support the young people to survive and resist the adversity in their worlds. Michael Rutter discusses the concept of resilience as “relative resistance to environmental risk experiences, or the overcoming of stress or adversity” (Rutter, 2007, p. 205). Through a constructionist lens, Michael Ungar defines the social construction of resilience as “the outcome of negotiations between individuals and their environments to maintain a self-definition as healthy” (Ungar, 2004, p. 352).

Resilience is culturally and contextually embedded (Ungar, 2008). Certain resilience-supporting transactions may appear common across contexts, and while they provide useful conceptual guidance, it is important not to assume their universality (Cameron et al., 2013; Rutter, 2012; Theron, 2016; Tol, Song, & Jordans, 2013; Ungar, 2004, 2013). Rutter (1987) identified four main processes which help to protect young people within adversity, namely the reduction of risk impact, reduction of negative chain reactions, the establishment and maintenance of self-esteem and self-efficacy, and the opening up of opportunities. Ann Masten and her colleagues (2004), in relation to resilience in the transition to adulthood, highlighted the importance of young people's own planfulness and future orientation; their autonomy and self-reliance (as opposed to “childish dependencies”); the presence of non-parent adult support and connectedness; and the ability to cope under stress.

Drawing from culturally embedded understandings of resilience, Ungar and his colleagues (2007) explored youth resilience across fourteen international communities from Palestine to Colombia to the Gambia (p.291). They associated resilience with access to material resources, including education, health, employment; relationships with significant others in one's family and community; identity and personal and collective sense of purpose, beliefs and values, including faith-based; power and control over one's environment and ability to care for one's self and others; adherence to cultural practices, values and beliefs; social justice and meaningful role in one's community; and finally, sense of spiritual or social cohesion (Ungar et al., 2007, p. 294).

Linda Theron (2016) found five of these seven themes to inform the resilience-supporting processes of rural Black adolescents in South Africa (the exceptions were social justice and control/efficacy). These findings led Theron to argue that, while existing theory should not be assumed, neither should researchers “disregard” it. She also highlighted the nature of contextual influences, which, in her study's context, included the normative nature of suffering and disadvantage, making “adversity less of a personal burden and more like a common fate” (Theron, 2016, p. 659). Other important cultural factors included the presence of strong women and a “culture of care”, underpinned by interpersonal solidarity and selflessness and religious beliefs, which is enacted within families as well through the

“parent-like acts” of outside adults. Theron’s study suggests ways in which broader theories of resilience can offer useful sensitising concepts to research conducted in diverse contexts.

Adversity may not always increase vulnerability either (Rutter, 2012; Ungar, 2004). Michael Rutter’s concept of “steeling effects” explains how the experience of overcoming challenges and stresses, rather than avoiding them can build their resistance to later adversity (Rutter, 2012; Ungar, 2004). Exposure to adversity can build young people’s “capacity for survival” within their given contexts (Ungar, 2004). For instance, Samantha Punch (2007), in her study with young people migrating for work and education in Bolivia, discussed how the young people, after encountering challenges in their migration, reported the development of new strategies and increased overall self-confidence.

Even behaviours, outwardly conceived problematic, anti-social or violent, may support a young person’s “capacity to survive” in their particular context (Seymour, 2012; Ungar, 2004, 2008). Furthermore, young people can hold different perceptions regarding their resilience and risks than those around them (Theron, 2016; Ungar, 2004; Ungar et al., 2007). Ungar and his colleagues (2007) in their 11-country study on youth resilience, refer to one Palestinian adolescent who did not consider himself socially disadvantaged, although his community did. Instead, he emphasised the “small collective acts of resistance” which provided him with a sense of power and control, which Ungar and his colleagues considered “buffered” him from the effects of structural injustices (Ungar et al., 2007, p. 302).

It is important therefore, to look not only at processes that signify “coping” with adversity but to how the young people go about their everyday lives, how they understand their challenges and their aspirations, and their perception of how they are addressing them. This leads on to the discussion of young people and the concept of agency.

Young People’s Agency

The concept of agency is culturally and socially constructed and, depending on the particular culture or society, certain forms of agency are considered more “appropriate” or “sanctioned” than others (Bordonano & Payne, 2012; Payne, 2012; Vacchiano & Jiménez, 2012). In contexts of extreme adversity, however, it is important to acknowledge that behaviours which “go against the grain” can nonetheless represent young people actively engaging in managing the adversity in their lives (Bordonano & Payne, 2012, p. 367; Payne, 2012; Seymour, 2012; Ungar, 2004). The literature reiterates the importance of research grounded in young people’s own personal and family orientations, contextual and cultural environments. Elsbeth Robson, Stephen Bell and Natascha Klocker (2007) provide a detailed definition of agency to this end:

“Agency is understood as an individual’s own capacities, competencies and activities through which they navigate the contexts and positions of their lifeworlds fulfilling

many economic, social and cultural expectations, while simultaneously charting individual/collective choices and possibilities for their daily and future lives.” (Robson et al., 2007, p. 135)

A useful conceptualisation of agency in this regard comes from Amartya Sen’s Capability Approach. Sen defines “agency freedom” as “what a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important” (Sen, 1985, p. 203). Sen points out that agency goals, as they can arise from other priorities, such as religious beliefs or sense of social or moral duty and so on, may even run counter to a person’s own personal well-being and their standard of living (Sen, 1993). Freedom—and the notion of unfreedoms—are central to this conceptualisation as they highlight the importance of choice. The “good life” is the life genuinely chosen, not forced into, irrespective of the resources one possesses; it is “inter alia also a life of freedom” (Sen, 1985, p. 202). Ingrid Robeyns draws from Sen’s conceptualisation to suggest the notion of “constrained choice” to help explain how family, ethnic, religious, community and cultural ties, and background can be so closely interwoven into an individual’s personality, values and preferences with regards to the aspired to “good life”, that “choice” becomes a blurred concept (Robeyns, 2005, pp. 101–102). The notion of “constrained choice” indicates that these constraints are not necessarily “negative or unjust”, at least in the eyes of the individual him or herself, who may find them instead “very enabling and supporting” (p. 102). Amartya Sen also points out that the realities of an individual’s life can also dictate and even limit what an individual may “dare” to desire. He explains, “Desires reflect compromises with reality, and reality is harsher to some than to others” (Sen, 1985, p. 191).

People’s sense of social or moral duty is often shaped by one’s culture. Asian cultures, such as those involved in the current study, are often considered more collectivist, as opposed to more western individualist, cultures (J. G. Miller, 2002; Trommsdorff, 2012; Worland, 2010). Within collectivism lie common assumptions “that groups bind and mutually obligate individuals” and that the individual self is subordinated or sacrificed for the group, often the family (J. G. Miller, 2002; Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002, p. 5; Worland, 2010). Such a difference is often taken to assume “an inherent opposition as existing between the desires of the individual and social requirements”, implying there is no room for individual agency within collectivism (J. G. Miller, 2002, p. 101).

Miller (2002) argues, instead, that collectivism can be quite compatible with agency. She highlights emerging literature within cultural psychology which indicates that, among more collectivist communities, the person is “inherently social”. In such communities, the ways an individual meets their role-related expectations are not perceived as a subordination of the self but as “expressions of the self”, which are affectively satisfying to young people (J. G. Miller, 2002). Miller points to research which demonstrates that familial expectations can actually serve to enhance intrinsic motivation among Asian-American children, while depressing it among European-American children. These findings are echoed in Michael Ungar and his colleagues’ (2007) multi-country

resilience study. They found that, among young people from non-western more collectivist societies, a sense of self-efficacy or well-being was not found in the “I” but in terms of their role and sense of cohesion within collective goals and pursuits (Ungar et al., 2007).

Demonstrating resilience and agency in extreme adversity

Taking a bottom-up approach to agency and resilience requires paying attention to the motivations, goals and cultural and socio-economic contexts of the young person making decisions about their lives. Agency and resilience are both dynamic and fluid (Robson et al., 2007; Rutter, 2012).

Robson and her colleagues (2007) highlight that young people may be willing to conform in many ways to what is expected of them, while also demonstrating “quiet” resistance, in order to create some space for themselves within unequal power relations. To explain this, they propose a differentiation between “conforming” and “reactive” agency. Not absolute dichotomies, young people move along an agency continuum depending on the different decisions that need to be made, and the different situations and different people they are with (Robson et al., 2007).

Natasha Klocker (2007) situates “thick” and “thin” agency at opposing ends of an agency continuum also, on which all people are situated as “actors with varying and dynamic capacities for voluntary and willed action” (p.85). Drawing from her study with child domestic workers in Tanzania, she demonstrates how agency can be “eroded” or, alternatively, “layered” by multiple “structures, contexts, and relationships”, including poverty, gender and age, which act as “‘thinners’ or ‘thickeners’... constraining or expanding their range of viable choices.” (Klocker, 2007, p. 85). The young workers, while often caught in “appalling” working conditions, rejected any categorisation of themselves as “objects” of exploitation and “unequivocally” emphasised their own agency and decision-making in choosing the “best possible option” to improve their own and their families’ lives. In their minds, their choice of work represents “an active and ‘rational’ response” to the realities of their lives (Klocker, 2007, p. 92).

Ruth Payne’s (2012) research with members of child-headed households in Zambia, provides similar insights into how young people’s own perspectives of their own actions within extreme adversity and precarity can vary quite considerably from those regarding them. Rather than considering themselves in terms of “extraordinary survivors [or] resilient and competent actors involved in a daily struggle to exist”, the young people viewed their actions simply as part of their everyday life (Payne, 2012, p. 399). Payne argues that looking at the young people’s actions and lives through an a priori defined understanding of resilience or coping, can overlook how young people themselves make sense of their lives and actions. In response, Payne offers the concept of “everyday agency”, “not to offer a new view of agency, but to convey a picture of daily life ... from the vantage points of [the] children and young people” (Payne, 2012, p. 399). Payne recommends that concept of

constrained agency be regarded as subjective, highlighting that, “It is important to ask who is defining agency as constrained” (Payne, 2012, p. 402).

Payne’s and Klocker’s research demonstrates that precarity does not preclude agency, but neither does evidence of agency diminish the precarity of their lives. Precarity and agency can co-exist, as demonstrated by Lynnette Arnold (2015) in her study with Salvadorian women about their migration to the United States. Arnold considers the “ambiguous agency” of Salvadorian women as they negotiated extreme “embodied” vulnerability during their “illegal” migration journeys in which “their bodies were literally out of place” (Arnold, 2015, p. 13). Arnold applies the concept of ambiguous agency to how the women describe their agentic actions which, while not fully avoiding risk and physical coercion, served to provide them with some protection and self-determination. The women’s narratives demonstrated neither “total victimization [nor] unmitigated agency” but an “interweaving” of both agentic actions and victimhood. Marcel Paret and Shannon Gleeson (2016) also point to the “constrained agency” of the migrant across contexts in the “struggle” against structural precarity. For instance, migrant workers can demonstrate nuanced decision-making regarding when to endure employer exploitation and abuse and when to defy or challenge them. These survival strategies are ultimately constrained, as while they help to optimise their precarious circumstances, they are not necessarily “emancipatory” (Paret & Gleeson, 2016). Research on the Thailand-Myanmar border by Kyoko Kusakabe and Ruth Pearson revealed how undocumented men and women accumulate various ways to deal with being arrested and deported, such as paying bribes to the police, alerting colleagues and employers, and in some cases submitting to deportation and then re-crossing the border (Kusakabe & Pearson, 2010, pp. 36–37). Kusakabe and Pearson (2010) describe this as a way of negotiating a “degree of freedom”, through which confidence can grow, despite ongoing vulnerabilities.

The nuanced concepts of constrained, ambiguous and everyday agency neither negate nor ignore the existence of coercion, victimhood or precarity, but instead reveal important insights into how young people understand, perceive and manage their own respective circumstances. Alcinda Honwana, writing on the challenges of young people in Africa, reflects that “Young people are not just sitting and waiting for their elders or the government to do something for them. Instead, they are using their creativity to find solutions for everyday-life challenges” (Honwana, 2014, p. 34). Honwana draws on Maira and Soep’s (2004) concept of “youthscapes” to describe how, from their place on the margins of society, young people can be transformative, “invent new forms of being and interacting with society”, and can be seen to “remake the world” (Honwana, 2012, p. 7, 2014, p. 30). Repeatedly across the literature relating to young people living and managing life on the margins of societies, this creative resistance of young people is apparent (Kabiru, Mojola, Beguy, & Okigbo, 2013; Locke & Te Lintelo, 2012; van Breda, Marx, & Kader, 2012). For instance, in reference to young Palestinians managing the “waithood” of displacement, McEvoy-Levy described how the young

people demonstrate both willingness and ability to be “creative within small spaces” in their efforts to overcome their “stuckness” (McEvoy-Levy, 2014, p. 325). For some, this meant reframing their waitness as part of their patriotic duty and political resistance, while for others education represented “living with purpose”, both strategies representing buffers against the hopelessness of waitness (McEvoy-Levy, 2014, p. 317).

Maintaining hope and a future orientation are often mentioned as critical to resilience, motivation and direction within uncertainty, and protection against despair (Brun, 2015; Gonzales et al., 2013; Mann, 2010; Masten et al., 2004). Simon Turner points out how in the refugee camp, “life is lived only in preparation for another—hopefully fuller—life in the future, beyond the camp.” (S. Turner, 2016, p. 145) Cathrine Brun (2015) discusses how within the uncertain spaces of protracted displacement, hope of this future can mitigate and even give meaning to boredom and, as long as hope remains and waiting is perceived as meaningful, people are willing to wait.

The resilience-related concepts of future orientation, optimism and planfulness come to the fore in Gillian Mann’s (2010) study with undocumented Congolese young refugees in Tanzania. Mann highlights how “staying busy” helps the young people avoid the hopelessness, physical pains, exhaustion and despair that can come from “thinking too much”. While life is “characterised by the unforeseen” and the future “at best unplannable, and at worst, unimaginable”, continuing to envision and plan for the future, and avoiding thinking about the harsh present, remains an essential survival skill (Mann, 2010, p. 264). From as young as 14 or 15 years old, young people begin “looking for a life”, strategically choosing which opportunities to follow and connections to nurture and often taking financial responsibility within the family (Mann, 2010, p. 266). Mann describes how the young people’s perception of being in a state of “becoming” the person they want to be in their future, rather than the person they are forced to be in the present, represents an important coping strategy. Any job can be endured if it promises an escape in the future (Mann, 2010).

At the same time, Mann observed a high level of flexibility and adaptability in the young participants as they planned and pursued “projets” and educational pathways. While a “projet” provides focus and drive, it does not override flexibility and adaptability. Mann describes a young man who she said goodbye to as he set off on a well-established plan the next day, only to hear from him a few weeks later saying he was still in Dar es Salaam following a work opportunity which had arisen last minute, he explained, “I took the path” (Mann, 2010, p. 267). This openness to seizing unforeseen opportunities, Mann describes as an example of Johnson-Hanks’ (2002) principle of “judicious opportunism”.

Jennifer Johnson-Hanks (2002) developed this term from her own extensive ethnographic study with young Beti women in Cameroon who denied any intentional planning due to the inescapable uncertainty of their situations. Johnson-Hanks explains judicious opportunism as a social practice

which arises in such contexts where everyday unpredictability limits the reliability of intentional strategising, leading to the importance of seizing “promising chances”. Johnson-Hanks explains that in unpredictable and uncertain conditions,

“The challenge is not to formulate a plan and implement it regardless of what comes but to adapt to the moment, to be calm and supple, recognizing the difference between a promising and an unpromising offer.” (Johnson-Hanks, 2005, p. 370)

These findings serve as a reminder that while “planfulness” is considered an important resilience-promoting process (Masten et al., 2004), in certain contexts, the absence of planfulness may instead be more useful to young people’s “capacity for survival”. Lauren Berlant’s (2011) concept of “cruel optimism” also brings attention to another less favourable side of hope or optimism.

The concept of “cruel optimism” relates to the pursuit of the “good-life fantasy”. Berlant (2011) explains that people hold on to the hope and expectation that certain objects—such as education—will help them achieve this good life, even when clearly unworkable or even self-defeating. Holding on to these unattainable hopes remains critical to the individual as “the fear is that the loss of the promising object/scene itself will defeat the capacity to have any hope about anything.” (Berlant, 2011, p. 24) Julia Ann McWilliams and Sally Wesley Bonet (2016) apply the concept of “cruel optimism” to young refugees in the United States for whom resettlement promises access to education which will “deliver them from a life of liminality and precarity” (p.167). They mention Burmese refugees who, considering themselves as “chosen” for resettlement over others in the refugee camps, believe they are morally obliged to become educated and “pay it forward” by returning in the future and relieving the suffering of their “people”. However, their optimism becomes “cruel” in the face of long hours of low paid work necessary for their family’s survival, the barriers to accessing education in the United States, and the ongoing effects of their own earlier interrupted schooling and experiences of trauma. As their imagined good-life delivered through education becomes “nearly impossible to achieve”, they are left with the realisation that resettlement merely represents a “new kind of precarity” (McWilliams & Bonet, 2016, pp. 158, 166).

The importance of supportive relationships outside the family, emerges as another proponent of resilience within adversity. Laura May Lee (2012) considers the “tactical agency” employed by young people in youth-headed households in Rwanda as they actively sought out and nurtured social connections in order to garner the support—whether emotional, practical or instrumental—they needed. Successful access to social support helped the young people feel more in control over their lives and “strive to a more hopeful future” (Lee, 2012, p. 165).

Drawing on Portes and Fernandes-Kelly’s work on “really significant others”, Gonzales (2011) highlights the importance of “positive mediators” to undocumented young people as they navigate their educational constraints. These non-familial trusted adults invest their knowledge, experience

and energy and help to mediate at crisis points (Gonzales, 2011, p. 611). The young people benefit from emotional support and an increased sense of motivation. Through these relationships, the young people feel less disconnected or cut off, more motivated, and enjoy increased hope, belonging, meaning, resilience and control over their lives (Gonzales, 2011; Gonzales et al., 2013).

On the Thailand-Myanmar border, Pia Jolliffe (2016) also discusses the importance of intergenerational relationships outside the family to young people's educational aspirations. Many parents, due to their own poor education and lack of useful institutional contacts, are not able to help their child overcome the costs and challenges of accessing higher education. Young people's "diligence" is highly valued within the Karen culture, and if demonstrated, they can gain the "benevolent support" of key adults such as a teachers, relative or priest, who can help them navigate their constraints.

Within circumstances of extreme adversity, precarity, restriction and coercion, evidence of resilience and agency may be hard to find, but it is nonetheless present, particularly when seen through young people's own perspectives of their actions, motivations and goals. I now move to consider the concepts of identity, home and belonging, which are commonly considered critical aspects of the migrant experience, the promotion of resilience, as well as the period of youth.

Identity

Another of Ungar and his colleagues' seven "tensions" of resilience is identity, which provides the young person "a position from which they can experience a sense of themselves as healthy despite exposure to risk." (Ungar et al., 2007, p. 297) Young people can hold multiple identifications on the family, community, ethnic or national level. The ability to reconcile conflicts between identifications contributes to resilience (Ungar et al., 2007).

If Sonia Pierre is correct that, "One's identity, roots and values are what make you a human being" (Sonia Pierre quoted in Lynch, 2008, p. 17), when discussing young people's lives "out-of-place" in the precarity of displacement and lack of documentation, issues of identity – as well as the related concepts of home and belonging – are very relevant. Social identity theory posits that an individual can hold and manage multiple social positions and identities simultaneously across contexts and spheres of life (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Several social identities related to the young people hold potential relevance for this study – from their sense of national and ethnic identities, to their relationship with the "spoiled identities" of "the refugee" and "migrant".

Identities are neither "natural" nor "inevitable", but are socially, historically and culturally constructed, and performed, negotiated and contested by active intentional agents within dynamic social environments (Erikson, 1968; S. Hall, 1996; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Yuval-Davis explains that, "Identities are narratives, stories people tell themselves and others about

who they are (and who they are not)” (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 202). These narratives can be collective or individual, they are often reproduced from generation to generation, but they also can “shift and change, be contested and multiple” (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 202). Relevant to the discussion of resilience, Yuval-Davis (2006) discussed how identities are emotionally charged, linked to the desire for belonging and attachment.

While individuals are active and engaged in the creation and recreation of their identities throughout the lifetime, youth is considered a period of particularly intense and lasting identity formation (Erikson, 1968; Holland, Lachiotte Jr., Skinner, & Cain, 1998; Kamal & Killian, 2015; Tanti, Stukas, Halloran, & Foddy, 2011). Many young men and women in this study can be said to grow up denied “formal recognition of their existence” or “an effective nationality” (Lynch, 2008). Such deficits can critically impact legal and psychological identification as well as lifelong development and well-being (J. Bhabha, 2003, p. 55).

Dual, Hybrid and Novel Identities

Migration and globalisation, according to Stuart Hall, disturbs any notion of a “settled” character or identity of populations (S. Hall, 1996, p. 4). Indeed, the study of transnationalism and transmigration has grown from the recognition of the growing numbers of people who cannot be described as “uprooted”, but who can be considered to live “firmly rooted in their new country but maintaining multiple linkages to their homeland” (Schiller, Basch, & Blanc, 1995, p. 48). These transnational migrants, or transmigrants, can often live “dual lives”, speaking two languages, having homes in two countries, and making a life and livelihood through continuous regular contact across national borders (Portes, Guarnizo, & Landolt, 1999, p. 217). These individuals “forge and sustain simultaneous multistranded social relations” linking together societies of origin and settlement, facilitated by technology which bridges time and space (Schiller et al., 1995, p. 48).

Even amid legal ambiguity, dual identities can emerge (Mendez-Shannon, 2010). In Elizabeth Mendez-Shannon’s study with young migrants growing up in the United States, the young people described feeling connected to both the United States and their countries of origin, and being able to “bridge” two worlds of languages, cultures and family relations (Mendez-Shannon, 2010, p. 158).

Research with young people growing up within “political cracks” indicate the emergence of innovative “hybrid” identities or “fusion selves” (Fine & Sirin, 2007, p. 23). Fine and Surin’s (2007) study with Muslim-American young people growing up in the United States since 9/11, describes identities which do not prescribe to dual or dichotomous conceptualisations of identity, but represent a different “not-yet identity combination”, a “hybridity” which “pierces the boundaries of identity and opens up the difference of others” (p.20, 25). The young people’s negotiations of their hybrid

selves reflect their attempts to “speak back, incorporate and resist the messages that swirl through them” and ultimately find balance “atop a spinning world” (Fine & Sirin, 2007, pp. 17, 28).

This framework of hyphenated identities departs from fixed and dichotomous notions of identity to accommodate “more fluid and contextual, hybrid notions of identity” (Fine & Sirin, 2007, p. 31). Fine and Sirin (2007) add, however, that there may be a certain “privilege of the hyphen”, acknowledging that their research was limited to university-attending young people. They admit that those from poorer, more isolated communities may instead find themselves “stuck” in the one world, and, as a result, be occupied with very different realities and concerns.

Hyphenated identities have, however, emerged in other contexts. Applying the notion of hyphenated identities to Palestinian-Israeli youth, Philip Hammack (2010) reveals the diversity of identity negotiation at the hyphen. While some youth regarded their position at the hyphen to be an asset—a “bridge between two nations”—others considered the hyphen as leading to their subordination and experience of being “discredited” by both communities (Hammack, 2010, p. 379). One young Christian woman in his study describe how she “locates her identity in a place of ‘emptiness’ because it is neither fully Palestinian nor Israeli, nor, by implication, Palestinian–Israeli” (Hammack, 2010, p. 376).

Jessica Ball and Sarah Moselle propose that similar research on identity, adaptation and resilience should be undertaken with young people along the Thailand-Myanmar border (Ball & Moselle, 2015, 2016). The authors point to the young people’s demonstration of “hybrid cultural practices” in response to their “conditions of liminality”, and a creative capacity to “eke out a living using ingenuity and persistence” (Ball & Moselle, 2015, p. 431). The authors propose that these responses suggest the young people may develop “unique capacities that enable them to thrive in a variety of unpredictable, fluctuating circumstances” (Ball & Moselle, 2016, p. 116). Forming loyalties to Thailand, as the place which provided them protection, while also holding on to the “imagined community” of Myanmar, may develop in the young people “novel” forms of global citizenship and hybrid transmigrant identities within their “liminal lifeworlds”, which may go “beyond dualistic attachments to ‘origin’ and ‘host’ countries” (Ball & Moselle, 2016, pp. 116, 112).

Other researchers have brought attention to the importance of ethnic identity on the Thailand-Myanmar border, particularly in relation to displaced Karen populations. Shirley Worland’s (2010) PhD study highlights the centrality of being Karen—considered both as an ethnicity and a nationality—to refugees’ overall identity and understanding of their worlds. Rachel Sharples (2015) highlights that, despite the cultural, linguistic and religious heterogeneity among the Karen, the common experience of suffering, persecution, displacement and alienation informs the Karen identity and helps people make sense of their lives on the Thailand-Myanmar borderlands (Sharples, 2015). Paula Watkins (2012) similarly discusses “communal identity” of Karen people which is based on

shared suffering. Watkins considers this “collective solidarity” to represent an important form of coping. Watkins points to the centrality of the Karen’s strong religious faith, their collective and community orientation and normalisation of suffering as key indicators of their adaptability and resilience (Watkins, 2012). This research opens up the notion of identity having a potentially important purpose for individuals and populations facing adversity.

Also worth noting is Rachael Sharples’ (2015) finding of the hyphenated identity some Karen people identified with—such as Thai-Karen or Karen Sgaw-Pho (two ethnic subtypes). She discusses how individuals were comfortable maintaining multiple seemingly contradictory identities, giving the example of a Christian Karen with an Animist tattoo written in Burmese lettering. The person saw no contradiction in his embodiment of more than one identity. Sharples demonstrates how identity cannot rely on the “supposed truths” of ethnic, religious or cultural identifiers but should focus on people’s own ways of understanding and making sense of their worlds (Sharples, 2015). One may expect therefore that growing up the atypical liminal environment of lack of legal identity and displacement along the Thailand-Myanmar border could similarly lead “unexpected and atypical” identities for young men and women in the current study (Ball & Moselle, 2015, 2016).

Refugee and Migrant Identity

Another aspect of identity relevant to the current study relates to how young people respond to their socially constructed identities which may be considered “spoiled” (Goffman, 1963), “negative” (Erikson, 1968), “devalued” (Katz, Joiner Jr., & Kwon, 2002), or “subordinate” (Hammack, 2010). Goffman introduced the notion of the “spoiled identity” to explain the “discrediting effect” of stigma. Stigma “spoils” an individual’s social identity and “cuts” them off from society, as well as “from himself so that he stands a discredited person facing an unaccepting world” (Goffman, 1963, p. 30).

Jennifer Katz and her colleagues’ (2002) explain how belonging to “devalued social groups” can leave individuals at increased risk for distress, negative personal self-evaluations and decreased self-esteem. These can occur in three ways: firstly, through the internalisation of negative stereotypes relating to their group; secondly, through the perception of being perceived—and devalued—purely based on that group membership; and thirdly, through the development of attitudes and behaviours that result from socialization experiences as a member of the devalued social group (Katz et al., 2002).

Membership of the “devalued social group” of the “refugee woman” dominated and shaped the experiences and treatment of women in refugee camps of northern Kenya (Bartolomei, Pittaway, & Pittaway, 2003). As refugees, the women were denied the fundamental part of individual identity and internalised notions of self-worth, belonging and protection, that come with being a citizen of a state (Bartolomei et al., 2003, p. 91). As refugee women, the sexual violence inflicted on them in the

camps demonstrated for them the devalued identity of the “refugee woman” as “a person unworthy of rights” (Bartolomei et al., 2003, p. 92).

In a study on the lived experiences of undocumented young people in Canada, young people reported feeling encased in “invisibility”, “ignored and erased” from society and forced to actively hide from view (Kamal & Killian, 2015). The youth expressed the realisation that “*who* they are are [sic] as individuals is directly informed by *what* they are” rather than any actions or efforts on their own part (Kamal & Killian, 2015, p. 69, italics in original). The internalisation of hostile and pejorative discourse and language about “illegals” and “aliens”, disseminated by the government, media and everyday society, exposed undocumented youth to a “consciousness of criminality”. These realities led in a “denuded sense of self” and an “undocumented consciousness” as the young people realised “they are defined by their lack of immigration status before they are ever defined as an individual” (Kamal & Killian, 2015, p. 70).

Within this social milieu, the youth experienced various dimensions of emotional stress and anxiety, including depression, loneliness, hopelessness and social impairment (Kamal & Killian, 2015). The young people strived to counter their negative identifications by striving to be their “best selves” and to be perceived as the “good child” or the “good citizen” in order to be accepted within society. In Kamal and Killian’s (2015) study, family support and the capacity to sustain one’s sense of agency emerged as the most important protective factors to maintaining a sense of hope and well-being.

In contrast, among Burundi refugees living in Tanzanian refugee camps, the liminal refugee status was considered far from a “spoiled identity”, but one of value (Malkki, 1992). Refugee status protected their Hutu identity against naturalisation in Tanzania and facilitated their refusal “to put down roots in a place to which one did not belong” (Malkki, 1992, p. 35). Liisa Malkki contrasted these camp-based perspectives with refugees who had settled in Tanzanian towns, who, instead, celebrated their changing, situational, multiple and borrowed identities. While seen by the camp refugees as “impure”, Malkki noted a form of “lively cosmopolitanism” or “worldliness” in the town refugees, as they “sought ways of assimilating and of manipulating multiple identities—identities derived or “borrowed” from the social context of the township” (Malkki, 1992, p. 35).

A central assumption of Tajfel and Turner’s social identity theory posits that individuals strive to maintain or enhance their self-esteem and a positive self-concept (Tajfel & Turner, 1986, p. 16). For instance, individuals whose social identity is negative or threatened may seek to leave or dissociate themselves from their existing group and join a more favourable one. Alternatively, they may attempt to increase the “positive distinctiveness” of their group by redefining or altering the dimensions of comparison, or they may seek positive distinctiveness through direct competition (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Migrants with tentative legal positions may strategically “switch” to “safer” identities as immigration legislation shifts around them (Rodriguez & Hagan, 2004). A relevant insight comes

from Leisy Abrego (2008) who found that the introduction of a new educational policy in California allowed undocumented young people to reposition their social position to the neutral, socially acceptable label of the “student”, hiding their stigmatized social identity and emphasising their merit.

Another way individuals may avoid hostile public attention garnered by their “spoiled identities” is through what Goffman calls the “arts of impression management” (Goffman, 1963, p. 154). This strategy can include “passing” or “covering”, in which the individual seeks to control how they are seen by others by changing their appearance or minimising their stigmatised marker (Goffman, 1963). The cycle may begin with “unwitting” passing, leading to “unintended” or “for fun” passing in non-routine situations, and then to more purposeful passing in everyday life. The process can lead all the way to a situation of “‘disappearance’—complete passing over in all areas of life, the secret being known only to the passer himself”, who may seek out a new context in which he can find recreate himself “like a butterfly, emerging to try the brand new wings” (Goffman, 1963, p. 99).

Home

The literature reveals a complex relationship between home and belonging for displaced and migrant young people. As described by Alba Guerrero (2008), “Displacement is not just about loss of place, but about the struggle to make a place in the world” (p.561). Displacement can also leave people in “a state of ‘in-betweenness’—a state of being attached to several places while at the same time struggling to establish the right to a place” (Brun, 2015, p. 21)

Belonging can be understood as an emotional investment, the feeling of being “at home” and of feeling “safe” (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 197). A clear distinction between forced and voluntary migration and people’s resulting relationship to “home” has been identified (K. E. Miller, Kushner, McCall, Martell, & Kulkarni, 2008). While “migrants” move by the “rational pursuit of a better life” towards a “dream”, “refugees” embark on a “necessary flight out of harm’s way” (K. E. Miller et al., 2008, p. 74). Within such a perspective, this explains the “powerful longing” demonstrated by refugees for their homelands, and their reluctance to remain in exile (K. E. Miller et al., 2008).

One’s homeland and the aspiration of returning to the place one left behind can represent an important part of refugee identity (Vasey, 2011). The camp-based refugees in Liisa Malkki’s (1992) study, who identified with the moral collective identity of “Hutu refugees”, considered their homeland a “moral destination”. The town refugees, however, who held no such singular essentialist identity, regarded their homeland as “simply a place” they may or may not return to. Such findings indicate the ambiguity and heterogeneity which can be evident among displaced populations.

Concepts of home, belonging and identity have many different layers for exilic populations (Fincham, 2010). Taking the case of Palestinians in south Lebanon, Fincham distinguishes between those who have lived their lives in the liminal, awaiting return; those whose lives have become

dependent on multiple ongoing interactions across borders and whose identities have become “configured in relation to more than one nation-state”; and, finally, those born in exile—the more complex generation—whose understandings of home have been passed down through generations rather than any first-hand experience (Fincham, 2010, p. 16). Fincham here highlights the temporality and instability of identity, belongingness and notions of home across generations.

As young people move, understandings of home can become less fixed or centred (Foubister, 2011). At times, for young refugees, the notion of home can be pragmatic, in which one’s practical needs are met rather than any nostalgic longing fulfilled (Tete, 2012). For the asylum seeking young women in Ala Sirriyeh’s (2010) study, realities demanded that certain facets of “home” be chosen at the expense of others, such as achieving safety at the expense of family relationships. The young women furthermore actively sought to “negotiate homely places” within their “‘unhomely’ wider environments” through seeking out friendships and support networks, entering education and establishing other “normal” routines (Sirriyeh, 2010, p. 225).

Taken-for-granted or idealised notions of home as “haven” have also been critiqued. Brun and Fábos (2015) suggest that the territorially-identified home may cease to exist or at least be highly ambivalent for those whose place of origin is far from any safe haven. Malkki (1995) argues provocatively on this issue, asking, if the concept of “home” only represents where one feels safe, and if that place holds only associations with danger, fear, hunger or oppression, how is going to that place “going home”? Other provocations are important to note also. Stuart Hall reflects on questions all migrants are asked: “Why are you here?” and “When are you going home?” Hall answers from experience, “Migration is a one way trip. There is no ‘home’ to go back to” (S. Hall, 1987, p. 44). Rey Chow suggests alternatively, “Home is here, in my migranhood.” (Chow, 1993, p. 142)

The above literature suggests that fluid and innovative notions and negotiations of identity, home and belonging may be important to consider when exploring such issues with young people who have grown up on the margins of societies, who are often denied formal legal identifications and frequently separated from their families and “homes” of origin. The literature indicates that while “devalued” and “spoiled” identities can take an emotional toll, individuals can also demonstrate remarkable creativity and innovation. Belonging and home are fluid notions, with heterogeneous meanings for different populations.

Conclusion

In the course of this chapter, I reviewed the literature on a broad gamut of issues relating to youth, migrant “illegality”, displacement, and more generally, the experience and challenges of growing up on the margins of societies. I charted the range of existing terminology, highlighting that even more

nuanced efforts often fall short in the face of the complexity and dynamic nature of people's lived experience.

I considered the application of the concept of precarity in the lives of migrant and displaced populations, a concept which seeks to capture the multi-layered uncertainty, unpredictability and vulnerability of lives on the margins. I drew particularly from the work of Susan Banki, which focuses on migrant and displaced populations the Thailand-Myanmar border as a site of multiple overlapping precarities, including Banki's own conceptualisation of "precarity of place".

With this background established, I turned to literature which discusses the realities of young people living and growing up in the uncertain worlds of protracted displacement and lack of legal documentation. While this is an area much under-explored, particularly in non-western contexts, the existing literature indicates that young people face numerous challenges in their everyday lives, with lasting impacts on their emotional and social worlds. However, this is not the whole picture. While the concept of resilience is complex and slippery, it opens up a way to look for the ways young people actively resist adversity, and what helps them to do so. The concept of agency allows for a focus on the actions and motivations of young people to overcome their challenges, within their perceived constraints and life-world orientations.

In threading together the theoretical and empirical literature, I opened up the density of issues facing young people growing up on the margins of societies in contexts of limited legal documentation and displacement. We know little about the consequences of this complexity. A small scale qualitative study is suited for such a task as it allows for an in-depth examination that goes beyond the limitations of discrete terminology and general categorisations. A bottom up approach prioritises young people's own lived experience of being "illegal" or "displaced", the challenges they see about them, and the ways in which they respond to them. Fundamentally, it focuses on the issues that are relevant to the young people themselves. The theoretical concepts of precarity, resilience and agency represent useful tools in understanding the young people's lives, constraints and efforts.

In the next chapter I outline the methodological approach I took to explore these issues.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I provided an overview of the existing field of knowledge relevant to the current study, charting literature relating to the problematic conceptualisations of the “illegal migrant” and the “the refugee”, as well as that which provides theoretical and empirical insight into the ways such lived realities impact young people and how they actively resist and adapt in response.

In this chapter, I now turn to the methodology and methods chosen in this study which aimed *to explore the ways in which young men and women, growing up in contexts of displacement and lack of documentation along the Thailand-Myanmar border, understand and negotiate their everyday legal and social realities*. A qualitative case study, grounded in the principles of social constructionism, was undertaken to support a person-centred, bottom-up approach which prioritised the young people’s own perspectives and understandings of their legal statuses and relationships to Thailand and Myanmar; their routes through education and work; and the strategies and resources of value to them in their current lives and future aspirations.

The chapter begins with the rationale for choosing the epistemological framework of social constructionism and the qualitative methodology of the case study. I then discuss the nature of the intercultural, reflexive, ethical and collaborative orientation which informed each step of the study, from the design, process and through to the final analysis and write up. In this section, I bring attention to my own positionality and personal investment in undertaking this specific study, reflecting on both anticipated benefits and challenges. In the next section, I move to consideration of the other challenges of the study—language, interpretation and translation.

With this groundwork established, I turn to the actual process of conducting the study, commencing with the preliminary stage, the theory and rationale behind the methods employed, and the overall insights which emerged and informed the main data collection phase. I then describe the design, rationale and process of this next phase, going into greater detail of the theory, rationale, methods, sampling, procedure, challenges and successes. I finish the chapter with a description of the in-depth transcription and translation process, before outlining the process of data analysis. Throughout this chapter, I continue to acknowledge the impact—challenges and benefits—of my own involved positionality.

Designing the Study

Philosophical Perspective – Social Constructionism

Social constructionism underpins the epistemological approach of this study. Within social constructionism, knowledge is understood as constructed by “meaning-making beings” within social, historical and political contexts (Crotty, 1998, p. 10). While the world may exist independent of a person’s consciousness, meanings do not (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Crotty succinctly explains, “The existence of a world without a mind is conceivable. Meaning without a mind is not. Realism in ontology and constructionism in epistemology turn out to be quite compatible” (Crotty, 1998, pp. 10–11).

Through interactions and processes of meaning-making between social actors, social constructions develop into taken-for-granted concepts and “naturally occurring” “truths” (V. Burr, 2003; Crotty, 1998). As a result, ideas of truth and knowledge can differ across societies, peoples and cultures, as well as over time, as meanings and social constructs evolve and change (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

A social constructionist orientation “explicitly tolerates diversity” of social realities (Ungar, 2004, p. 345). This supports the study’s bottom-up approach as it calls upon the researcher to prioritise the young people’s own understanding of their life-worlds, and to question and interrogate dominant discourses (V. Burr, 2003; Shanmugaratnam, Lund, & Stolen, 2013; Ungar, 2004). Taking an anti-essentialist social constructionist lens to terms such as “youth”, “the refugee” or “illegal migrant”, for instance, helps to focus on the complex and fluid nature of such social constructions and the diverse subjective experiences of those who live with them (Donato & Armenta, 2011; Shanmugaratnam et al., 2013).

Social constructionism considers research the “co-production” between involved social actors (V. Burr, 2003). I entered the research process with my own assumptions, subjectivity and expectations, as did the participants, interpreters, translators and other involved actors. Such additional social realities and the new power relations they introduce, impact knowledge production, which must be acknowledged and recognised.

Qualitative Case Study Approach

Qualitative methods “have the potential to provide a more comprehensive picture of lives lived under adversity”, and when combined with a social constructionist approach, can highlight the perspectives often hidden or silenced (Ungar, 2004, p. 358).

The distinction between qualitative and quantitative research has been likened to a continuum between holistic and reductionist approaches (Verschuren, 2003). While quantitative studies

typically split social reality into testable units and variables, qualitative approaches, such as case studies, preserve the quality of complex phenomena embedded within a cultural context—an important criterion for the current intercultural study (Verschuren, 2003). A quantitative approach can miss context-specific information which can enhance understanding of the unique complexities involved in the lived realities of migrant and refugee populations (See Akiyama et al., 2013 for a description of the limitations of a quantitative approach with young migrants on the Thailand-Myanmar border; and Yako & Biswas, 2014 for a discussion of similar limitations with refugees across contexts).

Finally, qualitative sampling supports research with populations for whom a sampling frame does not exist, such as undocumented populations who are generally absent from population databases (Birman, 2005; Staring, 2009).

Case Study

A qualitative case study methodological framework supports the overall research study. The goal of the case study is the understanding or “*verstehen*” of a specific issue or social phenomenon through the illustration of a particular case or cases (Creswell, 2012; Willis, 2007). The case study approach is particularly suitable when the phenomena and context are closely bounded, such as in the current study (Yin, 2009). The methodology facilitates the production of detailed descriptions of the lived experience, while retaining contextual complexity (Creswell, 2012; Willis, 2007; Yin, 2009). These in-depth descriptions invite readers to cross cultural divides, participate in a “*vicarious experience*” of participants’ worlds, and gain a deeper “*personal engagement*” with subjective perspectives (Stake, 1995).

The case study approach lends itself to a variety of methods, which some claim gives rise to the case study’s “*ambiguous*” status as a methodology (Verschuren, 2003). Others refute this, however, arguing that this flexibility, instead, represents a core strength of the case study approach, particularly in exploratory real-world research (Flyvbjerg, 2004). Other common criticisms of the case study approach often revolve around the issues of generalisability, objectivity and bias, and rigour. Flyvbjerg (2004) considers many of these criticisms to be misunderstandings and oversimplifications of the approach, rather than weaknesses. Firstly, rather than generalisation, the case study aims towards “*particularisation*”, through digging deep and deriving contextually rich and meaningful insights (Flyvbjerg, 2004; Padgett, 2008; Stake, 1995). Flyvbjerg (2004) also highlights the distinction between statistical generalisability and theoretical generalisability, the latter of which can be advanced by a careful and strategic choice of a case which offers rich information on the topic being explored. The Thailand-Myanmar border offers important insights into the experience of young men and women managing displacement and lack of documentation. The complex legal and social issues there are echoed in other contexts worldwide. While it is not assumed that the study’s findings

are universally generalisable, they may hold relevance to other contexts with similar constraints, particularly in non-western settings. Detailed descriptions will allow readers to assess this potential transferability (Creswell, 2012).

Regarding the case study's limited objectivity and verification or confirmation bias, Flyvbjerg (2004) argues, instead, that the in-depth nature of a case study, by prioritising the realities of participants, is well-suited to identifying "black swans" and avoiding overlooking unexpected data. The use of several different sources or actors also strengthens findings through triangulation (Yin, 2009). In the current study, recruitment was guided by the principle of diversity in order to explore a range of circumstances and experiences within the migrant and refugee communities as well as reveal potential patterns across circumstances (Wengraf, 2001). I also drew on my own field observations and reflections, and input from a comprehensive advisory network.

As I mentioned, I address issues of trustworthiness and rigour throughout the study. One of the least developed aspects of the case study methodology is the analysis stage. In response, and to promote the comprehensive and rigorous analysis of data, I draw on the systematic procedures offered by grounded theory techniques (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Crotty, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The social constructionist principles of the current study are highly compatible with the theoretical foundations of grounded theory, particularly the approach espoused by Kathy Charmaz (2006).

The "hybrid utilisation" of grounded theory methods within other qualitative methodologies contributes to the rigour and "analytic import" of the research (Birks & Mills, 2011; Charmaz, 2006, 2014). While some researchers combine or merge grounded theory methodology with another primary qualitative methodology (e.g. Babchuk & Hitchcock, 2013; Lal, Suto, & Ungar, 2012; Pettigrew, 2000), I, and others before me opt instead to adopt specific analytic processes (e.g. Zaal, 2009). The analytic methods I utilise—including coding, memo-writing and categorising—represent a practical approach to systematically "separate, sort and synthesise" the data during analysis and demonstrate rigour (Charmaz, 2014, p. 4). I do not claim my research as a grounded theory study, which would require a much broader set of methods implemented throughout the research process (Birks & Mills, 2011; Strauss & Corbin, 1994; Suddaby, 2006).

An Intercultural, Reflexive, Ethical and Collaborative Orientation

While many practical and ethical dilemmas arise in research involving displaced and undocumented populations, "ethically we cannot turn away from the challenge of doing so" (Birman, 2005, p. 163). The exclusion of undocumented and displaced individuals as participants in research leaves both the public, policy and practice uninformed of their experiences and realities (Birman, 2005). Franck Düvell and his colleagues consider it "the professional responsibility of social researchers" to inform

society of such phenomena through ethical and carefully designed research conducted with advice and guidance of the particular community or individual participant involved (Düvell, Triandafyllidou, & Vollmer, 2008, p. 15).

This study brings to the fore the issue of power, which “always exists in conditions of unequal relations”, posing risks to the research process around potential coercion, exploitation, and (mis)representation (S. Hall, 1997, p. 261). Entering the field as an educated white European researcher exploring the worlds of marginalised, legally disenfranchised young people is charged with daunting power-related issues (Pittaway, Bartolomei, & Hugman, 2010). A 2009 report entitled “Feeling Small in Another Person’s Country” by Thailand-Myanmar border community based organisation Committee for the Promotion and Protection of Child Rights (Burma), captures the many ways in which young people can feel powerless and looked down upon living in migrant communities in the region (CPPCR, 2009). It was important to me not to contribute to this experience.

Entering the field as a learner, prioritising collaboration, demonstrating intercultural competence, respect, reciprocity and flexibility and knowing “when to persist and when to desist”, were some of the ways which I sought to ameliorate power differentials while acknowledging the impossibility of ever fully eradicating them (de Laine, 2000; Im, Page, Lin, Tsai, & Cheng, 2004; Lund, Panda, & Dhal, 2016; McArdle, 2002, p. 186; Strocka, 2008). This approach led to carefully chosen methods, openness and transparency about the nature of the study, clear and accessible information materials, comprehensive informed consent processes, and a detailed approach to privacy and security (Birman, 2005; Clark-Kazak, 2009; Lorenz, 2011). I begin next by detailing my intercultural, ethical and collaborative approach. Subsequent sections elucidate the mobilisation of this approach.

Intercultural Competence

Contexts differ across social, historical, political and cultural lines. Culture refers to everyday conventions, values, and practices (Theron et al., 2011), or the ways people “make sense of their lives” (Rosaldo, 1993, p. 26). Meaningful dialogue begins with the acknowledgement of, and respect for, such differing world-views and paradigms (Crotty, 1998; Liamputtong, 2008).

Intercultural competence is relational in nature, involving knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviours, which combine in “the ability to effectively and appropriately interact in an intercultural situation or context” (Perry & Southwell, 2011, p. 453). Intercultural competence can improve over time as a person’s experience and understanding of cultural difference becomes increasingly complex (Perry & Southwell, 2011). Intercultural sensitivity requires “empathy, curiosity and respect” in the face of intercultural difference, as well as enjoyment in the negotiation of that difference (Perry & Southwell, 2011, p. 454). Qualitative research facilitates the development of intercultural sensitivity

as it requires researchers to work closely with community members and participants, building trust and rapport, and providing opportunities for individuals to voice their needs and concerns and for open researchers to hear and respond to them (Liamputtong, 2008).

Through my PhD research, I returned to a setting in which I lived and worked in a different role over three years, developing and delivering psychosocial programmes for children and youth together with mainly local grassroots migrant and refugee community organisations. I had built up close working relationships and friendships with individuals from both migrant and refugee communities, spending time at each other's houses and attending weddings, funerals, and other important religious and ethnic festivals. I had a working knowledge of oral and written Burmese, which I refreshed during the preliminary fieldwork, and deepened during the main fieldwork period when I also embarked on Thai instruction. I was aware of customs around conservative dress (e.g. covered shoulders), etiquette around visiting people's houses (e.g. the respect shown by eating offered food), appropriate body language (e.g. never point one's feet at a person or touch them on the feet), and other particular Burmese ways of behaviour and interaction (e.g. the concept of "anadey" or to have "ana"—a form of humbleness or modesty underpinning much social interaction). This knowledge was often noticed by community members and seen as a sign of respect (Berbary, 2013).

I was nonetheless aware that, while my prior experience and established networks in the field offered advantages, they also raised other potential ethical, moral and operational dilemmas (de Laine, 2000; Punch, 2001). I was aware of the potential fine line between, what Berger (2015) refers to as "harvesting the benefits of familiarity" and taking advantage. I was keen to demonstrate my Burmese language skills and my prior experience and connection with the community to help reassure potential participants of the authenticity of my interest and that I would handle their stories with sensitivity. However it was also critically important that these factors did not subtly coerce participation, that I did not promise what I couldn't keep, and that I remained very clear as to the purpose of my research (Berger, 2015; De Tona, 2006; Strocka, 2008; Twyman, Morrison, & Sporton, 1999). A clear informed consent process and a sceptical reflexive practice supported this approach.

Reflexivity

Social constructionism recognises the researcher as co-constructor within the research inquiry, whose personal characteristics and values inform each stage of the research process from data generation to interpretation and analysis (Preissle & Grant, 2004; Punch, 2001). The practice of reflexivity sees researchers embark on the "self-conscious and critical study of their own standpoints and assumptions and of how these change or remain stable throughout the fieldwork and analysis" (Preissle & Grant, 2004, p. 175). This process offers valuable extra sources of data to a study (Charmaz & Bryant, 2011; Preissle & Grant, 2004; Punch, 2001).

A reflexive practice was invaluable to me from the outset of the research process as I sought to re-establish myself in a new role in the community, one which was understood and accepted, and that expectations—both mine and those of the community of me—were clear and congruent (Adler & Adler, 1987; L. Hall, 2014). Together with ongoing monitoring from my academic supervisor, reflexivity helped to safeguard me against slipping back into my previous role and to navigate my own biases and assumptions acquired through living with the community over an extended period of time (Punch, 2001).

My role in the migrant and refugee community needed to shift from “active” to “peripheral” (Adler & Adler, 1987). This required attention particularly during the preliminary phase as I noticed my position within the community remained unresolved and I continued to be frequently informed and consulted on issues linked to my previous role in the community. My academic supervisor also noticed this in a correspondence to him by a representative from Mae Tao Clinic, my NGO-partner in the field, who expressed that they were very happy that I had “returned” to them.

Within my new peripheral role, I did not experience any shift in commitment (Adler & Adler, 1987). I felt both the insider and the outsider (Merriam et al., 2001) and certainly felt that the concepts of “we” and “they” were far from “neatly bounded and homogeneous” (Rosaldo, 1993, pp. 19, 217). I was concerned to do my research “with” and “for”, rather than “on” the community (Heron & Reason, 2010; Reason & Marshall, 1987). I sought to maximise the strength of the “we” in the research process in order to help guide me in “a proper way” within the context (L. Hall, 2014, p. 339). I re-entered the field with a “repertoire” of roles: of “learner”, “friend” and “collaborator”, “roles [which] unite the researcher and other people in bonds of friendship, rather than isolate and detach them” (de Laine, 2000, p. 18)”. I continued to be surrounded by the daily lives and struggles of those living with the ongoing temporariness and uncertainty of migrant and refugee life. I was subject to what Renato Rosaldo terms the “vices of subjectivity: passionate concern, prior knowledge, and ethical engagement” (Rosaldo, 1994, p. 171). Unable to pretend any “myth of detachment”, I sought to be the researcher “at once cognitive, emotional and ethical” (Rosaldo, 1994, p. 177).

While this position can have the benefits of increased trust and acceptance and easier access, it can also pose particular threats to the overall research agenda including exiting the field (Mays & Pope, 1995, p. 183). My reflexive practice helped me to strategically, rather than emotionally, engage with my plan for “getting in and getting out” of the field (Mays & Pope, 1995, p. 182). I also planned to take periodic withdrawals from the field in order to reflect on “what is going on” in the research process and to re-establish and regenerate the role of researcher if necessary (Adler & Adler, 1987; Koch & Harrington, 1998, p. 887). This was a challenge, in part as I sought to be flexible and responsive to participants’ availability, but also due to the guilt of knowing that most of my “research participants live their daily lives where they do not get time-off” (Punch, 2012, p. 90).

Written accounts, such as a reflexive journal, which apply the tools of introspection, self-reflection and interpretation, can help the researcher record and reflect upon these processes and how they develop and change as the research progresses (Holmes & O’Neill, 2012; Punch, 2001). I began keeping a journal during the preliminary fieldwork phase of my research, and continued to do so throughout the main fieldwork phase. In the journal I found a place to capture my “emerging ideas, difficulties and changing relationships” (Punch, 2001, p. 4) and a way into “embracing” my emotional journey while not “over-indulging” (Punch, 2012). I reflected upon my positionality, reactions and assumptions, as well as to reflect upon others’ reactions, particularly participants (Thompson, 2014). This can also be considered a form of memo-writing found within the grounded theory tradition (Birks & Mills, 2011). While other PhD researchers have found it useful to keep separate journals for field notes and reflections (Pyne, 2007), after beginning with this approach, I found an integrated approach to suit me best. Similar to Jennifer Thomson, I found the two parts “leaked into each other” (Thompson, 2014, p. 249).

Immersive bottom-up fieldwork is inherently isolating and each day can give rise to “the unexpected and unanticipated, the difficult and awkward, the messy and complex” (Punch, 2012, p. 90). These realities are often hard to adequately communicate to people—my friends, family and academic supervisor—back home. My journal not only recorded thick descriptions and an audit trail of my evolving methodological and analytical process, but also became an important sanctuary where I could safely and privately contain and work through reflections, fears and frustrations. This was critical as, at times, as I discuss further later, immersing myself in the lives and experiences of vulnerable young people was emotionally harrowing (Gaskell, 2008).

Context-Sensitive Ethics

An orientation and commitment to ethical research entails recognition of “cultural, social, personal and emotional” factors as well as adherence to rigorous academic and intellectual considerations (de Laine, 2000, p. 4). A strong ethical framework guided me: the Government of Ireland Data Protection Acts (2007) and the Freedom of Information Act (1997); the ethical framework set out by Trinity College Dublin Policy on Good Research Practice (2009); and the ethical guidelines of the School of Social Work and Social Policy (2014) and Children’s Research Centre (2006). While the research was conducted in a different jurisdiction, these guidelines and legislation provided a valuable ethical framework to guide me when faced with realities of the field (Shallwani, 2013).

Upon embarking on my study, it was important to me to meet both the ethical standards of my academic institution and those of the community where I would be conducting the research (Birman, 2005). Prior to the commencement of each phase, I obtained ethical approval from the Research Ethics Approval Committee at the School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College, Dublin. I also engaged with the Mae Sot Migrant Community Ethics Advisory Board (MEB), made up of

representatives of community based organisations who understood the local context, culture and circumstances of the border region for those who I was seeking to study. The MEB is coordinated by Mae Tao Clinic (MTC), a health care clinic for the migrant community which has a registered Thai non-government organisation arm. MTC is closely involved in the provision of education, legal and social services for children and youth within the migrant community, and has extensive involvement with research, with long-established ethical and procedural protocols.

My overall ethical approach was based on three over-arching principles: respect (for all individuals and populations); beneficence and the corresponding absence of maleficence (maximum benefit and minimum harm); and justice (equality, fairness and honesty for all involved)—principles which underpin all research at Trinity College Dublin (School of Social Work and Social Policy, 2014). These principles guided my decision-making across the research process and particularly with regards to consent and confidentiality (Children’s Research Centre, 2006). When researching populations whose contexts put them at risk of exploitation or abuse, such as undocumented or displaced populations, ethical issues become even more critical, nuanced and challenging. On an individual level, precarious migration status, for instance, is associated with marginalisation and limited freedoms, creating issues of vulnerability, safety and security (Bilger & van Liempt, 2009; Birman, 2005; Liamputtong, 2007; Tisdale, 2004). However, contexts differ and require careful assessment in order for appropriate responses to be made (Birman, 2005; Düvell et al., 2008; Pittaway et al., 2010; Staring, 2009).

The migrant community in and around the town of Mae Sot has a very visible and dynamic presence. The community itself openly fills in the gap usually provided by state social services, coordinating health, education and other such public services with minimal resources, while also advocating for Thai recognition and support, with some success (CPPCR, 2012). After the coup d’état in May 2014 which saw Thailand become under military rule, ongoing rumours and recorded reports emerged of clamp downs, arrests and mass deportations of “illegal migrant workers” (Human Rights Watch, 2014; Radio Free Asia, 2016). As I returned to the border after this commenced, it was critical to assess the potential negative attention I might bring to my participants as a foreign researcher.

Issues of confidentiality, anonymity and safety can be especially significant for populations in precarious legal circumstances (Bilger & van Liempt, 2009). Throughout the study, I sought ways to prioritise transparency about the nature of the research, its purpose, what participation involved (Ní Raghallaigh & Gilligan, 2013), and what could be kept fully confidential and what couldn’t (Strocka, 2008). In both phases I devised an informed consent process which provided time and space for people to decline participation while also facilitated the participation of those who wished to partake, but who required sensitivity to their particular circumstances (Birman, 2005; Düvell et al., 2008). I was also mindful that requesting written consent could give rise to discomfort to particular populations due to security concerns, fears of loss of anonymity, or literacy limitations (Birman,

2005; Düvell et al., 2008). As a result, I included the option to use a pseudonym or, as an alternative measure to written consent, to provide verbal consent, which would be audio-recorded but not transcribed (e.g. Morrow, 2009; Schenk & Williamson, 2005).

In both fieldwork phases, I carried out initial anonymization of all generated audio, written and photographic data through the allocation of a personal ID code. During transcription, I anonymised the information further anonymised through the omission or changing of names and identifying details, and blurring any identifiable faces and other details in photographs. All data was stored on secure, password-encrypted equipment, and consent and other non-anonymised forms were kept in a locked cabinet while on site in Thailand before being personally transferred back to Ireland by me to be retained securely within the Children's Research Centre. In accordance with the School of Social Work and Social Policy code of practice, data and interview transcripts will be destroyed two years subsequent to the completion of the dissertation. All of these details were outlined in the participant information materials and participants were made aware of their relevant rights according to the Freedom of Information legislation, including their right to access their personal data or withdraw from the research without penalty, including after participation. Details were given on how their information and permitted photographs would be used, such as inclusion in a dissertation to be submitted for assessment at Trinity College Dublin and in public reports, presentations, exhibitions, and publications related to the research study.

Another part of participant protection involves avoiding emotional harm which may arise in the study from recalling experiences of past or present distress or trauma. In this study, such issues could arise through the discussion of experiences of having left Myanmar under dangerous and oppressive circumstances and coping with the ongoing harsh and disempowered living conditions in Thailand (CPPCR, 2009; HRDU, 2008; Mackenzie, McDowell, & Pittaway, 2007). Some researchers highlight how, even when not explored intentionally by the researcher, participants can take the opportunity to open up and talk about many aspects of their lives, leading to an inherent potential for emotional "turmoil" in all interviews (Drury, Francis, & Chapman, 2007). Others take a different slant, perceiving the disclosure of personal information to be a normal part of interpersonal conversation, as is becoming upset when talking about distressing matters, and that the avoidance of topics and the assumption of potential harm takes away a participant's agency and control over the interview content (Corbin & Morse, 2003). Interviews, as a space to open up and be listened to can be therapeutic (Corbin & Morse, 2003; de Laine, 2000; Drury et al., 2007; Düvell et al., 2008; Rossetto, 2014). As trained psychotherapist, I was conscious of, what Vicki Drury and her colleagues (2007) refer to as, "taming the rescuer", i.e. to capitalise on my reflective listening skills and ability to notice and manage signs of emotional distress, while stopping short of responding therapeutically. Later in the chapter, I explain how this was not always possible or possibly ethical.

An ethical balanced approach advocates full transparency regarding the nature of the interview so as to give people the freedom to refuse participation, and for the development of protocols so as to safeguard those who may be affected negatively within the interview process (Corbin & Morse, 2003). All such efforts should include interpreters and other members of the advisory network who may have been touched by similar issues and experiences raised by participants (Gaskell, 2008).

Finally, it was also important to address my own safety as researcher, not least as the production of data can be affected if the researcher does not feel secure (Caretta, 2014). Upon the behest of my supervisor, I developed a risk protocol to that end. At the time of data collection, the situation in Thailand and along the border remained calm, travel was not restricted, and the army was committed to the safety of foreigners, as stated on the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) website. However, I was also aware that the strict *lèse-majesté* laws together with the junta's "Gross National Happiness" agenda massively curtailed any criticism of the government or its policies (The Economist, 2014). While foreigners had to that point been rarely targeted (for exception see the defamation case of UK activist Andy Hall, BBC News Asia, 2016), I knew to be mindful of these restrictions—and potential risks—while preparing presentations and interview related materials. I drew advice and guidance from the community and my academic supervisor in this process.

In terms of daily living, Mae Sot is a thriving border town with a working airport, a tourist police service and three hospitals with English-speaking doctors. Plentiful in amenities, it hosts the local headquarters for the refugee camp-based United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and other international humanitarian organisations working in the area. From my three years living there, I was very familiar with the town, and where, when and how to keep myself safe. I obtained the necessary immunisations, and took the usual precautions against dengue fever and malaria. Public transport is limited in and around Mae Sot, so I hired and then later purchased a semi-manual scooter for the duration of the two fieldwork periods, wore a helmet at all times and carried a second for the times I drove translators or others involved in the research process. Finally, I registered with the Department of Foreign Affairs website and established a connection with the Irish Ambassador to Thailand and Myanmar. This risk and response procedure was detailed in the risk protocol document and submitted to the ethics committee in Trinity.

Developing a collaborative approach

Engaging with people as partners rather than subjects, can help ensure focus remains on the practical problems of concern to groups and communities (Jacquez, Vaughn, & Wagner, 2013). A collaborative approach can create more equitable power relations within the researcher-participant dynamic and promote the active contribution of participants within the research process (Jacquez et al., 2013; Strocka, 2008). A "participatory" orientation in reflects a motivation and sense of

obligation to work with participants, and to carry out research grounded in their concerns (Kendon, Pain, & Kesby, 2007).

How to do this can be ethically, methodologically and practically challenging, requiring careful consideration of individuals, context and outcome objectives (Biggs, 1989).

Farrah Jacquez and her colleagues (2013) distinguish between community-placed research, community-partnered research and Community Based Participatory Research. Community Based Participatory Research is considered to represent “full” or the “highest” form of participatory research, involving research participants in “all stages and aspects of the research process” (Calabrese Barton & Johnson, 2002, p. 192; Israel, Eng, Schulz, & Parker, 2005). This requires considerable time and resources, however (Chatty, Crivello, & Lewando Hundt, 2005; Israel et al., 2005; Jacquez et al., 2013).

On the other hand, in community-partnered research, while community members do not participate as contributing partners in the research process, they are intrinsically involved so as to facilitate research that would benefit the community (Jacquez et al., 2013). Such an approach can represent a compromise for researchers seeking to conduct research that is relevant and beneficial to communities within limited resources (Jacquez et al., 2013).

Close collaborations with “cultural insiders” is considered critical to ethical inter-cultural research (Birman, 2005). These collaborators can also potentially serve as “a kind of broker and supporter of the research, facilitate broader institutional buy-in and a sense of responsibility for and commitment to the process and its outcomes” (Chaskin, 2008, p. 146). This should include a broad spectrum of different perspectives and experiences, recognising the heterogeneity of communities (Birman, 2005).

Youth advisors can be valuable to help to guide, rather than necessarily direct fully, the study’s design and implementation at various stages in the research process (Ansell, Robson, Hajdu, & van Blerk, 2012; Jacquez et al., 2013; Mann, 2008). When involving youth in one’s study, issues of confidentiality and knowledge (mis)use must be managed carefully (Conolly, 2008; Kesby, 2007; Tisdall, 2012). Furthermore, participation should at all times be “meaningful, sustainable and purposeful” (Tisdall, 2012). The researcher’s enthusiasm for equitable participation should not become a burden for participants (Chatty et al., 2005; Conolly, 2008; Jacquez et al., 2013; McCarry, 2012). Best engagement with youth should represent a negotiated involvement which respects and corresponds to the best interests and motivations of young people (Tisdall & Punch, 2012). Another consideration relating to involving youth in the research process was highlighted by Anna Conolly (2008). She argues that if research agendas are only set by young co-researchers, certain important topics considered uninteresting or which may be unthought-of by the young people may end up being overlooked.

I discuss later in the chapter how I incorporated these issues throughout the research process.

Language, interpretation, translation

Language of interviews

In general, conducting interviews in the language of origin of the interviewee is considered to be positive, facilitating ease and trust (Dahinden & Efiñayi-Mäder, 2009), and eliciting more detailed data (R. Edwards, 2013). Along the Thailand-Myanmar border, many in higher education and working for NGOs speak excellent English. Otherwise, in the migrant community, the majority language spoken and read is Burmese, and in the refugee camps many residents only speak either of the two Karen languages, Sgaw and Pho, or sometimes a colloquial hybrid of two languages. While I spoke some Burmese, for all interviews in Burmese, Pho and Sgaw Karen, I recognised the need to employ an interpreter.

Role of Interpreter/Translator

Within the interview, the presence of the interpreter gives rise to a “triple subjectivity” (Shimpuku & Norr, 2012; Temple & Edwards, 2002). Far a neutral instrument of language translation, interpreters and translators become central actors in the construction of the research knowledge. Interpreters and translators are faced with a “dazzling array” of possible words and word combinations to convey meaning (Temple & Edwards, 2002, p. 3) and the variation of metaphors and other expressive differences between and within languages can be hugely complex (Kosny, MacEachen, Lifshen, & Smith, 2014). Furthermore, participants’ words become filtered through the interpreter’s and translator’s own particular perceptions of social reality (Padgett, 2008; Temple, 1997). Caretta (2014) points out how there are actually multiple subjectivities present as the interviewer, interpreter and participant relate to each other across several spheres including culture, race, gender, values, etc. These realities can affect the information shared by the participant as well as the potential of capturing the meaning and “voice” behind the participants’ spoken words (Ficklin & Jones, 2009). Overtly acknowledging the potential impact of interpreters and translators on the data produced was important to me, both during the data collection process, and in the write up of the thesis.

Selection of Interpreters and Translators

There are few formally trained interpreters or translators in Mae Sot with perfect fluency in English. Those that are, generally work for large highly-funded international humanitarian bodies or the United Nations. They are highly sought after and charge accordingly. While working with a local interpreter who may have less perfect English poses challenges, the insider perspective has the advantage of understanding local dialects, idioms and colloquialisms and may be in a better position

to represent more accurately participants' view of the world (Björk Brämberg & Dahlberg, 2012; Caretta, 2014; Padgett, 2008). These were important considerations for the present study, considering the ethnic diversity of the border. Local interpreters, understanding the context, have the capacity to take on an active role in the interview process and alert the researcher to potentially culturally inappropriate questions (R. Edwards, 2013; Temple & Young, 2004). Local interpreters can also potentially serve as important gate keepers (R. Edwards, 2013; Temple & Edwards, 2002). As I was seeking to research a hard-to-reach population, having interpreters who had knowledge of potential avenues to explore and who could help with access was incredibly appealing throughout both phases of data collection.

In their systematic literature review of qualitative research in developing countries using interpreters, Shimpuku and Norr's (2012) found that interpreter competence could be assessed, not by professional qualifications, but by the level of respect and trust given to the individual by the particular community, their previous experience working with the target population, and whether or not they received training for the study in question. Indeed, recognising that distrust and concealment are common survival strategies of undocumented and displaced populations, it was critically important that I employ interpreters who could facilitate that trust and openness necessary for people to tell their stories (Bilger & van Liempt, 2009; Mackenzie et al., 2007).

One of the challenges for local interpreters can be in remaining objective in the interview process, where they may find themselves caught in a struggle between avoiding negative impressions of their community and obtaining research data, and thereby risking the collection of only socially desirable information (Dahinden & Efionayi-Mäder, 2009; Padgett, 2008). A second issue can arise in which certain participants may not feel comfortable sharing personal stories or certain opinions with an interpreter from their own community (Dahinden & Efionayi-Mäder, 2009). At the same time, the employment of expensive professional interpretation services brings its own challenges within the interview process around expectations and interview approach (Kosny et al., 2014). Finally, in some contexts and cultures and with respect to certain topics, gender can also impact participant responses (Kane & Macaulay, 1993). I discuss these issues, and their manifestation in the present study, later in this chapter.

While many studies utilise the interpreter to carry out the transcription/translation (e.g. Björk Brämberg & Dahlberg, 2012; Worland, 2010), this was not feasible in the main data collection phase for a number of reasons which are described later. I was very cognisant that the study depends on the quality of the final transcripts, the accuracy of which can be compromised by the double filtering by transcription and translation (Shibusawa & Lukens, 2004). While Allison Squires' (2009) 14-point checklist is designed to assess the trustworthiness of translated qualitative data, it can also be used within a study to identify actions to promote trustworthiness. The checklist was exceptionally useful to me during the main data collection period where the transcription/translation process necessitated

a pragmatic approach while safeguarding the quality of the data. As is described later, I developed, and was directly involved in, a multi-level transcription-translation strategy. This was facilitated by my prolonged immersion in the community giving me time to discuss understanding and address inconsistencies, reducing “risks of distortion by the translation” (Padgett, 2008, p. 137). This approach enhances research validity, and thereby contributes to the overall trustworthiness of the final data (Esposito, 2001; Twinn, 1997).

Implementing the Study

Preliminary Fieldwork – Consultation with Key Informants

In September 2014, I spent four weeks in Mae Sot conducting preliminary key informant interviews to hone the focus of my study, ensuring its coherence with the “interests, values, priorities, pressures, and understandings” of the community (Chaskin, 2008, p. 139). At this time, I also began engagement with a local ethics process and took the first steps towards establishing a local advisory network to guide me throughout the study. I had the opportunity to re-establish previous partnerships and commence others in my new role as researcher. Being on the ground allowed me to learn more about contextual changes, particularly in light of the ongoing reforms in Myanmar and the recent military coup d’état in Thailand.

Ethical Approval

In advance of travel, I obtained ethical approval from Trinity College Dublin’s School of Social Work and Social Policy Research Ethical Advisory Committee. Once on site, through my contacts I discovered that Mae Tao Clinic had recently officially established the Migrant Community Ethics Advisory Board (MEB), and I was invited to be the first to present my research to relevant members. After doing so, they granted me permission to proceed, informed me of the procedure to follow for the main data collection, and appointed me an ethics advisor to guide me through the process. Through presenting to the MEB, I had valuable opportunity to introduce my research to key community members working with migrant youth in the community, facilitating valuable buy-in. I discussed community expectations, and received excellent advice regarding the overall research study.

The KI interviews

In total, I interviewed 20 key informants, comprising NGO and CBO members, community leaders, educators, and researchers from the Myanmar, Thai and international communities living in or closely connected to Mae Sot’s migrant and refugee communities. I conducted fourteen interviews in English and six in Burmese with the aid of interpretation. All but one informant consented to being

audio-recorded, for whom I took detailed notes in lieu. Nineteen interviews were carried out in Mae Sot, northwest Thailand, with one interview carried out in Bangkok. Throughout the fieldwork, I kept a field journal recording the context, insights from informal conversations with other community members, and my own reflections on the emerging data.

As expert sources of local information, the key informants were well placed to provide me with insights into the main issues facing young people in their communities; give feedback on my proposed research tools, and alert me to potential challenges, including access and recruitment, as well as how to overcome them within societal norms (Creswell, 2012; Marshall, 1996). They also provided me with up-to-date information on the current political situation in the region and the new constraints and opportunities on refugees and migrants, issues which could impact the feasibility of the study.

Due to university requirements, my time on the border at this point was limited to four weeks. However, the nature of the key informant interviews facilitated my gathering of quality data in this short period of time (Marshall, 1996). I also hoped some key informants could be potential future gate keepers, and the interviews were an opportunity for me to demonstrate my sincerity and commitment to conducting a sensitive, bottom-up study and to connect them with the overall research (Marshall, 1996).

To avoid the risk of informant bias (Kumar, 1989; Tremblay, 1957), I purposefully sought diverse perspectives and knowledge bases and employed a sampling strategy that spiralled outward from informants from my previous network whose perspectives I was familiar with, through to individuals who I didn't know previously, identified through snowball sampling. As I was relying on my own network to recruit further afield, I recognise that there remained a risk of homogeneity among these extended networks. This could not be avoided however, as many key informants were themselves refugees and/or living with precarious immigration status, and would have been much more difficult to access without introductions by common connections (Dahinden & Efonyi-Mäder, 2009; Staring, 2009). I also recognise that some individuals may have been reluctant to refer particular people, for instance, those whose perspectives may be considered to have the potential of causing the community to lose face, or of not representing the community 'appropriately' (Dahinden & Efonyi-Mäder, 2009). Therefore it must be acknowledged that, despite my efforts, some bias may have continued within the sample, limiting the spectrum of experiences and attitudes accessed. These issues would also be echoed later in the main data collection period.

Translation and Interpretation

Upon advice from the Migrant Ethics Board, information materials were available in English and Burmese and provided to potential key informants prior to the interview via email or in person where

possible, and reviewed before commencement of the interview. The interview topic guide was included after discussion with my interpreter, Hay Mar San (who I introduce below), and members of the MEB. They suggested that such a gesture would show openness and transparency on my part, help to put those unfamiliar with research interviews at ease, and give prospective interviewees opportunity to reflect upon their opinions (particularly those choosing to interview in English), thereby facilitating the flow of the interview (See Appendix A for Preliminary Phase information and consent materials).

Lae Lae Nwe carried out the translations. I had worked with Lae Lae previously and she came with a wealth of experience in translation and conducting sensitive research projects. My interpreter Hay Mar San orally back-translated the materials, and together we addressed any discrepancies and improved the clarity of the English materials. Hay Mar San is a young Karen woman, fluent in Burmese and both Pho and Sgaw Karen, who, after fleeing Karen State with her family in her teens, had lived for a number of years in Mae La Refugee Camp, before coming to Mae Sot and working with me in my previous role. I knew her to possess a high degree of professionalism, sensitivity and integrity—characteristics central for the interview process to be positive, ethical and respectful (Kumar, 1989). Her selection as interpreter was sanctioned by the migrant community ethics board and she committed to the confidentiality agreement (See Appendix B). All participants were informed of her role and confidentiality conditions prior to their involvement (Kumar, 1989).

Preliminary Phase Findings

Upon my return to Ireland, I transcribed the interviews in English and Hay Mar San translated the Burmese interviews. We spoke on Skype regarding any confusions in the translation. First alone and then in conjunction with Hay Mar San, I read the transcripts several times, took memos on core concepts and highlighted ideas and key passages. In line with the aims and objectives of this initial fieldwork phase, I identified themes and dimensions and took examples from each interview, “winnowing” the data to narrow the focus of the overall study to the key areas of concern (Creswell, 2012).

Certain core interrelated dimensions emerged from the data pertaining to the lived realities of young people. Repeatedly, the course of conversation in the interviews returned to the pivotal meaning and function legal documentation had in young peoples’ lives. Table 1 below summarises the main findings, with elucidation by a selection of quotes. Documentation was linked to identity, sense of belonging, displacement and marginalisation, shaping everyday lives and relationships, opportunities, future aspirations, education and work pathways. The key informants were evidently concerned for the young people as they emerged into adult lives within these conditions and worried what the impact would be. It was clear that documentation, and how young men and women

considered and negotiated their associated opportunities and constraints in relation to their present and future, needed to become a core element of the overall study.

<p>1. The impact of lack of documentation in shaping the lives and future aspirations of young people</p> <p>“They are not Thai or Burmese, even though they really tried hard for their future it is not effective for them as they don’t have any documents”</p>
<p>2. The pervasive ‘out-of-place’ experience of protracted displacement</p> <p>“She said that she really doesn't feel that she belongs to Burma, and that she's never been to Burma, she doesn't know where her parents stays, what Burma looks like, what her parents' relatives look like. She feels more like Thai, even though her parents are Burmese migrant”</p>
<p>3. The uncertainty and unreliability of education amid lack of recognition and host country immigration policy</p> <p>“Officially, the Thai government allow the people to work, not to learn”; “Our children who finish a good education ... at the end get daily wages work, harsh work”</p>
<p>4. The difficulties of obtaining a sustainable livelihood in a labour market which seeks informal workers for “3D” (dirty, dangerous and demeaning) jobs</p> <p>“Majority of our children drop out from the schools and work, in 3D jobs, and some involved in smuggling and gambling and drugs and alcohol”</p>
<p>5. The influence of family and other social connections on choices and decisions</p> <p>“Very difficult cycle, because the teacher and the parents themselves, they grow up in this, the same life, so to, they suffer the same way, so I think it is very hard to change.”</p>

Table 1: Summary and selected quotes from preliminary field work

Establishment of Local Advisory Network & Local Liaison

I invited six key informants, three men and three women, with different knowledge bases, to act as ongoing local advisors and provide me with advice and guidance throughout the study. I believed that they would be highly appropriate potential advisors as they were informed of and engaged directly with youth and, having partaken in the interview, were already informed of and may be assumed to have interest in the study. Many also worked for organisations for whom I anticipated the findings would have relevance, and I hoped that their ongoing inclusion in the study could help

improve the later buy-in and operationalisation of findings (Chaskin, 2008). Aware of people's mobility on the border, including the increase in returns to Myanmar, I recruited on the basis that some attrition would occur. Finally, sensitive to their heavy workload, I worked with them to decide their level of engagement, deciding to seek advice as and when needed, including individual skype calls while I was in Ireland and individual meetings when I was in the field. Based on these parameters, all six individuals I invited agreed to be involved.

I also invited Hay Mar San to act as my ongoing local liaison. This was a formalisation of the role she was already undertaking: responding to potential key informants seeking further information, linking me with new connections, troubleshooting challenges and brainstorming emerging insights. Having such an asset enhanced the informed consent process and ensured information about the study in the community was consistent (Birman, 2005; Kim, 2010). While I would pay her for her interpretation or translation services, she understood and accepted that these advisory aspects would be voluntary, like the local advisors.

Finally, at this point I also began negotiating local mentorship on the academic level, commencing contact with Dr Shirley Worland, a researcher and lecturer at the Regional Centre for Social Science and Sustainable Development (RCSD) at Chiang Mai University. Chiang Mai University is the largest and top ranked university in northern Thailand. The RCSD is based within the Department of Social Science and serves as a research hub on development, ethnic studies, resource management and cross-border topics relating to the Greater Mekong Sub-region and Southeast Asia. Dr Worland's own research focuses directly on migrant education issues in Thailand, particularly along the Myanmar border region, and her PhD focused on identity among displaced Karen in the refugee camps. This affiliation not only offered guidance on conducting research in the region, but also provided direct engagement with stakeholders and other interested parties at the RCSD and Chiang Mai University, and potentially with the wider Thai academic community. Prior to my return to Mae Sot in June 2015, I was accepted as a RCSD Affiliated Researcher for the duration of my fieldwork (See Appendix C).

Main Data Collection – Interviews with young men and women

The main data collection phase took place between June 2015 and April 2016, mainly in and around the town of Mae Sot, as well as nearby Mae La refugee camp and Chiang Mai University. It predominantly involved semi-structured interviews with young men and women aged between 18 and 24, who were either born in Thailand or who arrived alone or with their families before the age of 12. The interviews were structured in order to ethically and sensitively explore the lived realities of the young people in a way that prioritised their own perspectives and viewpoints, and promoted their control over what information they chose to share. An extensive advisory network, made up of

young men and women, key community members, and an academic mentor from Chiang Mai University, provided feedback, guidance and aided recruitment throughout.

Ethical Approval

As in the preliminary fieldwork phase, in advance of travel, ethical approval was granted by Trinity College Dublin's School of Social Work and Social Policy Research Ethical Advisory Committee (See Appendix D). Once in the field, and the information materials and consent forms in Burmese were complete, I submitted an ethics application and presented to the Migrant Community Ethics Advisory Board (MEB) in Mae Sot, who again granted me permission to proceed.

As the interviews commenced in the migrant community, as per advice, all the materials were initially translated into Burmese only (See Appendix E for Information and Consent forms in English). A young Karen man was recruited to do this by Hay Mar San. This process took longer than anticipated due to incompatible Burmese computer fonts. Oral back translation was conducted with Hay Mar San and alterations were made for ease of understanding (Schenk & Williamson, 2005).

During the MEB presentation, other issues with the translation were brought to my attention, which were attributed the ethnicity of the translator. Two MEB members volunteered to make the subsequent changes. Interestingly, Hay Mar San did not agree with all the changes, and my other interpreter, Nge Lay, later mentioned that the changes were more a matter of wording and phrasing preferences and differences between more formal written Burmese (the choice of the MEB members) and the more casual oral language (the original translation). While I felt the latter would help with understanding, within cultural norms it seemed it grated too much. This incident provided me with useful insight into the complex—and subjective—nature of translation and how different translators can be led to different conclusions by the same language (Croot, Lees, & Grant, 2011; Temple, 1997). It also primed me for later challenges in the translation of the interviews.

Youth consultations

The aim of the consultative process with young men and women throughout Phase Two fieldwork was part of the overall commitment to ensuring that the insights, perspectives and advice of the local community, and those of young migrants and refugees themselves, informed the study at all stages of the research process.

The initial plan was to establish a Young Adult Advisory Group comprising four young men and women who met the same initial eligibility criteria for participants. As I wished to review both the English and Burmese materials, and to communicate directly with the youth advisors (rather than using an interpreter), I sought young people with a good level of English proficiency. While this

stipulation meant that the advisors would not be fully representative of the majority of potential participants, they would still have insights and perspectives of value resulting from their own experience growing up as a young person within the migrant and refugee communities (McCarry, 2012).

I aimed to meet the Young Adult Advisory Group at least three times during the data collection process: at the beginning to seek feedback on the participant materials, interview approach and appropriate rapport building and recruitment strategies; in the middle to discuss challenges and emergent themes; and at the end to discuss preliminary insights (Hohenemser & Marshall, 2002). An information sheet summarising the study and the nature of their expected involvement, and consent form was developed to reflect this plan.

Setting up this group proved to be much more difficult than I had imagined. The initial plan to draw from a youth community education programme fell through as the class had been suspended due to funding issues. Finally, I was able to arrange to meet four young men and women recruited through Hay Mar San. Early on at this meeting, one young man withdrew citing English difficulties. Similarly, at the end of the meeting, the other young man stated that he felt limited in his ability to contribute due to his level of English. One of the young women also informed me that she was moving back to Myanmar and would not be able to continue to meet with me. As a result, I proceeded to recruit two more advisors, one young man and one young woman, through my own networks. The young woman expressed that she was happy to take part as an individual advisor but would not feel comfortable speaking in a group. While the “natural” group interview consisting of peers can help some people feel more comfortable to speak (Chatty et al., 2005; Kitzinger, 1995), it can impede other young people from speaking about private and personal issues (Punch, 2002a). Furthermore, each young advisor had hectic schedules, managing work (frequently more than one job), some sort of ongoing higher education programme as well as family responsibilities, making individual meetings a more pragmatic approach. In total four youth advisors were recruited, three of whom I met at different times throughout the fieldwork (See Table 2 for details).

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Religion	Age of arrival to Thailand	Work/School	Involvement
Pun	F	25	Karen	Buddhist	4 years old	Working in CBO	3 meetings
Len	M	25	Mon	Buddhist	Born on Thai border	Working in large INGO	3 meetings
Nwe	F	24	Karen	Buddhist	11 years old	Working for NGO	2 meetings mid and at end
Kal	M	24	Karen	Christian	Refugee camp at 9, came to migrant community aged 16	Working for CBO	1 meeting at beginning of fieldwork

Table 2: Youth Advisors

All meetings were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed by me. Each of the advisors signed the consent form, which, upon the suggestion of one of the youth advisors, was edited to include a clause regarding confidentiality in terms of the information shared with them. This new confidentiality form was then signed by each of the advisors (See Appendix F).

At the first group meeting, we explored the best way to make initial contact, (e.g. should be made by a “familiar” face, with whom the young person would feel more comfortable asking questions about the study); how to use the information materials (e.g. should include an oral explanation, especially of the phase “any potential risks to the participant”, due to some young people’s worries around undocumented status); how to build rapport to overcome “feeling small” around a foreigner (“even if you can't speak a lot, when you speak a little of their language, they will be like—oh you can speak their language! They think ok, more comfortable to talk to you.”); and how to ensure transparency about study (“When we go to a poor community like that [for research], they already have hope. They hope that we will go and help them. So maybe tell openly that you cannot really help them, but you just tell directly what you need, and how they can help you”). These suggestions and recommendations were incorporated into the interview process.

Later meetings explored emergent themes and brainstormed arising challenges within the interview process. I refer to these discussions throughout this and the subsequent chapters.

Rationale for choosing qualitative semi-structured interviews

According to Ronit Lentin “people want to tell their stories”, and the qualitative research interview can facilitate a person to do so (De Tona, 2006). Within this, semi-structured interviews appeared to me to be the best way to ethically and sensitively explore the lived realities of the young people in a way that prioritised their own perspectives and viewpoints, and facilitated their control over what information they chose to share. This approach could help minimise power differentials and other identity-related dynamics, while meeting the research objectives within the constraints of the context.

At its core, the interview is a particular type of conversational face-to-face interaction (Wengraf, 2001), or an “inter-view where knowledge is constructed in the inter-action between the interviewer and interviewee” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 4). Interviews differ in forms and uses depending on the specific purpose of the activity (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Fontana & Frey, 1994; Wengraf, 2001). Interviews can be individual or group, the latter often in the form of the focus group interview (Fontana & Frey, 1994). While focus group interviews are known to facilitate communication of people unused to and reluctant to being interviewed on their own (Fontana & Frey, 1994; Kitzinger, 1995), with populations unused to the research context, they can be found to elicit simplistic responses (Block, Warr, Gibbs, & Riggs, 2012). Focus groups also rely on the interviewer to ensure participants are given equal space to talk and that the topic is comprehensively but sensitively discussed—issues I would have less control over in interpretation (Fontana & Frey, 1994). For these reasons, I did not use focus groups.

Interviews can vary in terms of how structured they are. On one end of the structure-continuum is the structured interview, in which questions are pre-established, potential responses are limited and the overall interaction follows a sort of fixed “theatrical script” (Fontana & Frey, 1994). On the other end of the continuum lies the more personal unstructured interview, in which the script is “improvised”, and the researcher has the space to respond to and follow unexpected data (Fontana & Frey, 1994; Wengraf, 2001). Between these opposite poles lies the semi-structured interview, which employs a framework of themes to be explored and, after initial themed questions, the remainder of the interview can be more improvised in order to explore the topic in-depth (Wengraf, 2001). I felt this semi-structured approach would provide valuable guidance to the interviews while also allowing space for other pertinent information to be revealed.

The interview is a joint- or co-production by the researcher, participant and interpreter, each bringing with them into the interview their own goals and priorities, anxieties, hopes and prejudices, pasts and senses of possible futures as well as class, age, gender and ethnicity (Wengraf, 2001, pp. 4–5). While this joint production is not inherently equally balanced, the semi-structured interview is known to allow more control over the interview to be taken by the participant who can choose what to share

and withhold, an important consideration in this study (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Corbin & Morse, 2003; Reeves, 2007).

While semi-structured interviews were chosen as the best option, they are also not without their own limitations, with particular challenges around problems of recall and the tendency towards selective memories. Ethnographic observational approaches were also considered for their ability to facilitate entry into the specific cultural, social and lifestyle dynamics of young people's worlds (Punch, 2001). However, considering the current political environment in Thailand, observations could potentially attract unwanted attention by the authorities by the regular presence of a white foreigner. Furthermore, individuals' wide geographic dispersal around Mae Sot, and enclosure in the refugee camp, would make equal observation of all participants unfeasible. These two issues could result in the inadvertent prioritisation of more easier-to-access young people, overlooking more isolated individuals and those whose legal statuses are more precarious.

Photo-elicitation techniques were also considered but I was aware that I would not have the opportunity to meet all participants on more than one occasion, such as those working seven days per week or living in the refugee camps where my access would be limited. Again, this approach could also result in the prioritisation of certain voices at the cost of others. Other creative techniques such as drawing were also rejected, as, similar to other cultural contexts (see for example Strocka, 2008), and from my previous experience with these communities, drawing can be often associated with school and focused on replication and mastery rather than creativity and expression.

Visual Prompts

As a complement to the interview, I invited participants to bring items (photos, personal items) to the interview which represented some aspect of their past, present and futures. This "stimulus material" offered a way to commence initial engagement with participants, help ease the anxiety of those who may have neither ever taken part in research nor even spoken to a foreigner before, and make the research experience more meaningful for them, thereby enhancing the external validity of data (Block et al., 2012; Punch, 2002a).

The use of visual items can lead to "opened doors of memory" and "released emotions", leading to a richer data and insights (Collier, 1957, p. 853). As the selection of the prompts was voluntary and left to the young people themselves, this technique also served to further transfer control over the interview process to the participant (Didkowsky, Ungar, & Liebenberg, 2010). Finally, these insights offered a further "way into empathy" with participants' lives and experiences (Lorenz, 2011). All of these points appealed to me. The visual prompts would provide a focus which was concrete and meaningful to the young person. They would also help me step across the cultural threshold and in some small way observe their worlds when I could not do so in person.

Selection and Training of Interpreters

Prior to commencement of data collection, my preliminary phase interpreter and local liaison, Hay Mar San, informed me that she would not be able to act as my sole interpreter due to her existing workload. In response, in preparation for employing alternative interpreters, I developed an approach to interpreter recruitment and training, drawing from recommendations and guidelines within cross-cultural research particularly in developing world contexts (e.g. Kosny et al., 2014; Shimpuku & Norr, 2012; Squires, 2009; Temple & Edwards, 2002). Table 3 outlines this process:

<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Introductory meeting/interview with potential interpreter2. Overview of study and study materials, discussion of expectations and interview approach3. Mock interview with interpreter4. Initial meeting with potential participant5. Review of meeting process6. Initial interview7. Debrief and Review of interview process (ongoing after each interview)

Table 3: The interpreter recruitment/training process

Potential interpreters were sourced through my networks. At our initial introductory meeting, I noted their conversational English ability, the ease with which we could communicate and the speed at which I could speak and be understood. I asked them about their previous experience as interpreter, their interest in and experience of working with youth, including around sensitive issues, such as mental health, and why they were interested in working with me on the current study.

Through this process I recruited Nge Lay, who came warmly recommended from separate sources, had extensive experience working with young people as both a teacher and community worker, some informal interpretation experience, and expressed keen interest in the study topic and in learning about the research process. She had one school-attending daughter and worked part time, and so working with me on an ad hoc basis worked for her also.

Over consecutive meetings, we got to know each other and our respective personal and professional positionalities (Ficklin & Jones, 2009; Squires, 2009). Mock interviews, conducted with both Hay Mar San and Nge Lay, provided me with useful opportunities to practice the flow of the interview, think through the wording of initial questions and raise my sensitivity to emotionally-laden stories (Charmaz, 2006; Wengraf, 2001). They seemed rewarding for the interpreters also, who experienced the interview from the perspective of a participant. Nge Lay remarked that she was surprised by how

the interview felt more like a conversation. Hay Mar San reflected that the questions were easy as they were just about her life.

I was conscious of the gender bias, which can have an adverse effect in certain interview settings (Kane & Macaulay, 1993). The advice from my advisors was not definitive, however. Over time, it seemed that, for the participants, other issues seemed more critical. The first male participant, when asked if he would prefer a male interpreter, replied that he would prefer to talk with someone he knew, i.e. Nge Lay, who had recruited them. As the interviews progressed, familiarity most facilitated recruitment, helping put participants at ease. Therefore while gender may still have affected the information shared, familiarity and trust were fundamentally in allowing the interviews to occur in the first place (Bilger & van Liempt, 2009; Mackenzie et al., 2007).

As I sought further diversity in the sample, I worked with different gate keepers. These individuals, for the same reasons, as per the choice of the young person, also acted as my interpreter for those interviews. Ko Myo, Liberty and Pan were these additional interpreters. I had known and worked with Liberty and Ko Myo in my prior role in the community, they both had excellent English, were very experienced interpreters, had taken part in many research projects and had years of experience working with youth and on youth psychosocial issues in the migrant and refugee communities. I had also interviewed Liberty as a key informant and she had become a valuable community advisor. Pan was one of my youth advisors. She worked in a youth organisation in the migrant community, spoke a good level of English, had some experience in interpretation, and also brought with her her own valuable insights as a young person in the migrant community.

While utilising new interpreters raised issues in terms of negotiating that relationship, it seemed the most pragmatic solution within the context to promote recruitment and participation. For instance, Pan offered me the rare opportunity to witness the working and living conditions in a large urban factory and to interview a young woman living there. This interpreter recruitment process reflects another part of the principle of flexibility—and pragmatism—which were necessary throughout my fieldwork.

Sampling and Recruitment of Participants

Sampling and recruitment was guided by the principle of diversity in order to capture the breadth of experiences and perspectives of youth. I developed a diversity chart, with input from my local liaison, community and youth advisors, and the local ethics board. It outlined the multiple layers of diversity that exists in the target population across age, the multiple ethnic and religious groups, differing forms of migrant and citizenship documentation, work and education circumstances, and in both rural and urban contexts (See Appendix G). While not exhaustive, the diversity chart was extensive,

helping me monitor recruitment and remain focused on finding ways to access more hard-to-reach young men and women.

Snowball sampling is often the preferred approach in research involving hard-to-reach populations as it relies for recruitment on referrals by other participants (Dahinden & Efionayi-Mäder, 2009). However, as this study sought diversity, this approach had limited success as it relied on the individual's own networks which are often comprised of people who are similar to them. In other cases of snowball referrals, despite my interpreters' and my own efforts to ensure clarity, upon arrival to a preliminary meeting, we would discover that the individual did not meet eligibility criteria. Other times, participants did not have up-to-date phone numbers of those they wished to refer. Occasionally, while the participant was willing to speak to me, they were not comfortable to try to convince someone else to speak with me, indicating that trust remained limited.

Targeted purposive sampling was much more successful. This technique utilises gate keepers—people with high credibility and standing in the study community—who can negotiate access and recruitment on behalf of the researcher (Dahinden & Efionayi-Mäder, 2009). While this approach also relies on potentially limited networks, I sought to mitigate this by the use of multiple and diverse gatekeepers (Dahinden & Efionayi-Mäder, 2009). A “Guide for Recruiters” was developed to help with clarity about the inclusion criteria and to aid recruiters explain the research to potential participants. While established trust with these gatekeepers may help others to trust me (Punch, 2001), I was concerned to never unwittingly coerce participation, what Deborah Padgett (2008) calls the threat of “deformed consent”. Furthermore, in my experience, Mae Sot sees many researchers who promise much but deliver little, which has left the community disillusioned about research and researchers. To safeguard against this, in the Guide and throughout all information materials, consent forms, as well as in person by me, my gatekeepers and interpreters, the purpose and nature of the research, the voluntariness of participation and the right to withdraw were reinforced repeatedly (Padgett, 2008).

Preliminary Meeting and Informed Consent Process

The semi-structured interviews followed the four-step procedure as suggested by Corbin and Morse: an initial a preliminary or pre-interview meeting, followed by the main interview consisting of a tentative phase, an immersion phase, and finally an emergence phase (Corbin & Morse, 2003, pp. 341–344). Throughout, I sought to prioritise transparency, confidentiality and safety, and address power issues (Strocka, 2008).

Prior to commencement of the interviews, a step-by-step informed consent process, as outlined in Table 4, was developed to allow adequate time for potential participants to consider participation and consent (Birman, 2005).

Step 1: Initial contact will be made through community networks or other participants in cases of snowball sampling. Contact details of the researcher, her PhD supervisor and local liaison person will be provided for additional information or clarity.

Step 2: Potential participants will be then contacted by the researcher or interpreter to arrange a preliminary meeting.

Step 3: At this preliminary meeting, information and consent forms will be verbally reviewed to ensure the individual's full understanding of the research, confidentiality and its limits, their voluntary participation, the purpose of audio-recording, and their right to withdraw and have their information destroyed. The details, purpose and voluntariness of bringing visual prompts will be explained. Time will be provided for the young man or woman to reflect on participation and request further clarification if desired.

Step 4: When contacted next, should the individual agree to participation, a suitable date, time and location of the interview will be arranged. At the beginning of the interview, the nature of the research and confidentiality will be reasserted, as well as the participant's right to opt out at any stage in the process without penalty.

Table 4: Informed Consent Process

Several adaptations were made to this procedure as the interviews progressed due to emerging challenges and opportunities. To begin, as described earlier, snowball sampling was not successful for this study. As Nge Lay was the main access point for many participants, with her permission, I also included her name and number on the information sheet, and when using other interpreters, I ensured the participant had their relevant contact details.

Holding a separate preliminary meeting and interview also proved frequently unfeasible. This was due to logistical challenges—weather conditions, rural locations, geographical terrain, communication problems, and so on—as well as the challenge of coordinating between the availability of the young person, the interpreter and local community contacts who often facilitated meetings where direct contact was not possible.

As a compromise, I decided to introduce a short break between the initial preliminary meeting and the interview. This gave the person time and space to reflect upon their participation, gather visual prompts should they wish, and carry out any necessary errands before coming back for the interview. The break also gave some young people the opportunity to withdraw without having to directly say no or lose face in front of the foreigner. It also provided me useful time to negotiate privacy for the interviews.

My interpreters and I noticed that the formality of the material and language of the information sheet often seemed to daunt young people, particularly those with little education. We believed this contributed to some young people declining participation. Instead, we began verbally introducing the critical points pertaining to the aims, confidentiality and anonymity, while providing the information sheet separately in an envelope for the young person to review at their leisure.

The logistics of the interviews was another ongoing challenge. One difficulty lay in finding a suitable location for the interview. Migrant agriculture workers live in remote areas, often with extended families in small one or two room bamboo huts. Factory workers live in the factory or in small terraced houses in crowded urban areas, again with extended families. Neutral community spaces for migrants are scarce, even their schools are commonly one large space. Migrants' mobility is highly restricted. Even with work documents, many are not allowed to leave their factory or village environs. To ask a young person to travel to a place to meet me, or to take them ourselves to a suitable location, could get both them and us into trouble with the authorities.

Due to these challenges, the majority of interviews were held in participants' homes. There are both "pleasures and pitfalls" of interviewing in the home (Borbasi, Gassner, Dunn, Chapman, & Read, 2002, p. 35). It frequently meant spending time establishing rapport with several members of the family, as well as often other neighbours and community members, at the preliminary stage (Borbasi et al., 2002). While I always explained that speaking in private would be ideal, and explored with my interpreters and advisors how to convey this sensitively, I also adapted to the reality that this was not always possible – as well as potentially unethical and rude. Individual private space within the home is culturally unusual, and previous researchers on the border have reported having to adapt to others being present during interviews (Sim, 2011). Privacy would require the family to leave their own home or remain in a stifling back room for the foreign researcher who they had welcomed into their home. Many young people stated a preference to be interviewed in their home with their family present. While my Supervisor and I were concerned about the impact of this on the data produced, I was also aware that following the participant's lead is a way to help reduce researcher-participant power (Clarke, 2006). All this meant that interviews were often conducted while daily life continued around us: people watched television, meals were prepared, people shouted in and out of windows, inquisitive family or community members dropped by briefly, and so on.

Despite the challenges, these circumstances also gave me an unexpected privileged glimpse into the private everyday worlds of the young men and women, their families and living conditions (Borbasi et al., 2002; Lorenz, 2011). Often isolated on the edges of fields or on the outskirts of towns and villages, I felt the vulnerability of their geographic and social marginalisation, and the implications of their documentation status, for instance regarding being able to access medical care. I saw the forests and woods where they ran and slept in to evade police raids. I met several family members and members of the wider community and learned about their lives. I witnessed how closely families

lived together and the necessity of interdependency. I observed the tiredness of family members' faces coming in from day-long working under the burning sun and the look of alarm on people's faces in the evenings when revving engines could be heard on the road. I also posed for several photos (many of which I developed and sent back to the communities) and shared about myself (Borbasi et al., 2002).

Main Interviews

I was keenly aware that the differences between my life and position and those of my participants, as described by Ruth Nicholls, were “non-negotiable”, and any goal to “dissolve” them would be naïve at best (Nicholls, 2009). I aspired to demonstrate curiosity, respect and openness, and drew from the strengths of my positionality (Punch, 2001; Ryan, 2015). I was someone who had been connected to the border communities for several years, who spoke Burmese and could demonstrate knowledge of their practices and customs, and was Irish (the similarity of Ireland's history with some of the struggles of ethnic groups in Myanmar was often well known and mentioned at surprising moments) (Punch, 2001; Ryan, 2015).

Rapport begins with the first exchange of pleasantries between researcher and participant. I often introduced myself in Burmese in order to demonstrate openness to reciprocity and to break the ice (Corbin & Morse, 2003). My imperfect Burmese tones often brought about laughter. Throughout the interviews, my limited Burmese meant I could occasionally communicate directly and also notice signs of misunderstanding, omissions and distress. I felt more closely involved in the interview. I felt the loss in the Karen interviews, in which I relied wholly on communication through my interpreter (Kosny et al., 2014).

This early stage of the interview process, which Corbin and Morse (2003) describe as the “tentative” phase, begins with background information and involves testing the parameters of trust and sharing. Gradually, as comfort and trust grows, the interview can enter into the next “immersive” phase (Corbin & Morse, 2003). In the initial interviews, I took more of a “lightly structured” approach in this phase to get a sense of which issues were most pertinent to the participants (Wengraf, 2001). This approach helped me examine if the topic guide had overlooked any important issues, but also resulted in very long interviews. For instance, the first interview lasted three-and-a-half hours, the second two-and-a-half hours and the third two hours. Many of the stories were hugely interesting, and it was hard not to be drawn in. After five initial “pilot” interviews, I provided a lengthy report to my academic supervisor, outlining emerging themes and lessons learned. I subsequently reviewed the topic guide, and moved forward with the interviews in a more semi-structured way (See Appendix H for Topic Guide).

The interviews explored aspects of the person's past, present and imagined futures, pertaining to nature and impact of lack of documentation and displacement, experience of education and work,

and resources and supports. While the interviews were not full life histories, it was helpful to understand the roots of young men and women's current circumstances and their strategies to manage the adversity in their lives.

I employed an "active follow-up strategy" to initial questions, involving probing, direct and indirect strategies, prompts and silences, which I improvised throughout the interview. I was led by my assessment of the context, the particular participant, and whether or not I was using an interpreter (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Wengraf, 2001). With some participants I felt comfortable taking an "assertive" position, probing and even occasionally challenging (Wengraf, 2001). More often, however, and particularly when using interpretation or where the participant was visibly nervous and unused to speaking with foreigners, I adopted a more "receptive" interviewing strategy (Wengraf, 2001). During interpretation I often felt it was not appropriate to probe into certain matters as I was conscious I was not fully in control of how my words would be conveyed. I was conscious of not "manipulating" participants to talk, but instead providing the space for people to opt not to talk when they were not comfortable doing so (see also Clarke, 2006; Fontana & Frey, 1994). I explained my approach to my interpreters and enjoyed witnessing their gradual adoption of similar techniques.

Handling the discussion of distressing and traumatic events with care is critical to prevent re-traumatisation, and so I was cautious not to probe too deeply into their lives prior to coming to Thailand (Pittaway et al., 2010). I was careful to respond to recollections of distressing events and issues with sensitivity, empathy and support (Corbin & Morse, 2003; Pittaway et al., 2010). My protocol for handling such situations was twofold. The first response was irrespective of whether or not the participant had exhibited any signs of distress or upset. At the end of each interview, I explored how they were feeling after talking with me and if they found any particular topic upsetting. I explained if, at a later point, upsetting feelings or thoughts surfaced for them, which organisations could offer counselling or support and that the interpreter could help them with connections—and explore how to access such support—should they wish. I also asked for their permission for me or the local liaison/ interpreter to check in with them again after a couple of weeks to see how they were doing, and in case there was anything further they would like to add, or if I should need clarity on anything (Wengraf, 2001). This approach was developed with understanding of certain cultural and contextual factors. From my own experience of working on mental health issues in the region, I knew the suppression of overt sadness was often a cultural norm and mental health remains a taboo topic. Additionally, due to challenges of mobility and communication, participants may require help accessing services.

The second response was devised for cases where a participant became visibly upset. This involved pausing the conversation, giving the participant time to regain composure, and only recommencing with the participant's permission and, at their choice, continuing with the same or a different topic (Corbin & Morse, 2003; Draucker, Martsof, & Poole, 2009). At the end of the interview, I requested

permission to follow-up with them the next day, and ensured they had access to a supportive person after I left and were informed about available counselling and support options.

In one particular case, a young woman decided to take the opportunity to speak about the death of her sibling which had occurred only a few months previously. The interview was through English, and so only involved the participant and me, and took place in her home. At the very beginning of the interview, without warning, the young woman chose, as a visual prompt, to show me a picture of her badly injured sibling, dead in the hospital. She went on to speak at length about the incident and her ongoing efforts to make sense of it. I was reminded of how participants enter into the interview with their own motives, which can include to talk about a particular topic, share their feelings and be listened to (Clarke, 2006; Corbin & Morse, 2003; Wengraf, 2001). Sally Borbasi and her colleagues (2002) believe how, as nurses, they are more likely to establish significant rapport and share significant moments with participants, exacerbated by the informal home setting. As a psychotherapist I should have been aware of a similar possibility, and this setting was particularly private without distractions or other people present. Like in an incident recalled by Borbasi in which she felt “caught off guard”, I too found myself reverting at times to my psychotherapist role (Borbasi et al., 2002, p. 33).

To bring us both back to the present research interview, I regularly repositioned the audio-recorder—to remind her of its presence—and checked she was happy for it to be still on, and drew from the topic guide as a way to move the conversation on when appropriate. At the end of the interview I discussed with her about accessing support and subsequently followed up with her both via Facebook (which proved to be an effective, relaxed and youth-centred way of staying in touch with participants and other community advisors, even across language divides) and in person later in the fieldwork. I was grateful for the opportunity to stay in touch as I was felt with what Burr (1996) described as “unfinished business”.

Recalling such distressing stories can be both upsetting for participant and researcher (Clarke, 2006). Amanda Clarke (2006) questions how while ethical requirements often require consideration of appropriate support mechanisms for participants (and others involved in the research), there are no similar expectations concerning the researcher. After the above experience, I recorded my reflections in my journal, and, after a delay due to travel and internet issues, shared the interview summary with my supervisor, as was the normal practice, detailing some of the unexpected emotion-laden aspects of the interview and how I sought to manage them. I would have welcomed the opportunity to verbally discuss and debrief my research-related concerns and the mixed personal emotions I felt after the interview but wasn't sure how or where to ask for that support. While there were counselling services in my university, I was not aware of any support I could have accessed while in the field. I agree with Clarke that contingency protocol should be part of the ethical considerations in advance

of fieldwork for researchers as well as participants, particularly when conducting sensitive research (Clarke, 2006).

Corbin and Morse (2003) describe the final phase of the interview as the “emergence” phase. As I used to find as a psychotherapist, in the research process, I found drawing attention to the approaching end of the interview often sparked the participant to share a whole new area of information not yet mentioned (Corbin & Morse, 2003; Wengraf, 2001).

As the interview drew to a close, I asked the participants about the experience of the interview, if it was what they had expected, and how they experienced interpretation, thereby giving participants opportunity to have the “last word” on the interview (Clarke, 2006). Many participants spoke about initially feeling nervous or expecting it to be difficult and expressed pride in having completed the experience, and appreciation of the opportunity to reflect on their lives, and to be listened to. Some expressed keenness for others to hear about and understand their worlds.

Several participants said they felt “light” after the interview. While some interpreters took this to reflect the positive experience of the interview, one of my translators, Niru, was more sceptical, considering it to reflect more about their politeness. She pointed out the contradiction in one young man’s response, who, while he said he felt “light”, also added, “My heart beats”, which Niru inferred to mean he was nervous. A small number of participants did admit to having mixed feelings about the interview, while others were more ambivalent, as one young man stated, “It is difficult. It is also experience.”

Participants expressed mixed opinions on the interpretation process. Most of the young people had never spoken through interpretation before. One young man directly stated that he didn’t like it. Others simply acknowledged its necessity. Others again said they found it “strange” but were happy to have experienced it and that they wouldn’t be “afraid” again in the future. One young woman said it made her want to study harder in English so she could talk to me “just one to one”. In response, I acknowledged their experience and thanked them for their time, patience and understanding of my need for an interpreter. I accept that interpretation is far from ideal and its necessity remains a limitation of the overall study.

The interview ended with housekeeping tasks: exploring potential snowball sampling opportunities, and requesting permission to take digital photos of the visual prompts for my research records and written (or oral, depending on earlier consent process) consent to use the photos, or some of them, anonymised in research publications (See Appendix E). Participants had the option to select for only particular items to be photographed and/or used in research-related publications (Davies, 2008) and were advised of their right to change their mind at a later stage (Bugos et al., 2014).

Once the interview was over and the audio-recorder off, some participants took the opportunity to ask me about my life. One participant requested information on migrant worker rights, which Nge Lay and I sourced for her. These conversations are part of “normal human interaction”, and demonstrate reciprocity (Borbasi et al., 2002; Corbin & Morse, 2003; Fontana & Frey, 1994). At times I was excluded from a conversation between the participant and the interpreter, who often seemed to consider their interpretation role was over once the recorder was off. While at first it was frustrating to be excluded, I noticed that these conversations generally concerned asking after family members and exchanging other pleasantries, and could see how these moments represented the interpreter’s own opportunity for reciprocity.

I concluded the interviews by offering a token of respect to participants—a gesture my advisors and interpreters expressed would be culturally appropriate in order to thank participants, and their families, for their time. I presented participants with bags of rice or fruit, small useful household items or photographs—common thank you gestures used by researchers, including on the Thailand-Myanmar border (Camacho, 2006; Chirau, 2012; Huijismans, 2010; Punch, 2001, 2012; Schenk & Williamson, 2005; Sim, 2011). I was often welcomed into people’s homes with a pot of green tea, a cup of water or some soft drink and some biscuits or a plate of tealeaf salad—the ubiquitous and delicious Burmese afternoon snack, and I was grateful to be able to demonstrate reciprocity in an albeit small way. The direct payment of participants was debated at length with my supervisor and advisors, and has precedence in qualitative cross-cultural studies (Devereux & Hoddinott, 1993; Liamputtong, 2010), and along the Thailand-Myanmar border (Watkins, 2012). On one hand, as Nge Lay pointed out, it would have better facilitated interviewing day workers, who generally work seven days per week and until dark. Paying them would have allowed them to take a day off to interview with us. On the other hand, as described by Hay Mar San, payment risks turning the interview into a “business deal”. While recruitment was most likely more challenging as a result, the risk of seeming as if I was ‘buying’ participation made me decide not to involve monetary transactions.

Debriefing with the Interpreter

After each interview I took time to debrief with the interpreter to share and appraise early impressions, discuss significant and surprising data, review the interview process, and reflect on our emotional responses. “The spoken or written word has always a residue of ambiguity”, and these occasions were invaluable to troubleshoot any challenges or confusions around language (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p. 361), as well as negotiate the role of the interpreter, such as being directive in the interview (Murray & Wynne, 2001)

These sessions both supported my ethical and reflexive approach within the study, and were valuable to the development of my working relationship with my interpreters and my own understanding of the data.

Each of my interpreters (and advisors) faced many of their own difficulties throughout the 10 months I was on the border, particularly regarding legal issues, health challenges and worries for family back in Myanmar. All of these elements required me to reschedule and re-plan my fieldwork throughout the 10 months. However, these challenges also sensitised me more and more to the nature of life on the border for migrants and refugees, for whom little is stable or secure, even for those with documents.

Exiting the Field

I concluded my recruitment once I felt I had gathered “rich and sufficient” data which provided a deep picture of the breadth of circumstances, views and strategies of young men and women negotiating lives growing up undocumented and displaced on the Thailand-Myanmar border (Charmaz, 2006, p. 19). In total I interviewed 39 young men and women. Three interviews I decided not to include in analysis as the young men and women did not adequately meet the criteria. A fourth interview was excluded as inconsistencies in the young woman’s narrative, and subsequent comments from my community gate keeper, led my interpreter and me to believe that the young woman may not been truthful in her account of her life (potentially related to her family’s involvement in extra-legal activities).

Prior to leaving the field I sought to carry out an initial member checking process with participants. While often conducted after analysis, member checking at the end of data collection can help ensure correct understanding of participants’ meaning, explore new or changing perspectives, validate participants’ feelings and increase the credibility of the final findings (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Bugos et al., 2014; Cohen & Crabtree, 2006; Doyle, 2007; Harper & Cole, 2012). This is also an ethical strategy, demonstrating respect and helping to diminish power differences by allowing young people a say in how they are represented (Swartz, 2011) as well as withdraw information or permissions should they wish (Bugos et al., 2014; Carlson, 2010).

I put a lot of effort into this endeavour for admittedly small returns. I struggled to contact participants and coordinate around the busy schedules of interpreters and gatekeepers. I could not arrange to visit to the more rural areas outside Mae Sot nor obtain another pass into the refugee camp. Of the eight participants I did manage to meet again, many of the young men and women said they enjoyed hearing someone tell their story back to them, one woman laughed saying it was the first time someone had ever done so. Another young woman took the opportunity to bring the book of her poems she had told me about in her initial interview, and we took time going through her school memories which were very dear to her. Two young women took the opportunity to ask me more about my own life, my PhD and my family. For two participants, their lives and perspectives had shifted considerably since their initial interviews—one taking a positive turn, and the other a more

negative one—reminding me of Wengraf’s description of the interview as a “particular research conversation that occurred at a particular time and place” (Wengraf, 2001, p. 1).

While limited in terms of input to the overall study, within my commitment to an ethical and reciprocal study approach, I felt the effort was worth it. Together with these interviews, in total I had amassed 44 interviews with 35 participants as I progressed into analysis.

Before I left Thailand, I met once more with many of the people who put a lot of time into my research, to thank them for their help, inform them of some of the emerging themes (and invite feedback), and to let them know what next to expect (Bernard, 2006; Binns, 2006; Taylor, 1991). Exiting responsibly is not only an ethical procedure but also facilitates ongoing cooperation (Bernard, 2006, p. 383). I discussed their interest in and availability for ongoing contact, and what form that could take. The realities of leaving the field in non-western, developing contexts, is such that despite the genuine interest of community partners, once the western researcher has left, immediate pressing matters render the researcher “low on the agenda” (Binns, 2006, p. 21). While I had hoped to return to Mae Sot to a final phase of member checking and presentation of findings, I was aware at that point that financial constraints may make that impossible – an intuition that proved correct. Therefore I ensured to establish a level and mode of involvement that would work best for them and facilitated ongoing contact (Pyne, 2007). For most, this was email, Facebook chat or Skype calls, which is how I stayed in touch since my return to Ireland.

Data transcription/translation, management and analysis

Transcription and Translation

After each interview, I immediately compiled a summary based on my notes and recollections, which included contextual information and notes on insights from my interpreter debriefing session, and shared them with my supervisor. I transcribed all the English interviews myself, commencing as soon as possible after the interviews took place.

Due to the context, languages and other issues I discuss next, I employed a number of translators throughout the comprehensive transcription, translation, back translation and final review process. While this took considerable management and negotiation, each translator brought unique and valuable experience, knowledge and insight to the study, and enhancing the overall quality of the data. Each signed the confidentiality agreement prior to their involvement, as in the preliminary phase.

Burmese Translation Process

The method of “sequential translation” was chosen for the Burmese interviews (Shibusawa & Lukens, 2004). This involved initial transcription of the interviews into Burmese followed by translation into English. This method preserves the original language used, facilitating the later process of back translation. Furthermore it promotes rigour in cases where analysis cannot be conducted in the original language (Irvine, Roberts, & Bradbury-Jones, 2008; Twinn, 1997).

I employed a local translator, Niru, to commence transcription and translation. I had worked with Niru before, and was familiar with her style of working. Niru had lived in both refugee camp and migrant community settings since she was a teenager, and was attuned to local cultural nuances and idioms (Björk Brämberg & Dahlberg, 2012; Caretta, 2014; Padgett, 2008).

Before the commencement of translation, I met with Niru to discuss what I was looking for in terms of a meaning-focused rather than literal translation. Previous PhD studies utilising Karen and Burmese translations have noted the complexities in the languages’ grammar, syntax, pronouns, tenses, concepts and expressions which lack equivalency in English (Costello, 2008; Worland, 2010). These challenges echo studies conducted in other Asian languages (Smith, Chen, & Liu, 2008; Twinn, 1997). Simple forward and back literal translation may not guarantee concept equivalence but can wrongly indicate errors (Larkin, Dierckx de Casterlé, & Schotsmans, 2007). A translation approach based on attaining meaning rather than seeking a verbatim account is appropriate in such situations (Twinn, 1997).

My, albeit limited, Burmese language abilities proved very useful to the translation process. After Niru had translated five interviews, we met and reviewed the process in light of some discrepancies I had noticed between the tapes, interpretation, Burmese transcription and translation into English. We clarified these issues, and continued to meet up to discuss English word choices and other points of clarification. As I had discovered during the translation of the information materials at the beginning of this fieldwork phase, language and translation are ultimately constructed, and different interpreters and translators can be led to different conclusions by the same language (Croot et al., 2011; Temple, 1997). In meeting with Niru, I was able to explore, for instance, where and why her translation may have diverged greatly from the interpreter.

In the interests of rigour and trustworthiness, I employed Ko Myo to review, together with me, particular sections where the departure between interpretation and translation was greatly evident, as well as other sections chosen at random (Björk Brämberg & Dahlberg, 2012; Squires, 2009). For the small number of interviews in which Ko Myo was involved as interpreter, this retranslation/review process was conducted with Aye Aye, a young woman studying in university in Chiang Mai, who is

fluent in Pho and Sgaw Karen, Burmese and English and highly experienced in interpretation and translation.

After Niru had moved to Myanmar, Ko Myo conducted the initial translation of the remainder of the interviews. For consistency, the same process of retranslation and review was applied, conducted either with Hay Mar San or Aye Aye.

The final stage of the process—back translation—is considered best conducted with a separate bilingual translator familiar with the study topic and the context (Chen & Boore, 2010; Irvine et al., 2008). I decided to conduct back translation in person, meaning that any difference—and its significance—could be quickly unpacked (Temple & Edwards, 2002). Zulu carried out this work with me. I had known Zulu for a number of years, she spoke excellent English, and was a highly experienced translator with years of experience living and working in Mae Sot. After Zulu moved to another city in Thailand for work, I engaged Htar Htar to continue this work with me. Htar Htar grew up in IDP camps in Myanmar and refugee camps in Thailand, had attended university in North America for a number of years, and now was living and working in Mae Sot. I felt privileged to have both of them—as well as their perspectives and insights—involved in this final process, furthering the rigour of the overall translation.

Karen Translation Process

As few people type Karen, particularly Pho, these interviews could not follow the same sequential transcription/translation and review process as the Burmese interviews. Initially, I employed Hay Mar San to translate two interviews and then meet with me for a review. The review was lengthy as, because I spoke none of the language, I had many questions about idioms and expressions. As meeting to discuss the interview was so useful, moving on, I decided to conduct the translation in person: I typed the English while Hay Mar San translated orally. While this took time, necessitating repeatedly listening to the same sections, and pausing to discuss emerging themes and insights, it was manageable as it involved only five interviews. The process was certainly rewarding and derived rich translations. I then conducted full retranslations in person with Aye Aye. Like Hay Mar San, Aye Aye frequently paused to reflect and share her own personal experience as a young woman growing up in the refugee camp, again deepening further my understanding of the lives and context in the refugee camp.

Data Analysis

Informal analysis began after each interview in the writing of summaries, as discussed previously, drawing from my interview notes and reflections, detailing the context, content and challenges. As the interviews progressed, I reflected on recurring themes and emerging ideas, which I discussed in the debriefing sessions with my interpreters as well as in my regular meetings with my community

and youth advisors. This process allowed me to test initial thoughts and seek additional information in subsequent interviews. During the transcription and translation process, I became increasingly familiar with the content, and took notes on patterns between interviews, again discussing these with my translators and community and youth advisors. In this way, while formal analysis only commenced once I had returned to Ireland and all transcripts were completed, I was already much acquainted with the overall shape of the data and had been able to road-test my early interpretations.

Upon my return to Ireland, data analysis of the 44 interviews commenced. Open coding was carried out working from the bottom up, line by line or in short segments, “assigning units of meaning” to the collected data (Birks & Mills, 2011; Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 56). This process helped me to “fracture the data” and ask new questions in terms of what was happening and what that meant (Birks & Mills, 2011; Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I applied gerunds or “in vivo” codes, i.e. participants’ own “vivid and descriptive” terms (Strauss & Corbin, 2007, p. 160), wherever possible to maintain a sense of activity (Charmaz, 2006), and stay close to what participants described themselves as doing, feeling, and being (Foley & Timonen, 2015).

I used Nvivo software to help me organise my data and manage this early process, and help prevent my getting lost in or flooded by the hundreds of codes which emerged. I initially broadly organised these codes according to the main overarching themes of the research objectives: the meaning and impact of lack of documentation, the meaning and impact of displacement, the experience of education and work, and resources and supports sought and mobilised. I recorded interpretation and language challenges and participant reflections on the interview and interpretation experience. I wrote memos, capturing my understanding of the arising themes, cross-referencing them to the transcripts (Charmaz, 2006; Foley & Timonen, 2015; Gilbert, Jackson, & Gregorio, 2014). Diagramming helped me identify points of connection as well as duplication, and, again, to protect me from becoming overwhelmed by the amount of data (Birks & Mills, 2011; Corbin & Strauss, 2015). (See Appendix I for an example of diagramming)

In the next stage of the process, I sought to reassemble the “fractured” data, transferring the hundreds of codes to Microsoft Excel, organising them and rewording them where necessary. I began mapping out the codes and, in the process, identifying and developing “focused” codes or “telling” codes which I felt most usefully explained significant or recurring emerging concepts and patterns, and testing them against other data (Birks & Mills, 2011; Charmaz, 2014).

Demonstrating Trustworthiness

Qualitative research and qualitative researchers are often by necessity creative and exploratory (Seale, 2002). With this acknowledged, trustworthiness refers to the level of trust which can be given that, within the challenges of the context, data was appropriately and ethically collected, analysed,

and reported from conception to final thesis (Gringeri, Barusch, & Cambron, 2013). Credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability are four common techniques to assess and establish trustworthiness of findings in qualitative research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Within cross-cultural studies, there can be extra threats to trustworthiness (Wallin & Ahlström, 2006). These can be ameliorated by the adoption of multiple steps to ensure the study is culturally sensitive and respectful, communicated clearly and using appropriate methods, and demonstrating flexibility to meet the needs of the participants (Im et al., 2004, p. 894). These I have addressed throughout this chapter.

In line with establishing trustworthiness, I continually examined my own biases, assumptions, beliefs and role in the research through my reflexive journal and in my meetings with advisors, interpreters and my academic supervisor (Creswell & Miller, 2000). These differing perspectives contributed to triangulation, as I sought convergence and corroboration among different sources of information derived from the diversity-driven sampling approach, while also welcoming inconsistencies or disconfirming evidence (Creswell, 2012; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stake, 1995). The written translation process similarly involved multiple points of triangulation in order to reach a common “meaning” consensus (Temple & Young, 2004).

My prior knowledge and experience in the community and culture and subsequent prolonged engagement and close advisory network during data collection helped me pay “due regard” to the specific cultural and social behaviour and norms (Irvine et al., 2008). This contributed to my ability to collect “thick descriptions” which can provide readers with a sense of “verisimilitude” or “being there”, allowing them to assess the transferability of findings to new contexts (Creswell, 2012). These thick descriptions, along with other theoretical, methodological, and analytical decisions, such as maximum diversity sampling and member checking, contributed to an audit trail or “chain of evidence”, demonstrating rigour (Creswell & Miller, 2000) and promoting the study’s dependability and confirmability (Bowen, 2009; Yin, 2009).

Conclusion

This chapter provided a detailed overview of the methodological approach that was adopted in the study. It explained the rationale for a social constructionism epistemology and how the choice of a qualitative case study and particular methods was made. Throughout the chapter I made explicit my own positionality, demonstrating my commitment to an intercultural, reflexive, ethical and collaborative approach, within the realities of messy real-world research. This approach was supported by bringing particular attention to the team of interpreters, translators and advisors in study, whose own social realities undeniably shaped the (re)construction of the data (R. Edwards, 1998; Squires, 2009).

In the next chapter, the first of the four findings chapters, I introduce the young men and women who participated in the study, commencing the “thick description” facilitated by the adoption of a qualitative case study methodology.

Chapter Four

Introducing the Young People in the Study

Introduction

In this chapter, I commence the process of providing “thick descriptions” of the everyday worlds of the young men and women in the study. This descriptive chapter begins with an overview of the young men and women’s demographic characteristics, before turning to the nature of their varying legal documentation in Myanmar and Thailand. The chapter highlights the diversity of legal circumstances which impact, in different ways, every sphere of their young lives. Next, the chapter turns to describe and detail the young people’s family and living circumstances, and concludes with their education and work experiences.

In Appendix J, I provide a number of sample case profiles. These cases have been chosen to reflect a range of different experiences and circumstances, allowing the reader to step briefly into these worlds and appreciate their challenges and diversity. All cases have been anonymised. The university student is a composite due to the relatively small number of young Myanmar men and women attending university in Thailand, and the therefore higher potential for identification.

Demographics and Time in Thailand

The narratives of 17 women and 18 men were used in the study. The broad demographic makeup of the young people is represented in Table 5 below.

Gender	Male: 18	Female: 17					
Age	18yrs: 9	19yrs: 9	20yrs: 8	21yrs: 2	22yrs: 3	23yrs: 2	24yrs: 2
Marital Status	Single: 30	Married: 5					
Ethnicity	Burman: 13	Karen: 17	Pa O: 1	Shan: 1	Myeik: 1	Islam: 1	Burmese-Thai: 1
Religion	Buddhist: 24	Christian: 8	Buddhist-Christian: 1	Muslim: 1	None: 1		
Arrival to Thailand	Born into Thai migrant community: 7	Born into Thai refugee camp: 5	Arrived 1-5 years old: 3	Arr. 6-10 years old: 11	Arr. 11-12 years old: 9		
Living environment	Mae Sot Urban: 14	Mae Sot Rural: 9	Refugee Camp: 8	Chiang Mai City: 6			
Living situation	With parents: 16	With relatives: 3	With spouse: 1	With spouse and parents: 4	Boarding House / Shelter: 4	Student house / with friends: 4	Alone: 3
Myanmar legal identity documentation	None: 8	Birth certificate: 6	Child ID: 5	Adult Citizenship Card: 10			
Thai identity & other legal documentation	None: 6	Informal, temporary migrant student/worker identity cards/permits: 9	Official, temporary migrant worker identity cards/permits/visas: 16	Thai citizenship: 2			

Refugee Camp official UN registration	None: 2	Registration: 6				
Education attainment	Dropped out: 16	Completed migrant / refugee high school: 3 Official Accreditation: 0	Attending migrant / refugee high school / “post-10” school: 9		Attending Thai high school: 1	Attending university: 5
Work (outside home)	None: 4	Factory: 3	Seasonal agriculture/ construction worker: 5	Selling in shop/ market: 4	Migrant teacher: 1	Refugee camp (occasional cutting bamboo): 4

Table 5: Overview of Study Participants

The participants range in age from 18 to 24 years, although the majority are aged between 18 and 20 years. The ethnicities as identified by the participants are as follows: Bamar/Burmese/Myanmar (13), Karen/Kayin (Sgaw or Pho) (17), Pa O (1), Shan (1), Myeik (1) and Islam (1). One young man identifies as half Burmese, half Thai. Twenty-four young people identify as Buddhist, eight as Christian and one as Islam. One young man identifies as both Buddhist and Christian and another young man prefers to be considered of no religion.

Seven young men and women in the study were born in migrant communities Thailand and five in Mae La refugee camp. One quarter of all participants have spent time living both inside and outside a refugee camp in Thailand, i.e. have experience living as “refugees” and “illegal migrants”. A total of 23 young men and women migrated to Thailand either alone or with their families as children: five between the ages of one and five years, eleven between the ages of six and 10 years and nine between the ages of 11 and 12 years. On average, the young migrants have spent 11 years in Thailand, the longest being 19 years and the shortest being five years.

These demographics reflect an intentional sampling approach taken to reflect and attend to the heterogeneity of the overall population. While diverse, the sample is still by no means exhaustive of all circumstances.

In the next section, I explore the documentation circumstances of the young men and women which are central to the study.

Documentation

Myanmar ⇨ ⇩ Thailand		<i>Unclear</i>	Nothing	Birth Cert	Child ID	Adult Citizenship	Adult Citizenship & Passport
	Nothing		Kan	Aung	Kyaw, Sone	Bo, Aye	
Informal (Temporary)	Migrant High School Student Card		Naw		Paw	Cho	
	Migrant Teacher Card		Thin				
	Village migrant worker “Baht”	Win, Min	Zin			Htin	
Official (Temporary)	Thai High School Student Card			Ku			
	Tor Ror 38/1			Phyu, Chit*			
	Migrant Worker Permit			Chit*		Grace	
	Temporary Passport		Khin			Thaw*, Nang*	
	“10-year-card” “0”				Htun	Saw*, Thaw*, Nang*	
	Thailand Visa						Saw*, Le, Kwi Nang*
Permanent	Thai Citizenship “2”		Taw				
	Thai Citizenship “8”		May*				

REFUGEE CAMP	Nothing		Nu	Sah			
	United Nations Registration		Law, Klo, Tha, Nan, Kalu, Noo				
NOTES: BLUE = born in Thailand. GOLD = born in Myanmar and migrated before the age of 10. RED = born in Myanmar and migrated after the age of 10. GREEN = born in the refugee camp. *Possesses more than one type of documentation in Thailand							

Table 6: Participants’ documentation types

Reference to “documentation” and “documents” in this study relates to the participants’ possession, or lack thereof, of a broad variety of legal documents for Thailand and Myanmar. Such documentation includes birth certificates and citizenship cards, worker permits and student cards—documents identified by the young people in response to the question, “Do you have documents?” Table 6 illustrates the diversity of responses and complexity of documentation types held across Myanmar and Thailand.

My interpreters and I at times struggled in the interviews to fully understand the nature of the young person's documents. The young people often refer to their documents by different terms. The multiple languages on the border (including English, Burmese, Thai, Karen) mean there exist multiple names for the same documents. Furthermore, the young people can have different understandings their complex permissions and restrictions associated with their particular document. For instance, when one young woman, Zin, initially said that her landlord had made her "baht" (the Thai word for any type of "card"), my interpreter inferred that her boss had made an official work permit for her and interpreted as such to me. However, based on the rest of the interview and the travel restrictions Zin described, it was more likely she has an informal card. In the absence of the actual document it remains difficult to establish for certain. Fortunately, many of the young people showed me their document and permitted me to photograph them. This allowed me to find out about the official name of that document and its associated permissions and restrictions. As described in Chapter Three, I established an extensive advisory network to help me navigate some of the cultural and contextual matters that arose during the course of the fieldwork. These advisors were particularly helpful as I sought to understand the complex nature of these documents and I refer to their advice throughout this chapter and the remaining chapters of the thesis. However, while the true nature of the documents is important, what is most important is what the young people themselves think of their documents. It is this perspective that I draw from for the most part throughout this chapter.

Myanmar Documentation

The main types of Myanmar documentation held by the young people are relatively straight forward: birth certificate, officially attainable only at birth, Child Identification Card, or the adult Citizen Scrutiny Card. The Child ID is available from the age of 10 years, obtained through a letter of "recommendation" from the head of their village or town quarter. The adult national identity card, called the Citizen Scrutiny Card, is accessible from 18 years old.

Of the 17 young men and women who had migrated to Thailand as children, three possess no form of documentation in Myanmar, three only have birth certificates, four have Child IDs and five young men and women had obtained adult citizen cards. (Two young men's documentation situation in Myanmar remain unclear from the interviews).

Three of the six young men and women born in Thailand also possess Myanmar birth certificates, acquired through relatives in Myanmar. Two had also acquired their adult citizen cards.

Four university students hold Myanmar adult citizen cards as well as a Myanmar passport and relevant visa for Thailand. The fifth young woman in university uses Thai documentation.

Officially, a Myanmar birth certificate is not needed to apply for the Citizen Scrutiny Card, and instead certain household and family documents can be provided (TNI-BCN, 2014). While a number

of the young people reported no difficulties in acquiring their Citizen Scrutiny Card, others discussed facing numerous obstacles, associated—according to the young people—with their lack of other documents or ethnic group, which were generally resolved by paying more money.

Example of the Myanmar Citizen Scrutiny Card (Adult National ID)

The Myanmar citizen cards are handwritten and usually, but not always, according to participants, laminated. The young men and women also mentioned that it is not uncommon for mistakes to be made by the official filling it out.

The card is written in Burmese. The title reads “National Scrutiny Card”. It records information on the front and the back including name, address, sex, date of birth, father’s name, race and religion.



Thai Documentation

As is evident from Table 6, when it comes to documentation in Thailand, there is a great deal of variation among the participants. One reason for this is the number of documentation types that exist, arising in part from the fluctuating policy positions of different Thai governments seeking to manage the country’s immigrant population (Thame, 2014). However, all migrant documents in Thailand are temporary in nature. Only citizen cards are permanent. Furthermore, while work permits allow the individual to work, the individual’s legal status in the country can remain “illegal, pending deportation” as they are deemed to have entered Thailand without documentation (IOM, 2011).

The types of documents held by the young men and women in the study can be broadly distinguished between those which are more informal and those which are more official. The informal documents were issued often in conjunction with local authorities in Mae Sot, they do not officially alter the individual’s legal work or immigration status and often offer very limited—and unreliable—security. The cards are predominately handwritten and laminated. The official documents reflect official policies set by the government of Thailand. They often permit the young person to work and

generally offer more security and access to other services, however also generally maintain the person's immigration status as "illegal, pending deportation". Examples of these informal and formal cards are described further below.

No documents in Thailand

Five young men and women, Kan, Kyaw, Sone, Bo, Aye and Aung, possess no form of documentation in Thailand, informal or official. Aung lost his migrant school card and was unable to replace it after completing school, leaving him undocumented.

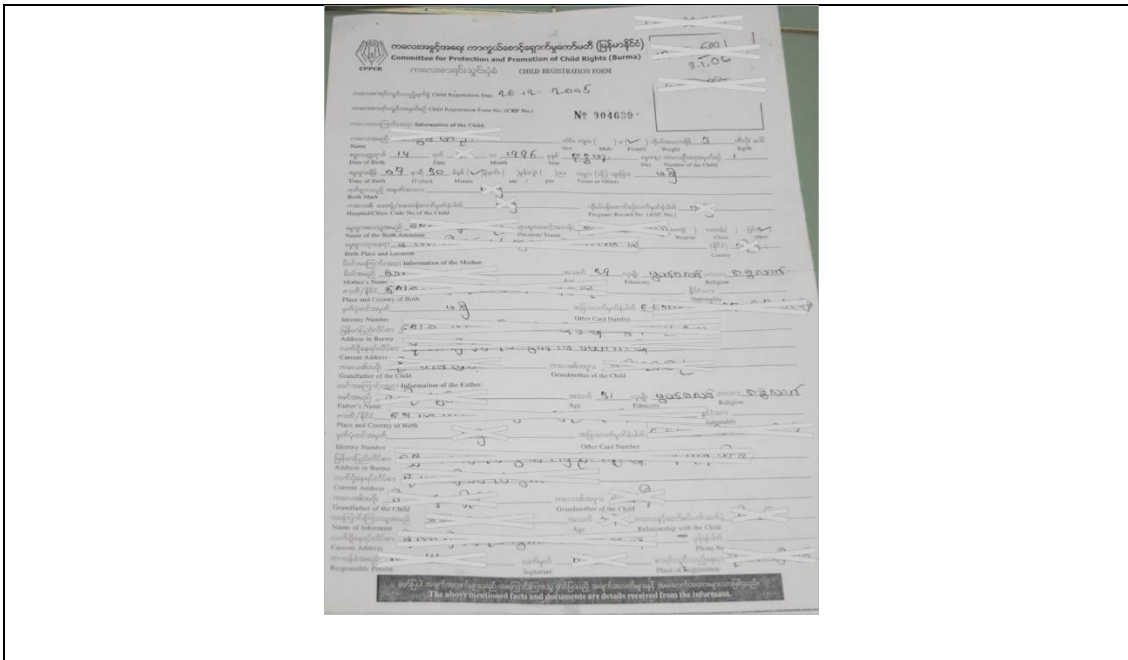
Lack of documentation affects every sphere of the young people's lives, resulting in limited mobility and daily risk of arrest, detention and deportation. Young people report having been arrested and deported from as young as 14 years old and having to pay up to 2000THB (€50) for release.

Without documentation, young people face challenges accessing healthcare, education, secure work, and recourse to justice. The young people's everyday social worlds are restricted by their lack of documentation, including the ability to travel to visit family and friends. One young woman, Nang, missed being with her dying mother. Without documentation, migrants cannot legally get married in Thailand. They cannot legally own or drive a bike or car.

Kan, Aye and Bo were born in Thailand, but did not receive official birth certificates at the time of their birth. When Aye was 10 years old, she was issued a birth certificate by local migrant community based organisation, Committee for Protection and Promotion of Child Rights (Burma) (CPPCR), during an outreach visit to her community in 2005. While not official, CPPCR began issuing these certificates within the migrant community in 2002, to provide young migrants and their parents with basic proof of their birth and parentage, and are accepted for enrolment by migrant schools and some Thai schools (CPPCR, 2009).

Example of the CPPCR-issued birth certificate

The CPPCR "Child Registration Form" records detailed information about the child's birth, her parentage, family and location. On the back, the child's hand or foot print is recorded as well as both parents' thumb prints.



Informal documents

Seven young men and women possess informal documents issued either through their “de thei” or their school. The Burmese word “de thei” means rich or wealthy person or boss in Burmese and is a term commonly used by migrants to refer to their Thai landowner or employer (who can often be both in agricultural areas as workers contribute labour in lieu of paying rent). These documents do not legalise the individual’s immigration nor work status in Thailand. They do not allow access to any services and provide very restricted protections within a particular vicinity.

“Baht”

Four young men and women, Zin, Htin, Win and Min, describe having a “baht”, meaning ‘card’ in Thai, which they acquired through their “de htei”. Costing about 320THB (€8), the “baht” allows the young person to work in the environs of the village or district stated on the document. If they leave the area, for instance to travel into Mae Sot town, they still have to pay the 100THB “fine”.

Example of an informal “baht”

The card reads “Alien Person Card for Agriculture Workers”. It records the individual’s name, personal details, location, the issue and expiry date (it is a one-year card), and the Thai person responsible.



Migrant student and teacher cards

Three young women, Cho, Naw and Paw, attend migrant high schools, through which they obtained migrant student identification cards, issued in conjunction with the local Thai Ministry of Education (MOE). These cards keep them safe within their school or boarding accommodation and are supposed to be recognised by local authorities (CPPCR, 2009). However, this is not always reliable, as I discuss in Chapter Five.

Naw was one of the young people in the study born in Myanmar whose birth was not registered—a common occurrence in remote and conflict-afflicted areas of the country (CPPCR, 2012). Naw was issued with a retrospective certificate by CPPCR to allow her to enrol in her migrant school in Mae Sot.

One young woman, Thin, possesses a migrant school “teacher card”, similarly issued by her school. While it allows her to remain on the school grounds, she risks arrest if she leaves.

Example of a Migrant Student Identification Card

The migrant student card records the young person’s migrant school, name, date of birth, gender, school grade and the school director responsible.



Official documents

Nine young men and women possess official migrant documents. These include Thai student cards, migrant worker permits, temporary passports, “10-year-cards” and, finally, educational visas. These represent official government issued documents. As all of these cards offer different freedoms and restrictions, each I describe in turn:

Thai Student Identification Card

Ku acquired a Thai student identification card through his Thai high school. This and his Thai student uniform accord him security and eased mobility in and around Mae Sot.

Tor Ror 38/1 & Migrant Worker Permit

The Tor Ror 38/1 (photo below), held by Phyu and Chit, is a temporary stay document developed specifically for migrant workers from Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia.

It entitles the bearer to limited services or security, and is often obtained prior to getting a work permit (IOM, 2011).

In addition to the Tor Ror 38/1, Chit and Grace both also have a migrant worker permit. Chit explained how the permit provides protection from unfair dismissal. The permit also allows access to Thailand’s 30THB (€75c) healthcare scheme. Maternal care is provided under this scheme, and Grace could give birth at the Thai general hospital.

Example of a Tor Ror 38/1 (no example of the migrant worker permit)

The English reads “Non-Thai Identification Card”, while the Thai translates as “Alien without Thai Nationality”. It records nationality, name, address and expiration date.



“10-Year Card”

Thaw, Htun and Saw possess the “10-year card”. This card allows holders to stay in the country and have some rights including to work, study, travel (however permission must be sought in advance from the local authority) and buy a house (but not the land under the house).

Htun describes it as a “10-year living permit... like being half Thai citizen. But in the next 10 years, I will get the Thai citizen card.” My advisors caution that this may not be the case but that it depends on future government leniency.

Example of a “10-Year-Card”

The Thai translates as “Identity Card for Person without Registration Status”. It records his name, date of birth, address and date of expiry.



Temporary Passport

Khin, Thaw and Nang all possess temporary passports (Thaw and Nang hold other Thai documents in addition). The temporary passport is issued under a joint National Verification process between the Thai and Myanmar governments.

Khin’s husband’s employer helped her acquire her temporary passport, while Khin paid for it. Thaw’s shelter procured her temporary passport, with which she said she was able to access the 30THB health care scheme and receive treatment at the hospital for her HIV symptoms.

Example of a Temporary Passport

Similar to a regular passport, it records various personal details: name, nationality, date of birth, gender, dates of issue and expiry, place of birth and issuing authority.



Thai National Identification Card (Citizenship)

There are eight different categories of Thai citizenship, denoted by the first digit of the individual's ID number. While all citizens are entitled to free education, to own land and to work, other rights are restricted to the members of particular categories, including freedom of movement, access to certain public services and political participation. While naturalisation is rare, it happened for one young woman during the course of the data collection period.

During the time between our first and second interviews, May, who was born in Thailand, acquired Thai citizenship. Her "8" card means she is a naturalised citizen, who could prove she was born and/or had lived in Thailand for a long time. This is a limited citizenship category: she cannot work for the government, for instance.

Taw's mother acquired Thai citizenship for Taw soon after he came to Thailand when he was around one or two. He does not know the details of how. With the first digit a "2"; his citizenship represents the category for children whose births were registered late, but which confers full citizenship and associated rights and privileges.

Example of the Thai National Identification Card

The Thai identification card is plastic, micro-chipped and barcoded. It records information including the person's personal details, date of issue and expiry. The first of the 13 digits denotes the person's type of citizenship. The next digits (hidden for anonymization) indicate information regarding issuing province and district.



Refugee Camp Identification

As I discussed in Chapter One, a formal refugee registration process by UNHCR in conjunction with the Thai government, took place in all the official refugee camps between 2005 and 2006. The process evaluated refugee status in accordance with the Thailand government's definition of a refugee as someone "fleeing fighting" or "fleeing political persecution". Being registered as a refugee opens up the possibility of resettlement to a third country. Acquiring rations and other services from NGOs in the camp is not related to being registered.

All six young men and women who were born in the refugee camp possess UN registration as does one young man who had come when he was five years old.

The two young people, one young man and one young woman, who came to the camp after 10 years of age are not registered. The young man possesses a Myanmar birth certificate which remains with his parents back in Myanmar, but with whom he has no contact since his arrival to Thailand almost ten years previously.

In this section, I reviewed the array of legal documentation types held by the young men and women in the study. The different documents afford varying levels of security, mobility, access to services, education and work opportunities, which those without documents live without. All migrant documents, however, are temporary in nature and even with official work permits the young person's legal status in Thailand remains "illegal pending deportation". All migrant documents can be rescinded at any time by the Thai government. Only the two young people with Thai citizenship have permanent status and access to full rights and services in Thailand.

Family and Relationships

Contact with parents and family

Just over half of the unmarried young men women in the study live with their immediate family. Half of those live with both parents and half live with only their mother or siblings, as a result of parental

separation, the death of one parent or one parent remaining in Myanmar with other children. For example, the father of one young woman, Chit, moved to work in Bangkok before she was born. Chit and her mother assumed he had died as he stopped making contact, however last year a family friend saw him working in another part of Thailand. Chit and her mother went to meet him, but have had no contact since. Ku's father is Thai but soon after he was born, "he stopped coming to see my mother". Ku has never met his father.

Three unmarried young men and women live with other close relatives. Bo has been living with his aunt and uncle since he was nine years old when his parents "dropped" him off to work in Thailand. Each year he visits his family in Myanmar. Win has been living with his older married sister in Thailand for the last 10 years, working to support his parents back in Myanmar. He rarely sees his parents as neither can they visit due to their lack of documents, nor he visit them as his "baht" does not permit travel outside the locality. Cho lives with her grandmother, aunt, uncle, cousins and other students. Her parents moved back to Myanmar the previous year. While she had initially returned with them also, she only stayed one year as she did not like it. She sought and received their permission to return to Thailand and continue her education.

Four young women live in boarding houses and shelters in Mae Sot. Boarding houses provide accommodation to students as well as teachers of migrant schools in the town. Nineteen-year-old Thin lives in the boarding house attached to the migrant school where she works as a teacher. Her parents also live in Mae Sot and she maintains regular contact with them as well as her grandparents across the border in Myanmar. High school students, Naw and Paw, live in the boarding house attached to their school. Eighteen-year-old Naw has only seen her parents once in the ten years since she started at the school. Her parents live in a refugee camp some distance from Mae Sot. Travel is expensive and risky for both her, due to the limitations of her migrant student card, and her parents, who are not permitted to leave the refugee camp. Nineteen-year-old Paw's sister lives at the boarding house with Paw, while their parents live in a remote village in rural Karen State. Transport is difficult and expensive for her parents to afford as farmers and, as a result, Paw has seen them "just three times in nine years", on occasions when they come for medical care in Mae Tao Clinic—a free community health clinic run by refugees and migrants in Mae Sot. The last time she saw them was two years ago. The final young woman, Thaw, lives in a shelter for women with HIV. It is located close to the hospital where she receives the medical care she needs. She visits her parents in Karen State every year.

In the refugee camp, seven of the eight young men and women live with their families, although, during term time, one young woman, Nu, lives at her school's boarding house as it helps her family's rations go further. One young man, Sah, lives between different friends. As I mentioned above, Sah has had no contact with his parents since he left his home in Karen State ten years ago, when he was 13, to pursue educational opportunities in the camp. His parents do not have a phone and live in a

remote part of Karen State where no one—no “chance-messenger”—travels who could pass messages between them.

None of the young people in university live with their families. In Chiang Mai, the students live alone or sharing, in either student or privately rented accommodation. Their families either live elsewhere in Chiang Mai, in Mae Sot, in one of the refugee camps or back in Myanmar. Most of the young people in university had also lived in boarding houses during school, and therefore have not lived with their families for many years. They stay in touch over the phone and on Facebook, with visits back to their families during university holidays.

Of the five married young men and women in the study, all but one young woman, whose parents died when she was a child, live either with or close by their parents or parents-in-law. Zin lives with her mother together with her husband and baby. Aye, lives with her husband in a self-contained space upstairs from her parents-in-law. She visits her parents regularly and recently stayed with them while her father was unwell. Htin and Grace both live with their respective spouses and children, next door to their parents.

In this section, I described how most young people I interviewed in the migrant community and refugee camp continue to live with their parents and/or immediate family. Even when married, living with or very close to one’s parents is common. In fact, for the most part, it seems that only the necessity of work or education causes young people to live apart from their parents. As I discuss in Chapter Six, it is often emotionally painful for the young men and women to be separated from their parents and most hope to live with them again in the future.

Marriage and parenthood

Five young men and women I interviewed in the migrant community are married. None of those I spoke to in the refugee camp or university are married. While the lack of married young people in the sample from the refugee camp most likely reflects recruitment choices of my local contacts, rather than reflect the demographics of the camp population, the lack of married young men and women in university is culturally normative. I discuss this and the young people’s choices and attitudes regarding marriage further in Chapter Seven.

Four of the five married young men and women got married after the age of 18. Zin was 15 when she got married, her husband nine years older than her. Three years married, they have a two-year old daughter. Grace met her husband at the factory where they both work. He is eight years older than her. They are married one year and have a one-year-old daughter. Khin has been married for six years. She was 18 when she met her husband at the plantation where they worked. They have a six-year-old daughter and a three-year-old son. Her daughter lives in Myanmar with her mother-in-law to attend school.

Htin met his wife when she moved with her family into his small migrant community. They ran away with each other for three days, in order to be “forced” to marry when they returned them to marry. Married now six years, Htin and his wife have one two-year-old son and are soon expecting their second child.

Aye met her husband when she was 18 during a visit back to Mae Sot during the time she lived in Bangkok. She too ran away with her husband. She has had one miscarriage previously and is pregnant again. As I discovered in the course of the conversation (much to my embarrassment), I last interviewed Aye on the day she was due to give birth. It was clear she was in discomfort.

The sample of married young men and women in the study is small, nonetheless it is noteworthy that most had children soon after they got married. As I discuss later, having children at a young age can put extra financial strain on the young people.

I now turn to the living environments of the young men and women.

Living Environments

Mae Sot migrant communities

While there are some predominantly migrant neighbourhoods in and around Mae Sot, migrants can be seen living all about the town, their living spaces often distinguishable from their Thai neighbours by the quality of housing and land they occupy.

Chit and Kan live in typical urban dwellings in one of several small one- or two-room units divided from one long concrete building. Chit lives in a predominantly migrant neighbourhood while Kan lives on the edges of the Muslim quarter of the town.



Urban and rural migrant homes in and around Mae Sot



Elsewhere in the town live Aye and Ku. Aye lives intentionally away from migrant neighbourhoods in a privately rented two story house about five minutes from the centre of the town. She and her husband live in a self-enclosed space upstairs, while her husband's family live downstairs. While I didn't visit Ku in his home, he describes living with his mother in a house on a small compound alongside several Thai families, close to the centre of the town.

Naw and Paw also live in the centre of Mae Sot. Their boarding house and school are located in a quiet network of roads behind a large new shopping complex. The boarding house is home to over 100 girls and young women.

Three young men and women, Phyu, Htun and Aung, live on the outskirts of the Mae Sot town between ten and twenty minutes by bike. Phyu and her brother Htun live together with several other migrant families in bamboo huts clustered together on what appeared to be uneven waste land between spacious and well-appointed Thai homes. Toilets and washing spaces are communal. Inside hanging fabric partitions the space into rooms. Aung lives with his parents, siblings and their families on private land up a laneway off one of the main roads leading out of town. According to his father, Aung's sister's Thai husband owns the land and built the houses on it for Aung and his family.

Travelling out of town, the countryside is less densely populated, allowing space for some large self-contained factories, like the one where Grace and her family lives about 20-minutes' drive outside of Mae Sot. The migrant workers' accommodation is located around the back of the large main factory building and annex buildings. A long concrete building, divided into single rooms, provides

homes for each family—not dissimilar to some migrant homes in the centre of the town. The roof is extended using old corrugated iron sheets to create a covered shared cooking space. Communal toilets and wash areas are located at one end of the building.

**Inside
migrants’
homes**



Heading further out of Mae Sot town, the land becomes increasingly agricultural. On the outskirts of small villages, small numbers of huts are dotted along edges of fields. Many agricultural migrant workers live in small communities such as these. Htin lives in such a community together with about six other families. The land is owned by their “de htei” (Burmese for rich person, landowner or boss, as discussed above). In lieu of rent, they contribute an agreed amount of labour per month.

In other areas, little quasi-villages of migrant workers homes have been established, with rows of bamboo huts lined up side by side with communal toilets and wash areas at one end. These communities appear strikingly similar to the refugee camps. Visiting the young people in these communities provided valuable insight into the day-to-day lives and the nature of the isolation due to their geographical remoteness and restricted mobility, which I describe in the box below.

Personal Reflection on “the migrant life”

For our first visit to this rural migrant community, my interpreter and I travelled in the morning to attend a ceremony marking an important Buddhist holiday. Many of the migrant workers living in the nearby areas had taken the morning off to attend the ceremony, giving us a special opportunity to meet prospective participants. We travelled together on my bike in the morning sun, the journey taking about 30 minutes down the main highway. Soon after a large police check point, we turned off the main road and drove through a pretty Thai village which opened into a beautiful scene of lush fields, filled with vigorously growing crops. Further on,

over a little bridge, we came to the migrant community hall, which is used during the day as a school. Today all the classroom partitions were pushed back to facilitate the morning's ceremony.

While waiting for the monks to arrive, my interpreter gave me a walking tour of the surrounding area, teaching me about the different edible wild plants and the games she used to play as a child with the stalks and seeds. She showed me the migrant workers' huts dotted between the fields, telling me how during the day while parents are working, children not attending in school are often left alone. She explained how trucks sometimes come through these areas, taking the children to Bangkok or other Thai cities where they are forced to beg or sell flowers.

Having arranged an interview with one young man, the next time we arrived was in the evening. We drove together on my bike enjoying the relative coolness of the late afternoon breeze. We interviewed the young man in the community hall, taking the "classroom" furthest away from where other people had congregated. The light faded as the interview progressed and by 8pm, when we finished, we found ourselves completely in darkness, the silence of the night broken only by the cicadas, frogs and mosquitoes. As we were leaving, our community liaison instructed us on the safest route to take back to the highway. He told us how to avoid driving by the fields, which, while beautiful by day, the plants' height made perfect hiding space for assailants. He also told us how to avoid road side shelters, where young Thai men congregate to drink in the evenings. The roads were dark and the lights on my bike only showed up the plentiful potholes at the last minute. The village seemed deserted. We both breathed a sigh of relief by the time we reached the main road. We agreed not to travel by night again, even though we knew it would be more difficult to access potential participants who work throughout the daylight hours.

I started thinking about how much more vulnerable the young migrants without documents would be on those roads, and how their informal documents would not even permit them to travel as far as we did to the main road. Their worlds suddenly appeared so much smaller, constrained and perilous.

Refugee Camp

As described in Chapter One, Mae La Refugee Camp is situated along the side of the main road leading north, 57 kilometres from Mae Sot, approximately 45 minutes to one hour's drive. The approach of the refugee camp is indicated by the several police and army check points. In the camp, the refugee homes are made of bamboo, blending in with the countryside. The barbed wire fences and armed soldiers at the camp entrances clash with the picturesque traditional village appearance of the patchwork quilt of bamboo huts.

The camp had been my interpreter's home for a number of years before she moved to Mae Sot. Her family still live there and she visits them regularly. She gave me a walking tour around the camp, which, after decades of inhabitation, has developed into a living community with shops and markets, schools and spaces of worship. Young men congregate in several places to play cane ball. Football is also a popular sport but with only one football field, "it is busy all the time", according to my interpreter. Behind the football field, sits the large medical centre, staffed by Burmese doctors

employed by non-governmental organisations (NGOs). My interpreter also brought me to the administrative area of the camp, where UNHCR and other NGOs have their offices. She pointed out one small hut with a glass wall on one side displaying a typical western bathroom inside—part of the pre-departure training for refugees about to be resettled.

As mentioned above, many refugee homes are strikingly similar to those in parts of the migrant community. Some are larger than others, some have gardens where they tend pigs and some have even dug wells. Many are small one or two room spaces. Most people use communal toilet and wash areas.

Refugee camp – the approach, the football pitch, picturesque bamboo huts and camp-based industry



University Life

As described earlier, in Chiang Mai, the students live in either student or privately rented accommodation, either alone or sharing. In the shared student accommodation, the young men live downstairs and the young women live upstairs. Bedrooms are shared. The cooking and cleaning is done by both the young men and women. Rent is covered by scholarships or other donors. Many either have their own or have access to scooters to travel in and out of university.

In this section, I described the broad range of settings in which the young people in the study reside, from urban to rural in and around Mae Sot, and from refugee camp to Chiang Mai city. In order to illuminate the isolation of the young people's worlds in the rural agricultural areas, I included an excerpt from my field notes.

In the next section, I move on to the educational experiences of the young men and women in this study.

Education

While all 35 young people in the study attended school for some period of time either in Myanmar or Thailand, three did not proceed further than kindergarten or Grade 1 and almost half had dropped out by Grade 5. In all cases, family financial challenges prompted school dropout, often exacerbated, according to the young people, by the cost of schooling in Myanmar and the refugee camps. Some also had their schooling interrupted by migration or short-term work.

Those still in school, attend between Grade 8 and 12, mainly in the migrant community and refugee camp, and one young man attends a Thai high school. One young man attends a post-high school programme preparing him for the GED exam which could open the pathway to third level education in Thailand. Five young men and women attend undergraduate courses in Chiang Mai University.

Of these six young people in higher education, only two completed Grade 12 high school, one in a Thai high school and one in a migrant high school. Four left their high schools either after Grade 11 or during Grade 12 to attend programmes to prepare them for the GED—the American education equivalency exam accepted in lieu of high school accreditation for entry to Thai universities. Schools run by the migrant and refugee communities are not recognised by either Ministries of Education in Thailand or Myanmar, leaving any education received in those schools ineligible for formal accreditation³. The two other young people, Thin and Sah, who completed Grade 12 in migrant and refugee schools, respectively, also do not hold any accreditation for their education, meaning that they have no way of proving their education. I discuss the impact of this, and the efforts by organisations in both communities to address these issues, in subsequent chapters.

School and school dropout in Myanmar

The majority of young men and women who migrated to Thailand as children had attended some schooling in Myanmar. Eight either concluded their schooling simultaneously or prior to their family's decision to migrate to Thailand. Nine young men and women found opportunities to continue their schooling once in Thailand, two of whom had anticipated working but found their way into education.

³ While the Thailand's Ministry of Education refers to these schools in the migrant community as "learning centres" in order to denote their lack of official status, for the purpose of clarity, in this study I continue to use the term school for all contexts.

The barriers to continuing school in Myanmar were mainly financial. Several young people mention how their families needed them to work to contribute to the family income. The reasons for this ranged from ageing parents, family illness or death, to the care needs of large numbers of children in the family. For others, the death of the supportive family member who paid the school costs necessitated dropout. When Le's uncle and Khin's father died, there was no one left to support their school costs, leading to their migration to Thailand to work.

The expense of school in Myanmar was another contributing factor to school dropout. In addition to the fees imposed by the government, many teachers also charge for extra "tuitions" to supplement their meagre state salaries. My advisors explain that some teachers can purposefully withhold core pieces of the curriculum to coerce students to either enrol in these extra paid classes or face missing out on a necessary part of the curriculum. Finally, the costs of school materials was often prohibitive for poor families. While both Htin's parents were working, "we were poor... there was no money for the book fee, pen fee..."

As mentioned, there are exceptions. Le did not know there were schools available to migrant young people and initially came to Thailand to work. As it was her intention to return to Myanmar as soon as she could afford to continue her education, she brought school books with her in lieu of clothes. Through support and guidance from her employer and later her teachers, she was able to access school in Thailand which led her to university.

Three young people, Naw, Saw and Kwi, left Karen State due to the dangers of the civil conflict, but chose their destination in Thailand in order to pursue their education. Naw described the raids on her village by the Myanmar army when she was a young child. Her aunt, who had lived in Thailand for many years, convinced her parents to leave Karen State. While they went to the refugee camp, Naw's aunt brought her to the migrant school in Mae Sot.

These cases indicate the multiple motivations and aspirations behind people's decisions to leave Myanmar and drop out of school, as well as their migration to and educational pursuits in Thailand.

School and school dropout in Thailand

Schools in the migrant community and refugee camps

As detailed in Chapter One, over the years, many schools, and boarding houses, have been set up in the migrant community and the refugee camps. Different individuals, community-based organisations and non-governmental organisations run schools for young people in the migrant communities in and around Mae Sot. The schools in Mae La Refugee Camp are run by the Karen Refugee Committee for Education (KRCEE) and follow its curriculum.

For some young people born in Thailand, while the schools in the migrant community do not charge fees, family financial difficulties often resulted in their school dropout, often at a young age. Zin left school after Grade 1 as her mother, as a “poor” migrant worker, moved around the border for work. Aye’s parents took her out of school when she was nine to work. Kan decided to drop out of school after Grade 3 in order to help with “family difficulties”.

In the refugee camp a nominal school fee is charged, described by the young men and women in the study as between 200THB and 650THB (€4-€16) per year. All but one of the young men and women who dropped out of school early in the refugee camps cite this fee as resulting in or contributing to their school dropout. Only one young man in the refugee camp, Klo, mentions a non-financial reason for his decision to drop out of school, saying simply: “I didn’t want to go”. He explains that while he recognises “going to school is the best [for people]”, it was not for him.

The three young men and women in the refugee camp whose families manage to pay their fees do so through different means. Nu’s mother pays for her and her siblings’ school fees “little by little” through her job working for a women’s organisation in the camp for which she earns 700THB (€17.50) per month. My advisors explain that the camp authorities limit the amount refugees can earn working in the camp. Nan’s parents pay for her fees through working (illegally) outside the camp “gardening and in the fields reaping the corn”. Kalu has relatives working in the migrant community in Thailand who pay his school fees.

Half of those who had attended school in Myanmar re-enrolled in migrant or refugee schools in Thailand. Many of them were required to restart school in lower grades, meaning they were older than their classmates. Htun and his sister Phyu joined their migrant school in lower grades than they left Myanmar. Both decided to quit school when they reached Grade 5. After reaching Grade six in Myanmar, Paw had to enrol in Grade 4 in her migrant school in Mae Sot as she failed the entrance exam. Aged 20, she is now in Grade 12. As I discuss later, many of those now attending university also recommenced in lower grades, but were facilitated to skip grades in order to catch up.

The two young people who migrated with their parents when they were babies or young children (before the commencement of their schooling) experienced delayed entry into school. After migrating to Mae Sot when he was five, twenty-year-old Aung worked alongside his father until his parents’ financial situation stabilised enough to allow him to commence migrant school when he was 11. He is now in Grade 10. Cho was a baby when her parents moved to Thailand. After attending a “border school” for Grade 1 and 2, Cho’s schooling was interrupted for a few years as she followed her mother moved around the border for work. She recommenced school in Grade 3 when she was about 13. She now attends Grade 10.

Lack of Educational Accreditation

Neither the Thai nor Myanmar education systems recognise the education provided by the schools in the migrant community or the refugee camp, attributed by my advisors to the nature of the curricula and informality of the schools. As a result, none of the eight students who graduated from high schools in either the migrant community or refugee camp acquired official accreditation for their education, limiting their access to certain jobs and higher education opportunities in both Thailand and Myanmar.

Efforts to address the gap in education accreditation are being led by various educational community based organisations and non-governmental organisations in both the refugee camps and migrant communities. For instance, Aung's and Kwi's schools both offer students opportunity to sit the Myanmar matriculation exams at the end of high school, opening up the possibility of accessing university in Myanmar. Set only in Burmese, for young people like Kwi, who grow predominantly speaking Karen and attending Karen-speaking schools, the Myanmar matriculation exams can be perceived as purposefully inaccessible.

Lack of accreditation influences decision-making. Chit's decision to quit school to work after Grade 10 was in part due to lack of access to accreditation. Had Chit been able to access the Myanmar matriculation exams, her mother explains that a "chance" might have been found to continue her education.

Post-high school programmes

In both the migrant and refugee communities, a number of post-high school programmes—dubbed "post-10 schools"—offer various advanced education programmes to young people who have completed Grade 10 or Grade 12. These programmes have different focuses but are generally orientated towards equipping young people with skills needed to help their communities. There are also a small number of highly competitive programmes which prepare young people for the General Equivalency Diploma (GED) as described above. High scores in the GED go a long way to securing highly prized, and vital, scholarships to attend university. One young man, Taw, currently attends a GED preparation programme.

Thai school

Five young people in the study had attended Thai school at some point in their education. While one young man, Taw, was able to use his Thai citizenship for enrolment, the other young people used informal records of birth and other "recommendations" from Thai officials. Three of whom, Cho, Nang and Taw, opted to leave the Thai system to pursue education in the refugee and migrant communities. Their reasons were related to perceptions of the quality of education, uncertainty of

accreditation in the face of the precarious nature of migrants' legal status in Thailand and the costs associated with Thai school in terms of materials and uniform, which are covered within the migrant systems. Ku, the only young person to have spent all his schooling to date in the Thai system, currently attends Grade 9. May graduated from a Thai high school although she had also previously attended both migrant and refugee schools.

Across the narratives of those attending high school or university, it was common to have experienced a combination of different systems of education—Myanmar, migrant, refugee camp, and Thai schooling.

University

Five young men and women attend university. Each had completed the GED, apart from one young woman who had attended Thai high school.

Work

In this section, I describe the types and conditions of work undertaken, and the patterns of everyday life of those working. The meaning and value that work has for the young men and women, and their decision-making, I discuss in Chapter Seven. In Appendix K, I provide short examples of the breadth of work engaged in by the young men and women in the study.

The majority of those in the study from the migrant community are engaged in some form of paid work, most having commenced working between the ages of nine and 14. More than half of the young men and women in the study had worked at some stage as children.

Broadly speaking, the work engaged by the young men and women in the migrant community can be categorised in terms of “lagasa”—stable monthly-salaried work, generally in factories or some sort of trade—or “neesa”—informal seasonal day labour, generally in agriculture or construction.

Although refugees are legally not allowed to work outside the refugee camp, half of the young people in the refugee camp earn some money.

Finally, this section focuses on paid work only. Several young men and women, particularly in the camp, who do not consider themselves to be working, engage in a considerable amount of valuable unpaid domestic work—cooking, cleaning and looking after siblings. Two young women in the migrant community also consider themselves not as working but are looking after their young babies and taking care of the home for their working parents and husbands. While my inclination is to consider their duties as valuable work, this study is committed to prioritising the perspectives of the young men and women themselves, for whom “work” is understood as paid work.

Working in childhood

In Myanmar, a child is legally allowed to work from the age of 13 under certain conditions, while in Thailand, the legal age for starting work is 15 years of age. Nonetheless, a third of the young people in the study had worked in Thailand when they were under 14, including four when they were under ten years old. The predominant types of work carried out by the young people when they were under 14 was agricultural and factory work. Bo's first job in Thailand when he was nine was spreading insecticide and fertiliser, earning 60THB or 70THB (€1.50-€1.75) per day. Grace moved into the factory with her parents when she was 11 but had to wait until she was 14 to be allowed to commence working there. Before then she looked after the home: "Since I was only a girl I helped my parents doing this or that."

Some young people worked to help while attending school. Taw worked on his parents' farm while attending Grade 10; Le worked in a factory in Myanmar while attending school; and Ku worked since he was an infant selling snacks with his mother in the evenings alongside attending school.

Work in the migrant community

For many, child work transitioned without change into their work as an adult, although they describe earning more money as adults. While across participants, earnings generally fall between 110-130THB (€2.75-€3.25) per day, the stability of work effected the overall monthly income. I distinguish two broad categories of work circumstances engaged in by the young men and women: "lagasa" or monthly work and "neesa" or daily work. "Lagasa" work is represented by monthly-salaried, full time jobs, such working in factories or some sort of trade. The young men and women in the study engaged in this work are also more likely to have some form of official or unofficial migrant work permit. "Neesa" work represents informal seasonal day labour, generally in agriculture or construction.

Hours are long across every sector and most of the young people work seven days per week, although work is more uncertain in the informal sector, and days off are imposed rather than chosen. The evenings and rare days off are spent, for the most part, carrying out chores and spending time with family and nearby friends.

The main ways the young people get work are through connections, through relatives already working at a factory or through word of mouth among those working in the fields. Workers phone each other when they hear of opportunities. Other times they "wait by" in the mornings, hoping employers will pass looking for workers. Without documents, even informal "bahts", jobs are more limited as it is not safe to travel. Often there is not enough work to go around, leaving people to "eat from their savings".

Work occupies a central place in many of the young men and women's lives, shaping their everyday experiences, often from childhood. Many young people take ownership over the decision to begin work, and value the meaning it has for their family's wellbeing. As I discuss in more detail in Chapter Seven, for those working in informal sectors, work—and therefore income—is unreliable.

Work in the Refugee Camp

Officially, refugees are not allowed to leave the refugee camp to work. Even if they pay for day passes out of the camp, they are not allowed to work during that time. If caught working outside the camp, they are treated like any other undocumented migrant worker and risk arrest, fines and potential deportation. My key informants and advisors add that being caught can also affect refugee status, with the consequence of jeopardising the ability to remain in the camp and any prospects for resettlement. While the authorities used to frequently turn a blind eye to refugees leaving the camp to work, usually as agricultural labourers on nearby farms, since the Thai military took over the government, enforcement is reported as stricter. Nonetheless, it is clear from the narratives that many young men still leave the camp to “cut bamboo”, carefully evading the authorities, leaving and returning under the cover of the night.

Within the camp it is harder to get work, although some describe earn money carrying water, rice or rations for other refugees. One young woman, Nan, while attending school, works in her friend's noodle shop in the camp, earning a little money when she is understaffed.

Work options in the refugee camp are much more restricted than the migrant community and working outside the camp as an “illegal migrant” is riskier. Many young people refer to their work as earning “pocket money”. This may reflect the fact that, in the camps, people are provided with rations. Many young people also carry out considerable domestic duties for their families but, as I discussed, do not consider this work per se.

Work in Bangkok

Five young men and women, three from the migrant community and two from the refugee camp, spent time working in Bangkok. “Agents” or “carrys” in their communities were paid to bring them down to Bangkok. Sometimes these individuals also found them work, other times it was through relatives already living in the city. Their work in Bangkok was similar to the work they found in Mae Sot—construction, factory or domestic work. Most of the young people stayed in Bangkok for less than a year. Travelling and working in Bangkok were risky experiences for each of the young women in particular. I discuss these experiences in more detail in the next chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on introducing the young men and women in the study: their legal status and possession of documentation; living, family and relationship circumstances; and their education and work experiences. These themes are further developed in the coming chapters.

Chapter Five

Legal Documentation Shaping Everyday Lives

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I introduced the participants in the study and provided an overview of their legal documents, family and living circumstances, as well as their education and work lives. This second findings chapter moves on to consider more in depth the central influence of legal documentation in the young people's lives. This, along with the young people's orientation to place, or sense of displacement, and the nature of their family relations are critical to understanding the young people's lived experiences. How the young people experience, relate to and negotiate these three important aspects of their lives, shape their everyday lives, strategies and decision-making, as well as their aims and aspirations.

Understanding “illegality” and wanting to follow the law

Several young people make direct reference to their “illegal” status and demonstrate a certain acceptance of Thailand's attitude towards “illegal” migrants. This includes the restrictions on their movement: “I can't travel freely in Thailand because I am illegal, it is right”, explains Kwi; and migrants' temporariness in Thailand: “[Those who] came illegally... will have to go back some day”, acknowledges Phyu.

While Kan, who was born in Thailand, considers it “a normal thing” to “go back and forth” to one's “neighbouring country”, he also considers himself and his family to be “a little bit at fault since we entered here without any documentation”:

“Before you enter to another's house you need to ask for permission first, right? ...
[Otherwise] it will seem like you stay here secretly, illegally. Just like that.”

He goes on to contextualise his comment. While his family may be at “fault” for having entered Thailand without documentation, he has done his best to regularise his presence there. However, when he approached his local Thai ‘nai amphoe’ or district chief in Mae Sot, the official refused to provide him with any documents, instead telling him when he encounters the police to “just explain that you were born here.” Each time Kan encounters the police, he has to “explain one word, two words, you give a long explanation, and have to plead sometimes like that”. It is hard for him: he knows both that he “should” have documentation as well as how much easier his life would be if he could just “show” a passport and be “let go”. Although he was born in Thailand and it is the only country he has ever known, he is reduced to daily “pleading” for his right to be there.

Kan's attempts to regularise his status in Thailand are echoed in the narratives of the other young people born in Thailand, indicating how ill-at-ease they are at remaining undocumented. As I describe in more detail later, Ku too was refused when he sought documents for him and his mother, while told, "But you can be free in Mae Sot". Only one young person in the study born in Thailand, May, managed to become naturalised. May's family's attempts to acquire documents for the family's children born in Thailand led them all over the country, in and out of different schools, and refugee and migrant contexts. Finally, during the data collection period, May was naturalised as a Thai citizen. This is an exceptional case, however.

As I outlined in the previous chapter, migrant documentation in Thailand is complex and wide-ranging. The young people's narratives seemed to indicate impressive knowledge of their legal situation and active engagement in obtaining legal documents from a young age. Changing personal details to meet requirements is often an accepted part of this process. Aye applied for her first work permit when she was 13. Too young to work under Thai law, she pretended to be 19 on her application, and was accepted: "Since I was a big girl they made it". Over the years, Nang has accumulated no less than five different forms of documentation in her attempt to overcome the different legal obstacles in her everyday life in Thailand. For instance, after being fined for not possessing a driver's licence, which at the time was not possible with the 10-year card she possessed, Nang set about acquiring a temporary passport which would allow her to get her driver's licence. Upon applying, she was informed she could not hold both documents, so the agent submitted a different name and date of birth on the application. In truth, none of her five documents reflects her real details:

"It's just one person, with three names and different... I just feel like, oh my god, I just want a real ID, so I can find myself or something. But it's hard for us to do that."

While she sought these documents to allay her anxiety, it is clear that she continues to worry about managing her different documents. She is very aware of the irony—and ambiguity—of her position:

"We want to follow the law but because we have lots of problems to go like that, so we have to make our own way to survive, to live in Thailand."

The young people are very aware of and often demonstrate remarkable understanding regarding Thailand's stance towards "illegal" migrants. Like the participants in Agnieszka Kubal's (2013) study, many young people try many different pathways, including some which are, ironically, legally questionable, to regularise their presence in Thailand. Their efforts rarely result in permanent, reliable solutions but leave them at best managing informal assurances or legally ambiguous positions. When set against the realities of living without documents, which I discuss next, their efforts become understandable. Finally, these efforts begin to give insight into the young people's

drive and capacity to carve out their own individual ways of negotiating the adversity and challenges in their lives, qualities which are echoed throughout the remainder of the thesis.

Everyday restriction and limitation without legal documents in

Thailand

Hiding and not daring

As in many countries in the world, in Thailand, the lack of legal documentation confines migrants to the margins of society and restricts their everyday lives.

Without documents, everyday activities—going to the market, visiting friends, attending religious ceremonies, and even accessing health care—require an individual to be prepared to “face the police” (Aung). Repercussions can differ, seemingly, according to the narratives, arbitrarily, from a ‘simple’ fine of 100THB (€2.50) and being let go, to detention, and even to deportation, both incurring ten-fold or higher penalties. Money must often be borrowed as “if you cannot give money, you cannot get out [from police detention]” (Sone).

Outside any legal system, the undocumented young people report having little recourse to justice in the face of abuse and exploitation. They find themselves always in a position of being liable to blame: “So when something happens, people would say, 'oh those Burmese people did this, this, this...’” (Le). In the event of experiencing an assault or even an accident, access to health care is restricted as treatment in local hospitals is “not easy... they ask for a lot of money” (Kyaw). As a result, they “can’t fight back” and must “keep quiet” (Win). Legal marriage is not possible for them in Thailand as “an official marriage requires official documents” (Aye). Htin, who got married in Thailand, admits, “If I have to tell, it’s illegal. There are no papers.”

Undocumented young people often attempt to hide themselves. According to Chit, many simply “don’t dare to go out”. However even in their homes, undocumented young people are not safe. Police raids in the evenings require them to “run without destination” (Win), often deep into the surrounding jungle forests, where they have to hide for up to three or four days, losing precious earnings.

Their marginalisation forces them into even more dangerous circumstances, from black market healthcare to being extorted by agents or “carrys” bringing them by dangerous back roads to Bangkok for work. “It’s not America” is the expression used by Aye to describe the dangerous route to Bangkok taken by the driver in order to evade the police, but which resulted in an accident where the car “almost fell down a cliff”, injuring 11-year-old Aye’s arm. Being undocumented, attending the hospital was simply not an option.

Living in everyday fear

Anxiety and fear are frequently part of the everyday experience of young people living without documentation (Mann, 2010; Menjívar, 2006; Stacciarini et al., 2014; Willen, 2007). The young people's narratives illustrate how "fear", "concern", "worry" and "anxiety" are part of everyday life without documents, ever present and everywhere. The matter-of-fact manner with which the young people mentioned how they "need to be afraid of this and that" (Kyaw) reveals how ordinary the presence of fear is in their lives. Throughout the narratives, young people describe their fear and anxiety of being arrested; of having to pay exorbitant fines; of having to go into debt to pay it; of being deported; of being exploited, assaulted or abused; of not getting work; of not earning; of them or a family member getting sick; of having to pay for expensive health care; of their homes being raided and having to hide in the jungle; of staying poor forever. The list goes on. Fear and anxiety are part of their ordinary life.

The visibility and sheer number of undocumented migrants in Mae Sot belies the dangers they live with on an everyday basis. They live in a catch-22 situation. While everyday risk and fear stops many of them "daring", everyday lives must be lived: they must travel to work, to school, to the market, or to the health clinic, as Thin observes: "Even though the police arrest, people have to go". They must live with their fears and anxiety in order to survive.

Saw reflects on the times he used to travel without documents on the local 'line cars'—pick-up trucks converted for taking passengers—not knowing "when my turn would be... When [the police] would ask me [for my document], when will they kick me out of the car". When I asked him if he felt scared, he replied, "Of course I felt scared, I felt isolated, and everything". Aung travels around with his brother, and while he is "worried" as he has no documents, he hopes for the best: "Sometimes police see us and sometimes they stop us, sometimes they let us go."

Even in situations of extreme fear, the young people must continue to live their lives. When Grace's car was intercepted by police en route to Bangkok, she knew she had no choice but to continue her journey:

"I was scared. I had never been there so I just followed (what they told me). Because if I said anything I would die, so I wouldn't complain about anything, I just followed"

Naw provides a reminder that the migrant population in Mae Sot is made up of many who fled the civil conflict in Myanmar. She points out how for those, who, like her, fled Karen State, the possibility of arrest and deportation back to Myanmar is linked to very serious "worries". This mirrors the realities facing those living in the refugee camp for whom the search for income and distraction from monotony can lead them into heightened risks in the migrant community.

The refugee camp: Doing nothing vs risk and fear

Nu describes longingly watching the everyday lives of people outside the camp, who simply “go around” and “go on past”. Boundaries, visible and invisible, define her everyday world and the life of the refugee: “Our people, we cannot go around ‘free’”. Nu uses the English word “free” to ensure her meaning is conveyed fully. According to Nan, the refugee is a “servant”, whose “superiors” deny them freedom of movement and “complain” at them about everything: “To answer honestly, I feel sad”.

Many young people in camp describe their everyday lives using the expression “aw ja tho”, translating from Karen to mean “just staying like that”. Law comments, “We are not able to do anything; we just have to stay (‘tho’) in the camp.” The monotony of life comes across keenly in their narratives. As described by Klo: “There's nothing to do, nowhere to go.” Over time the young people get used to it, but it is not easy, as Tha states simply, “Sometimes I want to go out.” The young people’s narratives evoke the “restless and irritable feeling” of boredom that refugees experience in the protracted uncertainty of the refugee camp, as described by Cathrine Brun (2015).

The young people in the refugee camp are faced with the unenviable choice between monotony, inertia and lack of income—but safety—inside the camp and the potential of income and adventure – but the risk of apprehension—outside. Once outside the refugee camp, if they do not possess a purchased camp pass, any camp documentation—and associated refugee protections—is rendered void and the young people are effectively considered undocumented migrants and treated as such if caught. As Naw pointed out, deportation threatens ‘returning’ them to the country from which they or their families fled, and they only associate with persecution and danger. Furthermore, according to my advisors, if their arrest is reported to the camp authorities, it can jeopardise their refugee status and chance of resettlement—the hope of the majority of those I spoke to in the refugee camp.

Yet the young people continue to leave the camp, laughing at the dangers of encountering the police: “They couldn't catch me, I ran (*laughs*)”. Klo goes on to explain that they learn how to stay safe: “You just have to run and hide in the mountain”. As with those in the migrant community, many perceive they have no choice but to leave the camp in order to help their family and earn money. Even if fear is present, it cannot hold them back. Law, who at the age of 14 was arrested, deported and detained across the border until his mother arrived to pay for his release, continues to leave the camp to cut bamboo to earn “pocket money”. Risk, fear and running from the authorities become part of the fabric of life. Law explains his reality simply: “If you want to go outside to work, you need to be afraid”.

Going to work in Bangkok promises both income and a break from the tedium of the refugee camp. Tha and Nyein, both when they were 16, decided to see the city for themselves. They desired to earn

money and to see what city life was like, both asserting simply: “I just wanted to go”. Outside the refugee camp for the first time in their lives, Tha explains how, at first, the city “made my heart shine”. However, after a while of being “alone, thinking in my room”, he decided to return to the camp. Nyein’s experience was more traumatic. She was hyper-aware of her isolation in the big city, disconnected from any supportive networks, and her vulnerability as a “small girl” who could not speak Thai. She “got hurt” easily when she could not understand. There was no escaping the fear she experienced every day for the nine months she spent in Bangkok. She spoke about her ordeal quietly and hesitatingly, but left my interpreter and me in no doubt about the extent of the danger and fear:

“I was scared of the people and I was afraid that someone would come and rape me (=‘ma gha ghoun’).”

After her employer “stabbed” her with a knife, accusing her of stealing money, Nyein got the name of another “carry” through contacts she had made in Bangkok and “fled secretly” during the night. Despite the fear and danger, she was not paralysed by her fear but able to mobilise herself to make herself safe.

A lack of documents forces the young people into multiple positions of marginalisation, powerlessness and fear, in which even everyday activities lead to infringements of the law. Legal restrictions, the risk of encountering the authorities, as well as risks of exploitation, extortion and abuse threaten to take control over their lives away from them.

However the young people’s narratives demonstrate multiple ways in which they actively resist this outcome, and retain control. This includes allowing fear and risk to become part of the everyday, part of the ordinary, and going about their lives, laughing in the face of fear. Fear does not paralyse. Even in extreme situations, the young people retain the capacity to resist and make choices to keep themselves safe. At times their outward appearance of timidity belies their strength and capacity to keep themselves safe.

As described in the previous chapter, some young people are issued with informal documents to enable them to work or study in a specific neighbourhood or school. However, as I discuss next, in reality, many aspects of the lives of young people with these informal documents echo those without documents.

Informal documents: unreliable safety

While not official, informal documents or “bahts”, issued by local village heads or migrant organisations who negotiate an informal agreement with local Thai authorities, offer a modicum of safety. Win lived for several years without any documents in Mae Sot before acquiring his “baht”. With it now, he feels “a bit freer”. He describes no longer needing to worry about raids at work or

on the compound where he lives or to “hide from police as soon we see them”. Min, in a similar situation, describes the simple freedom of travelling around his community: “Police don’t arrest when we go here and there”.

Others resent having to pay over two days’ earnings for an “obligatory” card that provides them with little of the security or legality they desire. Htin continues to refer to his status as “illegal” and considers the card “useless, because you cannot go anywhere with it. We live here and go to work. That’s it.” Zin, who was born in Thailand, feels angry at having to pay for her informal “baht” and also still having to “pay from our hard-earned money” even to travel to Mae Sot town.

Informal cards are often unreliable. Le described her migrant student card as “not very safe”, but dependent on whether the particular policeman one encounters “understands”. As a result, during her years attending school in Mae Sot, she rarely went out.

Thin’s migrant teacher card protects her inside the school grounds, but outside the school leaves her as vulnerable as someone without any documents. She describes her life as “like living in the prison”. While born in Thailand, she is treated like a criminal. She cannot travel to the market or visit friends without fear. She is confined. All she wants is “to go like other people go” but she cannot. “Even if I had money”, she could neither own nor drive a bike. “It’s like living in a ‘box’”, she explains, using the English word “box” to speak directly with me and make sure I understood. She is cut-off and ignored, her life consigned to looking out on the normal everyday lives of those who “go around freely”.

These narratives indicate the ambiguous nature of informal documents and how it would be inaccurate and misrepresentative to consider these young people “documented”, or in many ways, any less vulnerable than those who do not possess any documents. This was also the view of Jacobsen & Nichols (2011) in their study on migrants in Mae Sot, who also referred to those with informal documents as undocumented. The limitations of informal documents is not lost on the young people, whose lives and opportunities remain restricted and marginalised. However, many young people creatively push back against restrictions, and find ways to keep themselves safe.

Strategies to Stay Safe

As described, despite the restrictions, risks and fear, the young people must still go about their daily lives, both in the migrant community and refugee camps. The narratives indicate several strategies employed by young people employ to stay safe.

Being smart and living appropriately

Young people take considered measures to avoid the gaze of the authorities and regain at least some autonomy over their lives. Aye, who has lived in Thailand her whole life, emphasises the importance of being “smart”. She observes the circumstances in which people get caught by the police or “get cheated”, and what keeps people safe. She lives “with discipline...like Thai people, quietly”, away from predominately migrant areas where “people live nosily” and bring police attention upon themselves. She travels on her bike, as she considers that it is those travelling in the local ‘line-car’ passenger vehicles and motorbike-taxis who are more likely to be stopped by the police. She knows not to go “house style” when going downtown: she swaps her traditional Myanmar “longyi” skirt and “thanaka” make up for trousers and skirts.

Many of Aye’s strategies are echoed in the narratives of other young men and women. Paw simply said, “When in Rome, do as the Romans do”—an expression which is shared by both Burmese and English languages. She explains how some of it is unconscious, but often she knows she is “doing it”, such as wearing skirts and trousers instead of the traditional longyi. She notices that Thai people “look down” at people wearing the traditional longyi, so her actions are in part a defence against this disdain. She also considers it important for migrants to “stay appropriate to our surroundings” in order to enlist Thais’ help and cooperation in allowing migrants to remain in the country. The young people’s efforts to “pass” not only evade the gaze of the authorities, but also the social stigma associated with being a Burmese migrant (Goffman, 1963).

As movement is one of the main everyday activities restricted for those without documents, several young people mentioned related strategies. Htun says he travels with groups of friends, both Thai and migrant, when travelling outside the town, such as to waterfalls. Within such mixed groups, he is concealed. The young people also mentioned strategies related to travelling particularly on the local public transport “line cars”. Wearing one’s school uniform was one common strategy: “When we are students they won’t check much”, according to Nang. Pretending to be asleep at check points and sitting in the front of the line car beside the driver, one can also sometimes evade inspection.

As described by Saw, the anxiety that these strategies may not work remains. Nang described one incident on the way home from a visit to her father in another city in Thailand. The document she held at the time at the time required her to apply for permission to travel outside her region, but she had not done so. Travelling to her father, she applied her usual strategies of sitting in the front of the car and pretending to be asleep, and she arrived safely. However, on the return journey, the whole car was inspected:

“So I just got up and I just pretended I was going to the toilet or something. When people got up and I just pretended to go out with them, but one of the soldiers, he came and asked

me, do you have ID? And I said no, because if I said yes, he will ask me for the [permission] paper, but I don't have the paper, right? So, no, I said. So, come with me. And I was thinking, oh, what should I do? I don't have any paper, what can I do? (laughing) So I just follow him, ok, I followed him but I worried also because they will catch me. I followed him, but at least I have ID, so it's ok, so I followed him, but another truck came and met the bus, come, so he went to check that bus, so I just ran back to my bus (laughing).”

While Nang laughs throughout her story, her anxiety is clearly evident. She attempts to reassure and soothe herself: “but at least I have ID, so it’s ok”. She also mentions, “But I can speak Thai. And I felt, ok, I can explain. I felt ok”. As with Kan, being able to speak Thai offers Nang the possibility to negotiate any confrontation as well as to manage her own anxiety. In fact, across the narratives, speaking Thai emerged as another incredibly useful strategy for the young people navigating risk and confrontation in Thailand, and to nurture important connections and friendships with people within the Thai community

Speaking Thai

Speaking Thai represents an important resource to those without documents or with unreliable documents to help avoid arrest and exploitation. Htin explains that since he learnt Thai from living in Bangkok, he has felt a little more confident moving around his area with his informal document: “When travelling, the police ask, ‘Where are you going?’ If you’re not able to answer, they may arrest you.”

As described above, speaking Thai is vital for Kan to explain his lack of legal documentation to the police and avoid arrest or fines. He regularly meets the police when travelling at night to his work, but he has never had any problems: “Maybe I am lucky but whenever they stop me and I explain to them, they let me go.” When travelling with friends, he does the same for them, but when they are alone, it is a different story:

“But sometimes if they don't go with me, and if Thai police stop them, they don't know how to explain, and they get arrested. They get arrested if they don't know how to explain why they don't have any documentation.”

Speaking Thai is simply “necessary” to stay safe in Thailand, according to Kan. While in the markets, many people can speak a small amount of Burmese, few police do. Many of the other young people who cannot speak Thai spoke about how much “easier” living in Thailand would be if they spoke Thai. For instance, Nyein points to her inability to understand what her boss was telling her as one of the reasons for her abuse in Bangkok.

Being able to speak Thai, not only allows communication with the police, but it allows young people to establish and develop important Thai connections.

Nurturing critical social connections

Social connections are another important resource for the young people navigating life undocumented in Thailand. Bo's uncle is the "head of our village. He takes care of the people around here". He does not know what his uncle does to ensure everyone's safety, but he recalls one incident:

"I don't get arrested as I don't go out much. I got arrested once when I went to visit the Mae Sot festival. Other people reported that the car I was in was trafficking people so the police caught us. But my uncle helped me get out."

As mentioned earlier, Ku has been unable as yet to secure official documents for Thailand. However, through nurturing the right connections he has managed to keep himself and his mother safe throughout his life. He explains how, when he and his mother lived in a monastery, he became acquainted with "a big policeman" who regularly came to pray there. After getting to know Ku and his mother's situation, the policeman took pity:

"He said to all the police - don't catch him. We didn't do any bad thing, only selling, and we don't have family, I do not have father, so he said, you can be free in Mae Sot."

Ku actively ensures that this remains the case, getting to know many people around the town while walking around the streets, "selling since I was 4 years old":

"[Since] I [was] born, I have only my mum and myself, so I like to have a lot of other people.... I go everywhere and I know him, and I say hello, and then have a friend and then I know more friends."

Through playing football too, Ku explains how he has regular opportunities to nurture connections with a variety of people in the town:

"When we play.... we get to know a lot of friends.... all of them, Thai, Burmese, Karen. I see every time different [people]. Now I know big guys, I know more [and] more friends..."

Friendships with Thai peers, nurtured through everyday activities, can be very useful. Also through football, Htun met his best friend, who is Thai. After Htun was injured one day during a football match, his Thai friend accompanied him to the local hospital. Htun believes that having his friend with him protected him from abuse and exploitation: "[without him] the nurses would have shouted and asked for a lot of money".

The young people adopt several strategies to try to keep themselves safe without documents and resist marginalisation. Their narratives indicate that it is often being “daring”—travelling with confidence and making connections with critical people in the Thai community—that is at the core of what can work to keep them safe. Aye admits that “maybe I’m going around the same as a person who has documents”. Her confidence may help to hide her undocumented status. Finally, two young people Naw and Thin look to God to safeguard them when they travel, and both attribute their safety to date to the protection God has provided them, as Thin explained:

“[When] going to visit friends or aunts, I pray and then I go out... I say to God, “I give my life to you O Lord today. Please take care of it.”

Official Documents: Living more easily

Official documents help young people to step out of marginalisation and restriction. Chit describes how it is “easy to live [in Mae Sot] if you have a legal document”. Freedom of movement is relaxed due to the decreased fear of police encounters and life is safer from the everyday risk of abuse, harassment and exploitation. One welcome benefit commonly mentioned was the ability to access Thailand’s “30THB” health care programme for low-income households, reflecting the maximum fee (75c) charged for services. The scheme allowed Grace to give birth at the local hospital; Thaw to receive life-saving HIV treatment, unattainable in Myanmar; and Khin to avail of an operation to fix her cleft pallet and allow her to live “like a normal person”.

In addition to the practical aspects, having official documentation offers psychological advantages also. While the form of document Phyu possesses does not accord many protections in and of itself and is more a precursor to more dependable documents, having something official liberates her from the weight of constant vigilance and fear. Phyu describes how without documents she was hyper-aware of the police being “everywhere”. Having documents helps her escape that feeling:

“It’s independence... no need to be scared.... I have nothing to worry about, I have documents”.

Khin’s narrative reflects a similar perspective. She perceives that “Myanmar people face a lot of problems” in Thailand, but with her document she feels empowered, allowing her access to “knowledge of the world”. It gives her more freedom to resist abuse and exploitation as she can move around and find better work opportunities. This is Cho’s dream also: a more secure, more open future: “[With documents] I could get good jobs... I could go wherever I want...”

Getting his 10-year card allowed Saw to travel to attend a post-high school which offered the chance of leading him to university. He considers it a “privilege”, as with it he could “start a new stage of my life”. It represented his first step “out of the arena of migration... from migrant life to legal life”.

Here he hints at the psychological impacts of growing up without documents which I discuss in more detail later. The “migrant life” is placed as the opposite “legal life”, implying something inherently “illegal” and illegitimate about the “migrant”. Status is not only an administrative category but a lived experience which comes part of the young person’s understanding of themselves and their place in the world.

Official documents offer increased options, opportunity and overall sense of freedom. Possessing official legal documentation can be powerfully meaningful, even when providing limited protections or services.

Htin’s narrative, however, serves as a reminder that even legal documents may not protect against exploitation. While working in Bangkok, Htin went about acquiring a temporary passport, costing him an extortionate 30,000THB (€750). Then, while travelling back to Mae Sot, he was detained and fined more than ten times what he would have been fined had he not had any documents. He had no choice but to pay: “if you don’t give, you won’t reach your destination”. Htin’s situation is a reminder of the ongoing vulnerabilities of all migrants in Thailand.

In the next section, I discuss the increased gendered vulnerabilities of young women which transcends legal documentation.

Gendered risks: Needing to be afraid of the boys

The certain fears expressed by Chit and Phyu, who both hold official documents, indicate that the vulnerability they feel is not necessarily about documentation but related to their social status as migrant women. Chit showed me a recent photograph, in which she poses in a traditional longyi costume, with her hair and make-up carefully done. For Chit, the photo represents her increased vulnerability in Thailand as she becomes a young woman. While in her own community being beautiful gives her “hpon” or pride, within Thailand, it brings risk:

“It’s beautiful within the community. But for other strangers, ‘oh she’s beautiful’, they will say and so I need to be afraid of the boys...”

As a result, she explains, “I don’t think about going alone. I don’t dare to go. I always take my friends or my sister”. Phyu brings up the same risks facing young women in the migrant community:

“As a girl, you will be harassed/abused by others. That’s why parents are worried about girls. It’s not same with the boys. Girls are [physically] weaker”.

My translators explained how the verb “harassed” used by Phyu can also be a polite way of saying “raped”. Indeed this inference could be substantiated by Phyu’s explanation:

“If they pull or drag me, I am not able to do anything back to them. We have to tolerate whatever they... how to say...”

Phyu attributes the dangers to living in Thailand, “living in Myanmar, I think would be alright”:

“Myanmar is my country so I am returning to my country. So I think I am safe”.

As a result, in Thailand, Phyu’s life revolves between her home and the factory where she works, a five-minute walk she makes in the morning and evening together with her parents. Unlike Chit who is allowed to go out as long as she is not alone, Phyu’s parents stop her even doing that. For our second interview, my interpreter drove her to the compound where I lived, on the other side of town from Phyu’s house. While I took for granted this 10-minute trip through the town, for her it was a special experience, she rarely sees beyond her immediate neighbourhood. She does not think it “fair”:

“Sometimes, (I) would like to go with a group of girls, but mother thinks (it’s) unsafe. She doesn’t let us go as there are drunks and all. It (would be) good if they were not there. We would go freely if they were not there.”

Meanwhile her brother has “freedom”, a wide social circle, even the opportunity to learn and practise Thai – everything she, as a young woman, cannot do:

“I am a girl so I cannot go anywhere. For boys, wherever they go, they have freedom. For girls, (we’re) afraid to go this place that place – if we meet bad people, it’s not good... As for my brother, he goes around with his friends. He’s a boy so he’s got a lot of friends. He can [practice] speaking [Thai]. I just stay home. I cannot [practise] speaking”.

Aye points out that on the border young women face increased vulnerability to sexual exploitation. Financial desperation can lead to young women becoming “ruined” by becoming sex workers. Khin also speaks of the risk of young women becoming ruined. In her own situation, without parents on the border, as she approached eighteen years old, she was increasingly aware of how she had to “act appropriately in the community” and to “control” herself. If she didn’t, she explained:

“I would get bad reputation and my life would be ruined. I could be a bad girl. It’s a girl’s responsibility to keep herself properly.”

The young women perceive increased risks and vulnerabilities on the Thailand-Myanmar border due to their gender. The implications of being “ruined” are not only physical but also social—potentially leaving them with an even more devalued status. The young women are tasked with protecting themselves from being rejected by their own community. Their parents attempt to keep them safe by restricting their movements. These gendered restrictions on the Thailand-Myanmar border have

previously been noted (Kusakabe & Pearson, 2010). In a context where migrants' worlds are already limited, some young women's worlds can become very small.

Thai citizenship: feeling normal but special

It is important to remember that all migrant documents, and the freedoms they represent, are temporary and liable to be cancelled at any point by the government. All their benefits pale in the face of the benefits of actual Thai citizenship which provides the security of permanency but is extremely rare to achieve. However, when I asked May how she felt after acquiring her citizenship after years of trying, she simply responded, "just normal, but special". While it is special in her world to attain citizenship, she is aware that it also simply leads her into a "normal" life in the country in which she was born. It is not a destination but a starting point for new possibilities, which she must now embrace:

"I am just a person who got a chance to change my future. Just that.... The chance to maybe have a better life.... Yea, no limits. Now it's kinda like, only me. No, not only me... I mean, like, (laughing), it depends on me."

May can now prepare for a future of her choosing, rather than have her future dictated by the limitations of her documents, or lack thereof. She adds that while she is "happy" to have citizenship, she is not "not excited, because I could stay without it". However, her horizons have significantly expanded as she has the freedom to move about unrestrained. She already feels the pull of her new world and is making plans with a friend to travel overseas. Citizenship is meaningful for what it allows her to do rather than in and of itself: "I feel like I got more chance."

These insights from May are echoed in Taw's narrative. Taw's mother acquired citizenship for him after fleeing to Thailand when he was an infant. When I asked him how he thought his life was different due to having Thai citizenship, he replied that life is "easy going, easy to go anywhere.... Thai police can't easily give you trouble". Citizenship represents "a really great opportunity".

For both Taw and May, citizenship represents being given a chance. With citizenship, life shifts dramatically from constant constraint and limitations, to one of opportunity and possibility. It is now up to them, in their eyes, to embrace that chance and make it count.

Enduring consequences: Feeling "small-faced" and "small in heart"

The chapter so far has described many of the restrictions facing the young people and how they respond by facing fear, pushing back against their restrictions and resisting marginalisation. However a lifetime of this effort can take its toll, even after the attainment of documents (Menjívar, 2006).

A frequent expression used by the young people in the study was “myatna ngedeh”, which translates as “feeling small faced”. Even little daily incidents can reinforce this feeling in the young people, such as the time Kan was unable to put himself forward for selection for an under-19s football team as he had no documents to prove his age. Kwi explained how this is a common feeling among both migrant and refugee young people: “You don’t feel proud of yourself like other people”. Feeling small-faced is an “uncomfortable” feeling, it “can stop you”. Saw highlighted how feeling small-faced is a direct consequence of growing up “illegal in a different country”:

“It’s a kind of migrant thinking, you know, feeling down, feeling inferior and feeling like you are not worthy”.

When limitations and otherness are reinforced on a daily basis, migrant children feel they neither have “chance nor a future, due to the illegality”:

“If you are illegal, you may have very few chances compared to others who are legal, even though you are very clever or whatever..... By thinking that you will never have, you will never do it, you will never try... By thinking like that, you have already lost half of your motivation”

Although Aung worked for a number of years after he first came to Thailand, it was only upon commencing school at the age of 12 that he fully understood his lower status in Thailand and how, “The rights are not the same. Thai people have better chances.” For him it was his school uniform which reinforced this for him: “Even though we were both wearing the white school shirt, the [Thai students] wore brand new white.” School children in the migrant community all wore second-hand. For him, the distinction between Thai and migrant children was clear, leaving him “seit ga theneyreh” or feeling shy, without confidence, afraid to dare to do or say anything: “I asked myself, ‘why can’t it be like that (for me too)?’”

While Ku has nurtured many connections in Mae Sot and attends a Thai school, he remains very aware of the gulf between him and other young men. Every evening as he walks around Mae Sot selling snacks with his mother, he observes other young men living a very different life. He wants the same as him, but his life does not allow him:

“He eats in the restaurant, he sits down and he plays on his phone, and he has a jacket and watch, everything good. I am a little bit shy, I am not the same as he... I want the same as him, but I cannot.”

During the course of the interview Ku and I discuss the expression “feeling small faced”, referring to the Burmese phrase “myatna ngedeh”. His mother, who is present, hears this phrase and while she

does not speak English and therefore does not understand everything we are saying, as a mother, she understands her son. Ku translates for her:

“She said I’m studying hard and not doing bad things, so not to worry about shy.”

According to Saw, young people in the migrant community grow up like butterflies “flying without colourful wings”; they are incomplete. They cannot and do not “dare” imagine “a bright clear future” due to the layers of their marginalisation:

“When you face the discrimination in your everyday life, you don't really think about your future, you only think how to cope with this problem, right? Because as a student here, we are not allowed to go further than the limited places or area, right? If we go out of these places, the first thing we see is police, and we experience the language barrier. If you go outside of the school campus, then there will be a shop where they sell things, but they are the local Thai. And they have ID card, and you don't have ID card. Maybe you feel like you are the alien, you are the stranger”

Saw gives the example of two people traveling on a “line car” sitting side by side. They may be from the same ethnic group, have the same origins, but due to their documents, they face vastly different possible futures:

“In the line car, I sit here and let's say beside me is someone with the Thai ID. Even if he is Karen, I still feel some boundary between us, because he or she has ID card and I don't. I am sure different outcomes will come out for the two people, even though we are the same ethnic group, we might have been born in the same place, right?”

Connected to this, is the experience of “seiq ahngedeh” which translates as “feeling small at heart”, discouraged or disheartened. Insight into this comes from Cho. Cho initially spent many years at a Thai school. Speaking the language, wearing the uniform with the school insignia, and cutting her hair like other Thai students, she blended in. Life was straight forward, “nothing special”. She could easily go “here and there”. Often a glimpse of her Thai student card would suffice for the police as “they just know”: “I felt like I was equal with Thai people.”

Since she moved to a migrant school, she keenly feels the loss of this status. Her generic school uniform makes her stand out. Her informal migrant student card has led to a new, unfamiliar and unwelcome worry. She feels different, othered and “strange”, a disheartening new reality for a young woman who got used to feeling “equal” with those around her:

“People won’t interact with me much... it makes me ‘small at heart’”.

Many of the young people point out that being Burmese is a lower social status in and of itself in Thailand. Saw explains:

“It is not just about migrant or illegality. It has to do with the country status too. You come from Burma. Whether you are president or whether you are general or in the army, you come from Burma. You are lower status. In Thailand, people will think like that.”

Nang attributes it to the historical animosity between Thailand and Myanmar. She recalls one incident in which a Thai classmate, who noticed her excellent Thai, asked her where she was from. When she replied Myanmar, they asked her to just say Thailand to make them “feel comfortable”. Unlike Nang, Le cannot blend in: her looks announce her Myanmar roots. When she is with her Chinese-looking friend, they are both regarded “differently”: “They would treat her well, not me”. With Le, “the tone will change”.

While Le possesses a Myanmar passport and is “trying to stay carefree”, as a result of her treatment, her anxiety remains: “I still worry about it”. Saw discusses a similar feeling, pointing to the ongoing suspicion by the authorities due to being Burmese. He describes an imaginary situation in which he and I are both on a bus together:

“Now you have a passport, I have a passport, we are all living legally in Thailand. But if we sit in a bus together, and the police come, they will suspect I am illegal or even if I am not illegal, they will think that I only have the temporary passport. This kind of stuff, there is always something in your mind, that whenever you are in the bus, you will think that you are still illegal, even though you are legally in the country.... It disturbs you... As long as you are honest, you won't be in trouble, because we are living legally in the country, but sometimes it disturbs you, you know, the police come and ask you, and sometimes before they ask [for your document] they say, 'ok if you come from Burma, just get out of the car and show all your documents before we enter the car', something like that.”

While Saw, Le and I may all be “living legally”, as Burmese migrants, they are treated automatically with suspicion. While Cho could blend in and pass as a Thai student, she was treated as equal. However, once distinguished by her migrant school uniform and student card, she occupies a very different social position.

Now as a university student, Saw finds himself occasionally experiencing a different social position, one that elevates him from the discrimination experienced by other Burmese migrants. It is a bittersweet experience. Saw recalls an incident with a policeman who stopped him and other Burmese students travelling in a car on a day off from university. Upon regarding their passports, the policeman asked them sharply where they worked, making the assumption they were migrant workers. When they told him they were attending university, the policeman’s “impression changed

totally”, even in the end asking the students to look out for his son who would be joining the same course the following year. While Saw enjoyed the experience in one way, “in a way I still have the feeling”. While the discrimination may stop, the internalised othering remains:

“The biggest issue here? Alienation. I mean people discriminate against you, right? It's something that happens between you and people. But the feeling of being alienated is something that happens within you. As I mentioned earlier, you feel that you are not belonging to this country. So you won't dare...”

The young people grow up as the “illegal”, the “alien”, the “stranger”, and placed below Thai children. These realities associated with their “spoiled identities” can deeply affect the young people’s self-image and feelings of worth (Goffman, 1963). Internalisation by the young person leads to enduring feelings of inadequacy, inferiority and unworthiness, which threaten to undermine their ability to resist and push against the limitations of their lives. This feeling can last beyond the attainment of one’s legal status, shaping who they are into adulthood.

Myanmar citizenship: Belonging and ambivalence

While the focus of the study is primarily on the young people’s lives and documents in Thailand, it is clear that acquiring Myanmar citizenship represents an important security for those living in Thailand without documentation. The fact that almost all young people in the study either plan to acquire their Myanmar Adult Citizenship Scrutiny Card, or have already done so, indicates its meaningfulness for them and their families. Several, despite being born in Thailand, or having lived there for most of their lives, had family bribe officials in Myanmar in order to acquire birth certificates for them or had their names retained on family household registers in Myanmar to facilitate later getting their adult citizenship card. Possessing Myanmar citizenship means that on the day that they are ready financially or that Thai policy dictates it, they can return.

For instance, while Aye was born in Thailand, her maternal grandmother “gave money” to the division leader in Myanmar to make a birth certificate for Aye. While Aye did not understand its significance at the time, having it meant she and her husband could legally get married in Myanmar, something she would not have been able to do in Thailand where she was born. Recently her mother-in-law brought her to help her acquire her adult citizenship card. Despite her contentment in Thailand, Aye is very aware of her long-term precarity without documents. While she cannot imagine living in Myanmar, getting her Myanmar citizenship at least provides security for when the day comes:

“I wanted to get an ID card so I can live inside Myanmar.... Now I don't have any legal documents [in Thailand], and if one day they decide that Myanmar people cannot stay here, then we will have to go back. I think I cannot live there, but I feel I have to....”

For those in university in Thailand, acquiring their adult Myanmar citizenship card was a necessary precursor to getting their Myanmar passport and visa required for enrolment. For Saw, it also had psychological significance. Just as his 10-year card made him feel like he was moving from “migrant” to “legal”, Saw explains how acquiring his Myanmar citizenship and passport was like “getting something to get into a real life”. It helps him fight against the internalised “migrant thinking” described earlier and “go further” than he could have ever imagined:

“When I first got my passport, I felt like 'oh I get something real in my life, so that I can start my life'.... Suddenly I got a passport, with which I can go almost anywhere, as long as I have money. It's something like legal. I feel very, my god (*laughing*), I get something that will enable me to go further. And again, I got to fly, that's another excitement for me (*laughing*)”

Acquiring her Myanmar citizenship card was similarly meaningful for Le, before which she had no form of official documentation in either Thailand or Myanmar. One of her teachers called her a “lost puppy”, as “you cannot go back to Burma because you don't have Burmese ID, [and] you cannot stay in Thailand...” Growing up in Myanmar, her family could not afford the cost of acquiring her child citizenship card. Returning to obtain her citizenship card as an adult, she faced challenges which she attributed in part to her father's mixed ethnic heritage: “Burmese officers, they did not want to do very much for ethnic people”. They asked her many questions, purportedly due to her Burman accent which had shifted over the years on the border:

“They ask, are you sure you are Burmese? I say, I am, I was born in Burma! I was born here! Haha! They ask me a lot of questions.... But finally... actually all they want is money. It is very easy for them to make an ID card, but they want money. So they say, can you give us 80,000 kyat.”

After growing up without documents, facing restrictions in Thailand as well as challenges in Myanmar whenever she travelled back to visit family, her citizenship card finally allowed her step as herself into the world. Le wrote a poem about how meaningful this was for her, entitled “An 80,000-worth piece of paper”. She subsequently emailed the poem to me. The poem ends:

“It tells you who I am
It shows you how I look
Last but not least
I [sic] saves me
From being a lost puppy.
I love it and
I'll never lose it
An 80,000-worth piece of paper”

Kwi, like Le, faced many challenges getting his citizenship card but, likewise, found in the end that “if you pay money, yeah, you can do it in hours”. Kwi is from one of the so-called rebel-held “black zones” in Karen State where people were denied the “chance to get citizenship”. Being the first in his family to apply for citizenship, he therefore did not have any of the supporting personal or family documentation in his application. The bureaucratic obstacles were ultimately overcome with money. While he also appreciates now being “legal”, Kwi resents having to “buy” his citizenship:

“I don't feel like I was born in Myanmar, because I have to buy it....When I buy the Myanmar ID, I feel like I am not citizen from Myanmar”.

It is clear that his ambivalence about his Myanmar citizenship goes much deeper, related to his traumatic childhood memories of running from Myanmar soldiers. As I discuss in the next chapter, citizenship has been useful for him, helping him access university. Yet, personally, he does not want to ally himself with Myanmar and, given the chance, would rather not have to be “belong” anywhere.

Acquiring Myanmar citizenship can be significant in a number of practical and psychological ways for the young people in the study. It can represent security for their futures and against some of the risks faced in Thailand, as well as help to mitigate some of the inferiority and lack of belonging. Securing Myanmar citizenship is not always straightforward due to the circumstances of their upbringing and ethnicity, however obstacles can be usually overcome with money. Kwi's narrative highlights the friction that having to “buy” one's citizenship can cause. His narrative serves as a reminder that Myanmar citizenship requires ethnic minorities to ally themselves with a country which can hold many painful memories and negative associations. As I discuss in greater detail in the next chapter, the young people's relationship with Myanmar is often complex and ambivalent, impacting how they see themselves in the world and their futures.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored the meaning documentation holds for the young people in the study, the legal and social marginalisation it often involves and the impacts it has on their everyday lives. The young people's narratives provide interesting insight into the highly visible nature of undocumented migrants in and around Mae Sot. They demonstrate that it is not that migrants do not feel fear or anxiety, but these feelings are relegated to a normal part of life. Risk, fear, restriction and discrimination become an ordinary – expected – part of going about daily life. By normalising the experience of fear, the young people resist the paralysis that is supposed to accompany it. This is an important part of the resilience and agency of the young people.

Being “illegal” is not only a formal immigration status but also represents a deeply personal, embodied and internalised lived experience. However, being “illegal” is only one part of the marginalisation these young people experience growing up in Thailand. Even for those born there, they are often treated as, and feel like, the “alien” or the “stranger”. In the next chapter, I delve deeper into the young people’s sense of connection with both Thailand and Myanmar as well as their relationships with their family—frequently the one constant anchor in the young people’s lives.

Chapter Six

Orientations to Place and Family

Introduction

Following on from the previous chapter's focus on the young people's experience and relationship to their legal documentation, this chapter moves to consider, firstly, the young people's sense of "displacement", place and belonging, and, secondly, how they relate to their family.

The young people's narratives render inadequate any simple definitions of displacement, the "migrant" or the "refugee". While the young people may live in the migrant communities in and around the town of Mae Sot, in Mae La Refugee Camp or in Chiang Mai, there are many points of overlap and fluidity. Firstly, many of the young people's reasons for leaving their homes in Myanmar coincide, even though their destinations in Thailand diverge. Secondly, not all young people who cited conflict as their reason for leaving Myanmar are living in the refugee camp, and of those living in the refugee camp, not all cited conflict as their reason for being there. Thirdly, at least one quarter of the study participants have lived at various points in their lives in both "refugee" and "migrant" contexts. Further complicating matters, one third of the young people in the study were born in Thailand and have never "migrated" across a border in their lives. All of these factors reveal different lived experiences, and problematize discreet notions of the "refugee" and the "migrant". They also have implications on how the young people relate to Thailand and Myanmar, where they consider "home", and how they orient themselves in terms of their imagined futures.

The second part of this chapter explores the nature of the young people's relationships with their families. The young people's family often represent the only true constant anchor within otherwise uncertain worlds. The young people frequently point to their family as their central frames of reference orienting and directing them in their lives. Understanding the young people's sense of reciprocal duty to their family helps to contextualise many of the young people's decisions and strategies, as well as their aims and aspirations.

'Displacement' and place

Refugee or Migrant?

The young people's narratives frustrate simple definitions of displacement, the "migrant" or the "refugee". One young woman, Aye who was born in Thailand, was very adamant in the interview, stating very frankly, "I do not think myself as migrant... I see myself as someone from here."

For many of the young people, it seems that whether they are a “refugee” or a “migrant” is not necessarily part of their personal identity but a descriptor of where they are. Having fled the conflict in Karen State, under United Nations definitions, Naw and her family would be all considered refugees, and Naw differentiated as a “self-settled refugee” (Brees, 2008). Under Thai law, however, Naw is considered an “illegal migrant” as she resides in Mae Sot, while her family, who reside in the refugee camp, are considered refugees. This is reflected in her narrative. Naw speaks about the “struggles” facing young “migrants” in Mae Sot, how “when the police come and catch, there are worries about getting sent back to Myanmar”.

Both Saw and Kwi fled the conflict in Karen State as children and initially lived in the refugee camp before later moving to the migrant community. For both of them, moving from refugee camp to migrant community changed which category they fitted into. Law explains his perspective, alluding to the unconscious association between migrant and illegal, discussed in the previous chapter:

“I would say, before I moved to migrant, I am refugee. Yea. And then when I moved to migrant, I could say I am migrant. (*laughs*).... Now, I belong to Myanmar. I am not migrant anymore, I am not illegal anymore”

He does point out a critical difference in terms of the protection, however:

“In the refugee camp we have organisations that protect us, but when we live in the migrant area like Mae Sot, there is no protection.... In the refugee camp, you have protection, you have some organisation to give you food or to give you something... If you are in the migrant community, you have to stand on your own.”

Saw’s response gives insight into how the isolated and limited life in the refugee camp can drive young people in search of a better life out into the increased vulnerabilities of the migrant community:

“In the case of me, I think I am both [a refugee and a migrant], because I used to be a refugee and then suddenly I turned myself from refugee. I literally jumped from the camp into a migrant school which meant I became a migrant. So I think it will be the same for many Karen young people like me, who stayed in the camp, and suddenly they wanted to know more about what is outside the camp. So they mostly to a migrant school, so they become migrants.”

Le and Nang both came to Thailand after the death of family members. Conflict did not feature in their narratives. Le was clear that she was not a refugee, she had never lived in the refugee camp and explained, “I’m from middle Burma, we don't have much conflict there. Just poor (*laughing*)”. Nang, who had lived in both the refugee camp and migrant community, had to consider her answer more, similar to how Kwi and Saw responded:

“Interviewer: What do you consider yourself to be, a refugee, migrant, neither?

Nang: I think both. (*laughing*) I don't know. Because I used to stay in the refugee and also I came to migrant. I don't know... maybe migrant...?

Interviewer: Why do you think more migrant than refugee?

Nang: Because I am not [one of] the people who escaped the war and came to the refugee camp, like the people who stay in the refugee camp. But for me, I just came with my mother who was sick and I just stay in the migrant area, but yea... I... I think migrant... but we don't really work in the migrant area... We still do some work with them, like sometimes we do some activities like art class, or teaching the migrant children, so I don't know...

Interviewer: You still don't know who you are. You consider migrants very much to be those living on the border, and now you are not there, and in university, that word doesn't really capture who you are now.

Nang: I think we can stay that I'm still a migrant, because even though I used to stay in the refugee [camp], but as I said, we did not escape from the war, so it's just for the education that we stayed, so yea, I feel I'm a migrant.”

The young people's narratives indicate that on a day to day basis, whether they may be considered by international standards as “migrants” or “refugees”, in their own understanding of their worlds, those labels can overlap and intertwine. It is also clear that calling all young people “migrants” or “refugees” would also be inaccurate. In line with this, I try to avoid either marker, and refer to the participants as young men and women or young people throughout the thesis.

Surviving and suffering less in Thailand

Despite the multiple difficulties inherent in a life without legal documentation, for many young people and their families feeling conflict and extreme poverty in Myanmar, Thailand offered them what was most vital: survival. Their lives in Thailand often compare favourably to their childhood memories of Myanmar, and how they imagine their lives would be like had they remained there.

While Win recalls frequently not even having rice to eat as a child in Myanmar, in Thailand, “with little money, you can still buy food”. Chit also remembers there being not enough to eat in Myanmar, while in Thailand, her mother could get work and “I could eat whatever I want”.

Many young people have become used to the increased development in Thailand, which contrasts greatly with the remote rural contexts which they, or their parents before them, left behind in

Myanmar. Thin, while born and raised in Thailand, sometimes visits her grandparents across the border. There, everything is “different”, the roads are poor and there is no electricity. After growing up in Thailand, Cho recently spent a year in Myanmar with her parents. She struggled managing without electricity, internet or schools, and having to shower the more traditional way “with well water, with the longyi”. It was too challenging for the young woman for whom, in Thailand, “everything is good... living and everything is calm (slang = ‘cool’)”.

Where health care has been accessible in Thailand, it has often been life changing. For instance, Thaw would not be alive if it were not for the HIV treatment she is able to access in Thailand through the 30THB national healthcare scheme. Khin wanted me to know how “thankful” she is to Thailand and for being able to access the health scheme to repair her cleft pallet, which has allowed her to live “like a normal person”. Neither woman would have been able to access such services in Myanmar.

The education and work opportunities in Thailand have been very meaningful for many young people. Taw, for example, explained how in rural Karen State, people continue to have “no idea” about how to access school, whereas in Thailand “it is easier”. Work is generally more regular in Thailand, and there can be opportunities to access better work, as Grace pointed out, “We don’t have factories like here, we have to work like others in the village which is very hard”. For Win, his comfortable life makes him want his friends who remain in Myanmar to come to Thailand also:

“If I want to live comfortably (‘pyepye’), other people would want to live like that as well. I want to bring my friends over here. They would want to send money to their parents as well. This time, if I go back, I am thinking about bringing them [here].”

Regarding how his life would have been had his family remained in Myanmar, Aung reflects simply, “It would be another me”. Phyu reflects on how many children in Myanmar have to work “selling things”, whereas, in Thailand, she could “play with other children, eat snacks, [and] learn” and, possibly most critically, “live comfortably” with her family.

For the young people who fled persecution and conflict in Myanmar, whether living in the migrant community or refugee camp, they know their lives are better in Thailand. Naw, recalling vivid memories of conflict when she was a little girl, simply observes, “I’m happier here than living there”. Law states, “Living here, we don’t need to run from Burmese”. He recalls his mother telling him as a child “that if I’d lived in Burma at that age we would have needing to run from ‘porter’.” He refers here to the common “brutal” practice by the armed forces of forcing villagers, including children, to be porters, to carry heavy ammunition and other supplies, and who are often beaten or arbitrarily killed if they cannot keep up with the pace of the military (Human Rights Watch, 2002). Kwi, with his own haunting childhood memories, is simply happy to be away from the violence of Karen State:

“I feel like my living in Thailand is better... But you know, [whether] I lived in refugee [camp] or migrant [community], I feel like my life is better than in the place where I was born.”

Many of the young people mention how coming to Thailand has had multiple benefits for them and their families, releasing them from the strains and risks associated with extreme poverty and conflict in Myanmar. Their narratives suggest that, in some ways, these benefits may be worth paying the price of the challenges they face in Thailand. Their statements do not take away from the difficulties and challenges they face, but provides another perspective on the reasons why the young people and their families come to and stay in Thailand.

Ethnicity, nationality and “using” citizenship

Further insights into the young people’s sense of place and displacement are revealed through exploring issues relating to ethnicity, nationality and citizenship. While all young people seemed to easily answer the question, “What ethnicity are you?”, any further exploration revealed matters to be much more complex, related in part to the political context in Myanmar, also outlined Chapter One.

Myanmar’s Bamar, or Burman, ethnic group makes up the majority ethnicity of Myanmar, representing the dominant culture and the country’s official language. This leads to considerable overlap between what is considered ethnically Bamar and more broadly the Myanmar, or Burmese, nationality. Among the Bamar young people in the study, many identified interchangeably as Bamar, Burman, Burmese or Myanmar. This tendency also occurred in the translations of my interpreters and translators. Le, whose interview was in English, replied to my question regarding her ethnicity using both terms: “Burman, Burmese”.

For the ethnic minorities of Myanmar, the link between their ethnicity and Burmese or Myanmar nationality has been blighted by over 60 years of civil conflict and human rights abuses, persecution and oppression of ethnic minorities by the ruling military junta. Many ethnic groups, including the Karen, sought and fought for independence and secession from Myanmar and against the perceived “Burmanisation” of their states by the Bamar-controlled military government (Rogers, 2012). The campaign for more autonomy and control between ethnic groups and the government/army continues. Karen nationalism sees Karen identity as entirely separate and incompatible with that of Bamar, Burmese or Myanmar (Cusano, 2001, p. 171). For the young people in the study from one of the country’s ethnic minorities, their relationship with what is Bamar, Burmese or Myanmar can be understandably complicated.

In general, the primacy of ethnicity comes across strongly in the narratives. Ethnicity is one’s “blood”—as Nyein describes being Karen. It is innate and inherent. As such, official papers can neither validate nor undermine it. Thin was born in Thailand and while she holds no form of documents or

citizenship in either country, she is Karen: “My parents are Karen. I spoke Karen since I was born.” Taw, has held Thai citizenship since he was a baby, but maintains a deep connection to the land and forests of Karen State and “my Karen people”. While his Thai citizenship accords him “opportunity”, he does not consider himself Thai: “I just feel like I am Karen. But now I use Thai ID.”

In my first interview with May, before she acquired her Thai citizenship, she easily identified as Karen, but she was less certain about her nationality:

“I am confused. Because, you know, I didn't have any [ID], Burma or Thai, so I cannot, I am confused to say...”

She adds “my whole life is in Thailand”, she speaks, reads and writes Thai, does not speak Burmese and has only visited the country once. Therefore, in our subsequent interview, after she attained Thai citizenship, I expected a much stronger expression of Thai identity, but her conclusion echoes Taw’s words:

“[Now] I feel confident to say who I am. Before, even if I say I am Karen, but they will still ask, like, 'So what is your nationality', yea, they will ask that, so I cannot say that I am Thai or I am Burmese... But now I just say that, 'Yes, I am Thai'- no, not that, - 'I use Thai ID card, but I am Karen'.”

Saw also discusses the challenges of telling outsiders “who” he is. While he identifies strongly as Karen, his passport says Myanmar, but it feels awkward to him to say so as his Burmese is not “quite strong” and he knows nothing about the Myanmar school system:

“If I go study in Europe, for example, if people ask me where are you from? I cannot say Karen, right? I have to say Burmese. So they say, 'do you speak Burmese?', 'what is the culture?' I do not have these clear things... if people ask me about the school system, I cannot explain, because I didn't grow up in the Burmese grades schools, see?”

Nang first and foremost identifies with her Shan ethnicity. Having grown up in both countries, when I explore with her about whether she would prefer Thai or Myanmar ID, she responds in relation to what would work better for her:

“Mmm, yea, at first I thought I wanted a Thai ID, but now I feel like, ok, Burmese ID is fine for me because even though I can't speak Burmese, but I can communicate because at least I studied to Grade 5, so at least I know the language a little and at least my father is in Burma. And, yea, I am from Burma, so I think I'm ok with that. But the problem is just, difficult for me to travel, for example I don't know, because my Thai is better than my Burmese, I feel like I belong to this country more than Burma. It's half and half, right? 10 years in Thailand and 10 years in Burma.”

While Nang uses her Myanmar passport, it “is fine for me”, it does not reflect her “half and half” life. The reality is that there is no form of identification that can adequately do so. Therefore, like May, Taw and other young people, she uses what she can get and is useful to her in her life.

Nonetheless, one’s citizenship can remain difficult to reconcile for some. While Kwi holds Myanmar citizenship, he feels little connection to it. As already described, his childhood memories of the Myanmar army attacking his village continue to haunt him: “I can forget playing with friends in my village, but when I [had to] run, I can never forget this”. His subsequent experience of having to “buy” citizenship did little to warm him to the country. Like the others, he acquired his Myanmar citizenship for entry to university, however he is clear that his true ideal would be to live without any ID and to not to have to legally “belong” anywhere: “I feel it's ok, no problem, I don't feel like I see any obstacle”. He wishes to study and make his way in the world without having “to do the passport or ID. But we can’t”.

Ethnicity, nationality and citizenship often hold very different meanings – and meaningfulness – for the young men and women in the study. The issues they raise for the young people can be highly complex, awkward, as well as uncomfortable. While ethnicity is often innate and can be simply accepted, notions of nationality and citizenship are much more problematic. Some young people, recognising that identification papers may never truly reflect who they feel they are, reframe citizenship as something to be “used”. Within their ambivalence, citizenship becomes another strategy to overcome their daily challenges and improve their opportunities.

Orientation to home and future

Thailand is “like my own land now”

Ethnicity, nationality and citizenship do not necessarily relate to where one considers “home”. Ku who holds Myanmar citizenship, considers himself “half-Thai, half-Burmese” and identifies Mae Sot and Thailand as his home. Ku laughs gently, pointing out that this is not unusual in Mae Sot: “More people here are Myanmar”.

While Aye identifies as Burmese, like Ku, she considers Mae Sot, and Thailand in general, to be her home. Born there, she rejects the migrant label: “It’s like my own land now.... I feel like Thailand is my home”. Like others, her Myanmar citizenship is a practical measure as she believes that one day, like all Burmese people in Thailand, she will have to “go back”. She considers Myanmar to also be “my land, but I’m not familiar [with it]”. While she has no fear of Thai police, the police in Myanmar have “rough faces” and she fears their guns. Her knowledge of Myanmar, obtained from Facebook, relates to “uprisings”, “killing monks”, and “floods”, “I put some donations.”

Cho likewise identifies as Burmese, while Thailand is her home after living there since she was a baby. It is hard for her to put into words how she feels: “I think I am a Burmese. But I know the language (Thai)... How to say...” Her year in Myanmar reinforced where she wants to be:

“I don’t want to live [in Myanmar]. I’m not happy there.... I grew up here so am happy here only”.

Like Aye, she is grounded in reality and is similarly aware that if she does not get documents, she will likely have to return to “our Myanmar country”. While Aye rejects the label migrant and both she and Cho demonstrate ambivalence about living in Myanmar, both demonstrate many of the characteristics associated with transmigrants, who can live “dual lives”, speak two languages, and can negotiate home in two countries (Portes et al., 1999; Schiller et al., 1995).

Even for Thin, for whom living in Mae Sot is like a “prison”, Thailand remains the only place she has ever known, and her home. Everything across the border in Karen State is “different” and strange: “I don’t know what to do there”:

“I want to live here. As I have been living here for a long time. I don’t want to go back and live there.”

Kan captures her feeling: “Everyone likes the place where they were born”. Born and raised in Thailand, he has only visited Myanmar once, and has no interest in returning. Documented or not, Mae Sot is his home. When I ask him where he will be in five years’ time, he replied simply, “I will still be here”.

While Htun is proud of being Burmese, he likes his life in Thailand, sees opportunities there and wants to stay: “[In Myanmar] I’m not happy. I will just live here.” For many of the other young men and women in the study who came to Thailand as children, however, this would be unthinkable.

“Our Myanmar country”

For many young men and women in the study, particularly living in the migrant community, despite any number of years in Thailand, and the advantages the country has given them, Thailand remains “other’s country” and Myanmar remains undeniably home. Htun’s sister’s viewpoint, Phyu, is firmly in line with her parents, who are oriented “home” towards Myanmar:

“When the time comes, [we] have to go back to our Myanmar country. [We] cannot live long term here as it is others’ country.”

While Min admits that in Thailand, “the work opportunities are good..., I am happier in my village.” When I ask why, he replied simply, “I was born in my village”. Like Min, Bo has also spent ten years

in Thailand, and while claims to have “no aims for my future”, he knows it will not be in Thailand: “I will go back to Myanmar. I will not be living here.” Aung has lived in Thailand since he was six and appreciates the advantages it has given his family, especially regarding his education. Nonetheless, after 14 years, he remains firmly attached to his “own country”:

“I am a Myanmar citizen. I have my own country. I love my country. I never imagined that Thailand is a place that I have to live.”

Many of the other young men and women’s narratives regarding Myanmar are similarly fervent. Grace has lived half her life in Thailand and has benefited from work opportunities and inexpensive healthcare. She recognises all the advantages of Thailand over Myanmar:

“Here you don't have to worry about the water, the electricity fees, but in Myanmar, our village is quite far. But here is ok (‘asinpyedeh’), the water is free, because the boss provides it for us, and also the electricity is free for us. So, here it is more ok (‘po asinpyedeh’).”

And yet, when I ask her where she sees her future, returning to Myanmar is obvious and inevitable:

“I really want to go back, but my parents are here and going back to Myanmar to work for daily living... I will be happy if I go back since it's my place, my land ('ko ya, ko nye')... How could it be ok (asinpye) living here in other people's country? One day, (we) have to go back, one day.”

Like Grace, Kyaw is passionate about return and makes clear that he is not in Thailand by choice but by necessity. Close to his heart, he holds his beloved country and the promise that one day he will be able to return:

“I don’t know how [other migrants] live like this is their birth place.... We cross to other people’s country after leaving our country behind. It’s very sad. I don’t know how to feel. I always remember my country Myanmar. I just keep it in my mind that I came here to find (the) means to earn. But (the plan is) after getting money, I will go back. I never forget my country, Myanmar. I came here for economic reason. In our country, it’s not easy to get money.”

Even Taw, despite the opportunities his Thai citizenship accords him, makes it clear that he is only in Thailand due to the conflict in his home state, explaining simply, “We are Karen people, and we like to live in our Karen State... If there is no war, we will go back”.

For these young people, their places of origin remain an unquestionable nostalgic “moral destination” (Malkki, 1992). Interestingly, each one of these young people, apart from Taw, gave poverty as their

reason for coming to Thailand. Their narratives refute the mutually exclusive notion of the voluntary migrant moving towards a “dream” and the forced refugee’s “powerful longing” for her homeland (K. E. Miller et al., 2008). It is clear that these young migrants do not consider their being in Thailand as voluntary, but one borne out of the immediacy of poverty. While they cannot be considered “displaced” in Thailand, neither can they be truly considered voluntary. Cathrine Brun’s (2001) suggestion of considering migration as a continuum between “force and intention” seems to register more accurately.

In Thailand, the constant restrictions on movement and the ongoing suspicion and surveillance by the authorities serve as reminders to the young people of their continued otherness in the country. Like others, Chit recognises the many advantages of living in Thailand: “We are able to eat and drink, live a good life”. But underneath everything, and despite her official migrant worker permit, Chit is aware of the ongoing restrictions on her as a migrant. She is very aware of the difference in what life holds in the two countries:

“Need to live poorly if I live in Myanmar. Positive is – there is safety. We are able to go wherever we want. There’s nobody to arrest you. Here, I have been only to Mae Sot. There are places that we are not able to go and visit.”

This is also connected to her extra vulnerabilities as a young woman, as described in the previous chapter. In addition, as I discuss later, concerns for her mother as she gets older, also keep her oriented back to Myanmar. With debts there, a lot of “preparations” are needed before she can even begin to plan, but she will return:

“I can’t live here for the rest of my life. I’ve no plan at all. [But] when the time arrives, we need to go back.”

Thaw is in a similarly secure position in Thailand to Chit. She possesses both a temporary passport and 10-year card, two documents which provide her with security, access to services, including her much needed HIV health care, as well as permission to move around. And yet when set against her knowledge and experience of daily life in Karen State, the sense of restriction—and her lack of belonging—is clear:

“There’s more freedom to go here and there in Myanmar. Here, it’s difficult... Here, this is others’ country so cannot go anywhere we want.”

These narratives link to the earlier discussion of the internalised inferiority that young people can develop living in Thailand, where they are always left feeling the “alien”, the “stranger”. Zin was born in Thailand, and has grown up with the knowledge that the country into which she was born “is not our country”. Her limited experience visiting grandparents and siblings in Myanmar illuminated

how restricted her life is and how Thailand will never be home. She sees an alternative world where she can belong. She sees her family who enjoy the freedom she desires. She has spent her life so far no belonging, and she now wants to experience their reality:

“[Thailand] is not our country. I went back once to my village, I stayed once there, so I know.... I can't go freely here. But there, I can.... I want to go and live there.... I have grandparents, siblings. I have relatives. But I don't have (any) here. I've been here since I was born, so I want to go and live there.”

Ambiguity and Ambivalence in the Refugee Camp

The refugee camp represents an ambiguous space which is in Thailand and yet distinct and detached at the same time. Many aspects of everyday life indicate their being in Thailand, from mobile phone sim cards and services, television and radio channels, to the vegetables, spices and other goods in the market, as well as the Thai suppliers who bring them and the Thai army which runs and patrols the camp. And yet it is also in many ways Karen, in terms of the languages spoken in the camp, the clothing, the way people prepare their meals, and the schooling and religious practices.

The strangeness of the refugee camp is not lost on the young people living there but, as Nu observed, it may be no less strange than the world they left behind in Karen State:

“How do I feel about staying here? Staying here is abnormal, strange. But living in Myanmar too is strange. Living here we had a chance to study, we got 'free' education... it makes it easier to stay.”

While her “real” home remains a place she remembers in Karen State, having the chance of education helps Nu make the camp her home for now:

“I don't think this is my home but I have been living here for a long time, we have settled down here, so we have to consider it as our home...”

Being able to receive education makes the camp her home, for now. Her perception of home echoes the young women in Ala Sirriyeh's (2010) study for whom home can be represented by many things, some which come at the expense of others.

The refugee camp represents an even more ambiguous space for the young people born there as well as for Kalu who has lived there since he was five years old. As described in Chapter Five, everyday life is monotonous and boring. The barbed wire exterior of the camp, patrolled by the Thai army, reminds them daily of their lack of freedom.

Visits outside the camp provide a sharp contrast to their everyday restrictions. Upon visiting his village in Karen State for the first time in the fourteen years, Kalu smiles widely recalling the visit. However it was also clearly bittersweet for what it highlighted about his life in the camp:

“When I was in Karen State, I had the opportunity to go around but here I don’t have any chance to go around, to go outside. I’m not happy. I don’t see any development in the camp, it just doesn’t happen. The situation stays the same.”

However, the camp is also many of the young people’s only known world. Tha who went to work in Bangkok, decided to return to the camp because he missed his family and friends, and also “I missed camp”. Nyein laughs while describing the refugee camp as home: “I am happy to stay in the refugee camp.... I grew up here... I like everything here”. She recalls her visit to Karen State which was all so strange to her: “I don’t like to live there... I didn’t grow up there.” Nan who admits, “It is very difficult to live in the camp”, similarly remembers how challenging she found Karen State:

“There were no trees or bamboo. It was very hot and there wasn’t enough water.... It is not difficult for the people who live there, but we just go back once in a while so it was difficult for us to cope.”

It is clear that each of the young people, however, want more from life than what the refugee camp offers, and five of the six in the refugee camp eligible for resettlement, are at some stage in the resettlement process. Most young people are aware of the rumours that the refugee camp may close, although some admit that they simply cannot imagine it, as Klo comments, “People won’t have a place to live”. The narratives suggest, however, that the desire for resettlement does not stem from the fear of the camp closing, but from the hope in something that can let their lives grow. Klo likes life in the camp, it is familiar, but he does not want to be all his life:

“I’m happy to live here.... [But] you can say that there is no development in my life in the camp (=life improvement).... My parents... They just ‘stay like that’ (‘aw ja yu’), they didn’t go anywhere, they didn’t find any way to improve their life. It’s happened to me also. If they went to a third country, we would have more knowledge.”

He sees the life his parents have accepted and he wants more than that. Kalu similarly reflects:

“Once I would like to try to live the life of people in the third country, would I be happy?”

Most of the young people plan to join other family already resettled. Nyein and her mother had applied when she was a child but faced “barriers” as they could not contact her father. Now Nyein is 18, this is no longer an issue. They are currently waiting for the health check before being resettled to the United States where they have relatives. Tha, Law and Klo, now they have all turned 18 and can apply individually, hope to join their brothers resettled to the United States. Kalu hopes to join

his uncle in Australia. Most of the young men do not have a “Plan B”. Kalu admits, “I don't want to think about that... because I think it can mean a lot of change”. Law's plan B is to live in one of the Thai-Karen “jungle villages” along the border. His parents fled civil conflict in Karen State before he was born. The first time he went to Myanmar was after his grandparents were killed. He has never experienced Karen State as a home or “haven” (Brun & Fábos, 2015). “Return” is not an option.

Nan is the only young person born in the camp who is not focused on resettlement. While she admits that she would like to be resettled, she will stay with her parents who have always wanted to return to Karen State:

“They were worried that if they went, they wouldn't be able to come back. They want to live in Myanmar.... My parents stay here so I have to stay with them”

Home and future on the ‘mixed-up’ Borderline

As discussed in the previous chapter, many young men and women in Mae Sot, as Paw describes, try to “do as the Romans do” to fit in. It is conscious, through the choice of clothing or hair style, as well as unconscious, like Le's accent changing over years of living among different ethnicities. Paw claims, however, that she does not want to be an “exact copy” of Thai people, adding that she actively retains her “own traditions” as a Karen Christian. However, at the same time, when she wears the traditional longyi skirt now, she has to tie it using “hooks” like foreigners do. Consciously or unconsciously, growing up on the “borderline” shapes and changes the young people. Similarly, over time, where they feel “home” to be or where they feel “at home” shifts also.

Saw recognises no longer the boy who left Karen State when he was nine: “You are like two people, you cannot fit yourself to your original person.” While Saw continues to identify strongly as Karen, he “feel[s] some distance” from people in Karen State:

“I don't really feel there is my home to be honest, even though I was born there, even though my parents are there, my family is there. Because, as I told you, half of my life I have spent in Thailand.”

However, as with others, he is aware of the constant reminders that Thailand is not his home either:

“They are keeping me from being part of the country. And of course I am not the citizen, so I don't feel this is home”.

His accent, his clothes “everything... it's different”. He has become one of the “border boys”. He recognises an “attachment” which pulls him “back to the borderline”. According to Saw, the borderline represents a space where “all the things [ethnicities and languages] mix up” and “you need to be mixed in order to survive”. It is a space that “real Thai or the real Burmese don't really want to

come”. Saw is not one of those “real” Thai or Burmese, he sees himself both ethnically mixed—Pho and Sgaw Karen—and he can speak a mix of five languages. The mix of the borderline is the space for him.

Kwi also reflects upon his relationship with the borderline. While he does not identify with his Myanmar citizenships, he adds, “I don't feel like I'm Thai, but I feel like I'm from Thailand, yea.” Laughing at this idea, and pausing momentarily, he explores this further:

“I feel like I'm from Mae Sot (*laughing*). Mae Sot is Thailand. I feel like I'm from Mae Sot because I have lived there for many years. Mae Sot, community of Mae Sot is not only Thai, a lot of ethnic groups. Yea, a lot of different people. Also Thai people, also people from Myanmar, also Thai Karen, you know, I feel I'm from, I'm people there.”

Kwi comes to a similar conclusion as Saw. The borderline provides a home to young people who feel in-between worlds, a kind of “Third Space”, perhaps (H. K. Bhabha, 1994; Rutherford, 1990). Mae Sot is not “only Thai”, it is something different, created from the mix of ethnicities who live there. It represents a fluid dynamic space, reflecting its inhabitants:

“I feel like yea I belong there, maybe between borderline. Sometimes in Myanmar, sometimes in Thailand, yea, I feel like I'm the people there, I'm from there, I feel like.... If I am free, if I have rights to live freely there, yea, I will live there forever I think (*laughing*)”

“The future can be anything”

Over and over the young people demonstrate their pragmatism and flexibility in the face of the uncertainty of their worlds. Asking Kwi where he will be in five or ten years' time, he laughs and replies, “I don't know. Maybe I will be in the place where I come from, borderline”. He laughs at the twists and turns his life has already taken, his frustrated hopes and unexpected opportunities:

“I'm not sure yet, because I can't tell about my future, because I have dreamt differently and I know I've come out differently, so I can't tell.”

Naw and Paw are similarly pragmatic. Naw considers:

“The future can be anything. If it is in Myanmar, it's ok because it's my own country... It depends on the situation. If it's in Thailand, then Thailand”.

Paw echoes her, recognising the advantages of both scenarios:

“Depending on the circumstances, I might get a chance to work here [in Thailand]. If I get a job in Myanmar, I can live with my parents.”

Home can represent different things to the young people: the place of one's birth or heritage, the place where one feels safe, to simply a place of familiarity. The refugee camp represents an ambiguous space, a place familiar and known, but one which restricts and holds the young people back from life. Mae Sot and the "borderline", sitting "in-between", provides an alternative home or place of attachment for those who do not feel they fit in neatly elsewhere. In some ways, these young people echo what Rey Chow suggested as to what "home" can become to migrants: "Home is here, in my migranhood." (Chow, 1993, p. 142)

I suggested earlier in the chapter that the many benefits Thailand provides the young people and their families may help them reconcile themselves to the everyday challenges they face there. However, while this may be the case in the present, the young people's narratives suggest that this willingness may not extend to their futures.

Throughout this section, the centrality of the young people's parents has been evident. In the next section, I turn to discuss this further.

Family

"My love... my everything"

The young people's narratives are filled with touching expressions of how much their families, and particularly their parents, mean to them. About his mother, Ku simply says: "Mummy is my family, everything". He prioritises spending time with her: "You need to care [for your] mother and you... need to help her." May echoes Ku regarding her family: "They are my love, they are my everything". Chit shows her mother "full respects" in public, while they are "like friends" at home.

Within the isolation and social deprivation in Thailand, family can literally become "everything". Aung spoke about how after migrating to Thailand, his family became his "village":

"There's nothing in our area except our hut (in Thailand). The tree was our friend. It was okay ['asinpyideh', i.e. wasn't bad] because we have many family members so it was like a village with our family."

As described in the earlier section of this chapter, living in Thailand is meaningful to Phyu in part because it means she "can live happily with family". Even after marriage the young people continue, where possible, to live with or nearby their parents. Zin, who is married with a young baby, explains that her favourite time of the day is when she is "happy" with her mother. Recognising that many are not able to do so, being able to live with one's parents is not taken for granted. As Kyaw reflects:

"I am happy to live with both of my parents. Some don't have that chance. No one can replace your parents".

As described in Chapter Four, one third of the young men and women in the study have spent many years separated from their families, often due to their own pursuit of work or school. Many young people frequently value the sacrifice, although separation from their parents often remains difficult. While Paw knows that by staying in Karen State she would never have received an education, and would likely be married with children by now like the other girls her age in her village, it would have meant staying with her family: “It’s good to live with parents.” While Sah felt he had no choice but to leave his family behind in Karen State to come to the refugee camp in pursuit of his education, he also reflects that, “Life is good with parents. But (we were) not able to afford the school.”

While Paw has seen her parents three times in those seven years, many young people see their parents much more rarely and Sah has had no contact with his parents since coming to Thailand. As Naw reflects, the young people have no choice but to “just stay”. Saw reflects that while day to day life without parents can become “kind of normal”, certain times highlights the loss:

“When you see other people with siblings and with parents, then you feel something, even though it is normal for you for a long time... Even though they are used to it, my parents all will miss us, and we miss them too.”

While some young people spoke very matter-of-factly about missing their parents, Naw became visibly upset each time she spoke about her family. While I tried to move the conversation away to avoid further distress for her, her responses frequently returned to her family. They remain close in her mind despite the physical distance. Likewise, while separated nine years, Win frequently thinks, and worries, about his parents back in Myanmar:

“If I eat good food, I think of my parents saying, ‘are they getting this kind of food or not...’ Sometimes, my eyes well up.”

Some young people also acknowledge the emotional distance that can occur as a result of growing up away from their families. After living with her grandmother from when she was a baby when her parents moved elsewhere on the border to work, Aye “loved my grandmother more than my parents”. She continues to feel the impact of that separation when with her parents. Le was left in the care of her aunt in Myanmar when her mother first came to work in Mae Sot. After Le also came to Mae Sot, she initially lived with her uncle at his workplace, then, during school, with different teachers and various boarding houses and now, in university, she lives on her own. Her visits to her mother are short as the factory, where her mother works, only allows visitors to stay one or two days in the workers’ dorm. Le sees her younger siblings having close relationships with her mother, but she remains separated and disconnected, their exchanges awkward and limited to small talk:

“I can see my sister is very close to her since she spends a lot of time with her.... When I sit with her, I don’t know what to say to her (*laughing gently*). I just say, like sometimes,

she calls me, and I say, 'Ahh, have you already eaten?' and 'How was your day?' And that is all, I don't know what to continue. And then she just stop and I also stop."

She shows me a poem she wrote a few years previously entitled "Me and Mum", in which she reflects on the ambivalent relationship she has with her mother:

I wonder
Why I run away from it.
I wonder
Why I dare not face it.
I wonder
Why I can't believe in it.
I wonder
Why I question about it.
 I am scared of it.
 I am doubtful about it.
 I am coward to face it.
Her love, my mum's love
That has never been shown nor felt.
Have I ever cared about it?
Has she ever cared about me?
They say, "why not"
I say "it is true"
The ask "Who?" "me or her"
I answer "Both of us"
To be honest
It's me, never cared about her
& her love

Le feels that it is "strange" for her not to be close to her mother. She sees the closeness of her friends with their families, but after moving so much in her life, she is never close to anyone:

"For me I am more close to wherever I am, because I lived with many people, I have to move from one place to another place, so I cannot be very friendly in one place. I become very friendly in one place and then I have to move to another place."

She sees her friends discussing their plans and decisions with their family but she does not: "always I do by myself". Indeed, it is clear that for many young people, parents continue to guide and direct them in their lives.

Parents as “closest teachers”

My youth advisors explain that, culturally, parents are considered the “closest teachers you ever have”: “You are only at school for eight hours in a day, but parents are always teaching you”. The role of parents to instruct and guide young people even into adulthood—and the young people to follow them—comes across strongly in the narratives. Khin explains that this is because parents require the same deference as Buddha. Nan explains that parents are analogous to monks and teachers, who are expected to “direct me to the good things and also explain about the bad things that we shouldn’t do”. Zin, while married with a daughter, describes how she still looks to her mother to “tell me what to do, what not to do.”

Parents clearly continue to have a significant influence over the young people’s decision-making. Phyu had wanted to move to another factory where she would get paid better. However her parents did not “allow” her. She agrees that she obeys her parents although she sometimes “talks back” to her parents when they “scold” her unfairly. The constant instruction from parents can be difficult for the young people. Aung appreciates that the role of parents is to “discipline us”, however sometimes his are like “broken records... I have to always listen to it. It’s all the time.”

Saw describes young people’s deference to their parents as an internalised Asian “habit” of thinking that “only when people help me out, then I can do”. While he lives alone and, like many university students, makes many everyday decisions independently, he remains in his own mind a “child”:

“When you grow up you still have that character.... You will apply to your real life, even if you finish Grade 10, you will think that, let’s say you are 18, like me, you will still think, I am just 18, I still can’t do things by myself. At the time, that’s what I thought.”

In matters of love, the young people are sometimes less obedient: both Aye and Htin went against the wishes of their parents and ran away with their lovers to force their parents to accept their decision. Aye acknowledges that, in matters of “achit gyideh” or “big love”, people can often be reckless. Looking back now, if she could turn back time, she would not get married as she did. Even though Aye does not have a particularly close relationship with her parents, she regrets the “upset” and “worry” she caused them.

Parents as biggest worry

Many of the young people say that their biggest worries are about their parents. Min expresses many people’s main concern about their parents: “I worry that my parents will die.... They helped me come into this world. I will not be happy if they die”. Zin worries for her mother who gets tired from working long hours in the fields. Neither her mother nor her husband allow Zin to work while her daughter is young. Zin explained that as a result of the pressure on her mother, she now takes “good

care” regarding her contraception: “I am afraid that my mother will be in trouble so I take good care.” When I asked Law what was most important to him in his life, he answered without hesitation: “I need to take care of my mother and my father.”

In Thailand, the precarious legal circumstances facing migrants can become more difficult as they get older. Migrant workers who are provided accommodation by their employers, once they are no longer able to work, they cannot remain. Any work permits, which allow them to remain in the country, also expire. My translator could identify with Chit’s concerns for her mother as she gets older:

“This is not our own country. The older you get, the more unsafe you are. Mother is also getting aged. It’s better to go back. Living with relatives and neighbours in Myanmar is safer.”

Grace, whose parents work at the factory where they live, pointed out that her parents will eventually have to leave and return to Myanmar. My interpreter added that this is not only for practical reasons but also parents want to “die on their own land”.

Parents’ health and wellbeing are often main concerns of the young people. Phyu prays for her parents’ “good health” and for “good work” in order to improve their “economic situation” and “to vanish my mother’s worries.... [but] my wish isn’t fulfilled yet.” Kyaw attributes his worries to the pressure on his family of their existing debts in Myanmar and the expensive monthly hospital check-ups required for his mother’s heart disease and diabetes: “It’s difficult as we don’t have ‘baht’”.

The young people speak very affectionately and profoundly about their attachment to their families, particularly their parents. In a context in which many young people are separated from their parents and families due to migration for work, education and conflict, being able to live with them is often cherished. For those who live for years away from their parents, while they learn to live independently, the separation often remains painful. However, for some, it can also result in emotional detachment.

The cultural and religious values which shape the parent-child relationship continue into adulthood. Instead of becoming more independent into adulthood, the young people begin to realise the precarious situation of their parents as they get older, living in contexts of little affordable health care or pensions.

In the next section, I delve in deeper to these cultural and practical aspects which underpin family relationships and maintain a system of reciprocal support within the family. The young people often mention the reciprocal duty they feel and how they meet it, or plan to do so in the future. This is maintained even for those who feel more emotionally detached from their parents. This duty is key

to understanding many of the young people's decision making, goals and future aspirations, as well as hope they cope with the challenges and hardships in their lives.

“Mithazu seiqdat” – family unity and reciprocal duty

Three overlapping Burmese concepts related to young people's duty to their family were frequently mentioned by the young people: “mithazu seiqdat”, meaning “family spirit”, “mithazu thawoun”, meaning “family duty”, and “miba jezu”, meaning “parent thanks”. These expressions reflect cultural norms of reciprocal duty and care that exists between the young people and their families. My advisors explain that it is a “part of Asian culture” to put one's family's needs before one's own desires. Young people are brought up to “understand and believe” that they are to “listen to their parents more than what they feel”, even if sometimes difficult. One advisor explained, “All children know this, it is not a burden.... ‘My mother feeds me so I owe her’”. This exact sentiment was echoed by Win, who, since childhood, has worked hard in Thailand to support his parents back in Myanmar. He accepts his duty without question or complaint, explaining: “I got here because of them only.”

My advisors also point out that, in the absence of social welfare or pensions, this cultural practice makes common practical sense: “We only have our family”:

“When young people, the children, when they grow up, everyone, in their minds, they are thinking they have to look after their parents, or their brothers or sisters. For example the eldest son or daughter will always have to think about looking after their younger brothers and sisters. That is what happens in most families in Burma who are not in good condition... Most families are poor, so the eldest son or daughter, most of the time, does not have the chance to study much.”

Kan, the eldest in his family, dropped out of school as a child in order to help with his “family difficulties”. It is very meaningful for him to be able to meet his family duty:

“How can I describe that? I'm very proud of myself that I can take responsibility of my family duty [‘mithazu thawoun’]. I respect myself that I can help my parents somehow as I grow up.”

Aung considers the concept of “mithazuseiqdat” to relate to “unity of family”. He benefitted from the “mithazuseiqdat” of his older siblings as by them working, allowed him to attend migrant school until Grade 10: “I wouldn't be like this now if they did not support me”. Now his family's current difficulties fall to him as his older siblings are married with responsibilities of their own. It would be “not good” if he didn't in turn take care of his younger siblings.

As the eldest in his family, 18-year-old Kyaw has been working since childhood in Thailand to provide for his parents and younger brother. While he is not happy in Thailand, he accepts his responsibility and is focused on how best to meet his responsibilities and remaining positive:

“I have to think about what to do to make a living. About what to do for the family to be ok (‘asinpye’)... I encourage myself saying that I have to do this, no need to feel upset ... I am here just to support my family economic situation. I don’t feel so happy about it, but as our economic situation is not good (‘asyinmapye’), so we are working here suffering.”

Naw recognises that as the eldest sibling in a poor family, the usual expectation of her would be to work and provide for the family. Despite having little in the refugee camp, Naw’s parents decided to prioritise her education. Her parents sacrificed for her, “therefore I have to think about them”. Naw wants to “pay gratitude” for postponing her responsibility toward her family and allowing her an education. In turn, it will prepare her to “stand on my own two feet” and “to support my family”.

Saw’s parents also allowed him to postpone his duty and have struggled as a result. Now he is attending his final undergraduate year in university and will soon be graduating, Saw recognises that “it is my responsibility to make them proud”. While he also wants to further his education, he first wants to work to “pay back” his family:

“I want to earn money, the first thing, to impress my parents, like many other kids do, to pay back something of what they have given me, to pay back something to the family.”

To Kwi, the concept of “mithazuseiqdat” means family comes first: “You have to love your family”. He considers that within Myanmar culture, parents and children are “more connected” than the more individualist “Euro-style”:

“Euro-style means, even though you marry you can break any time, right? You can divorce any time you want? ... Because I have learned about family.... but in Myanmar we are more connected in our family”

In university, Kwi struggles with his unmet family responsibilities. Kwi is only in his first year of his four-year undergraduate. His family in Karen State are poor and he knows it is his responsibility to help them. It hurts him to be considered “not the one who loves my family”. However, he holds on to the hope that his education will allow him to “do something different” for his parents:

Kwi: “I have many siblings, and then my parents are, yea, they are very poor to support my family, we have younger brothers and sisters, yea we have to support them, I need to support them actually, but ...(laughs)... Sometimes I feel bad, sometimes, I just forget (laugh)...

Interviewer: “You have to turn it off”

Kwi: “Yea, I know, my older brother told me that, 'now you are older, you have to take care of your parents or your brother and sister', for me, I say, 'I have a future', to them, I am not the one who loves my family, but actually (*laughing*)... I do, but, yea, I'm going to do something different for them.”

Even the young people who feel less emotionally attached to their parents, recognise and assume their duty to them in different ways. Aye, for instance, recently returned to stay with her parents for a number of days while her father was sick. Le, too, acknowledges without question her responsibility to care for her mother and younger sister. Like the other young men and women in university, she has only postponed taking on her duty. While she does not imagine ever living with her mother, it is clear that supporting her is a given:

“My plan is that when I finished school and I'm working, I will make my Mum and my sister live well, for example, my Mum, she is good at cooking and making snacks, so while she is still young, right, so if I open a shop for her, or things like that... I will just live by myself and work more that I can support them from afar”

The young people living the refugee camp also acknowledge and accept their family duty. Nan attends school now and helps her mother when off school, “and one day, if I get a job, then I will support them with money”. The reality for most of the young people who I spoke to in the refugee camps is that they cannot support their families through work. Instead, both young men and young women assume several of the domestic duties, cooking, cleaning and taking care of the younger siblings. As one young man, Kalu, explained:

“It doesn't matter if you are a boy or a girl. You live in the home, do different things, so the work gets done”.

Parents and family are often of central importance to the young people. While duty to one's family is a cultural norm, it is also critical in contexts in which social welfare for impoverished families or a pension in later years is not a possibility. Migrants' legal and work situation in Thailand exacerbates these issues. As a result, the young people consider staying in Thailand to be simply untenable. Parents must return to Myanmar, and it is the young people's responsibility to make that happen.

Conclusion

The young people's sense of place, from the past, into the present and regarding their imagined futures, are important anchors. Despite the very real problems and tensions in life in Thailand, many young people recognise that living there has served them well, helping their families' survival. At

the same time, for many young people, it is clear that the challenges in Thailand are often not considered tolerable for their future selves. Life in Thailand represents a transitory, transformative space, one in which they create a life for the future (Mann, 2010; V. Turner, 1969).

However, the young people are endlessly pragmatic. While their time in Thailand may be temporary, there is no set end date. While they are able to live, they are not able to save. However the hope and dream of the future critically sustains them (Mann, 2010).

In the migrant community, three different types of young people emerge: those who remain orientated towards Myanmar, those who remain focused on Thailand and those who can be said to represent a more transmigrant orientation. Those in the first category, orientated towards Myanmar, do not speak Thai, remain closely connected to their immediate ethnic communities, and maintain ties to family and an identified home-place in Myanmar. Those in the second category, who remain singularly focused on remaining in Thailand, do not necessarily lead an easier life there, nor a more integrated one, but more generally have no sense of connection to Myanmar. As Thin noted, they would not know what to do there. The third category, the transmigrants have connections in both countries and speak both languages. While they may have a preference, they are mentally prepared, and practically preparing, for both eventualities. These young people move fluidly between Thai and Burmese worlds, have both Thai and Burmese friends and have in-depth knowledge of both cultures. While Thailand may be their home, and while they demonstrate dual lives, they do not claim dual identities (Mendez-Shannon, 2010). They know where the divide lies.

The family is another critical anchor in the young people's lives. Culturally, the family unit is one of unity and reciprocity (Jolliffe, 2016). Even in cases of more emotional detachment, the young people accept their duty to their family. It is an unquestioned part of life. This sense of duty can help the young people make sense of who they are in the world, and their sense of direction in it. For the young people in the migrant community it gives purpose to their suffering. In the refugee camp, it gives structure and purpose to their everyday lives.

This chapter opened up the young people's sense of orientation and direction in their lives. In the next chapter, I turn to the strategies and resources the young people employ and draw upon along their journeys.

Chapter Seven

Strategies, Resources, Coping

Introduction

After having established the circumstances and constraints in the young people's lives, I turn now to core strategies employed by the young people to overcome their challenges, meet their perceived responsibilities and realise their aspirations for better lives for themselves, their families and, often, their communities. Within constantly changing parameters, the young people are constantly strategising. They remain pragmatic and flexible, ready to alter and revise their plans, and resist feeling defeated or overwhelmed.

Education and work are central in the primary strategies identified and engaged in by the young people. Their journeys in these arenas are far from straight-forward, linear or predictable. The strategies and attitudes of the young people make it impossible to reduce them to victims of conflict, poverty or marginalisation. Even suffering is considered part of their journey to a better "decent" life.

Education

Valuing the opportunity to escape "village" life

Education is often considered a key pathway out of the cycle of poverty and the insecurities of displacement and lack of documentation (Rosalind Evans et al., 2013; Inchauste, 2012; Mann, 2010; Vungsiriphisal et al., 2010). Life without education is represented by the "village" life, where as described by Naw, "Life goes away by day by day", or as Paw explains, "people with no work just stay at home and eat". My local advisory network agree: "There are no opportunities in the village. Nothing to do, but eat, sleep, work. Life will waste away". Saw describes how a lack of education results in a "rotation" of poverty. Paw adds that without education, "You won't escape".

Lack of education is associated with lower social standing and feelings of inferiority. Naw explains, "We are in a developing world. Without knowledge, (you) will be left behind". Zin, who left school after Grade 1, admits, "I cannot do a lot". She explains that even among undocumented migrants, her lack of education means she cannot seek the same earnings as others. She feels that people "look down" on her and her mother because they are not educated. Khin similarly discusses how, when her father died and she and her sister had to drop out of school and come to work in Thailand, the "troubles" she faced stemmed from her lack of education. While she worked hard to not be "ruined", her social standing remained low: "I didn't get social acceptance". She does not want that for her children, and is therefore prioritising their education.

Thin's migrant worker parents prioritised her education so that she would not "be like them". Thin's own perception is that education holds the potential for undocumented young people, like her, to escape feelings of inferiority:

"Education makes you "higher", "you can hold your own with others.... If you don't have education, whatever you do, you are beneath others... you have no courage to communicate with others."

Many young people recognise that the reality of poverty for many families in Thailand and Myanmar requires children to work. As Saw puts it, work can be "for their family's survival". Nang describes her own compassion for many people, who, when living "day by day" and struggling to simply survive, can think little of education:

"Working on the farm, they can stay [survive] day by day. Most of the people in Myanmar are just like that, that's why I understand, in my opinion, that's the reason why they never care about the politics and education. Because even they try to live by their own, it is already difficult for them, because our government (*laughing gently*) never support us..."

Having grown up among these realities in Thailand or Myanmar, the young people who get to pursue their education do not take this chance for granted. As described in Chapter Four, family financial difficulties were the main reason for school dropout in Myanmar and Thailand. The young people are very aware that the opportunity to pursue education beyond a few years of basic primary level is rare within their communities. Education is regarded as an exceptional opportunity. As Naw reflects:

"Most of the eldest children cannot get education there [in my village]. Mostly, they have to work. They have to give priority to the younger ones. But I got a lot of opportunity.... [I am] very lucky to be attending school. There are many people who cannot. I can learn and study. I am attending school for my future to be bright."

Saw considers his parents special. Many other parents in his village would have made him stay "inside the village" and "become the labour for the family... because I am a man". His parents, being educated themselves, valued education and were willing to make sacrifices for him to attend school.

Education is viewed as a precious commodity, a possible route out of the poverty and inferiority perceived to be the common fate of Myanmar people on both sides of the Thailand-Myanmar border. The young people who get to pursue their education consider themselves fortunate and appreciate the sacrifices their families have made for them, and accept the sacrifices they must make also. The young people are very conscious of making their education and their family's sacrifice, as well as that of their own, count.

As Paw enters her final year of high school, she is very cognisant of her impending responsibilities:

“Now I’m 19, about to turn 20. I understand about my family situation, I’m mature now. I will have to support my family. My parents are getting older. Now, if I don’t try and study hard, it’ll be difficult [for me] to support my family. I need to be educated to support my family.”

However, like so much of the young people’s lives in the migrant and refugee communities on the Thailand-Myanmar border, educational journeys are rarely straightforward or their rewards guaranteed. Flexible strategising, including moving between school systems and nurturing potentially useful social connections, as well as sheer tenacity are critical.

Weighing up opportunity

The young people often describe moving between several school systems—Myanmar, migrant, refugee and Thai—in their search for the most reliable, valuable education. As described in Chapter Four, education in Myanmar is often made inaccessible due to conflict or poverty, leaving poor families, as Paw describes, left feeling “small-faced” and humiliated “when [teachers] ask for something and we cannot give”. While a few young people have been able to access Thai school, for those without citizenship documentation in Thailand, the benefits of education through the Thai school system are uncertain, as Cho explains:

“In Thai school, I’m not a Thai [citizen]. I can attend till Grade 12 only. It’s not certain that I will get [future] opportunities. Because of not having documents, you also can’t be sure that you will get [support] in Thai school.”

For the most part, the young men and women in the study who have been able to access education have been able to do so through the schools and boarding houses set up by community-based groups within the migrant communities and refugee camps. For some, this promise of education contributed, at least in part, to their coming to Thailand, separating them from their families and placing them in the restricted and precarious world of the refugee camp or migrant community.

However, this education comes with its own risk and uncertainty, often driven by the lack of accreditation available to young people who attend the unofficial migrant schools. Le greatly values the quality of her migrant high school and post-high school education she received on the border. However, the lack of official recognition frustrates her:

“Sometimes, if we compare to people in Burma, we feel a little bit... We can be proud of ourselves by what we are learning, but we cannot prove that we are learning something. When I sit with my friends in Burma, they can say that, ‘I am now in second year in university’, and I want to say that ‘I am learning something more than you do in your

university...I am learning something very deep, very meaningful.' I know a lot more than they do inside Burma. But the only thing is that I cannot prove that I am learning."

Amid lack of accreditation, the young people's narratives indicate the different ways they have availed themselves of opportunities in their communities to make their education count. For instance, Thin, who attended up to Grade 12 in a migrant high school, described her education as "official" within the migrant community. With it, she could attend a community teacher training course, and ultimately access a job teaching in a migrant school. While her legal situation outside the school remains precarious, within it she is safe and she can earn an, albeit small, salary.

Cho, like Thin and Paw, is looking to the future and sees that within the migrant school system, unlike the official Thai system, there are available to her many more potential "opportunities to attend other programmes and all". Here she refers to the so-called 'post-10 schools' in the migrant community, described in Chapter Four, which are designed to meet the further educational needs of young people with at least a Grade 10 or Grade 12 education. These programmes train the young people in skills needed by community organisations, thereby meeting community capacity needs as well as providing jobs for young people. A small number of programmes focus on preparation for the GED (General Equivalency Diploma) exam, which helped most of the young people in the study currently attending university to acquire the formal accreditation necessary.

The young people also benefit from another quality inherent in the unofficial nature of the migrant and refugee communities' education systems: their flexibility. While official systems require strict adherence to procedure, for example progression through grades, unofficial, informal systems can be somewhat more flexible, an advantage greatly beneficial to particular young people in the study. However, as Aung observes astutely, "Opportunity, it is not certain whether it will happen or not". An element of chance is involved. The young people's narratives indicate that opportunity often comes down to the guidance, advocacy and support of key individuals, as well as exceptional aptitude, hard work and determination on behalf of the young person themselves.

Needing people to "show the way" and grabbing opportunity

In lieu of any formal guaranteed educational pathway, the role of individual people becomes paramount in helping the young people find out about, access and progress through education in Thailand. As Paw's family struggled with the costs of school in Myanmar, her uncle, who lived in Mae Sot, told them about the migrant school and boarding house there, where there would be "no need to worry about a thing". Sah, in Karen State, heard from his aunt about the free education in the refugee camp. Nang's brother used his connections to help her access school in Thailand. A "recommendation" from Chos's local district official helped her access Thai school without any Thai documentation. Le's employer connected her with the principal of a migrant school, and supported

her throughout her education. These “really significant others” facilitate key turning points in the young people’s lives (Gonzales, 2011).

It is common on the border for young people to start school late or to have to restart school in Thailand at a lower grade than they left in Myanmar. My advisors inform me that while the migrant and refugee communities offered a way back into education for these young people, school dropout among this population was high due to the embarrassment of having to study alongside much younger children or to the realisation of the many years ahead of them before they would graduate. Each young person in the study currently in university was helped progress faster through school in Thailand. Nang recalls her own experience when she was 13 recommencing Grade 1:

“I think there were 6 students who were the same [age] as me in the refugee school... This is the problem when we study in Burma and we cross the border to Thailand. The students have to start their education again from the beginning. And some students will feel shy to study because they have to study with the kids. But my teacher helped me, ‘ah ok, if you try to read and write and you can do everything then I will ask if I can get you to the higher level’. So I tried hard.”

As promised, Nang worked hard and was helped progress remarkably fast through the grades. Similarly, after coming to Thailand and recommencing Grade 1 when he was nine, Saw ended up completing his schooling in nine years instead of the typical 12. Le, who had only completed Grade 9 in Myanmar, found herself enrolled directly in the post-high school programme of the migrant school where her employer had directed her.

The importance of these social connections is not lost on the young people. As Nang reflects: “I believe I’m lucky with the education, so many helped me to get on”. Saw similarly acknowledges the “many teachers and friends [who] always supported me”. These people have been critical in creating the opportunities for him to overcome the limitations of migrant and refugee education:

“I think if I really didn’t get this chance, then I may have ended up working already now, somewhere along the Burma border. At some NGO or CBO but it wouldn’t be like this because I wouldn’t have had any certificate, or no school or higher education.”

At the same time, the young people know the work that it takes on their behalf also. Opportunity is nothing if you do not “grab” it. Kwi recognises the importance of “someone who can show us the way”. However, it is clear that his role is far from passive:

“Many students, like me, including my friends, sometimes we look for opportunity, but we don’t really grab it. So if you are the person who grabs the opportunity, you will definitely get to university.”

Demonstrating capacity and resolve

I asked each of the young people in university what they thought made them different from other young people. Their responses indicated an awareness of their exceptional aptitude but also an attitude of confidence and commitment to hard work and perseverance, often developed from a young age. Saw described how since he was a child he has always been motivated “to be in the top place”. At meal times he always ate the chicken head due to an old Karen belief “that if you eat the head then you will be at the top.” Le explained that she learned her confidence growing up around her boy cousins: “I wasn’t shy to speak”. When I asked Kwi what set him apart, he laughed and responded, “Maybe I don’t give up easily”. Nang explained, “I go quite quickly because I like to study.”

The young people understand and accept the huge amount of effort and hard work necessary, as Nang observes: “It’s not like you go to the sun and get the tan, it’s not like this”. Indeed, Nang demonstrates this commitment to hard work. At one stage, by day, she attended her normal school, while, at night, she attended both non-formal schooling and extra English classes. It is little wonder that her teachers and supporters “trust” her to do the work.

The young people also demonstrate remarkable ability to manage the high level of pressure put upon them. Saw laughed recalling being told he would be skipping those initial grades and his parents warning him it would be “quite tough, but that he would skip me anyway”. Saw refers to his parents’ “kind of threat” as being “quite scary”. However, “after attending for a few months, it was ok, it’s ok for me”. Since he was a child he has always been the “top student”, and therefore never questions his own ability: “I never think I won’t get it”.

When Le struggled at first in her new school, she was resourceful. She knew an older boy in a higher class who had good English. She asked him to write out what she wanted to say in class and “the whole day I’d say that”. She was not afraid to make mistakes. She also recalls one teacher’s plain words which snapped her into focus:

“She told me, ‘if you didn’t finish, then don’t come back. You have to finish it.’ So... *(laughing)*... And I think, ok they already helped in school, I have to finish this... I’ve already started I have to finish this, so I try, try, try, try”

Most of the university students perceive pressure to be positive and transformative, as Saw remarked:

“I think pressure is something that enables you to achieve what you want. If you don’t have pressure, then you don’t know how to change yourself.”

These young people in university are a small subset of the study sample and the overall youth population along the Thailand-Myanmar border. Their stories serve to highlight some of the reasons for this. They are given extraordinary opportunities, singled out as a result of often chance encounters

with people with the capacity to help them overcome the many structural limitations. The young people also possess exceptional aptitude, tenacity and a commitment to hard work. They are ready and waiting to “grab” their remarkable opportunities, and find ways to cope with the remarkable pressure which accompanies them.

Nurturing higher aspirations through education

Being engaged in education allows the young people to dream big. Most hope to become doctors or teachers, thereby being able not only to help their families, but also “my people” either along the border in Thailand or in Myanmar. This community-centred mentality was similarly remarked upon regarding resettled Burmese refugees in the United States (McWilliams & Bonet, 2016). Cho was the only young person in education wanting to do something non-community related, hoping to become a translator for a company on the border and work through her three languages: Burmese, Thai and English.

Many of young people wish to help children and young people who face the same challenges as they faced growing up. They want to pay forward the fortune given to them and pass on the lessons they have learnt along the way (McWilliams & Bonet, 2016). May wants to be a social worker and work with children born in Thailand who face the same adversity as she has done:

“Because of that [experience], when I see other people, I understand and I know how to encourage them because I already passed [through those things].”

Kwi is passionate about informing young people in schools on the border about further education options which he had only heard of by chance: “I feel bad because I think [some teachers] do nothing”.

Ku would like to write a “small book” about his life so that other young men like him can understand where he has come from, the troubles he has faced, and know that, like him, “[they] can go do it too”.

Despite their aspirations, most young people remain grounded in the reality of uncertainty. While Paw dreams of being a doctor, she acknowledges that, “There are things that I didn’t get that I hoped for. But, I hope.” When I ask Thin what she will do if she cannot access higher education, she replies simply, “If it doesn’t work out after trying, I’ll just have to carry on”.

Within the worlds of the young people in the study, education is a rare opportunity to be cherished and made the most of. As a strategy, it represents high risk with uncertain high reward both for the young people, their families and their communities. Certain key adults or “really significant others” who come into the young people’s lives, often by chance, can transform the young person’s educational trajectory and help them circumvent their many structural limitations (Gonzales, 2011).

The realities for most young people mean that education is not an option in their lives, however. However, again like education, the dream of reaching a “better life” through working in Thailand is not guaranteed. Le explains her perspective:

“Because of what is happening in Burma, they flee to Thailand, they move into Thailand because they want a better life, but when they get here they don't have a better life. Things are the same. Like, for some it is even worse.”

Work

As described in Chapter Four, and illustrated in the examples in Appendix K, the work sectors available to the young people in Thailand are narrow, leaving many “good jobs” denied to them (Cho). Among the young people in the study, the best conditions derive from “lagasa” or monthly work, such as in the factory. There, the hours are long and exhausting (Phyu) and the workers are “controlled” (Chit), however the work is “neat and tidy” (Min), it offers a regular salary and, at least in the case of the young people in the study, it offers valued work permits. Most of the young people, however, are restricted to “neesa” or daily labour. This work can be “very dirty”, often involves day-long exposure to the elements, and is less well paid and often unreliable.

Reframing school drop-out

From their work as children to their work now, many young people reframe the challenges they face, focusing on the benefits their work affords them and their families. Working since childhood, Ku considers it “not a bad thing for me... I like to help Mummy”. Aye was taken out of school to work in Bangkok when she was 11, but reflects that, “I didn't feel sad because I needed to look after my parents”. While Bo acknowledges that, at only nine years old, he was young to be taken out of school and sent to work in Thailand, he was pleased to contribute to his family:

“I was young when I worked but it wasn't difficult. It was okay [...] I was happy to work as I got to help my family”.

Some young men and women highlight their own agency in the decision to drop out from school. Min explains that after his family had to sell their land and cows for his father to have an operation, it was his decision at the age of 10 to leave school and come to Thailand to work:

“My father had to have an operation for his stomach and got admitted at the hospital in Burma. It was very expensive so we had to sell our land and cows. It was then that I decided to work in Thailand and so I came ... I am happy to be getting money.”

Other young people emphasise the long-term strategising that went into the decision to leave school. Phyu said she decided to leave school when she was 15 to help her parents pay for their newly

acquired migrant worker permits, something that happens quite often in the migrant community, according to one of my advisors. Phyu works at a sewing factory, learning what she believes to be a useful, transferable skill she can bring back to Myanmar and use to support her parents as they get older. It is this, rather than formal education, that will provide her with the knowledge and skills necessary “for my future”. She accepts a lower salary than others as she is only learning and is not yet “professional”.

Chit demonstrates the flexibility of young people as they strategise within changing circumstances. She first dreamt of becoming an interpreter. However, her mother’s financial difficulties and her inability to access the Myanmar matriculation exam made her rethink her plan, and she decided to drop out of school after Grade 10. Like Phyu, she decided to work in a sewing factory. She focuses on developing her skills to be able to set up her own business from home in the future in Myanmar. She points out the strategy behind her decision-making: “[Sewing] is good for a girl, and by learning this skill, it can make a good business. The income will be suitable.”

Phyu’s brother, Htun was inspired by their older brother who was 12 when rest of his family migrated to Thailand. He remained in Myanmar as he’d begun apprenticing in their uncle’s garage. While Htun attended migrant school in Thailand, he witnessed his older brother develop his trade over the years, and when he later joined the family in Thailand, he was immediately engaged to work “as an expert”. After school, he taught Htun in the workshop. After Grade 5, Htun decided to drop out of school and invest his time in learning his brother’s “profession”:

“I quit school thinking that I would work like my brother.... I thought, if I have this skill, for my parents [it would be better]”.

Many young people assert their own responsibility for the decision to drop out of school, and frame the decision within a wider, well-considered strategy to develop the skills they consider important for their futures. Their narratives suggest that in the context of the Thailand-Myanmar border, for some young people, formal education may not be the only pathway to financial security or to building skills necessary to get the most out of the limited migrant job market and future work in Myanmar. In such cases, spending the time focusing on mastering a relevant trade may be more beneficial. One young man, Aung, may be realising this for himself. In Grade 10 and working towards his matriculation exams when we met first, by the time we met again, his family circumstances had drastically changed, and his family needed him to work. Undocumented and with only his unaccredited migrant education, his skills do not match the job market available to him: “I cannot not do hard labour. I do not know how to sew well”. However, as I discuss later, he too is actively engaged in formulating a new strategy for his future.

Enduring the present and working for the future

Even when working day-to-day, the young people are often focused on long term strategies. Before I asked my first question of the interview, Khin explained how everything she does is for a future in which she and her family can live “properly”:

“I came here, because I had some difficulties in Myanmar. I kept it in my mind that I have to work hard. If I do okay here, [then] I can live better in my country. In my mind, there’s only work in order to get over all the difficulties and to be okay. It’s enough if I reach my goal. It’s important that my family live properly. I just have that aim.”

Many young people working in Thailand, such as Htin, describe how their daily lives are “just work”. This frequently is reflected in the strategy of “byen, loh, sah”, meaning “return, work, eat”. My advisors explain how this is a common goal of migration:

“You save money here in Thailand, and you invest in your own work in Burma... You need to have money to start the business, then you work for yourself.”

Kyaw explained that, “Some people save by eating fish paste and go back to Myanmar”. He means that some people are so focused on return, they barely eat, often restricting themselves to rice and fish paste – the ubiquitous fermented fish product often the sole source of protein for poor people in Myanmar and South-East Asia. Grace captured this sentiment:

“Coming to other people's country, coming and working... We have to go back to our own country, that's why I work and try to save money. If you waste all the money as you work, how can you go back?”

The first step in the process of return is to save enough money to buy land and build a house. My advisory team explained that in rural Myanmar, people typically own their own houses on their own small plot of land. Renting is rare. Return is therefore often inconceivable without having bought land and built a house. Some explains simply: “After saving, once we are able to build our house, then we will go back.” Having already bought the land, Aye and her husband are currently saving to build a house.

“Now we have land in Myawaddy. I try to save money to build a house and after that I want to open a shop”.

After buying land and building a house, the next step is saving up “investment” or “start-up” money. Some plan to invest in a small business, such as Aye who hopes to “open a shop”, while others plan to buy seed to cultivate on their land, such as Min who plans to invest in “bean and grain”. My advisors explain that some people go to money lenders, but if their plan doesn’t work out, they are

then left with the extra pressure of ever increasing debts. Most wish to avoid this. Kan, who plans to remain in Thailand, also hopes to set up his own business: “I need start-up money as there could be profits or loss in a business”. However, he remains pragmatic: “It will depend on the situation. If things aren’t ok (‘asinmapyebu’) yet, I will work for other people.” Despite hopes and hard-work, nothing is guaranteed.

While the young people describe modest aims, as with so much in the young people’s lives, they remain uncertain. Like many others, Htin’s dream is “to live properly like other people”. His typical day is “just work”. When the interpreter asked if he ever got back pain, he replies: “Work is work. But it’s my livelihood, so even if I get pains, I have to work hard”. For Htin, the most challenging is the unreliability of work: the “getting and not getting”. He is working hard to improve his options, he has tried working in Bangkok, acquiring formal documents, and now holds an informal workers card. Nothing has worked:

“I search for money. If there is a good job, I will go and work. I look for [a good job], but am not finding it”.

Earning 130THB (€3.20) per day, and supporting his pregnant wife and soon-to-be two children, there is little to be saved: “That’s why I’m not going back [yet]”. After 13 years already in Thailand, he fears he will never achieve his aim:

“My biggest worry is – I’m afraid that I will be like this forever. I want to be improved. I’m afraid I won’t be.”

Min also works day-by-day. He lives with his mother and younger brother while his father and other siblings continue to live in Myanmar. He describes working on the farm as “very dirty”, he sees factory work as “neat and tidy” and paying better, but he does not have the skills. He holds on to his dream of returning to live with his family and grow his own “bean and grain”, but after ten years in Thailand, he acknowledges the uncertainty:

“I want to be living happily with my family, I want to be rich... I don’t know if it will happen or not. I am working though.”

While education is valued, the young people’s narratives clearly demonstrate that so too is working for one’s family when needed (Jolliffe, 2016). Again, the role of the family emerges as critical to help the young people manage the challenges of their present lives. Working for their family sustains them and gives their suffering meaning. This idea of purposeful suffering will be discussed further later. Next, I discuss another strategy undertaken by some young women: getting married, as well as why marriage is off the cards for many young people at present.

Getting married to avoid “chaos”

For some young women, marriage represents another pathway to a better future, to avoid the threat of being “ruined” discussed in Chapter Five. For Khin, getting married at 18 was a pragmatic strategy to avoid her life becoming “chaos”. Without parents to “depend” on, it was “not appropriate” to continue to live with her sisters, or, “as a girl”, to live alone. If she was not able to “control” herself or “keep herself properly”, “I would get bad reputation and my life would be ruined”, so, “I decided it would be better to get married”. Her husband is what she considers a “suitable one”, with whom she works well in her life: “He is honest. We both work together in order to fulfil our aims”.

After her mother remarried, Zin explains how people in the community made her feel “scared” to live with her step-father. My advisors explain how it can be perceived to be inappropriate for a young woman to be living with a man who is not her father, even if her mother was also there. Having entered what she called the “flirt age” at the age of 15, she was also ready to get married. She likes her husband, being older and more educated than her, he teaches her.

Both Khin and Zin—and Grace—had children soon after they got married. Zin explains that while she had access to contraception, she did not know how to use it properly. Marriage and parenthood bring their own challenges into the young people’s lives. Khin explains how she was “in trouble, because I had my babies.” While she now feels “it would be better not to be married”, she also respects her decision-making as a young woman seeking safety for her future.

For others, not getting married is a conscious decision to help them create a better future for themselves and their families. This is largely in the recognition that the new responsibilities that come with being married and having children make it more difficult to look after one’s parents. As Aung’s older siblings are all married, they cannot help now that his parents face financial difficulties, meaning the responsibility moves to him: “I have to take care of my parents as I am the only one who is left to do it.” Win’s sister who is married supports “when it is needed”. However, the bulk of the responsibility to support their parents rests on him as he is single. His sister has told him not to get married and he is not thinking about it: “Not yet, my life is not okay yet [‘pyi-leh-dhe-bu’]. I must look after my parents.” Kyaw has enough to think about trying to provide for his family, repay their debts and care for his sick mother. He explains very firmly that marriage is not on the cards:

“I don’t think about that. Now my parents are not in a good condition yet (asinmapedhebu) and are not healthy also. It would be a problem (for everyone) if I got married. Father cannot work much, and my younger brother is still young. Some people get married at the age of 15, 16, but I can control my mind. I don’t give priority to love. If I got married, it would be like living in a prison. Therefore, I am not interested in love.”

Marriage is also considered incompatible with educational pursuits. Kwi considers that those who get married young do so because they have “lost their future”. He remembers that he felt like that too when he was in Grade 12 and felt “no hope” about being able to continue his education: “The last option is to get married (*laughing*).” May similarly considers people who get married to be “giving up”. They stay as “normal people...instead of studying, they get married”. She understands the reality echoing the challenges described by the married young men and women in the study:

“If you get married when you are young, what will you have to do? [You will have to] do work and look after their family, just that.”

For young women, marriage would end their hope of education. Nu, attending Grade 12 in the refugee camp, jokes, “If I will marry someone, I will marry someone who can send me to school and who can love me.” Both interpreters (the interview required three-way, Karen-Burmese-English, interpretation) laugh with her, as it would be very rare, if not unheard of, for a young woman, to be continue her education after marriage. My advisors explain that culturally, young women who get married or pregnant—usually both happen in tandem—are automatically expected to leave education. Young men often are allowed to remain, although often do not do so due to their new financial responsibilities. Nang also explains that lack of prioritisation of young women’s education, often makes relationships difficult:

“In our culture, if your husband or your boyfriend doesn't understand you, it is hard for you to study, because... and also you have to give them the time... so I think I am comfortable with [being] alone. (*laughing*)”

For most of these young men and women, however, marriage is only being postponed. It is a given that it will happen in the future: “Of course I will”, replies Aung. Klo simply says, “Once it is time to get married, I will get married”. Phyu half-jokes, “I will marry one day. Even if I don't want to get married, my parents will arrange.” Law explains that he will get married when he gets “bored of the single life”. Then, “it depends on cupid’s direction”. Nang notices that impulsive marriages when young often end in separation. She wants to be like her sisters and father who “just have one” marriage, she will “think carefully” before deciding to do anything.

Like education and work, marriage can represent a purposeful strategy to manage their present difficulties and lead them to the “decent” lives they aspire to. The young women have to consider specific gendered risks, including social rejection which could impede future marriage prospects and long-term societal position. With marriage, however, come new responsibilities and increased financial “trouble” to navigate.

Interestingly, it appears that being a student protects a young woman from this due to the established incompatibility of education and marriage. If a young woman is expected to give up education if she

gets married or pregnant, while she remains a student, she cannot get married. The social position of “student” protects the young woman from having to worry about society passing judgement on her for being unmarried.

While up to this point in the chapter, practical strategies have been the focus, the young people’s own psychological strategies have also been evident. The young people reframe many of their challenges, to make sense of their lives within broader aspirations and goals for their lives and those of their families. Within the many uncertainties of life in Thailand, the young people work hard to maintain their sense of hope and stay optimistic.

Struggling, Suffering, Solace and Support

The normative experience of struggle and suffering

The young people’s narratives indicate that suffering and struggling in Thailand is expected. As Aung explains, “people who become migrants, everyone has to struggle.” Struggle and suffering is therefore a shared experience, normalising the young people’s experiences and offering them consolation. Thin, who is managing a life without documents in the migrant community, takes comfort in the knowledge that her situation is not unique: “Other people can live, [so] I can live. Work, Eat.” In the refugee camp, the young people share this perspective, Tha simply explains, “People stay here. So I stay here.” Kalu echoes him: “We have been living here for many years, living here as others are living here.”

Rather than focus on the injustice of life, the young people reframe their struggling and suffering as something which shapes them positively, giving them the strength and capacity to deal with difficulties throughout their lives.

Choosing optimism and maintaining planfulness

Many young people purposefully choose to remain positive and optimistic. In the face of sadness, challenges and uncertainties, remaining positive is a matter of self-preservation. While Naw keenly misses her family, she chooses to “just stay happy”. Paw similarly explains how as circumstances change, and her hopes do not work out, she actively looks to “keep up the spirit.” Klo, in the refugee camp, explains philosophically: “Being a human being, we need to be happy.”

The young people demonstrate a refusal to allow their stress or pressures overwhelm them. Kyaw acknowledges that his family’s challenges are “difficult” and make him feel “sad”. However, instead of his duty as the eldest in his family overwhelming him, the simple reality of it gives him solace: “I encourage myself saying that I have to do this, no need to feel upset.” He does not ignore or deny his challenges, but focuses on channelling his energy into overcoming them: “I encourage my mind [= I

resolve] that one day [my aim] will get fulfilled”. Kyaw explains firmly: “If sad things happen, I think about happy things. I think about the future”.

Across the narratives, the young people demonstrate this type of matter-of-fact resolve. Even as children “dropped” alone to the school boarding house, many of the young people reflect how they simply, as Naw explained, had to “just stay” and get on with it. Aung states that “getting depressed wastes time”. He remembers, as a child, feeling despondent at the unfairness and disparity between his life and that of Thai children, but his parents taught him how to accept his situation and focus on making the best out of what opportunities he can get:

“My mother used to say one thing, ‘Which ever you are, if you look at the people who are higher [in status] than you, you will feel ‘small at heart’, down and weary. If you compare who are below you, who have a lower life situation, lack of knowledge, it will motivate you’.”

Now older, Aung explains, “I know how to live with my life status. I don’t feel down thinking that I will always lose comparing to them.”

Remaining positive is also a cultural norm, one which threads across ethnicities and religions. One advisor, who is herself a refugee with a painful past, quoted a cherished hymn: “Look for the beautiful, look for the true; Sunshine and shadow are all around you”. She attributed this outlook to being a Christian Karen quality. When I followed up with Le, she attributed it to the Burmese Buddhist belief system:

“When we are young we are taught to be satisfied with what we have. When we get greedy, we tend to do bad deeds, which leads us to have the same, poor life after death. Thus, when we are already poor, we are more cautious about remaining satisfied with what we have.”

The young people’s goals and aims help to sustain them through their challenges and maintain their hope. Nang, now studying in university, explains how she believes that holding on to “your goal, your dream” has been how she has kept going through the challenges of her education. When I ask Htin what he does to relax, he answers plainly: “There’s nothing like that. I just focus on my economic to be okay.” Their ongoing engagement in their individual goal helps maintain their energy and focus on a better future.

Aung displays the determined purposeful resolve demonstrated by many of the young people in the study. In our first interview he was focused on education: “learning is opportunity”. However, since then, his family faced sudden financial difficulties. While he was previously planning for university, by the time of our second interview, he was hoping for a job in a factory that has an “understanding”

with the police, which, in return for a low salary, will take him on with no experience and no documents. Like Kyaw, he admits to feeling “down” but at the same time he asserts firmly, “I don’t worry”. He acknowledges that it would be expected for him to be less sure about his future: “You might think that”. But he refuses to allow this sudden significant change of fortune defeat him:

“I am planning for the best (asinpyezohm) situation. I don’t want to wait and do things like other people. I will have to plan for things to be ok (asinpye)... I know what I have to do because I am already planning. If you don’t have a plan, nothing will happen.... If I have to do something, I have to do it.”

Like the participants in Gillian Mann’s (2010) study with young Congolese refugees in Tanzania, the young people are relentlessly positive, planful and strategic. They engage with what choices they do have and, thereby, remain in control. These are core strategies which maintain their sense of resilience against the adversity in their worlds (Brun, 2015; Mann, 2010; Masten et al., 2004).

Developing strength through struggling

Several young people mentioned how their experiences of difficulty as a child instilled strength and resolve which serves them in their lives now, echoing Michael Rutter’s (2012) concept of “steeling effects”. Ku explains how through his experience working since he was a young child, he has learned to overcome “every trouble”. He has learnt to be less shy and less scared, he has learned to “dare”: an outlook on life which he mentions several times as being critical to getting on in Mae Sot:

“Being shy is very bad to me. When you are shy, you don’t have any friends to go talk to, and you don’t see anybody, don’t see outside, you don’t see anything... Even if you want to do one thing, but you are shy, you are scared, you cannot go there. [But when you are] not shy, when you are not scared, when you are very sure you can do it, everything is fine.”

To Aung, his struggles in Thailand since he was a child working with his father have shaped his perspective and motivate him towards creating a better future:

“People who become migrants, everyone has to struggle, some a lot, some less. If people hold on to their struggles like I have, it can be strength and motivation.”

May reflects similarly upon her own family struggles of poverty, parental incarceration and divorce as well as the tragic death of her sibling. She is grateful for the pain, for the strength it has given her:

“You know, sometimes I feel very, very thankful for my experience. Because of that, it has made me grow up and be stronger.”

While the young people hold on to their hopes and aspirations, these known hardships help them manage ongoing difficulties. When I reflect back to Htin about his responsibilities as a father and husband, and wonder at the difficult challenge he faces, he replies with the wisdom of experience:

“It’s not difficult. Since before, my life has been poor, so it’s not difficult.”

Seeking comfort, distraction and support

Many of the young people discuss how engaging in activities, both with others and alone, help them take their mind of their stresses and worries. Many young people explain how these activities help to “calm” them. Such activities include playing sports, playing the guitar and singing, knitting, writing, listening to music or watching television. Kan explains:

“I forget everything, all the tired things from my work when I get to football field... Since I am only concentrating on football, I don't get any stress”

As discussed earlier, in the refugee camp where, as Klo explains, “There’s nothing to do, nowhere to go”, many of the young people spend their days “aw ja tho” or “just staying like that”. Sleeping and music provides welcome escape: “I listen to music and stay like that [aw ja tho]”.

For some young people, their physical restrictions even deny them their stress-relievers. Paw, living in the boarding house in Mae Sot, laughs at the vast disconnect between what she wants to do and what she can do:

“I want to walk around the garden. I want to visit around. I like walking and cycling. But I can’t do those. So, I just sleep in the room (*laughs*).”

For most young people, having supportive relationships is greatly cherished, echoing one of the cornerstones of resilience theory across theorists (Masten et al., 2004; Rutter, 1987; Ungar et al., 2007). Many of the young people discuss how spending time with others, “chatting” or engaging in activities, both with others and alone, help them take their mind of their stresses and worries.

Sharing that time with other young people who have also grown up in the camp is an important part of their day. Nyein explains that she and her friend “just sit and chat”. The young men describe hanging out in big groups with other young men “who all grew up together”, passing their time playing caneball or football. They also talk about giving each other tattoos, as Klo explained simply: “My friends got tattoos so I got them.” One young man admitted that he and his friends sometimes takes drugs, marijuana, alcohol or yaba:

“It makes you happy. After you use it the more you think the happier you are. You are always happy.... a lot of friends use it, so I tried it.”

Friendships provide important distraction from the boredom and tedium of everyday life in the refugee camp, as Tha comments:

“Sometimes I don’t want to be in my house anymore. Then I go hang out with my friends, it makes me happy.”

Many of the young people speak about the value of having friends who understand them and their lives. In the “prison” of the school grounds, Thin values having friends who “understand about me”. In the boarding house, Naw feels “closer” to and can “open up with” the girls and young women there who are also living the same life. In university, May has lots of friends with whom she can “do and share everything together” and who “make me feel better”. However, she feels closest to one young woman, who has had a similar life to her, with whom she feels she “can share everything”:

“She also has the [same] feelings like me, and we can share, maybe I think because we have faced the same problems, so we can talk like that”.

Many young people point to the importance of school friends, to navigate new worlds together as well as provide ongoing understanding and support. Chit showed me a photo of her with her two best friends in school, who all came to Thailand from the same place in Myanmar and provided important mutual support to each other as they adjusted to their new worlds: “They were poor there and so were we... here, we could discuss together what we didn’t know.” Similarly, Htun showed me a present he received from a school friend from when he first came to Thailand:

“We always shared with each other. She used to help me whenever I needed it. We were attending school at the same class. She always helped me. We were like brother-sister friends.”

While Htun appreciates the practical support his Thai friend could give him in the hospital, his friendship is also emotionally meaningful: “Other friends don’t listen to me when I talk but as for my Thai friend, he always listens.”

Some young people are less keen to share their feelings, however. Kyaw does not talk about his feelings to anyone: “I don’t say it, I keep it in my heart. I don’t let it out, I just keep it in.” Le observes “mostly people want to talk about them, they don’t want to listen to others”. She is “afraid” to talk in case the person is “not interested”, so “I don’t talk to other people. I just keep it to myself”. Le explains that as a result of having to “move from one place to another place”, she “cannot be very friendly in one place”. She has learnt to simply be “more close to wherever I am”. Mostly, however, she is happiest by herself: “I feel better when I am alone.”

Relationships with informed peers and adults are often important sources of practical support and advice. Taw leans on those who are “cleverer” than him when he struggles in class. Ku has a classmate who allows him to copy from him when he cannot keep up with the homework due to working in the evenings. Bo appreciates his best friend who helps him practically by putting credit on his phone and who also gives him advice in his life. Le has learnt how to manage her finances from her housemate when she was living on her own for the first time after coming to university. Nang’s former co-worker has a master’s degree and is always there to give her advice about her education and to help her when she struggles in her university work: “She is like my sister”. Saw has surrounded himself with people from whom he can get the best advice regarding moving forward in his life:

“Making decisions by myself, it is not really by myself actually, with advice from my teachers, from my friends, from someone who knows about further studies”

The young people recognise the importance of supportive relationships and actively pursue and nurture them, demonstrating a type of what Laura May Lee (2012) terms “tactical agency”. Saw openly admits that nurturing helpful connections is high on his priorities:

“I always think of family, education, friends, not really friends, I mean association, networking is important.”

Another remarkable example comes from one of my youth advisors who, as a child, resolved to learn Thai in order to form a connection with the employers of the factory where she lived with her parents. She identified that such a connection could provide her with a way out of the factory and into school. To begin, the employers gave her a bicycle, and over time became so invested in her future that they offered to adopt her.

Friendships and social connections are very meaningful for the young people as they navigate unfamiliar worlds, manage pressures, and cope with the emotional challenges of being undocumented and separated from parents.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I brought the reader through the many strategies the young people employ in order to manage their challenges, meet their perceived responsibilities and realise their aspirations. Education is regarded as not only a pathway out of poverty, but also a pathway into social acceptance. Without education, one feels inferior to others. It is interesting that two of the young people who emphasised this point most strongly, Thin and Zin, were both born in Thailand and live their lives as “illegal migrants”. It may be that education could provide a way for young people on the border to counter the internalised inferiority discussed in Chapter Five. This suggests another potential side-benefit of

education in the migrant community. As discussed, education on the border, while it often does not provide formal accreditation, is very meaningful and purposeful in other ways. For Thin, it provides a job and a safe environment to live. This is not to say that this is “enough” for Thin, but these benefits, contrasted with the very real risks facing undocumented young women in the migrant community as discussed in Chapter Five, should not be dismissed.

The journeys of the young men and women in university are each singular. It is important to note, that in order to protect anonymity, I had to remove many details of the extraordinary opportunities they were each given, and the details of the equally extraordinary capacities of the young people to take on significant challenges and overcome them. These are gifted young men and women. I decided to include young men and women in the university in order to understand what set them apart. Some of them had come, as the other young people in the study, to work in Thailand, and had done so for a number of years, before returning to school and finding their way to university, while other young men and women remain working in the fields. I observe that three things set them apart: the chance “significant others” that come into their lives, the ability and willingness of their families to accept their education and, last but certainly not least, the remarkable capacity and tenacity of the young men and women. These are extraordinary pathways for extraordinary young people.

Most young people are aspiring to “ordinary” lives and work in Thailand offers a pathway to that end. While life in Thailand is never straightforward, and for those without documents, work is often unreliable, it is the *only* option. The young people accept this “suffering” in order “to be able to live decently with family” (Kyaw). It remains to be seen whether or not this will resolve into a “cruel optimism” however (Berlant, 2011).

Perhaps what protects them from the fate of cruel optimism is their enduring flexibility. Within constantly changing parameters, the young people are constantly strategising. They remain pragmatic and flexible, ready to alter and revise their plans, and resist feeling defeated or overwhelmed. Life on the borderline is a shared experience. Suffering and struggle is commonplace and to be expected. Shocks and disappointments do not represent personal failure, but are a known, expected part of life.

In the next chapter, I move into a more analytical exploration of the worlds and strategies described and discussed over the past four chapters, at the core of which lies the acknowledgement of the young people’s relentless “capacity to survive” (Ungar, 2008).

Chapter Eight

Discussion

Introduction

Over the course of the preceding four chapters, I charted the study's findings. This commenced in Chapter Four with a detailed description of the environments and circumstances of the 35 young men and women in the study. With this foundation laid, over the course of Chapters Five and Six, I turned to the young people's own understandings and negotiations of the central structural frames influencing their everyday worlds, namely the nature of their legal documentation in both Thailand and Myanmar, their sense of place and displacement, and their family. Finally, in Chapter Seven I explored the key strategies the young people employ to manage and overcome their adversity, from education, work and marriage, to the ways in which the young people frame their suffering and struggle, and seek out resources and support in their everyday lives.

While very aware of the challenges in their lives, the young people demonstrate a relentless "capacity to survive" (Ungar, 2008). Retaining their sense of personal agency is crucial to helping them manage the adversity in their lives. The advantage of the bottom up nature of this study is its capacity to view the young people's lives not in terms of assumptions of their victimhood nor in terms of expectations of "thriving", but in terms of the young people's own understandings of their worlds, challenges and concerns. Through this shift of perspective, for instance, Aung, whose dream of university is quickly fading and being replaced by a future of low paid, informal work, moves from being the passive object of negative chain reactions to someone who is planful, hopeful, motivated and resilient. He refuses to be the passive victim, and he should not be placed in that position by me.

This process of reframing does not deny the young people's constraints or challenges, and the young people do not deny them either. In this chapter, I employ the theoretical concepts of liminality, precarity and "illegality" to capture the multiple ways in which the young people's lives are constrained, restricted and defined by their everyday worlds. Through this discussion I also demonstrate how the young people continue to "speak back, incorporate and resist" their liminality, precarity and "illegality", in order to survive their worlds and hold on to their sense of agency (Fine & Sirin, 2007, p. 17). This is key to understanding the nature of the young people's resilience. In their constantly shifting worlds, there is no "good outcome" of resilience to measure (Rutter, 2007). Instead, in this study, the young people's resilience can be better understood in terms of their capacity and willingness "to continue to negotiate and navigate one's way through the challenges" (Ungar et al., 2007, p. 301). Everything changes and often rapidly, and yet the young people continue to change, adapt and endure.

Living in “Illegality”

Internalised illegitimacy

In Thailand the “spoiled identity” of the homogenous Burmese migrant, who is assumed to be, and synonymous with “illegal”, serves to “discredit” them in their everyday lives and interactions (Goffman, 1963). Being from Myanmar, in Thailand, they are automatically “lower status”: Le describes how Thai people’s “tone will change” once she identifies as Burmese. Nang was asked by her Thai university classmates to say that she was from Thailand, not Myanmar, to make them “comfortable”. When travelling, the young people will always be targeted for inspection. Going about their everyday lives, the young people find themselves perceived only for this “devalued social group” (Katz et al., 2002).

I discussed in Chapter Six, how this external milieu, over time, can become internalised (Kamal & Killian, 2015; Katz et al., 2002; Willen, 2007). The language employed by many young people, even those born in Thailand, regarding their everyday lives often implies some sort of criminality. Thin talks about “living in a prison”, several young people discuss evading or being “caught” by the authorities, and Kan, who was born in Thailand, refers to how he is in part at “fault” for being in Thailand “without permission”. While the notion of the “illegal” migrant is a social construction, problematic and, as Elie Wiesel pointed out, a “contradiction in terms”, many of the young people commonly and casually refer to their “illegality”. This language is normative for them, suggesting an embedded “consciousness of criminality” (Kamal & Killian, 2015).

The young people in the study grow up knowing that, as the “migrant child”, they are not “equal” to Thai children. Looking at the lives of Thai children around them, they must learn at a young age that it “cannot be like that” for them (Aung). Aung and Cho describe how as migrant students, they stand out by their uniform, the lack of signifying school emblem announcing their lack of place within Thai society. While their education is deeply “meaningful” for them, unrecognised by the state, it is undermined and overlooked. They know their chances are limited “due to the illegality”. Restrictions on their movements, lack of protection against arbitrary abuse or arrest, and even being unable to speak or understand Thai, reinforces borders “invisible” to others (Sigona, 2012). They learn at an early age that they are the “alien”, the “prisoner”, the “stranger”. This develops into a mode of “being in the world” (Willen, 2007).

Everyday discrimination, restrictions, exclusions and rejections, leave the young people feeling “small-faced” (“myatna ngedeh”) and “small in heart” (“seiq ahngedeh”), alone, discouraged and disheartened. Saw explains that these experiences can develop into a specific form of “migrant thinking”, which he describes as “feeling down, feeling inferior and feeling like you are not worthy”. This “migrant thinking” reflects an internalised illegitimacy. The young people are considered—and

often consider themselves—illegitimately in Thailand, illicit and unlawful, at fault for being there. Without citizenship they are without a motherland to legitimise them. Ethnicity, as it transcends borders or legal documents, and family belonging become critically important.

Internalised illegitimacy threatens to paralyse, stop the young people “daring” to see and go beyond their restrictions. And yet, as I illustrate throughout this chapter, as I did in the preceding four findings chapters, the young people in the study do continue to “dare”.

Everyday ‘illegality’

As has been elsewhere documented, it would be erroneous to assume that lack of legal status impact the everyday lives of all people equally, and sometimes if at all (See for example Kubal, 2013). Indeed, one young woman in the present study was proud that she did not act as someone without documents, but conducted her life “as if” she was documented. However, her actions reflected more calculating efforts: she lives away from other migrants, never wears identifiable Burmese clothes or make-up when travelling, and she keeps herself “quiet like others” in the Thai community. She has perfected the “arts of impression management” (Goffman, 1963, p. 154). These forms of “passing”, which she has cultivated over a lifetime, allows her to act “as if” she is documented both to the authorities and to herself (Goffman, 1963).

The young men and women in the study are clearly very aware of their “illegality” and sense of being “matter out of place” from a young age. This contrasts with the experience of many undocumented young people in western contexts who, up until the end of high school, often live in “a state of suspended illegality”, “buffered” from the realities of their legal status (Gonzales, 2011, p. 608). For the young people in the study, there is no “jolt” of “discovery” of their legal status, no feeling of “paralysing shock” of its implications on the rest of their lives, nor an eventual resignation to their fate (Gonzales, 2011). “Illegality” has always been part of the lives of the young people in the study. From childhood, they are both keenly aware of, and actively involved in managing, the implications of their legal status.

Nicolas De Genova (2002) discusses “everyday ‘illegality’” in terms of the “everyday forms of surveillance and repression” imposed by governments directed at policing undocumented migrants and reinforcing their vulnerability and exploitability (p.438). In contrast, I apply the term to reflect how young people learn to adapt to and resist these efforts to overwhelm or subdue them. The concept of “everyday ‘illegality’” is proposed not to detract from or underrate the real and lasting impacts of daily fear and experiences of stigmatisation, but rather to reflect that *despite* the fear, risks and experience of arrest, abuse and exploitation, the young people are not paralysed but go about their lives, even sometimes “as if” they have documents. Even if fear is present, it cannot hold them back: they must go to the market, go to work, and go to the health clinic and so on. Recognising that, in

their world, everyday activities involve “some kind of legal infraction” (De Genova, 2002), the young people push back accepting that they may “need to be afraid” or “run and hide”. Their “everyday ‘illegality’” represents a form of resistance and active resilience in the face of structural factors they cannot change. It is their way of retaining a sense of agency, no matter how “little” or constrained (Robson et al., 2007).

The young people’s agency is undeniably ambiguous. The nature of the young people’s lives as “illegal migrants” require constant infractions of the law in order to go about their everyday lives. These demonstrations of agency and resistance put them at risk, challenging conventional resilience discourse related to normative “health” outcomes (Ungar, 2004). Furthermore, while the young people resist, they also must also know when to submit. On her perilous journey to Bangkok, Grace knew to be silent and submissive, “Because if I said anything I would die so I wouldn’t complain about anything I just followed”. Submission was the rational choice (Seymour, 2012). To understand youth agency in extreme adversity, it is important to go beyond notions of agency as opposition (Ahearn, 2001). Resistance in the form of forbearance and endurance are critical forms of agency and resilience in these young men and women’s worlds.

Living in Liminality

Interdependent youth-hoods

The period of youth is often considered an intermediate liminal stage between the dependence of childhood and the independence of adulthood (Valentine, 2003). The young people in the study demonstrate youth transitions that do not aim towards independence, self-sufficiency or “individualisation”, however, but ongoing interdependent relations within the family which commence during childhood (Ruth Evans, 2011; Punch, 2002b, 2015). This dynamic is key to understanding the young people’s lives.

Youth is often considered a period of liminality, of unresolved in-between-ness, “suspended” between childhood and adulthood (Arnett, 2000). Victor Turner developed his theoretical framework around the concept of liminality in which the “transitional being” is “neither one thing nor another or may be both” (V. Turner, 1979, p. 236). The young people in the study demonstrate markers of both “the child” and “the adult”, and can fluctuate between the two. While aspects of “childhood” endure beyond 18 years old, the young people are far from “childish” (Masten et al., 2004). The young people demonstrate clear life-long reciprocal or interdependent roles and responsibilities within their families which come into play at different times depending on the circumstances of the family (Jolliffe, 2016; Punch, 2002b).

For instance, for many of the young people, their childhood involved work not education. For some of them, their circumstances changed, allowing them to return to school as adolescents. One young man, Aung, expressed how as a child working he felt “a bit grown up”, but then returned to being the “child” when he recommenced school. The young men and women, while working and even married, continue to live with and “obey” their parents. Eighteen-year-old Zin, who is married with a two-year-old child, continues to look to her mother to tell her “what to do, what not to do”. This obedience is particularly evident among young women in the migrant community who speak about how their parents do not “allow” them “to go anywhere” due to fears for their safety and becoming “ruined”.

One of my key informants during the preliminary stage captured this particular sociocultural form of “youth-hood”, reflecting the broad conceptualisation of youth which is expected to be soon enshrined in Myanmar’s first National Youth Policy (Eleven Myanmar, 2017; The Myanmar Times, 2017):

“Youth, of course, is 14-24 in the United Nations, but in Burma, we are youth until we turn 40 years old, we always joke that ‘we are not adult yet’. Once you turn 40 years, that’s the beginning of the life. That’s what Burmese say... now, it is becoming a bit changed, but in the past... even though you get married, and even if you have many children, that didn’t matter. You are still under the care of your parents.” (*Key Informant E, September 2014*)

An overriding feature of the narratives is the centrality of the family. The family is often positioned as the main source of continuity and support during the transition from childhood to adulthood (Valentine, 2003). Indeed, for the young people in the study, within their uncertain and unpredictable worlds, the family often remains a constant, grounding anchor, helping them make sense of their lives. As May commented, family is “everything”. But this is not a one-way flow. Parents and families are deeply reliant on the young people also. The young people refer to the lack of welfare or pensions available to their parents in either Thailand or Myanmar. They, therefore, become their parents’ pension. The Burmese concepts used by the young people in the study of “mithazuseiqdat” (family unity) and “mibajezu” (parent-thanks), echo Pia Jolliffe’s (2016) description of the tradition of intergenerational solidarity and reciprocity which underpins Karen family relations. Within this study, however, these values seem to transcend any particular ethnicity. The Karen belief that “you have to pay back the milk you drink from your mother” is apparent in young people’s narratives across ethnic groups and religions (Jolliffe, 2016, p. 42).

Even those who feel more emotionally distant from their family, such as Aye and Le, accept without question their role to look after their family. The young people assume this role in different ways, depending on what their circumstances allow, whether by earning money through external work, taking over domestic chores and the care of younger siblings, or attending parents when they are ill.

Domestic duties are assumed by both young men and women, particularly among the young people in the camps who are not in education and unable to work. Both young men and women describe everyday cooking, cleaning, fetching water and taking charge of their younger siblings. As mentioned already, where gender differences in the family do come into effect is in terms of mobility. Young women's social and physical environments are more likely to be curtailed by parents fearing for their daughter's physical safety as migrant young women. Birth order also plays a role, in which eldest children can be expected to drop out of school and work to provide for younger siblings. As older siblings get married and have families of their own, this duty transfers to the eldest unmarried child.

The young people demonstrate a self-hood which is "inherently social" and deeply embedded in the collective unit of the family (J. G. Miller, 2002; Worland, 2010). To infer a straight-forward "subordination of self" would be simplistic and unfair, however (J. G. Miller, 2002). The young people's facticity with regards their role in their family; the manner with which they take ownership over decision-making regarding school dropout and work commencement; their evident pride in being able to ease the hardship of their families' lives, particularly that of their parents; and the evident shame of being perceived as "not the one who loves [his] family", as described by Kwi, represent a deeply embedded commitment to "mithazuseiqdat" or "family unity" that is indivisible from their own sense of self and self-motivation (J. G. Miller, 2002; Payne, 2012).

I acknowledge the potential for social desirability bias, particularly considering the cultural importance of fulfilling one's "mithazuseiqdat" responsibilities. It would be understandable that in the interviews the young people would want to present their "good child" selves (Jolliffe, 2016). However, the young people's ardency and emotional affect when discussing their families, the consistency between their stated family-orientated aspirations and their actions, and their constant denial of any suggestion of any external pressure to act that way, lead me to consider their responses to be consistent with their own internalised worldview.

While from the outside looking in, the young people's agency could be considered to be constrained by the needs of their families, from the perspectives of the young people themselves, it seems their families' concerns and worries are accepted part of their own, rather than anything external, "negative or unjust" imposed upon them (Payne, 2012; Robeyns, 2005). In the current study, therefore, Amartya Sen's conceptualisation of "agency freedom" as "what a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important" is useful (Sen, 1985, p. 203). The young people's actions, goals and aspirations, are deeply embedded within and indivisible from those of their family. Being able to realise them is deeply meaningful and motivational. While the young people acknowledge these as cultural norms, they also see it as their decision to conform (Robson et al., 2007).

In some ways, the young people's "conforming" agency is further confirmed by their occasional "reactive" agency, i.e. the ways they quietly, as well as not so quietly, push back and create space for themselves (Robson et al., 2007). They "talk back" when "scolded" unfairly. They go to work in Bangkok despite their parents' misgivings. They suspend their family duty to attend university. They elope with lovers disapproved of by their families. While families look to a future in Myanmar, they intend to stay in Thailand. These acts do not mean they renege on their duty, however. Remittances are sent and the university students' education are intended to later put them in a better position to provide for their parents. In all instances of pushing back, except elopement, the young people did not incur, or expect to incur, any real backlash from their parents for their decisions, and they remain committed to meeting their family duty. Htin said he mother became "soothed" about his elopement after a number of months. When I asked him what changed her mind, he replied, "We live closely so that might have changed [her mind]". While they live physically "closely", in adjoining huts, their lives are also interlinked in every way.

Samantha Punch refers to these reciprocal relations as "negotiated interdependencies", defined as "how young people work within their structural limitations whilst fulfilling both individual and household needs and asserting some level of agency" (Punch, 2002b, p. 123). Over time, as circumstances, constraints and contexts ebb and flow, these interdependent relations are "renegotiated but maintained" (Punch, 2002b, p. 131).

While the period of "youth" is often associated with the transition between dependence and independence, the young people demonstrate an ongoing maintenance of interdependence. Other traditional markers of youth transitions—movement from school to work, marriage and family formation, residential independence, and so on—are in reality much more fluid, dynamic and "can only be understood if one knows what is happening in the other contexts of their lives" (Punch, 2002b, p. 123). Family remains a constant anchor in the young people's lives. Their families' needs are their own. The young people take pride in choosing, and being able to live up to their sense of duty. To reduce the young people to passive instruments of family or cultural expectations, would be to overlook and deny their evident valued sense of agency in a world of constraints. Furthermore, their "reactive" agency demonstrates that when the young people do perceive oppression, they are not beyond finding a way to resist (Robson et al., 2007).

Transitional Beings and Liminal Spaces

Migrants and refugees in the border region around Mae Sot, both inside and outside the refugee camps, have been described as living in a "purgatorial, liminal space...float[ing] somewhere between permanence and instability" (Harrell, 2013, p. 26). Migrant legal documentation and the refugee camps remain temporary under Thai law. The young people, while having predominantly lived in Thailand for most or all of their lives are aware of their temporariness there.

Victor Turner explains that within “wilderness” of liminality, the individual has neither place nor position. They must face invisibility, humiliation, “submissiveness and silence”; they must “obey their instructors” and “accept arbitrary punishment without complaint” (V. Turner, 1969, pp. 95, 103). Within Turner’s rites of passage, the liminal space is a “fruitful darkness” however, leading to “aggregation” —and empowerment.

The narratives of the young people in the study suggest that they too hold on to the hope that their current life represents a transitional stage. They hope toward a “bright” “decent” future in Thailand, Myanmar or, for those in the refugee camp, a third country. This is a future in which they can “hold [their] own”; in which their parents can “just sit and eat”; in which they can provide for both their families and “my people”; in which they have a house, a car and a reliable livelihood “like other people”. “Would I be happy?” Kalu asks about his imagined resettled life.

Their present life represents the necessary painful transitory space before this imagined future. In this space, as migrants, they must “suffer” and “struggle”; as refugees, they must “face difficulties” as the “servants” of powerful others, who criticise and blame them arbitrarily. For those who are looking to a future in Myanmar or in resettlement, no matter how long they are in Thailand, it remains temporary, transitory. Short-term plans can be extended over and over but they remain short-term plans. Nothing concrete holds them in Thailand. Thailand’s immigration legislation, which asserts that all migrants in Thailand are temporary, understandably provides heightened insecurity for those who desire a future there. However, for those who dream of return or resettlement, it plays into their narratives that these dreams will eventually come true.

Remaining actively engaged in working towards their more “decent” future is an important survival skill to prevent the young people from losing hope and becoming demoralised by their present (Brun, 2015; Gonzales et al., 2013; Mann, 2010). Simon Turner explains in relation to the refugee camp, “life is lived only in preparation for another—hopefully fuller—life in the future, beyond the camp” (S. Turner, 2016, p. 145). In the current study, this applies to both young people in the refugee camp and migrant community. While Kyaw and his family are “suffering” in Thailand, he “encourages” his mind by looking beyond his current challenges to a time when he can “live decently with [his] family”. This imagined future provides him comfort. Like the young people in Mann’s (2010) study, the young men and women in the study are actively engaged in “becoming” the person they want to be in the future, who they are in the present is in preparation for that. Their future self sustains them through the challenges of the present.

The collective experience of the migrant and refugee provides them comfort also. As described in the previous chapter, the young people indicate a normative experience of struggle and suffering. On the border, “People who become migrants [have] to struggle”, as Aung observes. Nu refers to “our people” in the refugee camp. They “cannot go around ‘free’”. This echoes previous observations of

the Karen communal identity which is based on shared suffering, persecution and displacement (Sharples, 2015; Watkins, 2012). However, again, the young people's narratives suggest that a similar sense of shared experience of being "the migrant" and "the refugee" broadens further than one ethnicity. It is the shared experience across ethnicities who find themselves together suffering and struggling in the "mixed-up" world of the border. This collective experience helps the young people make sense of their lives (Sharples, 2015) and normalises their personal challenges (Watkins, 2012). As observed by Watkins (2012), this collective spirit contributes another resource to their resilience arsenal. It is this that sustains them in their ongoing struggles and frustrated efforts and potentially will protect them if their dreams do not work out, as asserted by Thin: "Other people can live, [so] I can live."

Forming identities in liminality

The notion of liminality implies a sense of lost-ness, in which the individual is "neither here nor there; or may be nowhere" (V. Turner, 1979, p. 236). And yet, each of the young men and women possess a clear sense of their personal identity, where "home" is, as well as, for the most part, where they belong. These responses are heterogeneous, personal, and not without ambiguity or ambivalence, but reflect how young people can be "creative within small spaces" (McEvoy-Levy, 2014, p. 325), how they can "invent new forms of being and interacting with society", and actively "remake the world", or at least their own personal worlds (Honwana, 2012, p. 7, 2014, p. 30).

As discussed in Chapter Six, ethnicity offers a way to situate themselves in the world that transcends borders and documentation. Within this positionality, they can "use" other forms of legal identity, even citizenship. The young people's identities are infinitely complex, however, reflecting their own (re)making of their positionalities and interactions within their liminal worlds.

Born in Thailand, Aye identifies as Burmese, holds Myanmar citizenship, and while undocumented in Thailand, considers Thailand her home and she never feels afraid. She speaks both Thai and Burmese, knows how to act and dress appropriately in both cultures, interacting with both on a day-to-day basis, and has valued Thai and Burmese friends. While less comfortable in Myanmar, she is endlessly pragmatic, and is aware of her precarious position in Thailand. Therefore, she sustains connections with Myanmar, and is gradually building up a life there for her future. Her outlook and way of living reflects the "dual lives" of the "transmigrant", who is "firmly rooted in their new country but maintaining multiple linkages to their homeland" (Schiller et al., 1995, p. 48). And yet, for her, she rejects the label of "migrant", choosing instead to consider herself Burmese "from" Thailand.

On the other hand, Phyu identifies solely with Myanmar. Having lived in Thailand since she was about six, like her parents, she remains oriented towards Myanmar as home. Thailand will always be

“other’s country”. She holds only birth certificate in Myanmar and limited migrant worker documentation in Thailand. Unlike Aye, she does not go “anywhere” as her parents, fearful for her safety as a migrant young woman, do not “allow” her. She does not speak Thai, and has no interaction with Thai people or culture. There is no hybridity in her personal identity. While her physical restrictions have blocked her from the world around her, they have also guarded her sense of identity.

Aye and Phyu provide examples from two sides of a continuum with hybridity and fluidity, on one end, and solidity and steadfastness on the other. Cultural fluidity is only really required for young people interacting with Thailand. Indeed, prior to my interview with Htin, he remarked that, within his small migrant community, he often forgets that he is even in Thailand. The policies of the Thai government and the nature of life in the migrant community, provide a space for young people to remain often entirely separate from Thai society, similar in ways to life in the refugee camp.

Once outside these exclusive spaces, as Paw remarked, in order to stay safe both from authorities and social scorn, the young people have to “do as the Romans do”. These young people develop, as Ball and Moselle anticipated, “hybrid cultural practices” (Ball & Moselle, 2015, p. 431). These are not only outward performances. They become embedded in the young people themselves. Over time, the young people’s accents shift, their sense of style changes, as Saw acknowledges, “everything... it’s different”. While young people, like Saw and Nang, on one hand, yearn to be “real” Thai or “real” Burmese, they also embrace their liminality. Saw recognises the value of his multiple language skills and bi-cultural proficiency which comes from being a “border boy”. Nang looks for whatever documentation—including citizenship—which is useful to her. Furthermore, freed from any nostalgic longing for an idealised homeland, “the future can be anything”, anywhere, as Naw remarks:

“The future can be anything. If it is in Myanmar, it’s ok because it’s my own country... It depends on the situation. If it’s in Thailand, then Thailand”.

Living in Precarity

Another core concept that runs through the literature pertaining to refugees and migrants, and is also central to understanding the lives of the young people in this study, is precarity. Precarity is evident in the everyday vulnerability, insecurity and unpredictability of the lives of the young men and women. Figure 2, below, outlines the multiple forms of precarity which overlap in their lives, resulting in a prolonged experience of “vital uncertainty” (Precarias a la Deriva, 2004). Even with the resolution of one precarity, others remain: while Nang has been able to navigate her way through the uncertainty of education into a much coveted place in university, regarding her legal documentation she has always been “unlucky”.

Dimensions of Precarity

- Ongoing "illegal, pending deportation" status
 - Lack of or temporary work permits
 - Limited access to useful social connections and information
 - Vulnerability to arrest & deportation
 - Vulnerability to exploitation
 - Limited migrant labour market
 - Low wage, informal work
 - Unreliable access to education, and accreditation
 - Heightened physical vulnerability and lack of access to healthcare
 - Lack of recourse to justice
-

Figure 2: Multiple overlapping dimensions of precarity

In Thailand, the ground on which the young people live is itself uncertain and unpredictable. Their “precarity of place” leads to the daily risk of police raids or check points while going about their daily lives, which threaten detention and deportation (Banki, 2013a). Even with official migrant work documents, the young people remain suspended in a condition of “not yet deported or detained” but vulnerable to both (Banki, 2013a, p. 454). Most documents only ever provide temporary and unreliable protections. They can be refused at any time, and the consequences taken without any option. All legal documentation can be rescinded by the Thai government at any moment. The only certainty is that a time will come when they cannot remain in Thailand. When that time will come remains unknowable.

The young people face the “chronic insecurity” of low wage, informal and irregular work (Standing, 2011); vulnerability to abuse and exploitation—by employers, by police, by others—without access to justice; limited and uncertain access to education and lack of education accreditation; lack of access to health care or other social protection services (including support for elderly parents); gendered vulnerabilities for migrant young women; the list goes on. They find themselves separated from their families and unable to visit them due to fears of arrest while travelling, and the exorbitant costs necessary to travel safely. Ironically, while “matter out of place” in Thailand, restrictions on their movement keep them firmly in place.

Education represents a way out of a life of stagnation and lower social status, but is only accessible to very few, exceptional, young men and women. Any educational pathway is deeply uncertain, requires sacrifice and the return on investment is highly uncertain and unreliable. The young people must delay assuming their family duty in the promise that through their education, they will be able to create an even better future for their families. The young people’s family must often endure heightened financial precarity in the hope that, through education, the young person will be better equipped to lift them out of poverty.

Meanwhile, the young people must sacrifice the emotional support of their families, and occasionally emotional closeness. At times, long term separation from family can result in irreparable emotional detachment. Other times, years of sacrifice—and development of human capital—can be undermined by the immediacy of family crises, necessitating drop-out and the uptake of low-skilled labour. In the face of these costs and uncertain returns, investment in education can be a costly gamble. For many young people and their families, the gamble is not worth it: the uncertainty of the future and the restrictive migrant labour market overshadow the value of education (Petchot, 2014).

While work in Thailand offers more security and predictability than in Myanmar, many young migrant workers find themselves negotiating unstable, insecure work conditions, charged with vulnerability to exploitation and abuse. Precarity is compounded when the young person finds themselves alone, such as upon going to Bangkok to work, where the young person has neither appropriate documentation nor useful social networks to moderate their vulnerabilities (Banki, 2013b). Transported by “carrys”, and finding themselves isolated in Bangkok, the young women in particular find themselves negotiating extended “embodied” vulnerability in which “their bodies [are] literally out of place” (Arnold, 2015, p. 13). These vulnerabilities are intensified by a lack of access to healthcare or recourse to justice in the case of accident or assault.

The narratives of the young women adds a gender dimension to the notion of precarity of place. It was clear that some families, and the young women, considered young women’s vulnerabilities to be heightened as migrants in Thailand that would not be present if they were in Myanmar. As a result, some parents, due to their fears for their daughters’ physical safety and to protect them from being “ruined” in the eyes of society, increase the restrictions on their daughters’ independent movements compared to their sons (Punch, 2015). This has the consequence of limiting young women’s ability to acquire better work, learn Thai, make critical social connections which could help them overcome, or at least manage, other precarities, and potentially open up new opportunities and avenues for their futures. Having the opportunity to interview a brother and sister and noticing the vastly different lives they led, which was not lost on the young woman, brought these consequences into stark relief.

Pregnancy which often followed, or potentially prompted, marriage, also restricts young women’s ability to be mobile and to work, and put more financial strain on the rest of the working members of the family. Pregnancy puts the young women in heightened risks due to limited access to health care.

The multiple overlapping precarities in the young people’s lives are a given. They express feelings of anger, anxiety and alienation. However, they have not yet reached the fourth of Guy Standing’s (2011) four “A”s of the precariat: anomie. The young people are not yet defeated.

Flexible mind-sets

According to Guy Standing (2011), long-term living in precarity can risk developing a “precaritised mind”, defined by living in “short-termism” or the inability to plan or even think long-term. As described in the previous section, however, the young people are highly focused on the future. While the nature of their precarity reduces them to a day-to-day existence, their minds look to a more “decent” future. I argue that the “precaritised mind” demonstrated by the young people helps them engage realistically with the shifting parameters of their worlds and protects them from disappointments. In a world that is inherently uncertain, the young people’s hopes and dreams, while they remain “not yet” realised, neither are they “not yet” destroyed.

The experience of growing up in precarity fundamentally shapes young people, their attitudes, mind-sets and overall strategies to life, developing in the young people a particular mental capacity which is itself inherently flexible. There is a “precaritised mind” which is expectant of shocks and disappointments, and remains open to opportunities. The young people constantly strategise and plan, but are not paralysed when things do not go their way. The “steeling effects” of their previous frustrations and difficulties has instilled in them a capacity to overcome (Rutter, 2012). For instance, born in Thailand, May has lived through a childhood in poverty, lack of documentation, the tragic death of her sibling, and the ongoing challenges of education. She got through these, and she can deal with anything:

“You know, sometimes I feel very, very thankful for my experience. Because of that, it has made me grow up and be stronger.”

Equally, when opportunities arise, they are ready to change, adapt and “grab” them, when their circumstances allow. This is similar to Gillian Mann’s (2010) application of Jennifer Johnson-Hanks’ (2002) principle of judicious opportunism. The young people plan and pursue goals, but are always ready to adapt, as well as abandon plans, if something more opportune comes along. Making one’s way through the uncertainties of education, for example, simply demands this mind-set. As discussed in Chapter Seven, none of the young people currently attending education, at any level, has had a straightforward educational journey. The educational journey simply demands flexibility—as well as tenacity.

The precarity of their lives is a given, but their response to that precarity lies in their hands. The young people hold on to their sense of agency no matter how small, thinned or constrained it becomes (Bell & Payne, 2009; Klocker, 2007; Robson et al., 2007).

They have clear dreams, but they are persistently pragmatic. Whether they are fixed on a trajectory of returning to Myanmar, buying and cultivating land, and building a house, or pursuing education to help “my people”, they are realistic about their chances. While their dreams provide them with

drive, it does not destroy them if they not work out. Thin, who lives in the “prison” of her boarding house, dreams of furthering her education, and lifting herself out of the “box” that keeps her from going “like other people go”. She will try, she has not given up, but if it proves impossible, she will “carry on”.

Life always “depends”. As Kwi remarked, “I can’t tell about my future, because I have dreamt differently and I know I’ve come out differently, so I can’t tell”. In high school, he had all but given up on attending university when he was shown another way. Now looking into the future, he does not want to either presume or preclude anything. His life is in “permanent construction” (Precarias a la Deriva, 2004). He may not be in control of what may be thrown at him, but he knows that he will be able to respond and manage it. He always has.

I suggest that the uncertainty and unpredictability of precarity has the unexpected effect of sustaining hope. The young people are aware that in Myanmar there is no chance of fulfilling their dream—whether that be acquiring education or reaching some level of security through work—while Thailand represents a chance at least, and they are grabbing it. The “not quite, not yet” nature of precarity (Banki, 2013a), offers the possibility that it *could* happen. They may not have “not quite, not yet”, not fully succeeded, but neither have they “not quite, not yet”, not fully failed. All acknowledge that their lives are better than they were in Myanmar. As one youth advisor remarked, in Thailand, “They can still eat chicken”, while in Myanmar, some young people remember how even obtaining rice was a challenge. Those born in Thailand have been able to make their situations work to a certain extent through obtaining informal guarantees of security from local officials, securing work, or obtaining education through the migrant community allowing them to get a job, and so on. Even without documents, sometimes the authorities let them go. That they have been able to make it this far despite the odds, suggests they could make it further.

Their ability to plan and withstand shocks and disappointments maintains their sense of agency and forward motion. They readjust their plans as well as their dreams. Chit, who dreamt of becoming a translator, adjusts her dreams in line with her (family’s) financial situation and her inability to access accreditation for her education. She is engaged in developing her sewing skills, a trade which allows her to provide for her family, and which will, in time, provide her with the autonomy she desires. Aung, who dreamt of becoming an engineer or a teacher, readjusts his dreams when his exams do not go well and his (family’s) financial situation suddenly becomes perilous. Undocumented, his reality now involves informal low paid migrant work. However, he is not paralysed by the sudden shift in his fortune, but is spurred on, refusing to give up his sense of agency. It is a new challenge for him to solve and “getting depressed wastes time”. He remains in control of his own destiny, even if that destiny now probably looks very different. Htin, after 10 years in Thailand and numerous frustrated strategies, admits that he is “afraid” that his life “will be like this forever”. However even

then he refuses to admit resignation: “Since before, my life has been poor, so it’s not difficult.” He too refuses to be defeated.

The young people demonstrate a remarkable flexible ability to manage life within this uncertainty often holding multiple different directions in their minds. They recognise the importance of flexibility. This is not resignation, but active, mindful strategizing. The young people’s actions and attitudes, in the face of the hardships and insecurities of their lives, belie and frustrate any passive oppressed victim narrative.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I revisited the narratives of the young men and women through the concepts of precarity, liminality and “illegality”. I began with the latter concept. While a highly “obnoxious” construct, “illegality” is nonetheless a constant part of the lives of most of the young men and women in the study, fundamentally shaping their everyday worlds (De Genova, 2004; Sigona, 2012). As an analytic lens, it provides important insights. The concept of internalised illegitimacy captures the enduring psychological impact “illegality” can have on the young people’s sense of self and wellbeing. In response, the young people develop a form of resistance which I refer to as “everyday ‘illegality’” in order to go about their lives, in the face of the myriad of constraints they cannot change.

The concept of liminality then framed the discussion of the young people as “transitional beings”. Firstly, the young people do not strive toward a future of adult independence but of interdependence within their family. The central influence and meaning of the family unit to the young people is critical to understanding the nature of the young people’s agency, and agency goals. The needs, and aspirations, of the young people and those of their families are often impossible to disentangle. The notion of transitions can also help to understand how the young people manage within the daily “suffering” of their lives. The young people hold on to the hope that their “transitional” present will eventually resolve into a better future. Meanwhile the collective suffering that is part of the migrant and refugee experience helps them endure the ongoing shocks and setbacks. The young people know they are not alone in their suffering. In addition, the young people protect themselves from the loss of liminality by forming and reforming their own sense of identity and belonging.

The final concept visited was that of precarity. The young people face and endure multiple forms of precarity in their lives. While they retain hopes and dreams, they also know from experience that nothing is certain. However, within this is another paradox. While nothing is certain, neither is nothing potentially unachievable. This helps to understand the relentless optimism demonstrated by the young men and women. They have not yet given up. Their resilience lies in their ability to endure.

Chapter Nine

Conclusion

Introduction

The world is witnessing unprecedented numbers of people moving across borders for multiple, often overlapping reasons related to conflict, oppression and poverty. Binary distinctions between “willing” “migrants” and “defenceless” “refugees” are increasingly inadequate to understand the complexity of the different degrees of “force and intention” that inform people’s migratory decisions (Brees, 2010; Brun, 2001). People in search of better, safer lives, rarely conform to neat migratory channels, but make decisions based on what they consider best for them and their families. The evolving nature of migration and protracted displacement, combined with nation states’ increasing preoccupation with policing migrant populations, are resulting in increasing numbers of people living their lives as “illegal migrants”. Within these dynamics, generations of young people are growing up with precarious legal status on the margins of societies. Despite an increasing phenomenon, these young people are largely overlooked by researchers, particularly in relation to those living in non-western contexts or the Global South. The young people’s frequent absence from population databases, their necessarily “clandestine existence” and their complex positionality on the refugee-migrant nexus, are some of the reasons why their challenges, needs and strengths remain also hidden (Bakewell, 2008; Chatelard et al., 2009; IOM, 2013c; Mann, 2008; UNHCR, 2013).

Along the Thailand-Myanmar border these issues are widespread. Decades of civil conflict and economic oppression have resulted in hundreds of thousands of Myanmar young people growing up in contexts of displacement and lack of documentation in neighbouring Thailand. The border town of Mae Sot is one of the primary gateways connecting Thailand and Myanmar and home to hundreds of thousands of migrants and refugees, living around the town and surrounding rural areas. Mae La Refugee Camp is 40 minutes’ drive away, providing “temporary shelter” for over thirty years, and at the time of data collection, home to just under forty thousand people, fifty percent of whom are under 18 years of age.

This exploratory case study was conducted to increase our understanding of how young people understand and manage their uncertain circumstances growing up in non-western contexts where issues of displacement and lack of documentation are commonplace. Specifically, the study set out *to explore the ways in which young men and women, growing up in contexts of displacement and lack of documentation along the Thailand-Myanmar border, understand and negotiate their everyday legal and social realities.*

The Lived Experience of Growing up in Displacement and Lack of Documentation: Summary

This study sought to understand the young people's lived experience of growing up in contexts of displacement and lack of documentation from their own perspectives and world views, looking beyond binary and essentialising notions of "migrants" and "refugees". This was facilitated through the adoption of a social constructionist epistemology and a qualitative case study methodology which privileged the young people's voices. Social constructionism was ideally suited for this intercultural study as it "explicitly tolerates diversity" of social realities (Ungar, 2004, p. 345). This study sought understanding or "verstehen" of the young people's lived experience within the particulars of their contexts, a task suited to small scale qualitative case study research (Willis, 2007).

Consideration of diversity was a core component of this study. The migrant and displaced communities in and around Mae Sot are far from homogenous. It was not only important to consider age and gender, but also ethnicity, religion; family, living, work, and education circumstances; as well as geographical locations. I was not 'only' encountering one culture, but several, all of which intersected with the unique and multiple positionalities, values, priorities and outlooks of young people themselves. Qualitative sampling facilitated the celebration and deep exploration of this diversity, rather than demanding a representative sample of particular traits (Flyvbjerg, 2004; Werner & Bernard, 1994).

A preliminary key informant interview stage conducted on-site in the town of Mae Sot in September 2014, informed the focus of the later main immersive data collection phase with young men and women. This main data collection phase was conducted over 10 months between June 2015 and April 2016, amassing forty-four semi-structured interviews with 35 young people 'from' Myanmar, who were either born in Thailand or who arrived alone or with their families before the age of 12. As I discuss in further detail below, the complexity of language and culture was foreground in the study and made explicit in the methodology chapter. The management of these issues was supported by a comprehensive interpretation and translation protocol, as well as an extensive community advisory network, involving key adults in the migrant and refugee communities, young men and women from the migrant and refugee communities, and an academic mentor in Chiang Mai University. An overall collaborative approach facilitated an ethical, culturally aware orientation, aided access to and the recruitment of hard-to-reach young people, and grounded interpretations in the local context.

The findings were presented in a manner to retain the essence of the lived experience and support a "vicarious experience" for the reader (Stake, 1995). This commenced with a descriptive overview in Chapter Four, leading to a more detailed exploration of the young people's own conceptualisations of their contexts in Chapters Five and Six, before focusing on their broader strategies in Chapter

Seven. Finally, Chapter Eight brought together, through a more analytical lens, the central themes which emerged in the previous chapters.

The young people are deeply aware of the “illegality” in Thailand and do their best to regularise their presence in Thailand. Often this is simply not possible, and the best they can do is negotiate informal assurances of safety. Life without any documents is one of restriction and limitation. Everyday life, even going to the market, visiting family and friends, or accessing healthcare comes with the risk of arrest. Arrests can mean fines, detention or deportation. The repercussions of deportation are intensified for those who, or their parents before them, fled violence in Myanmar. The young people have little recourse to justice in the face of exploitation or abuse in Thailand.

Despite fear or anxiety, everyday lives must be lived: the young people travel to work, to the market, to the health clinic, and so on. Fear, therefore, becomes an ordinary part of their lives. For the young people living in the refugee camp, the same reality exists for them once outside the camps. The boredom of the camps, particularly for those not in education, and the necessity of an income, draws many of the young people out of the camps and into the danger of the “illegal migrant” life in Thailand.

The young people adopt a number of creative ways to remain safe. They know how to act, how to dress, where to go and where to avoid. Speaking Thai can help them negotiate with police. Useful social connections in the Burmese community and the Thai community can also provide security against arrest as well as exploitation. While none of these tactics guarantees safety, they provide the young people with some level of comfort as they go about their everyday lives. A small number claim to not feel any fear, their safety strategies, built up over a lifetime, protect them physically and mentally, and provide them with confidence.

Informal documents, issued by local village heads or NGOs, usually in cooperation with the local authorities, allow the young person to remain, and work, in their village or school but are not always reliable. Some young people feel exploited having to pay for these cards which afford them few securities, and do not consider their lives to be any different from having no documents.

The possession of official documents can be very meaningful for the young people. It affords increased security and access to services, particularly healthcare. It is also psychologically meaningful, releasing the young people from constant vigilance and fear. The young people describe feeling more empowered and freer to reach out and take control over their lives. However, for some young women, the security of their official documents is somewhat undermined by their ongoing vulnerabilities as migrant young women. They and their families consider them easy targets for sexual assault and restrict their mobility for their safety.

Two young people in the study possess Thai citizenship. Interestingly, while they acknowledge, and appreciate, their increased opportunities and freedoms, they also point out the normalcy of it. While having Thai citizenship may be extraordinary in the migrant, or refugee, community, it is at the same time only ‘normalising’ them within the wider society. It is up to them to make the most out of their increased freedoms.

Finally, a number of young people also have acquired Myanmar citizenship. Again, while it is meaningful for some, for others it is tainted with ambivalence for its automatic association with a country which holds painful associations. For most, however, it provides a security for the future for when they return to Myanmar as planned, or as required by the Thai government.

The young people’s sense of identity, ethnicity and nationality are complex, diverse and personal, shaped by the historical and ongoing political environment in Myanmar, their sense of “home” and where they see their futures. For most young people, ethnicity offers a critical sense of identity which transcends legal documents or location.

Most of the young people who migrated to Thailand as children, acknowledge the benefits of that decision, including to their family’s physical safety and economic wellbeing, and their own education. A small number of young people have become comfortable with their lives in Thailand, and they hope to build their future there. However, for most, Thailand represents a strategy to facilitate a better future in Myanmar and, despite any number of years in Thailand, they remain firmly orientated towards and focused on return.

For those who were born in Thailand, or have been living there since they were infants, despite the challenges of being “illegal”, Thailand remains the only country they have ever known and it is their home. Some of these young people are pragmatic, however, and plan for alternative possibilities. These young people also reveal much more complex and sometimes “confused” sense of identity towards Thailand and Myanmar. For the young people who were born and raised in the refugee camp, it too has become a place of “home”. However, it also represents a temporary home, leading to a future elsewhere. Finally, the “borderline” can represent an important place of belonging and home, a space in-between worlds for those who have grown up in-between.

Finally, any understanding of the young people’s perspectives and motivations is incomplete without acknowledging the central importance and influence of the family. The young people’s sense of family duty and responsibility underpins much of their decision-making and sense of direction in their lives.

Education, work, and marriage are all considered potential pathways out of the insecurities of their lives. The young people are resourceful and pragmatic, planful and opportunistic as they weigh up their best options within ongoing changing circumstances. Struggle and suffering are part of their

journeys to a better future. The young people know they are not alone in this: it is part of the migrant or refugee life. They also seek out friendships and useful social connections, in order to feel less alone, feel understood, as well as receive a helping hand to overcome their challenges.

The young people are undeniably constrained, shaped and by the liminality, precarity and “illegality” of their worlds. The young people grow up fully aware of their “illegality”, and engage in language which implies everyday criminality. Ongoing legal and social exclusion can threaten to overwhelm them through an internalised sense of inferiority. However, the simple necessities of everyday life and their commitment to their responsibilities, mean that the young people continue to push back, resist and defy their restrictions, as well as their fears. The young people’s own sense of agency and sense of belief in their own capacity to survive drives them forward in their lives.

The young people’s agency goals are rarely individualistic. Beginning in childhood, the young people and their families demonstrate life-long reciprocal relations. The young people’s “youth-hoods” cannot be considered in terms of a liminal transition from childhood dependence to adulthood independence, but in terms of continued interdependence. These relationships ground young people as they grow up in their precarious worlds. The young people’s everyday worlds are undeniably uncertain, unpredictable and insecure. And yet, the young people continue to plan and envision their futures. These imagined futures out of precarity and “illegality” sustain the young people. In order to get there, they much endure their current liminal space of struggle and suffering.

Key Insights from the Study

Methodological Insight: Making explicit the navigation of language issues

While the complexity of language and cultural barriers to data collection and analysis is often acknowledged, rarely do studies detail the process involved (Kosny et al., 2014). This study contributes nuanced insight into the process of interpretation and translation—and the utilisation of local interpreters and translators—highlighting the challenges and opportunities that occurred throughout the process.

While the employment of local interpreters and translators presented its own challenges, it was certainly the best decision for this study. The most vulnerable or precarious young people in the migrant and refugee communities are often those who lack useful social connections (Banki, 2013a). These young people are, by their nature, unknown to service providers, and therefore obviously could not be reached through those channels. In this study, local community members proved to be excellently placed to reach these young people, but were less likely to be formally trained interpreters. Many young people were “scared” to speak with me, a stranger and a foreigner. They said they felt too “shy” or “small faced” due to their lack of education. Those who agreed to speak

to me often did so on the condition that my liaison would be present. Indeed, it seemed to me that the initial rapport in the interviews was not created between the participant and me, but between the interpreter and the participant, which was gradually transferred to include me (Kosny et al., 2014).

This experience highlights certain considerations for research. Firstly, to research hard-to-reach populations, researchers reliant on interpreters need to be flexible and adaptive to the needs of the population. Secondly, particularly with populations unused to interpretation, the interpreter is not “just” a facilitator of dialogue, but represents a fundamental component of the interview dynamic. This emphasises the critical nature of interpreter selection, training, as well as ongoing emotional support (Shimpuku & Norr, 2012). All of these factors point to the importance of taking interpreters out from “behind the shadows” and acknowledging them as central co-agents in the research process (Björk Brämberg & Dahlberg, 2012; Temple, 1997).

The use of the same individual for interpretation and translation is often advocated for consistency of language. This was not possible in this study for several reasons as highlighted in Chapter Three. I was aware that translator who was not in the interview itself, lacks important information around affect, tone and atmosphere, which is critical to understanding ambiguous words and phrases. However, by remaining in the field, utilising the extent of my own language skills and immersing myself in the translation process, I found I could be the one to provide this consistency and contextual insight, help to overcome ambiguity and moderate some of the limitations of the interpreters’ and translators’ levels of English. In addition, I could observe—and check—when similar expressions seemed to be recurring, and note and discuss the significance of patterns that were emerging across languages.

The process of translation, retranslation and back translation is an essentially creative endeavour, coalescing around consensus rather than any “correct” end point (Temple & Young, 2004). Being able to sit in person with my translators and advisors and discuss “concepts rather than just words” was critical to understanding the young people’s meaning and to promote rigour and trustworthiness through triangulation (Creswell, 2012; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stake, 1995; Temple & Edwards, 2002, p. 5).

Real-life research involving hard-to-reach populations and language issues is messy, complex and requires compromise and creativity on the part of the researcher. This study contributes an example of such an endeavour.

I turn now to the theoretical and empirical contribution this study adds to the literature on refugee and migrant youth, through researching a population who, due to the complexity of their position on the refugee-migrant nexus, often remains overlooked within research.

Complexity of Documentation and Legal Status

This study offers in-depth insight into the multiple complexities of migrant legal documentation, often hidden by simplistic notions of “documented” or “undocumented”. The young men and women in this study possess an extraordinary number of different types of migrant work, student and identity documents, some official, some informal and unreliable, and many offering few and limited protections or access to services. Even those holding official migrant work permits could be considered at best to have a “semi-legal” status (Kubal, 2013), as while they are legally allowed to work, their immigration status remains “illegal, pending deportation” (IOM, 2011). For most young people this state of being “semi-legal” is the best they can hope for in Thailand. Indeed Thailand’s immigration policy and practice could be said to deliberately maintain migrants in this legal ambiguity (Kubal, 2013). The notion of semi-legality also captures the ongoing precarity of the young people’s lives. Their vulnerability to exploitation remains, and all migrant permits are temporary.

The lived experience of being “undocumented” is remarkably nuanced. Everyday worlds and perceptions of risk and safety can vastly differ. For most young men and women it means daily risks and fear. However for a small number of young people, it could be said to be more of an inconvenience. One young woman claims it does not impact her life in any way. She happily acknowledges that she lives her life “the same” as someone with documents. Furthermore, this young woman also rejects the label of “migrant”. She was born in Thailand, and considers herself therefore “from” there, not Myanmar. Thailand is her country “too”. She, like others, never migrated anywhere. Therefore, while the title of the thesis refers to “young migrants and refugees”, it is with the recognition of the simple lack of available terminology to truly reflect the circumstances of the young people.

The young people in this study are not unique in many ways. Young people all over the world do not sit quietly on the margins of society, but creatively interact, reinvent and remake their worlds and their place in them (Honwana, 2014; Kabiru et al., 2013; Locke & Te Lintelo, 2012; van Breda et al., 2012). The dynamics of migration and displacement are constantly evolving but enduring essentialist definitions and restrictive categorisations can often leave certain groups of people invisible from research, policy and planning. Oliver Bakewell (2008) discusses the importance of “policy irrelevant” research, which goes “beyond the categories” of the refugee and migrant and uncovers the alternative ways people are negotiating their worlds. This research can “can help build new knowledge with tremendous practical relevance that can bring change to people’s lives and cast light on the invisible situation of those living in the shadow of bright policy lights.” (Bakewell, 2008, p. 450). I contend that this study has indeed “cast light” on an often invisible group of young people and through learning about their realities, from their own perspectives, has revealed much practical relevant knowledge as well as theoretical insights.

The psychological impact of “illegality” on everyday lives

The study contributes understanding of the lived experience of growing up “illegally”. While indeed an “obnoxious” term (De Genova, 2002), employing “illegality” as an analytical lens, has allowed the thesis to reveal the pervasiveness of the impact of such labelling across the young people’s everyday lives, sense of self and wellbeing. The label of “illegal migrant” is not only a technical matter but a social reality. A life of reconciling being treated like the “alien” or the “stranger”. A life of restriction as well as resistance. A life of knowing where the boundaries lie, and knowing when and how to push them.

This study provides a rare glimpse into this lived experience in a non-western context. There is an emerging body of literature relating to the experience of growing up undocumented in the west, particularly coming from the United States (e.g. Bloch et al., 2009; Gonzales, 2011; Gonzales & Chavez, 2012; Sigona, 2012; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011; Yoshikawa et al., 2016). In these contexts young people “awaken” into an “illegal” adulthood after being “buffered” throughout their primary and secondary education (Gonzales & Chavez, 2012; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011). They must “learn to be illegal”, transform how they relate to their worlds (Gonzales, 2011). This can propel them into “developmental limbo” and cause considerable disillusionment, emotional paralysis, “confusion, anger, frustration, and despair” (Gonzales, 2011; Stacciarini et al., 2014).

This study has revealed how the lived experience of “illegality” for the young people along the Thailand-Myanmar border is not a gradual coming-of-age experience, but one that is part of their whole lives from childhood. Life-long negotiations of barriers and evasion of the authorities develops into a form of “everyday ‘illegality’”, a taken-for-granted way of being in the world. Everyday discrimination, inequality and exclusion can also take an emotional toll, however, establishing in the young person an enduring “internalised illegitimacy”. This too can threaten to paralyse and stop the young person from daring. What protects them from despairing, however, is the hope of a better future, as well as the recognition that theirs is a communal experience. Both in the migrant community and refugee camp they are not alone in their adversity: “Other people can live, [so] I can live.”

Ordinary aspirations in extraordinary circumstances

This study also reveals that, despite their exceptional circumstances, they are also ordinary young people. Amid their struggles and challenges, the young people are seeking “normal” lives. While some young people aspire to attend university and become leaders of their communities, most are simply aspiring “to be ok”. The Burmese expression “asinpyedeh” was a commonly used expression in the interviews. My discussions with my advisors, interpreters and translators led me to liken “asinpyedeh” to the expression “grand” in Ireland. It means satisfactory, going well, to have enough.

They want to have enough to have a house, be able to run their own business, to look after their parents in their old age, perhaps to have a car. They want a normal, ordinary life.

This reinforces the importance of looking beyond categorisations of “refugee” and “migrant”, or the extraordinary circumstances of their adversity, and their “normality” (Bakewell, 2008). The young people are sons and daughters, husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, going about their lives fulfilling their ordinary responsibilities and pursuing their aspirations. Interdependent family dynamics are part of this normalcy and are a common feature of Asian families and other collectivist cultures. That these young people are trying to live ordinary lives in extraordinary circumstances is an important insight of this study. Programming efforts for refugee and undocumented youth, both along the Thailand-Myanmar border and elsewhere, should prioritise these ordinary aspects of young people, in order to understand and meet the young people’s own priorities, needs and ambitions.

Importance of Hope and Sense of Agency

This study adds to emerging literature on resilience and agency which helps to understand young people’s everyday “capacity to survive” in conditions of ongoing uncertainty and adversity (Klocker, 2007; Robson et al., 2007; Ungar, 2008). The young people in the migrant community and refugee camp are far from passive victims but are actively—and relentlessly—engaged in the adversity in their lives in different ways. To understand their agency, requires looking often at their own understanding of the unit of ‘young person-in-family’. While their families could be said to constrain the young people, this is not how the young people necessarily regard these relations themselves. Family duty is a fact of life. As their parents gave them life, so too should they help their parents live: “If my mother didn't exist, I wouldn't exist”. Subordinating the young people to passive dupes of family or cultural expectations, in addition to being insulting, ignores the motivation, sense of meaning and positive affect being able to contribute to their families’ lives provides the young people. As elucidated in Chapter Eight, the conceptual ideas of “conforming” or “reactive” agency can be both seen in the young people’s negotiations of their interdependent family relations (Punch, 2015; Robson et al., 2007).

By foregrounding the young people’s perspectives, this study has been able to uncover the many small and uncombative ways the young people quietly resist ongoing and unexpected adversities. As discussed in Chapter Nine, resistance in the form of forbearance, endurance and even submission, represent important forms of agency and resilience.

After a lifetime of precarity, the young people are strategically and mentally prepared for the constantly shifting, precarious nature of life in Thailand. Therefore, while they are undeniably vulnerable, they are also relentlessly agentic. They demonstrate that they are planful, but also flexible and opportunistic. They are hopeful, but at the same time realistic and pragmatic. The “steeling

effects” of their past challenges lets them know they can endure anything, even a life time of poverty (Rutter, 2012; Ungar, 2004). The balance between hope and pragmatism provides them with ongoing drive and protects them from despair. Programming efforts with such young populations should take into account the nature of this vulnerability and agency.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

As a small-scale, contextually-bounded qualitative study, it does not claim to be generalizable to all young people in contexts of displacement or lack of documentation, nor even all young people along the Thailand-Myanmar border. While the sample was diverse, it nonetheless did not capture the full scope of circumstances of young people living the migrant and refugee communities. A number of omissions were most significant, representing some young people who could be considered to be most vulnerable on the border. This includes sex workers; factory workers without documentation who are not allowed to leave the grounds of the factory; “street” and homeless young people; young people with disabilities; young people living and working in the rubbish dump; among others. Religious diversity is also limited. While Mae Sot has a significant Muslim quarter, the sample only included one Muslim young man and no Muslim young women. I made many attempts to access these different populations. At times I came close but meetings or follow-up interviews were frustrated by the complexity of coordinating the schedules of multiple people. A number of young women also shied from speaking with me, too “scared” talk to the foreigner. A research project designed to involve community researchers, including youth researchers, could help to overcome these various hurdles and allow for new important perspectives to be included.

The circumstances on the border are dynamic and constantly shifting. Children of migrant workers are now entitled to Thai birth certificates, and while this does not correspond to citizenship, it does provide young people proof of identity unavailable to the young people in the current study. Furthermore, increasing numbers of migrant children can now access Thai schooling due to the Education for All Policy. At the same time, funding for border projects both in the refugee camps and migrant communities is waning. Furthermore, circumstances in Myanmar are continuing to evolve. It could be that repeating this research in a number of years could reveal very different results.

On a similar note, this study was cross-sectional in nature, capturing, for the most part, young people’s perspectives and circumstances at one moment in time. As I have emphasised, life can change rapidly on the border. In the eight follow up interviews I carried out, one young woman’s legal circumstances were entirely transformed by attaining citizenship, while another young man’s circumstances had become transformed by misfortune. Being able to discuss these significant changes in their lives provided important opportunities to observe how these impacted their outlook and strategising. Shortly after data collection, one young woman gave birth and another young man

got married. A longitudinal study design would be able to uncover the implications of ongoing changing dynamics on the young people's lives, perspectives and strategies.

Other limitations and cautions of the study should also be acknowledged. While this study was highly collaborative in nature, both in terms of engagement with my extensive advisory network on the Thailand-Myanmar border as well as on an ongoing basis with my academic supervisor, I was responsible for the final data analysis and write up. Furthermore, while I contend that the comprehensiveness of the interpretation, transcription and translation process is one of the strengths of the study, the necessity of translation, the inclusion of more than one language in the study, and the fact that analysis was conducted in English rather than the original language(s) all remain limitations of the study. Finally, I recognise that my literature being restricted to the English language is another limitation of the study.

Concluding Reflections

After being in Mae Sot for a couple of years, I began to liken the borderline to the floating islands of Lake Titicaca. Life is never certain, fixed or permanent. Like the Uros people of Lake Titicaca, the people on the border need to constantly repair and reinforce the ground beneath them. Sometimes their ground falls apart entirely and they need to start again. They are constantly involved in constructing and reconstructing their worlds. Through the course of this study I felt this even more prominently. The interviews were intense experiences. Leaving them and re-entering my own life, the juxtaposition was powerfully evident. I am grateful for the times I felt my own sense of vulnerability driving on remote country lanes in the dark, or felt the flicker of fear hearing loud revving engines outside the building where I was interviewing a young person. I recognise that these experiences were just that, however, flickering glimpses into their worlds.

As I acknowledged in the introduction to this thesis, my motivation for undertaking this study grew over three years working on the Thailand-Myanmar border, developing, together with local community organisations, child protection, psychosocial and mental health programmes for children and youth. Through this study I wanted to increase understanding—my own and others'—of how these young people managed the remarkable adversities in their lives. My “passionate concern, prior knowledge, and ethical engagement”—what Renato Rosaldo (1994) refers to as the “vices of subjectivity”—guided and pushed me through the challenges of the fieldwork. I was motivated to ground my study in the subjective perspectives and voices of the young people themselves. This informed every step of the process from my choice of epistemology and research design, to the collaborative interpretation and translation process and overall design and tone of this thesis.

To conclude, I return to the beginning and the aim of the research which was *to explore the ways in which young men and women, growing up in contexts of displacement and lack of documentation*

along the Thailand-Myanmar border, understand and negotiate their everyday legal and social realities. This study represents a rare window into the everyday lived experience of young people growing up in contexts of considerable adversity in contexts of displacement and lack of documentation. “Illegality” and precarity define their worlds. However, the young people are far from passive victims, and resist any reduction to those terms. They are agentic social actors, who are fully cognisant of their constraints and actively engaged in addressing their challenges.

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Appendix A

Preliminary Phase Information and Consent Materials



TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN
COLÁISTE NA TRÍONÓIDE

THE
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OF DUBLIN

သတင်းအချက်အလက်များ Information Sheet

ကျွန်ုပ်တို့သည် ကတော့ ဒရီနာ ဂျွန်ဆန်ဖြစ်ပါတယ်။ ကျွန်ုပ်တို့ သုတေသနလုပ်ငန်းဖြစ်သော " ထိုင်းနိုင်ငံ- အနောက်မြောက်ပိုင်းတွင် နေထိုင်သော မြန်မာနိုင်ငံမှ ရွှေ့ပြောင်းလူငယ်များ၏ဘဝများ- ပထမအကြိမ် (တွေ့ဆုံမေးမြန်းမှုများအား ဖြေဆိုသူအညွှန်း)" ပါဝင်ရန်အတွက် သင့်အား ဖိတ်ခေါ်ပါတယ်။ ကျွန်ုပ်တို့ လူမှုရေးပိုင်းဆိုင်ရာ လုပ်ငန်းများနှင့် ပေါ်လစီ ကျောင်း၊ ထရီဂီနိုတီ ကောလိပ်၊ ဂျူဗလင်တွင် ပညာသင်ကြားနေသော ပါရဂူဘွဲ့ကျောင်းသူတစ်ဦးဖြစ်ပါတယ်။ ကျွန်ုပ်တို့ ကြီးကြပ်ရေးမှူးကတော့ ပရော်ဖက်ဆာ ရော်ဘတ် ဝီရီဂန် ဖြစ်ပါတယ်။

My name is **Derina Johnson**. You are invited to participate in my research project - **The lives of migrant young people from Burma living in north-west Thailand. Phase 1: Key Informant Interviews**. I am a PhD student at the School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland. My supervisor is Professor Robbie Gilligan.

မဲဆောက်မြို့အနီးတဝိုက်ရှိ မြန်မာရွှေ့ပြောင်းအသိုင်းအဝိုင်းတွင် အသက် ၁၄ နှစ်မှ ၂၄ နှစ်အရွယ် လူငယ်များနှင့်ပတ်သက်ပြီး ကျွန်ုပ်တို့အနေဖြင့် ပိုမို နားလည်သိရှိလိုပါတယ်။ ကျွန်ုပ်တို့အနေဖြင့် ကျွန်ုပ်တို့ သုတေသန အစပိုင်းအဆင့်ကို အကောင်အထည်ဖော်ခြင်းဖြစ်ပါတယ်။ ၎င်းအရာများကတော့ - ငယ်ရွယ်သူများနှင့်ပတ်သက်ပြီး ပိုမိုသင်ယူနိုင်ရန်အတွက် ပတ်ဝန်းကျင်ရှိ အရွယ်ရောက်ပြီးသူများအား တွေ့ဆုံမေးမြန်းမှုများအား ဖြေဆိုသူအညွှန်း၊ ၎င်းတို့ နေထိုင်သည့် အခြေအနေများနှင့် ယဉ်ကျေးမှုပိုင်းဆိုင်ရာအရ သတိထားရသည့် နည်းလမ်းများဖြင့် ကျွန်ုပ်တို့ သုတေသနစာတမ်းအားပြုလုပ်ရန် မည်မျှ အကောင်းဆုံး ပြုလုပ်ခဲ့ခြင်း စသည်တို့ ဖြစ်ပါတယ်။ ကျွန်ုပ်တို့အနေဖြင့် ၎င်းအရာများနှင့်ပတ်သက်၍ ဗဟုသုတရသည်ဟု ထင်မှတ်ရသည့် လူမှုပတ်ဝန်းကျင်ရှိ လူငယ်များထံမှ သတင်းအချက်အလက်များနှင့် အကြံဉာဏ်များကို ရှာဖွေနေခြင်းဖြစ်ပါတယ်။

I would like to understand more about the young people (age 14-24) in the Burmese migrant community around Mae Sot. I am currently carrying out the initial stage of my research. These are "key informant" interviews with adults in the community to learn more about the young people, the contexts in which they live, and how best to do my study in a culturally-sensitive way. For this I am seeking information and advice from adults in the community who are considered knowledgeable about these things.

မည်သည့်အတွက်ကြောင့် ယခု သုတေသနလုပ်ငန်းတွင် ပါဝင်ရန် ဖိတ်ခေါ်ခံရပါသနည်း။

Why have you been asked to take part?

ကျွန်ုပ်တို့ သုတေသနနှင့်ပတ်သက်သည့် အကြောင်းအရာများအား သင်သည် ဗဟုသုတနှင့်ပြည့်စုံသည်ဟု ထင်မြင်ယူဆသည့် အတွက်ကြောင့် ယခု သုတေသနလုပ်ငန်းတွင်ပါဝင်ရန် ဖိတ်ခေါ်ခံရခြင်းဖြစ်ပါတယ်။ သင် မည်ကဲ့သို့ ထင်မြင်ယူဆသည်ကို ကျွန်ုပ်တို့အနေဖြင့် ပိုမို သိရှိလိုပါတယ်။

You have been asked to take part because you are considered knowledgeable about issues related to my study, and I would like to know more about what you think.

သင့်အနေဖြင့် မဖြစ်မနေ ပါဝင်ရမှာလား။

Do you have to take part?

မဟုတ်ပါ။ သင့်အနေဖြင့် ယခု သုတေသနလုပ်ငန်းတွင် မဖြစ်မနေ ပါဝင်ရမည်ဟု မဆိုလိုပါ။ ပါဝင်ဆောင်ရွက်မှုများသည် စေတနာအလျောက် ပါဝင်ဆောင်ရွက်ခြင်းဖြစ်သည်။ ယခုကဲ့သို့ ပါဝင်မှုအတွက်ကို အကြောင်းငွေ ပေးမည်မဟုတ်ပါ။ ယခုအချိန်တွင် ပါဝင်မည်ဟု သင့်အနေဖြင့် သဘောတူထားသော်လည်း သင့်အနေဖြင့် ပါဝင်မှုကို အချိန်မရွေး ရပ်ဆိုင်းခွင့်ရှိပါတယ်။ ကျွန်ုပ်တို့အား ပြောပြထားသည့် သတင်းအချက်အလက်များကိုလဲ ဖျက်သိမ်းပေးပါမယ်။

No, you do not have to take part. Participation is completely voluntary. There is no payment for taking part. Even if you agree now, you can withdraw at any time without any negative consequences, and the information you gave to me will be destroyed.

သင့်အနေဖြင့် ယခု သုတေသနလုပ်ငန်းတွင် ပါဝင်ရန် ဆုံးဖြတ်ပါက ဘာဖြစ်မည်နည်း။

What will happen if you decide take part?

သင့်အနေဖြင့် ယခု သုတေသနလုပ်ငန်းတွင် ပါဝင်ရန် ဆုံးဖြတ်ပါက တွေ့ဆုံမေးမြန်းမှုပြုလုပ်နိုင်ရန်အတွက် အချိန် နှင့်နေရာတစ်ခုကို ကျမတို့အနေဖြင့် ရွေးချယ်သတ်မှတ်ပါမယ်။ တွေ့ဆုံမေးမြန်းမှုကြာချိန်မှာ တစ်နာရီခန့်ဖြစ်ပါတယ်။ လိုအပ်ပါက နောက်ထပ် သုတေသနလုပ်ငန်းအဆင့်နောက်တဆင့်အတွက် (ဆိုလိုသည်မှာ - ဒုတိယအကြိမ် တွေ့ဆုံမေးမြန်းမှုအတွက် စကိုက်ပြန်သော်လည်းကောင်း/ ဖုန်းဖြင့်သော်လည်းကောင်း) သင့်အား နောက်တစ်ကြိမ် ပြန်လည်ဆက်သွယ်ရန် ကျမအနေဖြင့် သင့်ထံမှ ခွင့်ပြုချက်တောင်းပါမယ်။ ဒုတိယအကြိမ်မြောက် တွေ့ဆုံမေးမြန်းမှုတွင် ပါဝင်ဆောင်ရွက်မှုနှင့်ပတ်သက်ပြီး သင့်အနေဖြင့် စိတ်ပြောင်းပါက ပြောင်းခွင့်ရှိပါတယ်။

If you decide to take part, we will organise a place and time to meet for an interview. It will take approximately one hour. I will ask your permission if I may contact you again at a later stage if necessary, for a follow-up interview over Skype or phone. You can change your mind about participating in these follow-up interviews.

သင် ပြောပြသည့် သတင်းအချက်အလက်များအားလုံးကို လျှို့ဝှက်စွာ သိမ်းဆည်းထားပါမယ်။ သင်ဖြေဆိုသည့် အဖြေများကိုလည်း တခြားသူများမသိစေရန် သင်၏နာမည်ကို ပြောင်းပေးထားပါမယ်။ သင့်အနေဖြင့် ဘာသာပြန်လိုအပ်ပါက ကျမအနေဖြင့် ဘာသာပြန်တစ်ဦး စီစဉ်ပေးနိုင်ပါတယ်။ ဘာသာပြန်ဆိုသူအနေဖြင့်လည်း သင် ဖြေဆိုသမျှ သတင်းအချက်အလက်များအားလုံးကို လျှို့ဝှက်ပေးထားမည်ဖြစ်ပါတယ်။

All the information you share with me will be treated confidentially. I will change your name and other things to make you anonymous so that no one can identify you from your answers. If you would like to use a translator, one can be provided. The translator must also treat everything you say confidentially.

သို့သော် သင်ပြောပြသည့် အသေးစိတ်သတင်းအချက်အလက်များမှာ သင့်အတွက် (သို့မဟုတ်) တခြားလူတစ်ဦးအတွက် အန္တရာယ်ဖြစ်စေနိုင်သည့် အချက်အလက်များပါဝင်ပါက သက်ဆိုင်ရာ တာဝန်ရှိသူတစ်ဦးကို ကျမအနေဖြင့် သတင်းပေး ပို့ရလိမ့်မည်ဖြစ်ပါတယ်။

However, if you tell me details of any harm, or risk of harm, to you or another person, I will have to report it to the relevant authorities.

ရလဒ်များ မည်ကဲ့သို့ ဖြစ်မည်နည်း။

What happens to the results?

ပထမဦးစွာ - သင်ပြောပြသည့် သတင်းအချက်အလက်များမှာ ကျမရဲ့ ပါရဂူဘွဲ့နှင့်ပတ်သက်ပြီး ဆုံးဖြတ်ချက်များ ချရာတွင် အလွန်အရေးပါပြီး အထောက်အကူဖြစ်စေပါတယ်။ ဒုတိယအနေဖြင့် - နာမည်မဖော်ပြထားသည့် ကိုးကားချက်များအပါအဝင် သတင်းအချက်အလက်များသည် ကျမရဲ့ နောက်ဆုံး ပါရဂူဘွဲ့စာတမ်း၊ ဆောင်းပါးများ၊ ဂျာနယ်များ၊ ညီလာခံများနှင့် အစီရင်ခံစာများတွင် ပါဝင်မည်ဖြစ်ပါတယ်။

Firstly, the information you tell me will be very useful to help me make decisions about the rest of my PhD study. Secondly, the information, including anonymous quotes, will be included in my final PhD thesis and in articles for journals, conferences, and reports.

ယခုလို ပါဝင်သည့်အတွက် အန္တရာယ်ဖြစ်စေနိုင်သလား။

Are there risks to taking part?

မျှော်လင့်ထားသော အန္တရာယ်များ မရှိနိုင်ပါ။ သို့သော် သင်၏ လူမှုအသိုင်းအဝိုင်းရှိ လူငယ်များအကြောင်းကို ပြောရန် သင့်အတွက် စိတ်မကောင်းစရာ/ ဝမ်းနည်းစရာ ဖြစ်ကောင်းဖြစ်နိုင်ပါလိမ့်မယ်။ တွေ့ဆုံမေးမြန်းမှုများပြုလုပ်နေချိန်အတွင်း ထိုကဲ့သို့ ခံစားလာရပါက ကျမတို့ တွေ့ဆုံမေးမြန်းမှုကို ချက်ချင်းရပ်စဲ၍သော်လည်းကောင်း/ ခဏ အနားယူခြင်းသော်လည်းကောင်း/ တခြားအကြောင်းအရာ များကို ပြောဆိုခြင်းသော်လည်းကောင်း ပြုလုပ်နိုင်ပါတယ်။

There are no anticipated risks. However, it might be upsetting for you to talk about the young people in your community. If you feel upset during the interview, we can stop, take a break, or talk about something else.

တခြား သတင်းအချက်အလက်များ

Other information:

ကျမရဲ့ တက္ကသိုလ် ထရိုင်နိုတီ ကောလိပ်၊ ဂျူ ဗလင် မှ တွေ့ဆုံမေးမြန်းမှုများပြုလုပ်ရန်အတွက် ကျမအား ကျင့်ဝတ်ဆိုင်ရာ သက်သေအထောက်အထားများကို ပေးထားပြီး ဖြစ်ပါတယ်။ ကျမ ပါရဂူဘွဲ့ရပြီးနောက် သင် ပြောပြပေးထားသည့် သတင်းအချက်အလက်များကို ကျမရဲ့ တက္ကသိုလ်တွင် အနည်းဆုံး (၂)နှစ်တိတိ လုံခြုံစွာ သိမ်းထားမည် ဖြစ်ပါတယ်။ ယင်းမှာ - အိုင်ယာလန်နိုင်ငံ၏ သတင်းအချက်အလက်များဆိုင်ရာလွတ်လပ်ခွင့်ဥပဒေ (၁၉၉၇) နှင့် အချက်အလက်များကာကွယ်ခြင်းဥပဒေ (၁၉၉၈ နှင့် ၂၀၀၃) အရ ပြုလုပ်ခြင်းဖြစ်ပါသည်။ သတင်းအချက်အလက်များဆိုင်ရာလွတ်လပ်ခွင့်ဥပဒေတွင် သင့်အနေဖြင့် အချိန်မရွေး ကိုယ်ပိုင်သတင်းအချက်အလက်များကို လွတ်လပ်စွာ အသုံးပြုခွင့်ရှိကြောင်း ဖော်ပြထားပါသည်။

My university, Trinity College Dublin, have given me ethical approval to carry out these key informant interviews. The information you share with me will be stored securely at my university for two years after I finish my PhD. This is in line with Ireland's Freedom of Information Act (1997) and the Data Protection Acts (1998 and 2003). The Freedom of Information Act also states that you are free to access your own information at any time.

မေးစရာ မေးခွန်းများ ရှိပါသလား။

Do you have any questions?

ယခု သုတေသနလုပ်ငန်းနှင့်ပတ်သက်ပြီး သင့်အနေဖြင့် မေးစရာ မေးခွန်းများရှိပါက ကျမအား ကျေးဇူးပြု၍ မေးပါ။ သင့်အနေဖြင့်လည်း ကျမရဲ့ ကြီးကြပ်ရေးမှူးထံ အချိန်မရွေး လွတ်လပ်စွာ ဆက်သွယ်နိုင်ပါတယ်။ သင့်အနေဖြင့် ကရင် (သို့) မြန်မာစကားဖြင့် မေးမြန်းလိုပါက ကျမရဲ့ လုပ်ဖော်ကိုင်ဖက်တစ်ဦးဖြစ်သူ ဟေမာဆန်းအား အကူညီတောင်း၍ မေးခွန်းများ မေးမြန်းနိုင်ပါတယ်။

If you have any questions about this research please ask me. You are also free to contact my university Supervisor. If you would like to ask in Burmese or Karen, my colleague Hay Mar San has offered to help me.

နောက်ထပ် ဘာလဲ။

What is next?

သင့်အနေဖြင့် ကျမရဲ့ သုတေသနလုပ်ငန်းတွင် မပါဝင်ရန် ဆုံးဖြတ်ထားပါကလဲ ကိစ္စမရှိပါ။ ယခု သတင်းအချက်အလက်စာရွက်အား အချိန်ယူဖတ်သည့်အတွက် ကျေးဇူးတင်ပါတယ်။

If you decide not to take part, no problem! Thank you for taking the time to read this.

အကယ်၍ သင့်အနေဖြင့် သုတေသနလုပ်ငန်းတွင် ပါဝင်လိုသည့် ဆန္ဒရှိပါက သဘောတူစာချုပ်အား ကျေးဇူးပြု၍ လက်မှတ်ထိုးပေးပါ။ အကယ်၍ သင့်အနေဖြင့် သဘောတူစာချုပ်အားလက်မှတ်ထိုးရန် မသေချာသေးပါက ကျမ (သို့မဟုတ်) ဟေမာဆန်းအား ကျေးဇူးပြု၍ အသိပေးပါ။ ကျမတို့အနေဖြင့် သင့်အား ကူညီနိုင်ပါသည်။

If you would like to take part, thank you! Please sign the consent form. If you are unsure about signing the consent form – please let me or Hay Mar San know, and we can help you.

<p>ဒရီနာဂျွန်ဆန် အီးမေးလ် johnsode@tcd.ie လူမှုရေးပိုင်းဆိုင်ရာ လုပ်ငန်းများနှင့် ပေါ်လစီ ကျောင်း၊ ထရိုင်နိုတီ ကောလိပ်၊ ဂျူဗလင် ၂၊ အိုင်ယာလန်။ ဖုန်းနံပါတ် - +၃၅၃ ၈၇၃၂၈၅၇၁</p>	<p>ပရော်ဖက်ဆာ ရော်ဘတ် ဂီလီဂန် အီးမေးလ် - Robbie.gilligan@tcd.ie လူမှုရေးပိုင်းဆိုင်ရာ လုပ်ငန်းများနှင့် ပေါ်လစီ ကျောင်း၊ ထရိုင်နိုတီ ကောလိပ်၊ ဂျူဗလင် ၂၊ အိုင်ယာလန်။ ဖုန်းနံပါတ် - ၃၅၃ ၁ ၈၉၆၁၃၃၁</p>	<p>ဟေမာဆန်း အီးမေးလ် - haymarsanms@gmail.com မဲဆောက် -၀၈၅၆၀၆၉၅၀၉</p>
<p>Derina Johnson johnsode@tcd.ie Thailand +66 930109124 Ireland +353 872328571</p>	<p>Professor Robbie Gilligan, robbie.gilligan@tcd.ie School of Social Work and Social Policy Trinity College Dublin, Dublin 2, Ireland Ireland +353 1 8961331</p>	<p>Hay Mar San haymarsanms@gmail.com Mae Sot 0856069509</p>



တွေ့ဆုံမေးမြန်းမှုခေါင်းစဉ်လမ်းညွှန်

Interview Topic Guide

ဒရီနာ ဂျွန်ဆန်

Derina Johnson

“ ထိုင်းနိုင်ငံ- အနောက်မြောက်ပိုင်းတွင် နေထိုင်သော မြန်မာနိုင်ငံမှ ရွှေ့ပြောင်းလူငယ်များ၏ဘဝများ- ပထမအကြိမ်
(တွေ့ဆုံမေးမြန်းမှုများအားဖြေဆိုသူအညွှန်း)”

The lives of migrant young people on the Thailand-Burma border. Phase 1: Key Informant Interviews

ကျွန်မ၏သုတေသနလုပ်ငန်းတွင် ပါဝင်ကူညီသည့်အတွက် ကျေးဇူးတင်ပါသည်။ Thank you for participating in my study!

နမူနာမေးခွန်းများ SAMPLE QUESTIONS:

- Please tell me a little about yourself သင့်အကြောင်းနှင့်ပတ်သက်ပြီး ကျမအား ကျေးဇူးပြု၍ အနည်းငယ် ပြောပြပါ။
 - Age အသက်
 - Ethnicity လူမျိုး
 - Religion ကိုးကွယ်သည့် ဘာသာ
 - Role in Community သင့်ပတ်ဝန်းကျင်ရှိ သင်၏ အခန်းကဏ္ဍက ဘာလဲ။
- Migrant youth in community ပတ်ဝန်းကျင်ရှိ ရွှေ့ပြောင်းလူငယ်
 - What age groups do you consider 'youth'? What are their roles/responsibilities in society?
 - “လူငယ်” ဟု သတ်မှတ်ရာတွင် မည်သည့်အသက်အရွယ်အုပ်စုများဖြစ်သည်ဟု သင်အနေဖြင့် ထင်ပါသနည်း။ လူမှုပတ်ဝန်းကျင်တွင် သူတို့၏ အခန်းကဏ္ဍများ/ တာဝန်များက မည်သည့်အရာများဖြစ်သနည်း။
 - What are their challenges facing migrant young people in the community?
 - လူမှုပတ်ဝန်းကျင်ရှိ ရွှေ့ပြောင်းလူငယ်များရင်ဆိုင်ကြုံတွေ့နေရသည့် စိန်ခေါ်မှုများ/ အခက်အခဲများက မည်သည့်အရာများဖြစ်သနည်း။
 - What are their opportunities?
 - သူတို့၏ အခွင့်အလမ်းများက မည်သည့်အရာများဖြစ်သနည်း။
 - What strengths do they have?
 - သူတို့တွင်ရှိနေသည့် အားသာချက်များက မည်သည့်အရာများဖြစ်သနည်း။
 - Are situations different for different groups of migrant young people?
 - ရွှေ့ပြောင်းလူငယ်များ၏ မတူညီသည့်အုပ်စုများတွင် အခြေအနေများမတူညီမှုရှိပါသလား။
 - Are there gender differences? ကျား/မ ကွဲပြားချက်များရှိပါသလား။
 - What needs to be done, in your opinion, to help young people?
 - လူငယ်များအား ကူညီရန် မည်သည့်အရာများလိုအပ်ဟု သင်ထင်ပါသနည်း။ သင်၏ ထင်မြင်ယူဆချက်များကို ပြောပြပါ။
- Context အခြေအနေ
 - Thailand ထိုင်းနိုင်ငံ
 - o Have there been any changes recently in Thailand for migrant young people on the border?

- နယ်စပ်တွင်နေထိုင်သော ရွှေ့ပြောင်းလူငယ်များအတွက် မကြာသေးခင်အချိန်ကာလအတွင်း ထိုင်းနိုင်ငံတွင် အပြောင်းအလဲများရှိပါသလား။
- Do you think future options within Thailand are changing for them?
- ထိုင်းနိုင်ငံအတွင်း ရွှေ့ပြောင်းလူငယ်များအတွက် ပြောင်းလဲရန် အနာဂတ် ရွေးချယ်ခွင့်များရှိလာမည်ဟု သင်ထင်ပါသလား။

- Burma/Myanmar မြန်မာနိုင်ငံ

- What do you consider to be the main changes in Myanmar?
- မြန်မာနိုင်ငံတွင် အဓိက ပြောင်းလဲမှုများဖြစ်လာစေရန် သင်အနေဖြင့် မည်သည့်အရာများ စဉ်းစားမိသနည်း။
- How are the changes impacting the current lives of migrant young people on the border?
- နယ်စပ်တွင်နေထိုင်သော ရွှေ့ပြောင်းလူငယ်များ၏ လက်ရှိ ဘဝအခြေအနေများအပေါ် အကျိုးသက်ရောက်မှုရှိစေမည့် ပြောင်းလဲမှုများက မည်ကဲ့သို့ ဖြစ်သနည်း။
- Do you think the changes will alter future options for them?
- ယင်းအပြောင်းအလဲများသည် သူတို့ ၏အနာဂတ်ရွေးချယ်မှုများအတွက် ပြောင်းလဲလိမ့်မည်ဟု သင် ထင်ပါသလား။

4. Research Project သုတေသနစီမံကိန်း

- a. Do you think this study will be relevant to the community?
ဤသုတေသနလုပ်ငန်းသည် သင့်ပတ်ဝန်းကျင်နှင့် ဆက်စပ်မှုရှိသည်ဟု သင်ထင်ပါသလား။
- b. What challenges do you think I will face?
ကျမအနေဖြင့် မည်ကဲ့သို့သော စိန်ခေါ်မှုများ/ အခက်အခဲများ ရင်ဆိုင်တွေ့ရမည်ဟု သင်ထင်ပါသလဲ။
- c. How can I overcome them?
၎င်း စိန်ခေါ်မှုများ/ အခက်အခဲများကို ကျမအနေဖြင့် မည်ကဲ့သို့ ဖြတ်ကျော်နိုင်မည်နည်း။
- d. Do you have any advice for conducting research with young people in the migrant community?
ရွှေ့ပြောင်းဒေသအတွင်းရှိ လူငယ်များနှင့်အတူ သုတေသနလုပ်ငန်းပြုလုပ်ရန်အတွက် သင့်အနေဖြင့် အကြံဉာဏ် ပေးစရာရှိပါသလား။
- e. What methods are useful to help young people express themselves?
လူငယ်များအနေဖြင့် မိမိတို့ကိုယ်ကို သိမြင်စေရန်အတွက် အထောက်အကူဖြစ်စေသည့် အသုံးဝင်သော နည်းလမ်းများက မည်သည့်နည်းလမ်းများဖြစ်သနည်း။
- f. How is it best to build trust with young people?
လူငယ်များနှင့် ယုံကြည်မှုတည်ဆောက်ရန် ဘယ်အရာက အကောင်းဆုံးဖြစ်ပါသနည်း။
- g. Do you know of any Thai legal framework for research in the migrant community?
ရွှေ့ပြောင်းဒေသအတွင်း သုတေသနလုပ်ငန်းအတွက် ထိုင်းနိုင်ငံတွင်တရားဝင်ဥပဒေများရှိ/မရှိကို သင် သိပါသလား။
- h. Do you know of any existing local ethical or research processes within the migrant community?
ရွှေ့ပြောင်းဒေသအတွင်းတွင် လက်ရှိ လုပ်ကိုင်နေသော ဒေသဆိုင်ရာ သုတေသနလုပ်ငန်းများ (သို့မဟုတ်) လူ့ကျင့်ဝတ်နှင့်ကိုက်ညီသည့် လုပ်ငန်းများကို သင် သိပါသလား။

5. Can you suggest other people you think I should speak with?

ကျမအနေဖြင့် တခြားလူပုဂ္ဂိုလ်များနှင့် စကားပြောသင့်သည်ဟု သင့်အနေဖြင့် ထင်မြင်ယူဆပါက မည်သူနှင့်တွေ့ဆုံစကားပြောသင့်သည်ကို ကျမအား အကြံဉာဏ်ပေးလိုရန်မလား။

6. Would you like to add anything or ask any questions?

သင့်အနေဖြင့် မေးစရာ မေးခွန်းများ (သို့မဟုတ်) နောက်ထပ် ဖြည့်စွက်ပြောဆိုရန်အကြောင်းအရာများရှိပါသေးသလား။



သဘောတူညီမှုစာချုပ်

Consent Form

ကျွန်း/ ကျမ သည် ဒရီနာ ဂျွန်ဆန်မှ ပြုလုပ်သည့် "ထိုင်းနိုင်ငံ- အနောက်မြောက်တွင် နေထိုင်သော မြန်မာနိုင်ငံမှ ရွှေ့ပြောင်းလူငယ်များ၏ဘဝများ- ပထမအကြိမ် (တွေ့ဆုံမေးမြန်းမှုများအားဖြင့်အညွှန်း)" ခေါင်းစဉ်ဖြင့်ပြုလုပ်သည့် သုတေသနလုပ်ငန်းအား နားလည်သိရှိပါသည်။

I ... understand that Derina Johnson is conducting the research study "The lives of migrant young people from Burma living in north-west Thailand. Phase 1: Key Informant Interviews".

ကျွန်ုပ်အနေဖြင့် ယခု သုတေသနလုပ်ငန်းတွင် ဖြေဆိုသူအဖြစ် ပါဝင်ရန် သဘောတူပါသည်။

I agree to take part in this study as a key informant.

<i>Please tick if you agree</i> အကယ်၍ သဘောတူပါက ကျေးဇူးပြု၍ အမှတ်ခြစ်ပါ။	
ကျွန်း/ ကျမသည် အသက် (၁၈) နှစ် (သို့မဟုတ်) (၁၈)နှစ်အထက်ဖြစ်သည်။ I am 18 years or older	
ယခုသုတေသနလုပ်ငန်းနှင့်ပတ်သက်၍ မည်သည့်အကြောင်းအရာဖြစ်သည်ကို ကျွန်း/ကျမအနေဖြင့် နားလည်ပါသည်။ ကျွန်း/ကျမ၏ မေးခွန်းများအားလုံးအတွက် အဖြေများကိုရရှိပြီးဖြစ်၍ မေးခွန်းများမေးရန် ကျွန်း/ကျမတွင် အခွင့်အရေးရှိပြီးဖြစ်ပါသည်။ I understand what the study is about. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have received answers to all my questions	
ကျွန်း/ကျမအနေဖြင့် ယခု သုတေသနလုပ်ငန်းတွင် စေတနာအလျောက် ပါဝင်ကူညီပေးခြင်းဖြစ်သည်။ I am participating voluntarily	
ကျွန်း/ကျမအနေဖြင့် ယခု သုတေသနလုပ်ငန်းတွင် ပါဝင်ခြင်းကို အချိန်မရွေး ရပ်ဆိုင်းနိုင်သည်ကို နားလည်သိရှိထားပါသည်။ I understand that I can stop taking part at any time	
သုတေသနပြုလုပ်သူအနေဖြင့် သုတေသနလုပ်ငန်းစဉ် နောက်တဆင့်အတွက် ကျွန်း/ ကျမအား နောက်တကြိမ် ပြန်လည်ဆက်သွယ်နိုင်မည်ကို နားလည်သိရှိထားပါသည်။ I understand that I may be contacted again at a later stage by the researcher	
ကျွန်း/ ကျမအနေဖြင့် ရရှိလာသည့် သတင်းအချက်အလက်များကို မည်ကဲ့သို့ သိမ်းဆည်းအသုံးပြုမည်ကို	

နားလည် သိရှိပါသည်။ I understand how the information will be used and stored	
တွေ့ဆုံမေးမြန်းမှုများပြုလုပ်ချိန်တွင် အသံသွင်းထားခြင်းကို ခွင့်ပြုပါသည်။ I give permission for my interview to be audio-recorded	

ပါဝင်သူ၏လက်မှတ် Participant's Signature:

သုတေသနပြုလုပ်သူ၏ လက်မှတ်: Researcher's Signature:

ရက်စွဲ Date:

တွေ့ဆုံမေးမြန်းမှုများပြုလုပ်ရန် အချိန်ပေးသည့်အတွက် အထူးပင် ကျေးဇူးတင်ရှိပါသည်။ သင်၏ ပူးပေါင်းပါဝင်ဆောင်ရွက်မှုများသည် ကျမ၏ သုတေသနလုပ်ငန်းအတွက် အလွန်ပင် အရေးကြီးပါသည်။ သင် ပေးလိုက်သည့် သတင်းအချက်အလက်များသည် ကျမ၏ သုတေသနလုပ်ငန်း အဓိကအဆင့်ကို စီစဉ်ပြုလုပ်နိုင်ရန် အထောက်အပံ့ဖြစ်စေပါသည်။

Thank you so much for giving me your time. Your participation will be extremely important for my research, and the information you give me will help me plan the main stage of my research.

ဒေါ်နာဂျွန်ဆန်
ကြီးကြပ်ရေးမှူး - ပရော်ဖက်ဆာ ရော်ဘတ် ဂီလီဂန်
လူမှုရေးပိုင်းဆိုင်ရာ လုပ်ငန်းများနှင့် ပေါ်လစီ ကျောင်း၊ ထရိုင်နတီ ကောလိပ်၊ ဂျူဗလင်
အီးမေးလ် johnsode@tcd.ie
ဖုန်းနံပါတ် - +၃၅၃ ၈၇၂၃၂၈၅၇၁

Derina Johnson
Supervisor: Professor Robbie Gilligan
School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin
johnsode@tcd.ie
+353 872328571

Appendix B

Preliminary Phase Interpreter / Translator Confidentiality Agreement



TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN
COLÁISTE NA TRÍONÓIDE

THE
UNIVERSITY
OF DUBLIN

Translator Agreement

Derina Johnson
“The lives of migrant young people on the Thailand-Burma border. Phase 1: Key Informant Interviews”

I..... *[name]* am aware that in the course of my work with Derina Johnson as an interpreter, translator or in any other assistive role, I may have access to sensitive personal information of participants and other individuals. I understand that such information must be kept in confidence by me and used only in connection with the work assigned to me by Derina, in adherence with the confidentiality agreement with the participants and as outlined in the participant information and consent forms which I have sighted and initialled.

Translator’s Signature:

Researcher’s Signature:

Date:

Appendix C

Acceptance as RCSD Affiliated Researcher



The Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development (RCSD)
Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University
239 Huay Kaew Road, Tambon Suthep, Amphur Muang, Chiang Mai 50200 THAILAND
Tel: +66 (0) 5394 3595-6 Fax: +66 (0) 5389 3279 Email: rcsd@cmu.ac.th

March 26, 2015

Derina Johnson, PhD student
Trinity College (Dublin)
University of Dublin, College Green
Dublin 2, Ireland
Tel: +353-1-896-1000

RE: Letter of Acceptance for being RCSD Affiliated Researcher

Dear Derina Johnson,

On behalf of the Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development (RCSD), Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University, I am pleased to accept your request for being the host institute and welcome you to spend time with us as you *Affiliated Researcher* to conduct the research (supervised by Professor Robbie Gilligan, School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin) on migrant youth and their education and employment pathways for a period of 8 months, starting from 1 June 2015 – 31 January 2016. Dr. Shirley Worland will act as your local academic mentor during your stay in Thailand.

During your stay with us at the center, you will be provided an office space. Since RCSD offers several courses at the M.A and PhD levels in areas of development, ethnic studies, resource management and crossed border topics in the GMS and Southeast Asia, we would, therefore, like to invite you to share your research experiences and findings with RCSD students and staff, as well as conduct a small seminar or training workshop for our students over the period of your stay.

I trust that your period as an Affiliated Researcher at RCSD would be greatly beneficial to academic communities at RCSD as well as Chiang Mai University.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Chayan Vaddhanaphuti'. The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a light blue horizontal line.

Chayan Vaddhanaphuti, PhD.
RCSD Director

Appendix D

Main Phase – TCD SWSP Ethical Approval



COLÁISTE NA TRÍONÓIDE, BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH | TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN
Ollscoil Átha Cliath | The University of Dublin

28th May 2015

To Whom It May Concern,

On 23rd April the Ethics Committee of the School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin, assessed Derina Johnson's ethics application for her PhD research project entitled *"Insecure Lives, Uncertain Futures: A case study of undocumented and displaced young migrants from Myanmar negotiating education and work in northwest Thailand. Phase Two: Data Collection with Young Men and Women"*.

I am pleased to confirm that this project has received ethical approval from the Ethics Committee. Ongoing monitoring of this doctoral study is carried out by her supervisor Professor Robbie Gilligan (Robbie.gilligan@tcd.ie)

Yours sincerely

Assistant Professor Patricia Walsh
Chair Research Ethical Approval Committee
School of Social Work and Social Policy
Room 3034
Trinity College Dublin
Dublin 2
Tel. No + 35318963241
Trish.walsh@tcd.ie

Appendix E

Main Phase – Information and Consent Materials (English)



Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

Participant Information Sheet

My name is **Derina Johnson**. You are invited to participate in my research project – “**The lives of young migrants growing up on the Thailand-Myanmar border: Interviews with young men and women**”. I am a PhD researcher at the School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland, where my supervisor is Professor Robbie Gilligan.

I would like to understand more about what it is like to grow up as a young migrant on the Thailand-Myanmar border. I want to speak with different young men and women aged between 18 and 24 years who grew up in the migrant community, who were either born here or who arrived before they were 12 years old.

Why have you been asked to take part?

You have been asked to take part because you have grown up in the migrant community on the Thailand-Myanmar border, and I am interested in learning about your life.

Do you have to take part?

No, you do not have to take part. Participation is completely voluntary, and there will be no payment. Even if you agree now, you can stop at any time and for any reason.

What will happen if you decide take part?

- If you decide to take part, you will take part in an interview with me about what it is like to grow up in the migrant community on the Thailand-Myanmar border. We can do the interview in English, Burmese or Karen. If you would like to do the interview in a different language, please let me know.
- To help us talk about your life, I would like to invite you bring three things to the interview that you are happy to show me (e.g., photos or things which are important to you):
 1. Something that reminds you of what your childhood was like
 2. Something that represents your life now
 3. Something that makes you think about your future

If you don't know what to bring, or don't want to bring anything, that's ok

- You only have to talk about things you want to talk about. If I ask a question you don't want to answer, you don't have to.
- The interview will take place at a time and place which is good for you. It will take a maximum of two hours but can be shorter if you need.
- At the end of the interview, I will ask your permission to take a digital photograph of the items you brought for my records.
- All information you share with me will be confidential. I will change your name and other details to make you anonymous [no name] so no one can identify you or anyone else from your answers. The interpreter must also keep everything you say confidential and they have signed a form promising to do that.
- The only time I might have to talk to someone about you is if you tell me details of harm, or risk of harm, to you or another person, as I will have to report it to the relevant bodies. I will discuss this with you first.

What happens to the information I collect?

I will use the information you tell me, and some anonymous quotes, in my final PhD thesis and other publications, such as journals, conferences, and reports. If you give me permission to photograph the items you brought, I will also ask you for your permission to use them in publications. I will make sure everything is anonymised - I will blur out any identifiable details. You can also change your mind about these things later.

Are there risks to taking part?

My university and the Mae Tao Clinic Ethics Board do not think there are any risks to taking part.

However, it might be upsetting for you to talk about some parts of your life. If you feel upset during the interview, we can stop, take a break, or talk about something else.

Other information:

My university, Trinity College Dublin, has given me ethical approval to carry out these interviews. The information you share will be stored safely at the university for two years after I finish my PhD. The study conforms to protection laws in Ireland, including the Freedom of Information Act (1997) and Data Protection Acts (1998 and 2003). Under the Freedom of Information Act, you are allowed to access your own information at any time.

Do you have any questions?

If you have any questions please ask me, my university Supervisor, or my Local Liaisons if you would like to ask in Burmese or Karen. My Local Liaisons must also keep everything you say confidential and they have signed a form promising to do that.

What is next?

- If you decide not to take part, no problem! Thank you for taking the time to read this.
- If you would like to take part, thank you! We will organise a time.

Derina Johnson johnsode@tcd.ie School of Social Work and Social Policy Trinity College Dublin, Dublin 2, Ireland Ireland Phone: +353872328571 Thailand Phone: [0930109124]	Professor Robbie Gilligan robbie.gilligan@tcd.ie School of Social Work and Social Policy Trinity College Dublin, Dublin 2, Ireland Ireland Phone: +35318961331	Local Liaison Persons Hay Mar San (Languages: Burmese / Karen) harmarsanms@gmail.com 061 3711298 Nge Lay (Language: Burmese) naneisanngelay@gmail.com 0816049867
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Trinity College Dublin

Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

Participant Consent Form

I [name] agree to take part in
Derina Johnson's research study:

The lives of young migrants growing up on the Thailand-Myanmar border: Interviews with young people

	<i>Please tick if you agree</i>
I am 18 years or older	
I understand what the study is about. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have received answers to all my questions	
I am participating voluntarily	
I understand that I can stop taking part at any time	
I understand how the information I give will be used and stored	
I give permission for my interview to be audio-recorded	

Date:

Participant's Signature:

Researcher's Signature:

Thank you so much for giving me your time. Your participation will be extremely important for my research.

<p>Derina Johnson Supervisor: Professor Robbie Gilligan School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin johnsode@tcd.ie Ireland Phone: +353 872328571 Thailand Phone: 0613569099</p>



Trinity College Dublin
 Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
 The University of Dublin

Participant Photograph Record Permission Form

**Derina Johnson – The Lives of Young Migrants growing up on the Thailand-Myanmar Border:
 Interviews with young people**

This section refers to the photographs that you allowed me to take of the items you brought with you.

All photographs will be anonymised (made unidentifiable) and securely stored by me.

With your permission, I would like to use some of these photographs in my reports and publications about my research.

Below please indicate if you agree to this. You can also choose which photographs you agree for me to use-

I give Derina my consent to use **all / numbers** / **none** of the photographs in her research reports and publications

Signed: Date:

Derina Johnson
 Supervisor: Professor Robbie Gilligan
 School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin
 johnsode@tcd.ie
 Thailand Phone: 0613569099
 Ireland Phone: +353 872328571

Appendix F

Main Phase – Youth Advisor Materials



Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

Young Adult Advisor Information Sheet

My name is **Derina Johnson**. You are invited to participate as **Young Adult Advisor** in my research project – “**The lives of young migrants growing up on the Thailand-Myanmar border: Interviews with young adults**”. I am a PhD researcher at the School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland, where my supervisor is Professor Robbie Gilligan.

I want to understand more about **what it is like to grow up as a young migrant on the Thailand-Burma border**. For this, I will speak with different young migrants between the age of 18 and 25 who have lived in Thailand all their life, or came to Thailand before they were 12 years old.

To help me, I want to recruit **Young Adult Advisors (YAAs)** to get advice on my study. I would like to meet with the YAAs occasionally while I am onsite in Mae Sot, and via Skype after I return to Ireland.

Why have you been asked to take part?

You have been asked to take part because you are a young adult in the migrant community. You also speak English, which will help us talk about the study directly without a translator. Otherwise, you don't need any special experience or skills, just an interest in giving your opinion on my study.

Do you have to take part?

No, you do not have to take part. Participation is completely voluntary, and there will be no payment. Even if you agree now, you can stop at any time and for any reason.

What will happen if you decide take part?

If you decide to take part, you will meet me occasionally while I am onsite in Mae Sot, and via Skype after I return to Ireland. We will arrange the time and place to meet to suit you and your schedule. The meetings will take approximately one hour. During these meetings, I will ask your advice on my study. I will ask for your perspective on the methods I am using and on some of the things that the young men and women are telling me in my interviews.

Everything we discuss will be kept confidential by Derina, and you will also be requested to keep everything we discuss confidential. I will audio-record our meetings to help remember what we spoke about.

The only time I might have to talk to someone about you is if you tell me details of harm, or risk of harm, to you or another person, I will have to report it to the relevant bodies. I will discuss this with you first.

What happens to the information Derina collects?

I will use the advice and information you give me to review and adapt my study to better engage with young adults in the migrant community. I may mention some of the things we discuss in my final PhD thesis and other publications, such as journals, conferences, and reports. I will change your name and other details to make you anonymous [no name/identification] so no one can identify you or anyone else.

Are there risks to taking part?

We don't think there are any risks. However, it might be upsetting for you to talk about the situation of some young people in your community. If you feel upset during the meeting, we can stop, take a break, or talk about something else.

Other information:

My university, Trinity College Dublin, has given me ethical approval to carry out this research. The information you share will be stored securely at the university for two years after I finish my PhD. This is in line with Ireland’s Freedom of Information Act (1997) and Data Protection Acts (1998 and 2003). Under the Freedom of Information Act, you are free to access your own information at any time.

Do you have any questions?

If you have any questions please ask me, my university Supervisor, or Hay Mar San if you would like to ask in Burmese or Karen. Hay Mar San must also keep everything you say confidential and they have signed a form promising to do that.

What is next?

- If you decide not to take part, no problem! Thank you for taking the time to read this.
- If you would like to take part, thank you! Please sign the consent form. If you are unsure about signing the consent form – please let me know and I can help you.

Derina Johnson johnsode@tcd.ie School of Social Work and Social Policy Trinity College Dublin, Dublin 2, Ireland Thailand Phone: 0930109124 Ireland Phone: +353872328571	Professor Robbie Gilligan robbie.gilligan@tcd.ie School of Social Work and Social Policy Trinity College Dublin, Dublin 2, Ireland Ireland Phone: +35318961331	Local Liaison Hay Mar San haymarsanms@gmail.com Thailand Phone: 0613711298
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Young Adult Advisor Consent Form

I [name] understand that **Derina Johnson** is conducting the research study: **“The lives of young migrants growing up on the Thailand-Myanmar border: Interviews with young adults”**

I agree to take part in this study as Young Adult Advisor.

	<i>Please tick if you agree</i>
I am 18 years or older	
I understand what the study is about and what my involvement is. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have received answers to all my questions	
I am participating voluntarily	
I understand how the information will be used and stored	
I understand that everything we discuss – about me and others involved in Derina’s study – will be kept confidential by Derina, and I also agree to keep everything we discuss confidential.	
I understand our meetings will be audio-recorded	

Young Adult Advisor’s Signature:

Researcher’s Signature:

Date:

Thank you so much for giving me your time. Your participation will be extremely important for my research.

<p>Derina Johnson Supervisor: Professor Robbie Gilligan School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin johnsode@tcd.ie Thailand Phone: 0613569099 Ireland Phone: +353 872328571</p>

Appendix G

Main Phase Diversity Table

Diversity Table														
Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Religion	Birth place	Place growing up	Marriage Status	Children	Myanmar Documentation	Thai Documentation	School Type	Schooling - Grade achieved	Schooling - accreditation	Age entry into work	Type of Work
18	Male	Myanmar'	Buddhist	Thailand	with parents	Married (official in T/M?)	Yes	None but possible	None	None	None	None	None	None
19	Female	Thai?	Christian	Myanmar	with relatives	Single	No	None and impossible	Unofficial understandings - school card/CBO card/Community Leader	Thailand - Thai school Thailand - Migrant Learning Centre	Grade 1-4	Myanmar accreditation	Child	Volunteer
20	Transgender?	Burman	Muslim	Refugee Camp	at boarding house	Living with someone		Citizen (birth certificate) but no ID	Temporary 'migrant (non-skilled) worker permit'	Myanmar	Grade 5-8	Thai accreditation International	Teenager	Informal
21		Karen	Aminist		at safe house			Citizen & "Over 10-year-old" card	10 year ID (discontinued)		Grade 10	accreditation	Adult	Formal
22		Karenni	Hindu					Citizen & Over 18 card - Citizenship Scrutiny Card - "pink"	Passport and education/work visa		Grade 12			Factory
23		Shan	Jewish?					Temporary 3-fold card - 'pre-ID/ Associate Scrutiny Citizenship Card - 'blue'	Passport and work visa and work permit		Post 10'			Market
24		Mon						Naturalised scrutiny Citizenship Card - 'Green'	Purple passport - discontinued		University Non-formal education - Vocational - Thailand - Burmese community			Shop
25		Kachin						Temporary Registration Card - 'white' Passport?	5 year ID (mountain karen)					Café
		Muslim (Rohingya) Rakhine Pa O etc												CBO / NGO Teacher Home Domestic Agriculture Construction Sex Work Rubbish Dump

Appendix H

Main Phase Topic Guide



Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

Interview Topic Guide – Derina

- INTRODUCTION**
- About me, study.... Just to learn you.... Can stop whenever he / she wants.
 - Taking notes

FACT CHECK:

Age	Living Situation
Ethnicity	ID in Thailand (type, usefulness vs limits, with them?)
Religion	ID in Burma (type, usefulness vs limits, with them?)
Married, Children	<i>Registration in camp? Ration card?</i>
Born in Thailand/Myanmar	School experience “Ever been to school?”
Age of arrival in Thailand	Work “What do you do for money?”

VISUAL PROMPTS:

- Can you tell me what they are?
- Why did you bring them?
- How does it make you think of your past/present/future?

EVERYDAY LIFE:

- Tell me about a typical day for you. For example yesterday, what did you do?
- Favourite / Least favourite part of the day
- Biggest challenge overall in life
 - What/who helps you with those challenges? (*‘extra-legal’*)
- What is the most important thing in your life?
- Does documentation limit your life? How do you evade being caught?
- Do you speak Thai? ... Is it / would it be useful? ... Thai friends?
- How do you feel living here in the migrant community / refugee camp?
 - Ever been to Burma, how do you feel there?
- Do you think of yourself as a refugee or a migrant? What is a refugee / migrant? ‘From’ Burma / Thai? Impt?
- Is life different for migrants vs refugees?
 - Is life different for young men and young women?

Religion Many people say they have a religion, but explain that it isn’t a huge part of their lives or they don’t know a lot about it, others tell me it is a big/important part of their lives. What place does religion have in your life?

Future Where do you see yourself in 5 / 10 years’ time?

Marriage Would you like to get married one day? Future?

Refugee • *Ever bored? What do you do when bored?*

Camp • *Drugs? Some people when bored / some young people use drugs, do you know if that happens? Do you ever? How does it make you feel?*

Now that we’ve finished – was the interview different to what you expected?

- What did you expect? How was it really?
 - How do you feel now it is over?
- END**
- What was it like for you to speak through translation? I’m sorry if there was any confusion or misunderstanding due to translation.
 - > I wish you all the best, and that your dream of XX will come true.
 - Check in in 2 weeks – anything you would like to add
 - MH check in : Upsetting feelings/thoughts come up for you, please feel free to contact me or local liaison/interpreter, as there are some services (e.g. counselling) that can help.

- Check List**
- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| Consent form | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Photograph permission form | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Two week check in & contact details | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Appendix J

Sample Case Profiles

- **Chit, female, 20, Buddhist Burmese, came aged 7 with mother, factory worker**

Chit was born in Myanmar and lived with her aunt until she got sick around the age of seven, when her mother brought her to Thailand to access both “English medicine and traditional medicine” unavailable in Myanmar.

Chit lives with her mother, younger sister, aunt and cousin. She has little contact with her father. They live in two-room typical urban migrant dwelling located on a small side street in a predominately migrant community on the outskirts of the town.

Most activity in the house occurs in the front room, including our interview upon Chit’s request, along with her mother being present. Along one wall cabinets store clothing and other family items, a large television plays day-time Burmese television. A Buddhist altar is placed alongside pictures of the Thai King and of a Hindu god, the latter reflecting the family’s cultural heritage. The second room is a bedroom, though some household members sleep in the front room, evidenced by the mattresses and mats folded in one corner. To the back of the house, there is a private toilet and wash room.

Chit has her Myanmar birth certificate and wants her adult “National Citizenship Scrutiny Card” for when her family return to Myanmar when they can pay back their debts. As both of her parents are citizens, she imagines no technical obstacles, however she will need her family’s household registration book, lost during a fire and too costly to replace at present. In Thailand she has the Tor Ror 38/1 and Migrant Worker Permit. These temporary legal documents allow her to stay and work in Thailand and to access health care for a flat fee of 30THB (75c).

Despite having documents, Chit “rarely” goes out alone: “I don’t dare to go”. Chit showed me a recent photograph of her wearing a traditional Myanmar costume, representing her vulnerability as a beautiful young migrant woman:

“It’s beautiful within the community. But for other strangers, ‘oh she’s beautiful’, they will say, [so] need to be afraid of the boys”.

Chit attended a migrant school in Mae Sot, dropping out for a period during Grade 9 to help her mother with financial problems. Upon her mother’s insistence, she returned to school and graduated Grade 10. She does not have any accreditation due to the unofficial status of the school. Chit had dreams of becoming an interpreter, however her family’s circumstances precluded continued education. She now works in a sewing factory. Sewing is “good for a girl”. Chit is learning the trade

with a view to working for herself from her home in the future. There, it is safer and she won't be "controlled" like at the factory.

- **Sone, male, 18, Buddhist Burman, came to Thailand alone aged 8, rural agricultural worker**

Sone lives over 50 kilometres south of Mae Sot in a rural mainly agricultural area. He came to Thailand aged eight "with connections of my friends" to work. His parents came later. His first job involved spreading chemicals in the fields and now he digs potatoes or picks chili, depending on the need of the particular "boss", earning 130THB (€3.20) per day. All his work is day-to-day which he learns about through friends and neighbours.

Typically, his day begins around 5 or 6am. He does the housework and cooks his lunch before going to work. He finishes work around 5pm, returns home, cooks and cuts firewood, prays and helps his parents, which he is glad to do. He doesn't do anything for fun.

It is harder for him to get work as he has no legal work documents in Thailand, and he risks arrest daily. He was arrested once and paid 2000THB (€50) for his release, borrowing from others. The police sometimes raid the compound where he lives. The landlord warns them and all the undocumented migrant workers run into the jungle and hide for the duration of the raid. He feels afraid when he has to run. Sometimes they have to hide for 3 or 4 days; whenever it is safe a few of them return to cook food. His landlord is "good", he is "friendly" and "respects" the workers.

He attended kindergarten only back when he lived in Myanmar. He enjoyed school, but, "This age is the time for work. It's the time to support parents." For this reason he doesn't think about marriage. He doesn't bother learning Thai as his future is in Myanmar. While he has never returned to Myanmar, he will return one day once his family have saved enough money to build a house:

"We didn't have anything, so we came here to work. Once we earn money, we will go back to Myanmar."

- **Zin, female, 18, Buddhist Burman, born in Thailand, married with daughter**

Eighteen-year-old Zin has been married for three years and has a two year old daughter who she gently cares for throughout our interview.

Zin was born in Thailand. She lives with her husband, daughter, mother and step-father in a rural community 30 kilometres south of Mae Sot. Zin got married because she entered the "seit kazar" or "flirt age": "So it happened". She explained that she also felt "scared" to live with her mother and new step-father, explaining, "The father is not my father. Other people say it... so I was scared. Then I got married." Her husband is nine years older, he is kind and teaches her.

When married first, she did not know how to take her contraception properly and became pregnant. It is hard being a mother so young, going from being a daughter to taking care of one: “My mother used to take care of me. Now, I am taking care of [my daughter].” Zin only attended school until Grade 1 as her mother moved frequently for work. Consequently Zin “cannot do a lot”, earns less and feels people look down on her. She wants her daughter to have an education.

Her favourite time of day is sitting with her mother, “My mother loves me. She tells me what to do, what not to do.” She worries for her mother having to work long hours but neither her mother nor her husband allow her to work.

Zin’s landlord provided her “baht” – Thai for “card”. This is an informal work permit provided to migrants by the local village head. The card cost 300THB and allows her to move around the area, but not to Mae Sot. She feels angry being arrested and having to “pay from our hard-earned money” despite also paying for documents.

She repeats how Thailand is “not our country”: “It’s not that free. (I’m) not happy as it’s not our country. I rarely go (to festivals) here. I am poor.” She visited Myanmar once and, despite not having any documents there either, she felt she could “go freely”. Her family is trying to save to return but work is irregular and there are many mouths to feed.

- **Naw, female, 18, Karen Christian, living in her school boarding house in Mae Sot**

Naw came to Mae Sot when she was eight years old. Her village in Karen State was increasingly unstable, and her family was having to move frequently. Whoever the army found, they would kill. She recalled a night, when she was five years old, she was woken up in the middle of the night to flee her village as the soldiers were approaching:

Her aunt brought her to Mae Sot for her safety, and it was her who introduced her to the migrant school and adjoining boarding house there. Meanwhile, her older siblings remain in Karen State and her parents and younger siblings live in a refugee camp elsewhere in Thailand. She has seen them once in the ten years since she came to Thailand. Without documents, it is too risky for them to visit each other. It is clearly very painful for her to be separated from her family, and her eyes welled up each time talking about them. As the eldest, she feels a sense of responsibility to get a good education and provide for her family. She is working hard in school to do that.

At the boarding house, she has a migrant student card, which allows her to move between the boarding house and school. Her boarding house is located very close to a large new shopping centre, however, out of the reach of her student card. The boarding house staff strictly limit the movement of the students to keep them safe.

Naw lives alongside 100 other girls and young women. Naw explains how living at the boarding

house is “hot. Also, it’s strict, so it’s difficult.” Naw remembers that when she initially came to the boarding house when she was nine years old, she found it difficult at first to adapt to the strict schedule, including meal, washing and sleeping times: “They ring a bell when it’s time for meal... run and go. [It’s] difficult”. It is hard at first for many children: “Some [children] didn’t have experience of being separated from their family so they cry”. Ultimately, like Naw, they adapt. After being “dropped” to the boarding house when she was nine, Naw had no choice other than to get on with it: “I was young so I just [had to] stay.” The discipline is necessary for the girls and young women to “live in harmony with a lot of people”.

- **Law, male, 18, Buddhist Karen, born in Refugee Camp**

Law considers himself “my mother’s assistant”. He dropped out of school after Grade 1 as his parents could not pay the school fee, needed him to look after his five younger brothers, “and also my father didn’t go to school.” He isn’t interested any more in school: “I want to work to support my parents.”

It makes him “feel good” to help his mother: “If my mother didn't exist, I wouldn't exist”. In the mornings he gets the water for the family, cooks, does the washing and brings his brothers to school. In the evenings he cooks again. Through looking after his siblings he gives back:

“When I was little my mother raised me well. Now I have my younger siblings. I think I have to take care of them.”

He feels “sad” when a brother asks for a snack and he doesn’t have the money. Two or three times a month, he leaves the camp to cut bamboo to sell for “pocket money”, or to repair his hut. He comes back “secretly” in the dark as he fears arrest. When he was 14 years old, he was arrested working in a village outside the camp. He was detained for two days across the border, made “dig the earth” and only given one meal per day. He was scared and missed his mother. Another worker returned to the camp to inform his mother who came to pay his fine and release him.

The only other time he has ever been to Myanmar was with his father when he was 16 after his grandparents had been killed. He felt “bad” seeing their dead bodies. He never wants to return to Myanmar, believing “people would harass me also”. His parents had “run” to Thailand for their safety. Resettlement is the only solution. His family have UN registration but were rejected for resettlement as his father mentioned wanting to look after his sick parents. They hope to reapply. His older brother was resettled after applying individually when he reached 18. If Law isn’t resettled he imagines he will live in one of the Thai Karen “jungle” villages.

Camp life is often “boring”. Most of the time, Law explains, “I stay like that”, using the frequently-used Karen phrase “Aw ja tho”. He hangs around with around 100 other young men. They all have many tattoos which they give each other. He often feels “sleepy”, particularly in the heat. For Law

“just staying like that”, i.e. doing nothing, in part defines the life of a refugee, “We face difficulties. We are not able to do anything; we just have to stay (‘tho’) in the camp.”

- **Nan, female, 19, Buddhist Karen, born in Refugee Camp, attending Grade 12**

Nan sees the refugee as someone who must bend to those “superior”, and accept that whatever they do they will be wrong:

“I see myself as a servant (‘plae’) of others, I’m not allowed to go outside. I have to stay in the camp. If I want to go outside I have to pay.”

Nan was born in the refugee camp where she lives with her family. Her older brother was resettled after applying individually a few years previously. They stay in touch through Facebook. While her family have UN registration and could be eligible for resettlement, her parents hope to return one day to Myanmar. While Nan would like to be resettled, “I have to stay with them”. Her uncle had also decided not to apply as he was working, but has since changed his mind, “maybe he got bored of picking the corn and planting”, she reflects.

When not in school, Nan looks after her younger siblings, fetching water and feeding the pigs. Her days are busy She also helps out at her friend’s noodle shop, for which she occasionally is paid.

Nan is currently sitting her final Grade 12 exams. Her parents could afford the annual 600THB (€15) fee as they do agricultural work outside the camp. Knowledge is important “for the future”, and helps her access the world beyond the camp, “through studying, I get knowledge from outside”. She hopes to attend medic training to join those bringing medical services into rural Myanmar. If the camp closes, she will follow her parents back to Myanmar or, if necessary, work in Bangkok.

She thinks it is “not good” for young people in the camp to have tattoos and drink and take drugs. Unlike some in the camp, she learned about “the good things” and “the bad things” through her parents, school and the monastery.

Nan has been to Myanmar once, visiting relatives. It was hot, the land barren and there was little water: “It is not difficult for the people who live there, but we just go back sometimes so it was difficult for us to cope.” She doesn’t have any papers in Myanmar but doesn’t believe she would need them to live in the village.

- **“Pun”, female, 22, Christian Karen, Attending University (composite profile in order to maintain anonymity)**

Aged 12, Pun was sent to Thailand to relatives in Thailand after fleeing fighting in Karen state in Myanmar. She was sent to a school in the migrant community where she worked hard and was

allowed skip several grades. She lived in the boarding house attached to the school which she rarely left as some police did not recognise her school-issued migrant student card and so it was too risky.

After she won a scholarship into university, her school teachers paid for her Myanmar citizenship and passport necessary for enrolment. It was expensive as her parents do not have citizenship. A lot of bribing was necessary. It angers her to have had to pay so much for a document which is her right.

She lives with others in a student house, but does not socialise much:

“There is no different day for me, I just live the way that I am. Every day I go to school, go home, go to school, go home...”

She feels guilty that her family struggles due to her attending university and knows that some people think she is a neglectful daughter. Therefore, she works hard: “I have to study! I came here to study!” She will graduate this year and would like to work on the border with migrant children as well as give back to her family.

Appendix K

Work examples

- **Child Work: Khin**

When Khin was aged 12 her father died, leaving her an orphan: “There was no one who I could depend on”. She and her younger sister were brought to Thailand to live with their older sister. Khin was grateful to be given a job in a rose plantation: “We were only children then so people pitied us. The Thai manager gave us jobs.” She earned 45THB (€1.10) per day.

- **Child Work: Nang**

After her mother passed away, Nang was sent to live with her older sister in Thailand. She had planned to work alongside her sister who worked as a cleaner in a house, but being only 11 years old, her sister’s employers wouldn’t allow her to work. As a consequence, Nang had to find a job elsewhere, alone. She remarked, however, that she was fortunate as the Thai family she found work with was “nice”.

- **Child Work: Bo**

Bo was nine when he was taken out of school: “My parents told me to quit”. His parents needed him to work and contribute to the family, deciding to send him to work alongside his aunt and uncle in Thailand. While he struggled in school and was often beaten by teachers for being lazy when he couldn’t keep up. It made him sad to leave: “I miss my school. If I have any chance, I would like to attend”. However he is proud to support his family and see the improvements in their lives due to his contribution:

“Since I been working, our living condition got a bit okay (asinpyeladeh)... I am happy to work as I get to help my family.”

- **Daily life of ‘lagasa’ / monthly worker: Phyu**

Phyu works in a sewing factory, commencing around 8am in the morning and finishing at 5pm, with one hour for lunch. In the evenings, overtime often continues from 6pm until 10pm or midnight. Phyu lives and works alongside her parents who get up earlier than Phyu to make the lunches for all the family members. The factory is close by and she walks to and from work with her parents. Her two days off per month give her just enough time to catch up on chores: “I stay at home and do house work such as washing clothes, cooking rice and curries at home. Doing all these (chores), time is just gone”.

Through the factory, Phyu has acquired her Tor Ror 38/1 – a type of official migrant worker documentation – which has meant that Phyu does not feel “scared anymore”. Phyu earns 110THB (€2.75) per day which results in about 3000THB (€75) per month. She feels this is a fair amount for her as she is still learning: “I haven't worked long enough yet. Some [other workers] are more experienced”.

- **Daily life of ‘lagasa’ / monthly worker: Win**

Win works at a farm supply store selling fertiliser and insecticide for which he earns 3500THB (€87) per month. He gets up at 4.30am in order to be on time for the store which is open from 5.30am to 5pm. He walks to work which is nearby his home. There are no set breaks during the day: “we have to eat whenever we’re free”. If a customer comes, his break time is over. If business is not going well, his boss often takes it out on him and his co-workers, shouting at them and accusing them of mistakes they didn’t make. He feels angry and frustrated but holds it in. Despite this, he is grateful for his job having previously worked only earning 700THB (€18) per month doing agricultural work. He had heard about the work through friends who had been working there but had decided to move to Bangkok. He finishes work around 6pm, returns home, cleans his clothes and, after dinner, either visits his friends or helps his sister with whom he lives. He loves to play football but it is usually too late in the evenings to play as it is dark and his informal “baht” would not protect him from arrest should the police patrol the area.

- **Daily life of ‘lagasa’ / monthly worker: Kan**

Kan works at night in the market selling chickens, getting up at 2am and working until 10am. He explains that his Thai employer “treats us like brothers” and “the work is not so heavy for me” unlike the construction work he did previously which is “hard” under the hot sun. He earns 9000THB (€225) per month. He usually works seven days per week, taking off religious days – he is Muslim – “when we are not allowed to kill animals”. After work, he eats lunch, chats with his mother, sleeps until around 4pm and goes to play football before another sleep before work. Playing football is an important part of his day: “I forget everything, all the tired things from my work when I get to football field”.

- **Daily life of ‘neesa’ / daily worker: Htin**

Htin’s work day begins around 4 or 5am, “never later than 6am”. As an informal agricultural worker, he does different types of work, from planting corn or bean to cropping paddy. But the work is “not regular”, a matter of “getting and not getting”. His earnings are usually around 130THB per day, sometimes as much as 200THB on the rare times he secures “pot-pyat” or project work to plant or reap a full field for example. The work day ends with sunset around 5:30 or 6pm. He showers, eats dinner and goes to sleep.

- **Daily life of 'neesa' / daily worker: Kyaw**

Kyaw also emphasises how the work and the work hours are “not the same”:

“If there are potatoes, we have to dig that. If there are chilies, we have to pick the chilies.... If I finish early, I can go home early.... If there is no work, we have to sit.”

Work opportunities are shared among friends and colleagues by word of mouth or phone. Other times he must “wait by” his migrant compound “hoping” for an employer to come by and select him to work. Often there are not enough jobs available for the number of people seeking one leaving many people having to “eat from their savings”.

- **Daily life of 'neesa' / daily worker: Bo**

Bo's work changes with the seasons, agriculture from June until February and construction during March, April and May. He earns between 150-200THB (€3.75-€5) per day. He prefers the construction work as it can be “under the sun and shelter, it isn't that tiring” while in farm work he is always exposed to the elements whether sun or rain.

Bo works seven days a week when he can: “When there's no work only I take time off”. On those days he visits work friends in the immediate neighbourhood. He doesn't travel far as he doesn't have documents.

- **Refugee camp daily work: Klo – cutting bamboo**

Once a month Klo earns other money helping his father in the ration store room, carrying the rice bags. He and his friends also regularly leave the camp to cut bamboo, using it to repair their own or other relatives' huts in the camp or earning money by selling it. He cannot always leave the camp as sometimes the authorities are patrolling. He admits to having been chased “one or two times” by the authorities while outside the camp but evades them by running and hiding, indicating the sheer mountainside behind the refugee camp. He laughs and proudly states: “They couldn't catch me”.

- **Refugee camp daily work: Nyein – Domestic work**

Nyein used to regularly leave the camp to “work under the sun planting corn”. She describes how farm owners used to come to the camp to collect groups of people to bring them to work on their land. Now it is more risky as restrictions on movement are more enforced. While some continue to risk leaving the camp to work, Nyein no longer goes: “we will be caught if we go”. After a traumatic stint working in Bangkok, which I discuss below, Nyein is back in the refugee camp.

When I ask her if she is working, she replied “I don’t do anything”. Her day begins at “6, 7 or 8am” as “there’s nothing to do”, meaning she has no work. In the morning she carries water and cooks rice for the family. She cleans the house, sweeps the floor and washes the dishes. During the day, she often helps her brother looking after her nieces and nephew and cooking for them. In the evenings, she again carries water and cooks.

- **Working in Bangkok: Htin**

Struggling after seven years working as an informal worker in Mae Sot, Htin heard from relatives that work was more available and better paid in Bangkok. There he found work as a construction worker. Depending on the hours he worked, he reported earning up to 15000THB (€375) per month. However, each month the employer cut costs from his salary, starting with the cost of his transport to Bangkok, as well as electricity and other utilities. After five months, his employer acquired a temporary passport for him, costing Htin 30000THB (€800) which he began to repay each month. After all “cuts” he was often left with as little as 2000THB (€50) per month. After two years, he didn’t see the point in staying in Bangkok and returned to Mae Sot: “I worked for 2 years but nothing was left”.

- **Working in Bangkok: Grace**

Grace was 18 years old when she decided to go to Bangkok after her factory in Mae Sot was reducing its number of workers. Her sister and others she knew were already living in Bangkok and Grace was curious: “I wanted to try it”. Her father did not want her to go but her mother allowed her to decide for herself. After paying 15,000THB (€375), for the “special car” to “sit freely to Bangkok”, Grace found herself with several others packed “like fish paste” into the cab of a small pick-up truck. She wanted to change her mind, “but we couldn’t do anything because we’d already paid”.

En route, soldiers intercepted the vehicle, forcing everyone to run and hide in the forest. After hiding well into the night, they were bundled into the back of the truck, covered with a net, “and we all slept on top of each other” for the rest of the journey.

By the time she arrived in Bangkok she had lost all her spare clothes and her shoes were broken. Her sister’s employers gave her clothes and later her sister brought her to the nearby market. She was “lucky” to have had her sister to look after her. After seven months working as a housemaid, she decided to return to Mae Sot as she missed her family too much. She returned by double-decker bus and at the regular police check point, along with several others, she was detained and deported across the border to Myawaddy where someone came to pay for her release “and we could come back home” to Mae Sot.

- **Working in Bangkok: Nyein**

When Nyein was 16 years old, she decided to leave the refugee camp and work in Bangkok. She wanted to work and to have a new experience outside the camp: “I just wanted to go”. On the journey down, the dangers the city would hold for her were foreshadowed when the driver started touching her leg, although she was able to tell him to stop and move out of his reach. In Bangkok, she was separated from the other girls with whom she travelled and started working for a woman selling “alcohol and milk”. She earned 4500THB (€112) per month. She described how being a “small girl” in Bangkok, she was an easy target. She was regularly verbally abused by her employer, and described how she was “afraid that someone would come and rape me”.

The final straw came after about a year when her employer “stabbed” her with a knife, accusing her of stealing money. Nyein explained that her employer had found Nyein’s savings which she had earned doing extra work for other people. After that incident, she decided to return: she waited to receive her salary and, through some neighbours, found another “carry” to bring her home to the refugee camp, creeping out “secretly” in the middle of the night after her employer had fallen asleep. When she returned to the refugee camp, she decided to become a nun for a period of time in the camp looking for “good merit” after her experience in Bangkok. She shaved off her hair and spent a “short period” living at the monastery in the refugee camp, praying and giving homage. She was “happy”. My interpreter and I later discussed feeling that her choice to become a nun seemed to be in some way to atone for her Bangkok experience.